

# AMERICAN REVOLUTION AS TOTAL REVOLUTION: DEL NOCE AND THE AMERICAN EXPERIMENT

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“America, unlike the nations of Europe, is the *essentially* modern nation and . . . the American experiment is thus *essentially* revolutionary—perhaps, in the final analysis, *more* revolutionary than Marxism.”



## THE DECOMPOSITION OF AMERICA

America today has made a prophet of Augusto Del Noce, which is undoubtedly one reason why Carlo Lancellotti’s superb translations of Del Noce’s essays into English have met with such an enthusiastic reception.<sup>1</sup> The “totalitarianism of disintegration” that Del Noce foresaw seems to have reached its most perfect

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1. The two volumes, edited and translated by Carlo Lancellotti (with a third on the way), are Augusto Del Noce, *The Crisis of Modernity* (Montreal: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 2014); and *The Age of Secularization* (Montreal: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 2017). All citations of Del Noce come from these two volumes, hereafter referred to as *CM* and *AS*, respectively.

expression thus far in the present-day United States.<sup>2</sup> “Total revolution” seems to have taken on a life of its own as the social or antisocial form of an empire united by nothing but its mutual fascination with and enslavement to technology and its collective opposition to fascism, which the empire more or less equates with being. Its mutual surveillance of all against all is the work of everyone in general and no one in particular, made possible by the digital conquest of time and space. The “rebellion against being” unleashed by total revolution is now rapidly annihilating not only the cultural residuum of a people who, lacking a shared tradition, faith, or history from before the age of progress, has never really been a people. It is also negating our shared human nature and even the language by which we recognize a world in common. Ideas and words have ceased to be vessels of truth and communication; they have become instruments—or weapons—of social change.<sup>3</sup> Young people are inculcated into this brutally instrumental vision, and assimilated into the process of revolutionary change, by a massively bloated educational apparatus without the slightest idea of what education actually is. The only “reason” held in common is identical with what Del Noce called “scientism,” which is predicated on the philosophical *renunciation* of universal reason and the unknowability—if not the nonexistence—of ultimate truths and goods. Two-dimensional “sociologism,” which is congenitally incapable of recognizing a profound question, governs public discourse among intellectuals, while reality is increasingly mediated to everyone through the even cruder empiricism that is journalism.<sup>4</sup> Twenty-first century America

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2. *CM*, 95.

3. On the banalization of language, see *CM*, 191.

4. Del Noce’s description of sociologism places its metaphysical and anthropological underpinnings in sharp relief to that of the tradition, revealing what is at stake in its contest for primacy with philosophy: “The true clash is between two conceptions of life. One could be described in terms of the religious dimension or the presence of the divine in us; it certainly achieves fullness in Christian thought, or in fact in Catholic thought, though per se it is not specifically Christian in the proper sense. Rather, it is the precondition that makes it possible for the act of faith to germinate in man, inasmuch as it is man’s natural aptitude to apprehend the sacred. (I cannot linger here on the definition of this dimension and I must refer to the very beautiful pages by Fr. Daniélou.) The other is the conception that ultimately can be called soci-

exemplifies what Del Noce meant by a “semi-culture,” that is, the “outlook of those who receive from outside, from the *mass media* and thus from the groups who direct and control the flow of information, certain ‘new’ opinions and accept them without any serious consideration of the premises that shape them.”<sup>5</sup> Most subjects of the new totalitarianism, therefore, have no idea they are being coerced.

Del Noce’s genius was to recognize that the root of the political crisis in the West is not itself political but metaphysical and religious.<sup>6</sup> At its core is the elevation of becoming over being—in a word, anti-Platonism. “Every revolutionary negation of traditional values,” he writes, “depends upon this initial negation.”<sup>7</sup> The primacy of becoming replaces the vertical transcendence of eternity with the horizontal transcendence of futurity. The negation of transcendence eliminates the possibility of “intellectual intuition,” an apprehension of being in its enduring intelligibility, truth, and goodness.<sup>8</sup> Gone, then, is the ground of the “religious dimension” presupposed in any genuine act of faith, whose absence sets in motion a historical course from the atheism in which God is denied to the irreligion in which the question of God can no longer be asked meaningfully.<sup>9</sup> Gone also is any possibility of traditional *theoria*. Speculative

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logistic, in the sense that contemporary sociology reduces all conceptions of the world to ideologies, as expressions of the historical situation of some groups, as spiritual superstructures of forces that are not spiritual at all, such as class interests, unconscious collective motivations, and concrete circumstances of social life. So that the progress of the human sciences is supposed to lead to social science as the full extension of scientific reason to the human world, achieving a complete replacement of philosophical discourse by scientific discourse and thus clarifying the worldly, social, and historical origin of metaphysical thought” (*AS*, 219).

5. *CM*, 140 (emphasis original).

6. *CM*, 228.

7. *CM*, 58.

8. “Primacy of contemplation just means the superiority of the immutable over the changeable. It just expresses the essential metaphysical principle of the Catholic tradition, which says that everything *that is* participates necessarily in universal principles, which are the eternal and immutable essences contained in the permanent actuality of the divine intellect” (*AS*, 241).

9. See *CM*, 198; *AS*, 230.

or contemplative thought is unintelligible, thoroughly routed by a “philosophy of *praxis*.” Truth itself is either measured by the efficacy of the action—“the historical reality it is able to produce”—or it is reduced to historical, sociological, or psychological conditions and functions, that is, to ideology.<sup>10</sup>

From the anti-Platonic vantage point, the world is “a system of forces, not of values.”<sup>11</sup> The primacy of force elevates politics over ethics—indeed over everything—even as the negation of universal reason and human nature undermines the basic condition of possibility for a genuinely political society: a world of shared meanings and a common good. Herein lies the novelty of the new totalitarianism according to Del Noce. It “is not that of a political movement that aims at world domination”; it is, rather, a wholly negative phenomenon—anti-racist, anti-fascist, etc.—“marked by a quest to bring about a disintegration of one part of the world” in the name of freedom.<sup>12</sup> It is total war legitimated by its perennial opposition to fascism, falsely defined as whatever sins “against the progressive direction of history.”<sup>13</sup>

Total revolution could only succeed by bringing the whole of human nature within its purview, that is, in sexual revolution.<sup>14</sup> One of Del Noce’s greatest insights is that “scientism” and “eroticism” form a unity. They are but two sides of the same ontological coin and are mutually efficacious in advancing total revolution. Together, they annihilate all but the barest “biologicalistic” conception of human nature with its vital energies. “Nature” is simply whatever can be observed, which means anything is just as natural—or unnatural—as anything else. The family must be dissolved; only then can the “meta-empirical order of truth” finally be abolished.<sup>15</sup> The fundamental realities of human nature—man, woman, mother, father, child—must be perpetually redefined. History must be erased, since the past is oppressive, by definition, and language, morality, and law must all be

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10. *CM*, 61.

11. *CM*, 232.

12. *CM*, 87.

13. *CM*, 101.

14. See *CM*, 167.

15. *CM*, 161.

ideologically reconceived. The inevitable result is what Federico Sciaccia called “the reign of stupidity.”<sup>16</sup> If all truth claims are merely the expression of class interest, bigotry, or psychosis, if “only what is subject to empirical observation and can be empirically ‘represented’ . . . ‘is,’” then there is no possibility of argument; there is only rhetorical persuasion and manipulation. Scientism and eroticism are twin pillars in “the rule of systematically organized mendacity.”<sup>17</sup>

Del Noce rejected grand genealogical explanations for this revolutionary turn, such as the attempt among Catholic anti-modernists to trace its origins to the advent of nominalism. As a historical matter, he thought such explanations failed to account for why such rapid and dramatic social change culminating in the turmoil of the 1960s should occur during the postwar years. Philosophically, he thought that the conception of history as a “unitary process,” whether a pro-modern thesis of inevitable secularization or a reactionary opposition to an ineluctable fall, was infected with the modernist sense of historical inevitability. It also overlooked an alternative modernity extending from Descartes through Rosmini, in which the priority of being, intellectual intuition, and *theoria* were maintained.<sup>18</sup> Lancellotti adds an additional caution against “self-interpretations that associate today’s moral landscape primarily with the heritage of ‘liberalism.’” This approach risks “viewing our predicament primarily in political terms” and overstating the importance of a tradition that seems to lack the metaphysical “firepower” to abolish Platonism and human nature by itself.<sup>19</sup>

Del Noce sought “to go beyond both the modern and anti-modern position” in his explanation.<sup>20</sup> Viewed from the perspective he called “ideal causality,” the history of the twentieth century could be seen to unfold according to the logic of

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16. *CM*, 130.

17. *CM*, 130.

18. See *CM*, 25–33.

19. Carlo Lancellotti, “Augusto Del Noce on Marx’s Abolition of Human Nature,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 48, no. 3–4 (Fall-Winter 2019): 566–84, at 569.

20. *CM*, 8.

a philosophical system. It “represents the complete success of Marxism” as a worldwide event, which also turns out to be its complete defeat.<sup>21</sup> Del Noce called this simultaneous fulfillment and collapse the “suicide of the revolution.”<sup>22</sup> It is a function of an inner conflict deep within the heart of Marxism itself, between its historical materialism (which leads to relativism) and dialectical materialism. Classical Marxism elevated becoming over being, substituting horizontal for vertical transcendence, and attacked traditional religion, metaphysics, and morality, denying the good and the true of traditional metaphysics as enduring “values.”<sup>23</sup> Even so, there remained what Del Noce calls a residually Platonic dimension to Marxism. Early Marxism retained a residual belief in an objective order of values derived from the necessities of history and its emancipatory destiny, the residuum of eschatology that Marx inherited from Christianity. As Lancellotti puts it, “In Marx the absolutization of politics is accompanied by faith in the coming of the revolution, the self-redeeming action whereby mankind will liberate itself from its alienated image (God).”<sup>24</sup> Over time, however, the teleology and eschatology of dialectical materialism could not withstand the “rebellion against being” latent in Marx’s thought. The “spirit of negation” that Marxism unleashes thus eventually negates Marxism’s own eschatology, leaving only perpetual revolution, the interminable war against every form of antecedent order. Marxism eventually succumbs to technological civilization and becomes the agent of an even more radically *bourgeois* culture. “If we consider the necessary process by which Marxism yields to the so-called ‘technological society,’ we find the paradoxical feature that the process it started leads, out of necessary consistency, to the type—which at last becomes realized, of the pure *bourgeois*, who denies and desecrates all he values.”<sup>25</sup> The only possible utopianism after revolutionary suicide is “a

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21. *CM*, 73–85.

22. *CM*, 36.

23. *CM*, 126.

24. Lancellotti, “Augusto Del Noce on Marx’s Abolition of Human Nature,” 576.

25. *AS*, 240.

utopianism in the modern sense, which first appeared when Bacon equated science with power”: the interminable quest for a liberating mastery over nature itself for the sake of a thoroughly immanent, and thoroughly bourgeois, “well-being.”<sup>26</sup> This civilization of “well-being” arises as a consequence of the inner contradiction of Marxism itself. “Therefore, the technological civilization defeats Marxism in the sense that it appropriates all its negations of transcendent values, by pushing to the limit the very source of negation, namely the aspect of Marxism that makes it a form of absolute relativism.”<sup>27</sup>

The transformation was brought about through the eventual synthesis of Marxism and psychological analysis, a possibility suggested by Erich Fromm and Wilhelm Reich years before the migration of the Frankfurt School to New York. As “metaphysical being” is transmuted into “social being,” liberation becomes the criterion of truth. The falsification of Marx’s eschatological hopes by the rise of Nazism in Germany and the course of revolution in Russia, which forced a split between German critical Marxism and Russian dogmatic Marxism, eventually led to the abandonment of the Marxist interpretation of history and its integration with psychoanalysis. “Class warfare” in the West was subordinated to a more generalized “warfare against repression,” concentrated on the most fortified repositories of enduring values—marriage and the family. The ironic result, “against the intentions of the Marxists themselves, is the rise of a radically secular neo-capitalist ‘non-society’ that embraced an instrumentalist

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26. This led to an interesting, and ironic, observation in 1970 on the difference between Russia and the West: “Anyway, it is unquestionably true that Russia constitutes the last bastion of the sacral mindset in the field of politics. Can this defence be delimited to the political field? Or, instead, is this the reason why in Russia religiosity has made a comeback, as attested by many observers? Is this why the Orthodox Church has been affected the least (or not at all) by the new Modernism, the theology of secularization and of the death of God has impacted it very little, and Russian theology schools are the most traditional and (I have heard) the most rigorous in their teaching? On the contrary, Europe thought that it could renew itself by adopting the ways of the civilization of well-being, in which well-being is the only political-social goal—and then whoever wishes to believe that this well-being will continue or increase in another life is free to do so (but, in fact, who thinks about that any longer?)” (*CM*, 120).

27. *AS*, 79.

concept of reason and radically rejected the ideal and religious dimension of reality.”<sup>28</sup>

Del Noce’s diagnosis fits Marxism’s American profile and casts light on what has been, until recently, its subterranean presence in American life. Marxism in America has always been bourgeois, less a phenomenon among political party bosses and factory floor proletarians than among elites in universities, where “critical theory” has now metastasized into every conceivable kind of gender and “cultural studies” department. Now that these ideologies have escaped their decades-long confinement in universities to overtake corporate boardrooms, the media, popular culture, and parts of the government, it seems obvious that Americans have underestimated its potency as a historical force in this country. It should be said, moreover, that Del Noce saw something in America that made it uniquely susceptible to revolutionary thought. He regarded America as “the wellspring of disintegration” and followed Reich in thinking it the “only country where the sexual revolution could take off, in spite of many obstacles and of Puritan resistance.”<sup>29</sup>

Del Noce’s analysis of the decomposition of Marxism casts a bright spotlight on the decomposition of contemporary American life, leaving little doubt that the former is a contributing factor to the latter. It is to be wondered, nevertheless, to what extent this correlation equals causation, and whether the decomposition of Marxism *suffices* to explain the suicide of the American revolution—the fulfillment of American liberal order in its totalitarian opposite—that seems to be unfolding before us according to some terrible, hidden logic. There are several important issues at stake in this question, the least of which is *why* the revolution has enjoyed unparalleled success in America, given the relatively marginal place of Marxism in American culture in comparison to Europe. There is also the question of a remedy, if there is one. The belief, congenial to many American conservatives, that American founding principles are not fatally flawed but corrupted by the later corrosive influence of Marxism leads to the ineluctable—and, in our

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28. Lancellotti, “Augusto Del Noce on Marx’s Abolition of Human Nature,” 569.

29. *CM*, 133.

view, woefully—wrong conclusion that an impossible return to those principles in their classical, pristine form, would rescue America from its nihilistic course. But the most serious question is whether the “crisis of modernity” can be adequately apprehended on the basis of this ideal history alone, without at the same time grasping the meaning of the *quintessentially* modern nation, the historical and philosophical novelty that is America.

The Canadian philosopher George Grant, trying to explain this novelty, once wrote of Europeans’ difficulty in grasping the American essence. Almost inevitably they regard Americans as a species of “European-minus,” “the children of some low-class servants who once dared to leave the household and who now surprisingly appear as powerful and dominating neighbors masquerading as gentry.”<sup>30</sup> This is not simply false.<sup>31</sup> There is indeed, Grant notes, something deeply derivative about American thought and culture. “It was exiled Europeans with the new physical theory who provided us with our first uses of atomic energy. Our new social science may fit us so perfectly as to seem indigenous; but behind Parsons is Weber, behind Skinner, Pavlov, behind social work and psychiatry, Freud.”<sup>32</sup> What the “European-minus” view neglects, according to Grant, is what makes the American project “European-plus,” and thus what is not really European at all: the radicality of the “break” brought about in crossing the ocean and conquering this continent and the “primal” that shapes subsequent American experience. This primal “was the meeting of the alien and yet unconquerable land with English-speaking Protestants,” a meeting that gave the Americans, if I may paraphrase Thomas Paine and Bernard Bailyn, the power “to begin the world anew.”<sup>33</sup> This world of possibility, I

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30. George Grant, *Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969), 16.

31. Nor, obviously, is it a sociological claim about the demographic makeup of the American populace; rather, it is a philosophical and cultural claim about the historical provenance and conceptual structure of the American project.

32. Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 16.

33. The remark from the appendix to Thomas Paine’s 1776 *Common Sense* is as follows: “We have it in our power to begin the world over again. A situation, similar to the present, hath not happened since the days of Noah until now. The birthday of a new world is at hand, and a race of men, perhaps as numerous as all Europe contains, are to receive their portion of freedom from the

maintain, is the key to understand the revolutionary essence of the “American experiment” wherein our novelty consists. But to truly grasp this, “it is necessary to understand those Protestants and to understand particularly their connection to the new physical and moral science which were coming into being in Europe.”<sup>34</sup>

Del Noce’s is a very Eurocentric perspective, and therefore at times he seems to be of two minds about the essence of the American project. Instead of “the Americanization of Europe” or “American imperialism,” Del Noce prefers to discuss “a universalistic awareness of their mission that Europeans lent to Americans as they waged the Enlightenment’s war against their own past.”<sup>35</sup> He does not ponder the significance of the mission to create an “empire of liberty” on these shores—a mission at once philosophical and territorial<sup>36</sup>—nor the speed with which this mission was brought to completion at the turn of the twentieth century, much less the massive exertion of power necessary to bring it about.<sup>37</sup> Although Del Noce regards America as

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events of a few months.” See Barnard Bailyn, *To Begin the World Anew: The Genius and Ambiguities of the American Founders* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004).

34. Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 19.

35. *CM*, 133.

36. The “empire of liberty” was a term coined by Thomas Jefferson to refer both to what we might call the “philosophical” mission of exporting enlightenment around the world and the “territorial” mission to expand the American empire from the Atlantic to the Pacific. He used the phrase in two letters: one letter to George Rogers Clark in 1780, and the other a letter to James Madison in 1809. For more on this sense of “American destiny,” see Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 225–34.

37. The historian Stephen E. Ambrose writes, “The United States was less than one hundred years old when the Civil War was won, slavery abolished, and the first transcontinental railroad built. Not until nearly twenty years later did the Canadian Pacific span the Dominion, and that after using countless American engineers and laborers. It was a quarter of a century after the completion of the American road that the Russians got started on the Trans-Siberian Railway, and the Russians used more than two hundred thousand Chinese to do it. . . . But the Americans did it first. And they did it even though the United States was the youngest of countries. It had proclaimed its independence in 1776, won it in 1783, bought the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, added California, Nevada and Utah to the Union in 1848, and completed the linking of the continent in 1869, thus ensuring an empire of liberty running

“the wellspring of disintegration,” he is content to say that “the poisoning of America has largely been the work of Europeans,” failing to consider that the American gaze upon their vast new home as potential real estate already presupposed, well before the arrival of Marx, an ontological reduction of nature, a primacy of *praxis*, and a continual surpassing of the given.<sup>38</sup> Yet at other times Del Noce seems to intuit more. Perhaps he says more than he could possibly be expected to know when he writes that “the American spirit . . . found in Pragmatism its philosophical expression.”<sup>39</sup> He is very near the mark when he cites approvingly a 1954 remark by Michele Federico: “Even if society in the United States calls itself Christian, American philosophy is essentially all atheistic. Not only that: it is marked by the idolatry of science, the tool that will radically change humanity by producing technical development and will bring to mankind all the happiness that man by his ‘nature’ can desire.”<sup>40</sup>

#### THE AMERICAN ATLANTIS

We wish to affirm this intuition and propose that the revolutionary elements Del Noce associates with Marxism are already present, sometimes implicitly and at other times *more radically*, in the so-called American experiment. Indeed, we wish to go further and say that America, unlike the nations of Europe, is the *essentially* modern nation and that the American experiment is thus *essentially* revolutionary—perhaps, in the final analysis, *more* revolutionary than Marxism. This opens a possibility that Del

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from sea to shining sea” (*Nothing Like It in the World: The Men Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad 1863–1869* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000], 17–18).

38. *CM*, 133. On this point Grant writes, “The conquering relation to place has left its mark within us. When we go into the Rockies we may have some sense that gods are there. But if so, they cannot manifest themselves to us as ours. They are the gods of another race, and we cannot know them because of what we are, and what we did. There can be nothing immemorial for us except the environment as object. Even our cities have been encampments on the road to economic mastery” (*Technology and Empire*, 17).

39. *CM*, 121.

40. *CM*, 123.

Noce did not consider and that we can only begin to sketch here, namely that the truest “ideal history” of late modernity is not the decomposition of Marxism—though we do not wish to discount Del Noce’s diagnosis so much as to circumscribe it—but the decomposition of America. The ideal history of the modern West is the outworking of the totalitarian logic of technological society, of which the United States is the historical and philosophical exemplar. This would provide an additional reason, besides its internal self-contradictions, for why Marxism could yield to technological civilization so completely. To be clear, we do not propose this as a *replacement* for Del Noce’s explanation, which retains its full force as far as we are concerned, but as a *complement* to it that we hope will strengthen the pertinence of his arguments to our present situation. A world-historical event like the dawning of a ubiquitous new totalitarianism defies reduction to a single cause.

To grasp fully the revolutionary character of the American project, it is necessary, as with Del Noce’s treatment of Marx, to grasp it in its metaphysical meaning. Americans have long had their own version of the absolutization of politics, and Lancellotti is correct about the shortcomings of a merely *political* critique of American liberalism, as the political incarnation of John Locke’s philosophy, for example.<sup>41</sup> This is not false, but it is far from the whole truth. Historically speaking, such a reduction fails to appreciate not only the amalgam of influences upon the American founders—e.g., civic republicanism, Scottish Enlightenment epistemology and moral theory, and Protestant Christianity—but, philosophically, it would separate political philosophy from its foundation in natural philosophy and isolate Locke’s political thought from the critical reduction of reason that elevated Baconian experimentalism to first philosophy among English-speaking Protestants.<sup>42</sup> In other words, by failing to grasp the metaphysical and even theological meaning of Locke, the typical *reductio* to Locke fails to grasp what is arguably the most significant aspect of

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41. Lancellotti would undoubtedly agree that the rich analyses of liberalism by David L. Schindler and D.C. Schindler constitute an exception to this tendency.

42. See Gordon S. Wood, *The Idea of America: Reflection on the Birth of the United States* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2011).

the Lockean inheritance in the American founding: its function as a midwife to the establishment of Bacon's "New Atlantis" on the western shores of the Atlantic.

There is a school of thought on the American Catholic Right that argues the American Revolution, in contradistinction to the French, was essentially conservative because it restored an older natural law tradition that had been eclipsed by the absolutist strands in English political theory such as Hobbes's and Robert Filmer's.<sup>43</sup> The obvious implication is that our present moral and political disintegration could theoretically be halted by returning to a more original form of America's founding principles, with its stress on the Declaration's "self-evident" moral truths, negative rights, personal responsibility, and a limited role for the state within a broader civil society. Europeans who are not deeply schooled in Anglo-American thought and who rely inordinately on contemporary English speakers for their understanding seem particularly susceptible to the diagnostic, if not the prescriptive, aspect of this argument.

The problem with this understanding is not that it is false so much as that it is empty. It is true that the "laws of nature" were on everyone's minds and lips in the eighteenth century, but most of the contemporary appeals to this tradition fail to account for the radical transformation of the meaning of nature, law, God, knowledge, truth, and Christianity that occurred in this era. The inevitable result is some species or other of Whig history.<sup>44</sup> The overthrow of Platonism—whether it be in neo-Platonic or Aristotelian form—was essentially completed long before Marx by the seventeenth-century architects of the scientific revolution,

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43. For two recent books of this genre stemming from the Claremont school of West Coast Straussians, see Robert R. Reilly, *America on Trial: A Defense of the Founding* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2020); Thomas G. West, *The Political Theory of the American Founding: Natural Right, Public Policy, and the Moral Condition of Freedom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017). For a more sustained critique of this genre, see Michael Hanby, "The Birth of Liberal Order and the Death of God: A Reply to Robert Reilly's *America On Trial*," pts. 1–3, *New Polity* 2, no. 1 (February 2021), available at <https://newpolity.com/blog/the-birth-of-liberal-order>.

44. For more detailed accounts, see Michael Hanby, *No God, No Science? Theology, Cosmology, Biology* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 107–49; "The Birth of Liberal Order and the Death of God."

the mathematical apriorism of Descartes notwithstanding.<sup>45</sup> The Cartesian bifurcation of reality (which merely repeated in dramatic and more speculative form the working ontology of Galileo) gave philosophical expression to a new, positive conception of matter as some kind of dimensive quality fully actual prior to and outside of any relationship to form.<sup>46</sup> With superficial variations, this basic conception would become axiomatic in the English-speaking world from Newton all the way to the time of Darwin.<sup>47</sup> Here already is a reconception of reality as “a system of forces, not of *values*.” The result was to transform “form” into the formalism of law (Newton) or the process of coming to be (Bacon). In either event, form in the sense of “essential nature” would cease to be the internal principle of motion and rest that ontologically precedes a thing’s unfolding—a notion that presumes a “Platonic” distinction between a transcendent order of being and a historical order of development—and becomes, to the extent this notion has any application at all, the “accidental” consequence of the arrangement of material parts. The self-transcending identity, indivisible existential unity, and interiority that had heretofore distinguished natural things from artifacts is erased. As nature is reduced to artifice, creation is reduced to “manufacture.” God thus ceases to be the *ipsum esse subsistens* of Aquinas, so transcendently other that he is more interior to the world than it is to itself. Rather, he becomes an extrinsic designer or contriver, to borrow the language of William Paley’s 1802

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45. Suffice it to say I dissent from Del Noce’s assessment of Descartes as an “‘accident’ in the history of the new science,” but adjudicating this dispute is beyond the scope of this essay. See *CM*, 14. For more on my position, see Hanby, *No God, No Science?*, 107–49; and *Augustine and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2003), 134–77.

46. This is especially clear in Descartes’s short treatise, “The World,” written before the *Meditations* or the *Discourse* but published posthumously. Descartes declined to publish the essay during his lifetime after learning of the condemnation of Galileo. In “The World,” the mechanical philosophy of the *Meditations* and the *Discourse* is laid bare, without any of the skeptical apparatus Descartes would later build as a path of induction toward it. See René Descartes, “The World,” in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. John Cottingham et al., vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 81–98.

47. On Darwin’s “Newtonianism,” see David J. Depew and Bruce H. Weber, *Darwinism Evolving: Systems Dynamics and the Genealogy of Natural Selection* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 85–140.

*Natural Theology*, “the Supreme Workman” of Thomas Jefferson, imposing his purposes in the form of physical or moral law from without upon things that would otherwise lack them.<sup>48</sup> This extrinsicism would govern the meaning of “teleology” in English natural theology up to the time of Darwin.<sup>49</sup>

Against this emerging ontological backdrop, the “laws of nature” that were so prominent in the eighteenth century begin to appear not as an expression of a “Platonic” primacy of the logos and a metaphysics of participation but as a *replacement* for them necessitated by the new mechanical philosophy of nature. The primacy of “law,” in other words, is a sign of metaphysical rupture and of a profound transformation in our understanding of the relationship between God and the world. Ironically, the loss of divine transcendence and the intrinsic form and finality of the natural world meant that God’s contriving agency was called upon much more directly in the eighteenth century than it had been in the thirteenth to account for “irreducibly complex” features of the natural order that resisted mechanistic explanation—things such as language, sociality, and the “moral sense.” This is one reason for the overwhelmingly moralistic character of American civil religion. But this “natural theology” came with a built-in obsolescence. This extrinsic, contriving God becomes superfluous once an alternative mechanism such as history or natural selection could be found to account for the construction of the artifact that is the present configuration of matter.

Del Noce describes how the Marxist primacy of becoming over being eliminates intellectual intuition and elevates *praxis* over *theoria*, whose very possibility is denied. Similarly, the conflation of nature and artifice in mechanistic philosophy leads ineluctably to the conflation of being and history. As Hannah Arendt put it, “The shift from the ‘why’ and ‘what’ to the ‘how’ implies that the actual objects of knowledge can no longer be things or eternal motions but must be processes, and that the object of science therefore is no longer nature or the universe but the history, the story of the coming into being, of nature

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48. See Boorstin, *The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson*, 29–56.

49. This is still what Darwinians think they are denying when they reject final causes.

or life or the universe.”<sup>50</sup> It would take time, and an infusion of Romanticism, for the mechanism of the eighteenth century to be transmuted into the historicism of the nineteenth, but already in the eighteenth century, well before Hegel or Marx, this vision began to give rise to the “science of providence” or “cunning of history” arguments.<sup>51</sup>

As Arendt’s comment suggests—and as Del Noce’s would lead us to suspect—the immediate effect of this new vision of nature was in the sphere of knowledge. Beginning with Bacon and Descartes and culminating in Kant, the critical project of modern philosophy restricted the scope of reason within ever-stricter bounds—muting the world, so to speak—in order to magnify the power of technical and instrumental reason over it. This was certainly true of Locke who, along with Hume, represents the apex of this trajectory in the English-speaking world prior to the advent of American pragmatism. Locke’s very definition of ideas as mere objects of thought—which simply sets aside the long philosophical and theological history of “ideas”—testifies to the fact that the metaphysics of participation has already been ruptured, well before he goes on to deny that such ideas are innate.<sup>52</sup> Locke further restricts the scope of reason by excluding all but the barest affirmation of God’s existence from

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50. Arendt continues, “Long before the modern age developed its unprecedented historical consciousness and the concept of history became dominant in modern philosophy, the natural sciences had developed into historical disciplines, until in the nineteenth century they added to the older disciplines of physics and chemistry, of zoology and botany, the new natural sciences of geology or history of the earth, and, generally, natural history. In all these instances, development, the key concept of the historical sciences, became the central concept of the physical sciences as well. Nature, because it could be known only in processes which human ingenuity, the ingeniousness of *homo faber*, could repeat and remake in the experiment, became a process, and all particular natural things derived their significance and meaning solely from their functions in the over-all process. In the place of the concept of Being we now find the concept of Process” (Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958], 256).

51. For more on the new conception of history and the new science of providence, see Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination: From the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1986), 202–89.

52. See John Locke, “An Essay Concerning Human Understanding” (London: Penguin Classics, 1997), 59ff. (2.1.1).

the rational sphere—thereby also excluding both Catholicism and Protestant “enthusiasm”—and sets this rupture in stone by restricting knowledge to the knowledge of our ideas only.<sup>53</sup> This turns out to be a false modesty, however, for it is the very impotence of reason before the unintelligibility of the world that warrants the triumph of experimental reason over it.

America, as we have said, is more than the incarnation of Lockean philosophy, which is less important for specific tenets that the American founders may have drawn from him—on property or liberty, for example—than as a representative of philosophical sensibilities that, though internally contested, were becoming axiomatic in the English-speaking world. There are profound implications to this that will subsequently prove decisive for the shape of American liberal order. In one stroke, Locke radically restricts the scope of things we can meaningfully think about, making “nonsense” an important category of Anglo-American philosophy. Indeed, it is arguably this—what can no longer be thought about—that is the most distinctive characteristic of this philosophy. The disincentive to understand, the inducement to thoughtlessness, is built into the structure of reason itself that corresponds to the primacy of technical rationality. If by manipulating variable  $x$  I can produce result  $y$ , and if  $y$  provides an “inference ticket” to new experiment  $z$ , then it is no longer necessary—or even possible with reason thus construed—to ask what being, causality, or truth are, or even what  $x$ ,  $y$ , and  $z$  are.<sup>54</sup> “They are,” John Dewey will later say, “what they can do and what can be done with them.”<sup>55</sup> Del Noce laments the “ban of the question” under the reign of decomposing Marxism, enforced “in the name of the greater prosperity made possible by science.”<sup>56</sup> But there was never a need to “ban” such questions in America; they are already unthinkable within the structures of

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53. See, e.g., Locke, “An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,” 283 (2.23.29).

54. On a “knowledge that can’t say what anything is,” see Henry B. Veatch, *The Two Logics: The Conflict between Classical and Neo-Analytic Philosophy* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969).

55. John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (London: Forgotten Books, 2012), 115.

56. *CM*, 233.

American public reason. Americans have never confronted reality as a mystery to be contemplated but as a set of problems to be solved or challenges to be overcome. The persistence of moralism in a once-Protestant culture is both a sign and a delayer of the fateful implications of this fact.

Del Noce premises all the negations that characterize revolutionary thought on the elevation of becoming over being. Another, more Aristotelian, way to describe the same phenomenon, which perhaps allows us to see certain aspects of its implications more clearly, is to speak of the elevation of possibility (i.e., *posse*, power) over actuality, consequent upon the “artificial” reimagination of God and nature. In its political guise, American order valorizes possibility under the form of freedom; in its scientific and technical guise, it valorizes possibility under the name of truth. Both senses of possibility were necessitated and confirmed by that confrontation with the land and “the conquering relation to place that left its mark within us.”<sup>57</sup> As Boorstin put it,

The final extent of human expansion on this continent was indefinable, though of course not unlimited; and Jefferson hoped that here the happiness of the species might advance “to an indefinite, although not an infinite degree.” The assignment which was found in America was less the attainment of any specific destination, than simple and effective affectivity. The continent offered a vague and nearly boundless arena for practical energies; and the fact that the task was without known (or perhaps knowable) limits, was one of its major attractions.<sup>58</sup>

Only by becoming an Atlantis could America realize this possibility.<sup>59</sup>

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57. Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 17.

58. Boorstin, *The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson*, 225.

59. To illustrate the concrete relation between the organized pursuit of technical conquest and metaphysical possibility, I refer again to the observation of Stephen Ambrose that, in George Washington’s world, the sense of time and space relative to the capacity and velocity of travel resembled that of Julius Caesar. But in less than a century after the American Revolution, the continental empire of liberty would be essentially complete. It was technology such as the railroad—but also the telegraph and later the wireless—that made this possible. The creation of a “unified” American culture, in other words, coincides with the advent of a technology that made a “culture in-

The reconception of freedom and truth as indefinite possibility gives the American project its revolutionary character, concretely realized in the interminable conquest of every kind of “frontier.”<sup>60</sup> Philosophically, the elimination of intrinsic form and finality from the natural order means that freedom (at least in its highest instance) could no longer be understood as the uninterrupted, undivided enjoyment of the good, as it had been understood in the tradition. Freedom is reconceived as the power to act or forbear from acting, in other words, as indeterminate possibility. The liberal conception of rights, which D.C. Schindler defines as the “enclosure of a field of power,” enshrines this possibility and makes the protection of this enclosure the *raison d’être* of American political order.<sup>61</sup> Yet this enclosure can only be protected, can only become real, in a sense, by remaining *unreal*—by negating all the claims of the *actual* world that threaten to define me prior to my choosing, of which there is no end. An inexhaustible spirit of annihilation is thus unleashed under the name of progress and prosperity in the technological and economic sphere and under the name of rights in the political sphere. This spirit *needs* something to devour in order to affirm itself. It must forever be in search of new sources of oppression, lest it die. As enclosures of possibility ever threatened by the determination of antecedent order, rights *must* proliferate endlessly, as indeed they have. And yet every new right extends the power of the state to

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dustry” possible for the first time. But the railroad was the *sine qua non* of this development. As Ambrose puts it, “America was riper than anywhere else for the railroad. It gave Americans ‘the confidence to expand and take in land far in excess of what any European nation or ancient civilization had been able successfully to control,’ as historian Sarah Gordon points out. The railroad promised Americans ‘that towns, cities, and industries could be put down anywhere as long as they were tied to the rest of the Union by rail’” (*Nothing Like It in the World*, 25).

60. I will sometimes refer to the “American project” or “the American experiment” rather than American thought both because these more encompassing terms capture the essence of America not only philosophically but in its historical, political, and institutional aspects, and because, as we are in the process of unfolding, the latent metaphysics of this project provides philosophical justification for the operational primacy of a mode of action that is largely *unthinking*.

61. D.C. Schindler, *Freedom from Reality: The Diabolical Character of Modern Liberty* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 182.

protect and enforce that right. Politics becomes absolute, ironically, in the name of protecting freedom, mediating all human relationships and eventually interjecting itself even between persons and their own nature.

The claims of nature are not just philosophical but inscribed on our flesh. And it is here, among other places, that technological reason, perhaps even more decisively than liberal freedom, contributes to the revolutionary character of the American project. The Marxist equation of truth with “the historical reality it is able to produce” is preceded by the Baconian equation of truth and utility, knowledge and power. This does not mean merely that knowledge is *for the sake of* power as a means to an end. Rather, it means that our knowledge is identical to—verified by—the various kinds of power we can exercise over natural phenomena. “The task of human Power,” Bacon writes, “is to generate and superinduce on a given body a new nature or natures, . . . to . . . subordinate the transformation of concrete bodies from one thing into another within the bounds of the *Possible*.”<sup>62</sup> Yet the ultimate limits of possibility can only be discovered by perpetually transgressing the *present* limits of possibility. With the conflation of truth and possibility, the so-called “technological imperative”—that what can be done must and will be done—is built into the very structure of reason. To abandon it—if it were possible—would be to abandon reason itself. Built into truth as possibility is “an unwanted, built-in, automatic utopianism,” a “self-feeding necessity,” “a principle of innovation in itself which made its constant further occurrence mandatory.”<sup>63</sup> By the hidden necessity of its own inner logic, the exaltation of possibility as freedom and truth sets in motion an interminable war against every form of antecedent order that becomes a regime of necessity, with a life of its own, as the cumulative results of technical advance determine the conditions for subsequent thought and action.

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62. Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, ed. Lisa Jardine and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.1, p. 102 (emphasis original).

63. Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 21; and *Philosophical Essays: From Ancient Creed to Technological Man* (Englewood, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1974), 48, 51.

The first and most fundamental order, the bearer of that vision of reality being overthrown, is the Catholic Church. The new vision of God and nature that legitimated the triumph of political over ecclesiastical order meant that Christianity would have to be reinvented as an instrument of the new orders of nature, reason, and politics. There is perhaps something of significance that Del Noce does not quite perceive in the continued affirmation of God's existence and the persistence of morality within a world reconceived to exclude him, something unique to Grant's "break" and the primal "meeting of the alien and yet unconquerable land with English-speaking Protestants."<sup>64</sup> Thomas Jefferson astutely observed "that while in protestant countries the defections from the Platonic Christianity of the priests is to Deism, in Catholic countries they are to Atheism."<sup>65</sup> We might suggest similarly, in contrast to Italy and the rest of continental Europe, that there was no need for America to pass through the stage of "postulatory" and "positive" atheism *en route* to an irreligious destiny, just as there was no need in America to "ban the questions" that heretofore constituted the Western philosophical tradition.<sup>66</sup> Just as the American mind, constituted as American

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64. This, broadly speaking, is how I would interpret Alasdair MacIntyre's "disquieting suggestion" of moral collapse, which was the subject of his *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

65. Thomas Jefferson, "To Thomas Law" (June 13, 1814), in *Thomas Jefferson: Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 1336.

66. Lancellotti describes Marx's "postulatory" and "positive" atheism: "God is not denied on the basis of some newly acquired scientific knowledge or metaphysical argument; rather, God *cannot* exist, because if he existed man could not be free. However, Marx operates within a post-Christian framework, and so he inevitably thinks of man as transcending the natural world. Thus, his rejection of God cannot take the form of a reabsorption of humanity into the cosmos, à la ancient paganism; instead, it must coincide with a deification of man, or, to be more precise, with a reclaiming by man of the attributes that he previously 'alienated' to God. As a result, Marxism is also the first fully developed form of *positive atheism*" (Lancellotti, "Augusto Del Noce on Marx's Abolition of Human Nature," 571). He contrasts this with earlier forms of "negative" atheism, which, because it is pessimistic and potentially nihilistic, according to Del Noce, "goes through a cycle that leads it to shed progressively its atheistic character, and to reconcile with religious thought" (Augusto Del Noce, *Il problema dell'ateismo* [Bologna: Il Mulino, 1964], 375, as cited in Lancellotti, "Augusto Del Noce on Marx's Abolition of Human Nature," 571).

by its break with Platonism, was drained of the capacity to ask such questions, so too was American Christianity always already “irreligious.” Irreligious Christianity is perfectly compatible with moralism and pietism, for these can coexist peacefully—frequently in the same soul—alongside an apprehension of the world that is functionally atheistic.<sup>67</sup> The new vision of God and nature necessitated this. In Locke, for example, mechanistic nature and Baconian empiricism have as their religious corollary a Christianity reduced to the barest affirmation of God’s existence and of Jesus as the historical Messiah, coupled with the recognition of moral norms that could only derive their binding force, in a world drained of goodness as an ontological principle, from the prospect of eternal reward or punishment. The Church likewise ceases to be genuinely Catholic (*kata holos*, with respect to the whole). It is no longer the sacrament of God and the supernatural completion of an inherently symbolic creation, the transcendent whole that contains the political order within its plenitude. Rather, churches are reduced to voluntary associations within the transcendent whole that is the liberal order. The price of religious survival in liberal society is that every manifestation of religion express itself as a species of Protestant congregationalism. To be American is to be Protestant, even if one is also an atheist, a Catholic, or a Jew.

The ontological and epistemological substructure for the eventual emergence of technological society was already established on these shores, by philosophy and necessity, at the time of the American founding. Its exigencies only grow more urgent in retrospect. As Daniel Boorstin says,

What was peculiar to America was not the emergence of an independent national life, but the extraordinary speed of the accomplishment, and the prehistoric background in which it occurred. . . . The uncovering and mastery of the continent, the building of a constitution, and the shaping of a national consciousness had been accomplished in a paroxysm of creative activity.<sup>68</sup>

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67. One could undertake an analysis of the liberal Protestantism of the early twentieth century analogous to Del Noce’s analysis of the Catholic progressivism in the 1960s. See *AS*, 236–66.

68. Boorstin, *The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson*, 6.

“The meaning of ‘philosophy’ under American conditions,” Boorstin further notes, was personified by Benjamin Franklin, a man “completely determined by the category of usefulness” and thus paradigmatically bourgeois in Del Noce’s sense.<sup>69</sup> Franklin’s 1743 proposal for “Promoting Useful Knowledge among the British Plantations in America”<sup>70</sup> recognized that the new “useful knowledge” had been indispensable in establishing the new colonies and would prove even more necessary in the future. Franklin founded the American Philosophical Society on the same Baconian vision that had inspired its prototypes: the Royal Society of London and the Académie des Sciences in Paris. The purpose of the Society was to promote “useful knowledge” and to advance “all philosophical Experiments that let Light into the Nature of Things, tend to increase the Power of Man over Matter, and multiply the Conveniencies or Pleasures of Life.”<sup>71</sup> “Including an intellectual elite from every corner of British North America,” the Society was, in Boorstin’s words, “truly continental in catholicity and influence. By the time of the Revolution, it had become the main institution through which Americans collaborated to comprehend and master their environment, and the

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69. *AS*, 95.

70. See Benjamin Franklin, “A Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge among the British Plantations in America” (Philadelphia, 1743), available at <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-02-02-0092>: “The English are possess’d of a long Tract of Continent, from Nova Scotia to Georgia, extending North and South thro’ different Climates, having different Soils, producing different Plants, Mines and Minerals, and capable of different Improvements, Manufactures, &c.

The first Drudgery of Settling new Colonies, which confines the Attention of People to mere Necessaries, is now pretty well over; and there are many in every Province in Circumstances that set them at Ease, and afford Leisure to cultivate the finer Arts, and improve the common Stock of Knowledge. To such of these who are Men of Speculation, many Hints must from time to time arise, many Observations occur, which if well-examined, pursued and improved, might produce Discoveries to the Advantage of some or all of the British Plantations, or to the Benefit of Mankind in general.

But as from the Extent of the Country such Persons are widely separated, and seldom can see and converse or be acquainted with each other, so that many useful Particulars remain uncommunicated, die with the Discoverers, and are lost to Mankind; it is, to remedy this Inconvenience for the future, proposed.”

71. *Ibid.*

focus, not merely of ‘scientific’ activity, but of intellectual life on the continent.”<sup>72</sup> The society boasted Washington, Madison, Hamilton, Marshall, and Paine among its members and officers. Thomas Jefferson, arguably the leading visionary of the American experiment, served as its president for eighteen years, attracting a circle of “Jeffersonian” natural philosophers that included David Rittenhouse, Benjamin Rush, Joseph Priestly, and Charles Wilson Peale. The American framers would even inscribe its Baconian vision into the Constitution of the new nation. Article I, section 8 grants Congress the power to “promote the Progress of Science and the Useful Arts” through what came to be known as the Copyright and Patent Provision, which had been advocated by Madison in *Federalist* no. 43.<sup>73</sup>

In good Baconian fashion, the preface to the first volume of the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* had eschewed speculative knowledge as useless, declaring that its members would “confine their disquisitions, principally to such subjects as tend to the improvement of their country, and advancement of its interest and prosperity.”<sup>74</sup> But Jefferson made the extinction of Platonism, which he regarded as a mere instrument of priestcraft, into something of a personal vendetta. He wrote often of his disdain in his correspondence, and he created the *Jefferson Bible*, a collection of bare historical and moral teachings from the synoptic gospels shorn of everything mystical, miraculous, supernatural, or symbolic, in the hopes that it would “prepare the euthanasia for Platonic Christianity,”<sup>75</sup> fittingly symbolized by its concluding verses: “Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein

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72. Boorstin, *The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson*, 11.

73. This prompts Leon Kass to say that “the American Republic is, to my knowledge, the first regime explicitly to embrace scientific and technical progress and officially to claim its importance for the public good.” He goes on to say that “the entire Constitution is a deliberate embodiment of balanced tensions between science and law and between stability and novelty, inasmuch as the Founders self-consciously sought to institutionalize the improvements of the new ‘science of politics,’ and in such a way that would stably perpetuate openness to further change” (Leon R. Kass, *Toward a More Natural Science: Biology and Human Affairs* [New York: The Free Press, 1985], 133–34).

74. As cited in Boorstin, *The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson*, 11.

75. Jefferson, “To John Adams” (October 12, 1813), in *Writings*, 1301–02.

was never man yet laid. There they laid Jesus. And rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.”<sup>76</sup> The epitaph for Platonic Christianity can be found in a letter Jefferson wrote in 1813 to his old friend, the second president John Adams:

In extracting the pure principles which [Jesus] taught, we should have to strip off the artificial vestments in which they have been muffled by priests, who have travestied them into various forms, as instruments of riches and power to them. We must dismiss the Platonists and Plotinists, the Stagyrites, and the Gamelielites, the Eclectics the Gnostics and Scholastics, their essences and emanations, their Logos and Demi-urgos, Aeons and Daemons male and female with a long train of Etc. Etc. Etc. or, shall I say at once, of Nonsense.<sup>77</sup>

Jefferson’s devotion was to “our master, Epicurus,”<sup>78</sup> and to the “creed of materialism,”<sup>79</sup> which he took to be the doctrine of Locke, Tracy, and Stewart, as well as compatible, in his mind, with the “Supreme Workman.” “To talk of immaterial existences,” he confided in an 1820 letter to Adams, “is to talk of nothings.” Jefferson’s was what Robert Faulkner calls the “useful and active materialism” of Francis Bacon, whom Jefferson regarded, together with Locke and Newton, as “the three greatest men that ever lived, without any exception, and as having laid the foundation of those superstructures which have been raised in the Physical & Moral sciences.”<sup>80</sup> As he wrote near the end of his life in 1825, “The business of life is with matter, that gives us tangible results. Handling that, we arrive at knowledge of the axe, the plough, the steam-boat, and everything useful in life,

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76. *Jefferson Bible* 17:62–64.

77. Jefferson, “To John Adams” (October 12, 1813), in *Writings*, 1301–02. Anti-Platonism is something of a theme in Jefferson’s letters. In addition to the letter to Adams, see also “To Peter Carr” (August 10, 1787), in *Writings*, 900–01; “To Benjamin Waterhouse” (June 20, 1822), in *Writings*, 1458–59.

78. Jefferson, “To William Short” (October 31, 1819), in *Writings*, 1432.

79. Jefferson, “To John Adams” (August 15, 1820), in *Writings*, 1443–44.

80. Robert K. Faulkner, “Jefferson and the Enlightened Science of Liberty,” in Gary L. McDowell and Sharon L. Noble, eds., *Reason and Republicanism: Jefferson’s Legacy of Liberty* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 43; Jefferson, “To John Trumbull” (February 15, 1789), in *Writings*, 939–40.

but from metaphysical speculations, I have never seen any useful result.”<sup>81</sup>

It is this spirit that later found philosophical expression in American pragmatism. John Dewey traced the origins of pragmatism back to Francis Bacon, “the real founder of modern thought.”<sup>82</sup> This made Dewey’s “renascent liberalism” a natural consequence of the “classical liberalism” of the founders, even if they, like Bacon himself, had a foot in two worlds that prevented them from realizing the full historicist implications of their own philosophy.<sup>83</sup> It is thus not an accident, though there have been Americans of every philosophical school, that this philosophical justification for philosophical suicide is America’s only enduring contribution to the history of philosophy. Jefferson had praised the scientific societies of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in terms worthy of Dewey, as “a great fraternity spreading over the whole earth” whose “correspondence is never interrupted by any civilized nation,” and which remains “always in peace, however their nations may be at war.”<sup>84</sup> The mission of conquering the vast American continent with its ocean of possibilities necessitated that America itself be a “great fraternity” of this kind. To *become* the America that we in fact became, the nation would have to become a state, in Dewey’s words, “organized for collective inquiry.” It would require that society take the form of an “organized intelligence” spanning generations that “attacks nature collectively.”<sup>85</sup> This, and not a novel exercise in self-government, is the deepest meaning of the American experiment. Progressives of Dewey’s generation helped birth the administrative state and presided over the great bureaucratization of American life in the early decades of the twentieth century, often juxtaposing their own “organic”

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81. Jefferson, “To Sheldon Clark” (December 5, 1825), in Edwin T. Martin, *Thomas Jefferson: Scientist* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1952), 36, as cited in Faulkner, “Jefferson and the Enlightened Science of Liberty,” 43.

82. John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (London: Forgotten Books), 28.

83. See the whole of John Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action* (Amherst, MA: Prometheus Books, 2000).

84. Jefferson, “To John Hollins” (February 19, 1809), in *Writings*, 1201.

85. Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, 37.

liberalism with the more static, “mechanical” liberalism of the founders. But it should be said that the collective nature of this attack is entailed in the very nature of scientific truth as possibility, which makes every result provisional and generative of unforeseen consequences. The “organization” of intelligence is as much an emergent feature of its aggregate actions, a “self-organizing” intelligence springing almost spontaneously from the ground up as a conscious “design” imposed from the top down.<sup>86</sup> Once its premises are accepted and put into practice, this New Atlantis almost builds itself without anyone exactly intending it. This explains one of the most novel features of the new, technocratic totalitarianism: its almost automatic character. It is not the rule of one, a conventional tyrant controlling the levers of power, but the rule of nobody, with no control levers to pull.

Pragmatism is the highest intellectual expression of America’s mission to make the world safe for science. With the possible exception of Del Noce himself, no one but Richard Rorty has stated more powerfully—and certainly none more approvingly—the intellectual consequences of this mission’s success.

Pragmatists think that the history of attempts to isolate the True or the Good, or to define the word “true” or “good” supports their suspicion that there is no interesting work to be done in this area. It might, of course, have turned out otherwise. People have, oddly enough, found something interesting to say about the essence of Force and the definition of “number.” They might have found something interesting to say about the essence of Truth. But in fact they haven’t. The history of attempts to do so, and of criticisms of such attempts, is roughly coextensive with the history of that literary genre we call “philosophy”—a genre founded by Plato. So pragmatists see the Platonic tradition as having outlived its usefulness. This does not mean that they have a new, non-Platonic set of answers to Platonic questions to offer, but rather that they do not think we should ask those questions anymore. When they suggest that we do not ask questions about the nature of Truth and Goodness, they do not invoke a theory about the nature of reality or knowledge or man which says that

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86. See *ibid.*

“there is no such thing” as Truth or Goodness. They would simply like to change the subject.<sup>87</sup>

The point, and it should be abundantly clear by now, is that “anti-Platonism” and “scientism” are not accidental corruptions of American thought that need to be accounted for by the addition of an extraneous factor. They *are* American thought, insofar as they are really American. American thought did not therefore need to pass through a dialectical negation of its utopian eschatology, because the American valorization of boundless possibility was a utopianism *without* a utopia, promising the interminable *pursuit* of happiness and forbidding its arrival.<sup>88</sup> In consequence, American Christianity did not need to pass from atheism to irreligion; it was already irreligious. Here we may suggest an alternative to the question of Del Noce and Lancellotti about the rapid transformation of Western society after 1945. As Lancellotti puts it, “Did the Anglo-American liberal tradition—broadly identified with Locke and his successors—have the ‘metaphysical firepower’ to lead *by itself* to the modern abolition of human nature and to radical anti-Platonism?”<sup>89</sup> The alternative answer is that there was no need for America *to be led* to the modern abolition of human nature and to radical anti-Platonism. It was already *essentially* anti-Platonic in a way that Europe could never be. The eventual (and inevitable) collapse of the final vestiges of its Europeanness could occur relatively swiftly and relatively painlessly without the vast conflagration that beset Europe for the better part of the twentieth century, like a dead tree blown over in a windstorm.<sup>90</sup>

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87. Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xiv.

88. I am grateful here to the thought of my student Stefano Zamagni in his excellent STL thesis: “The Pragmatic Revolution and the Rise of Irreligion: A Delnocean Reading of How Thinking Turned into Thoughtlessness within the American New Totalitarianism” (Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family, 2020).

89. Lancellotti, “Augusto Del Noce on Marx’s Abolition of Human Nature,” 582.

90. We might see this more clearly by altering somewhat the terms of Lancellotti’s question, bringing it to bear on the advent of that “Catholic Progressivism” that Del Noce so ably demolishes (*AS*, 217–66). How is it, we might

## THE OTHER REVOLUTION

When this mighty wind finally swept across the great American plain, setting mechanism in motion and reducing the last anachronistic remnants of human nature to dust and time, it bore the name not of Marx but of Darwin. The relation between Marx and Darwin is a subject of endless fascination, as is the relation between Marx and Dewey, given the similarity in their underlying metaphysics.<sup>91</sup> Dewey's relationship to Marx is, at the very least, ambivalent; there is nothing ambivalent about his relationship to Darwin. Dewey's praise for Darwin is effusive, as Marx's had been.<sup>92</sup> Dewey calls Darwin's theory "an intellectual revolt" that "introduced a mode of thinking that in the end was bound to transform the logic of knowledge, and hence the treatment of morals, politics, and religion."<sup>93</sup> Darwin, building upon the foundation of "Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, and their successors

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ask, that after a century of "brick and mortar" Catholicism in the United States and the massive assimilation of Catholics into Protestant American society culminating in the election of President Kennedy in 1960, the entire edifice of American religious life, priestly vocations, etc., could suddenly collapse in the immediate aftermath of the Second Vatican Council? Notwithstanding the diffusion of Marxist thought among Jesuits in the latter half of the twentieth century, does the "decomposition of Marxism" have sufficient metaphysical and cultural "firepower" to explain this catastrophe? Or is there something in the process of the "Americanization" of Catholicism that had already hollowed out the tree from the inside?

91. See Gerald Runkle, "Marxism and Charles Darwin," *The Journal of Politics* 23, no. 1 (1961): 108–26. On Dewey's relationship to Marx, see Jim Cork, "John Dewey, Karl Marx, and Democratic Socialism," *The Antioch Review* 9, no. 4 (1949): 435–52.

92. Marx said of Darwin, whose *On the Origin of Species* was first published eight years before the first edition of *Das Kapital*, "Nothing gives me greater pleasure than to have my name linked to Darwin's. His wonderful work makes my own absolutely impregnable. Darwin may not know it, but he belongs to the Social Revolution" (Runkle, "Marxism and Charles Darwin," 108). We might propose alternatively, in light of Marxism's subsequent absorption into technological society, that "the Social Revolution" belongs to the still more comprehensive scientific revolution we have been discussing. Darwin the Whig, who gives no evidence of having read Marx, would have been uncomfortable with the association and declined Marx's wish to dedicate the first volume of *Das Kapital* to him.

93. John Dewey, "The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy," in *Darwin: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Philip Appelman, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), 305.

in astronomy, physics, and chemistry,” succeeded at last in conquering “the phenomenon of life for the principle of transition, and thereby freed the new logic for application to mind and morals and life.”<sup>94</sup> Here, at last, the banishment of “the changeless, the final, and the transcendent” is complete. Here, finally, is the triumph of a “new logic” that dispenses with the traditional questions of philosophy that had animated the West since Plato—that is, dispenses with philosophy itself—not by resolving them, or even by banning them, but simply by changing the subject.<sup>95</sup> The logic of Darwinism “outlaws, flanks, dismisses—what you will—one type of problems and substitutes for it another type.”

Two radically different reasons . . . may be given as to why a problem is insoluble. One reason is that the problem is too high for intelligence; the other is that the question in its very asking makes assumptions that render the question meaningless. The latter alternative is unerringly pointed to in the celebrated case of design *versus* chance. Once admit [*sic*] that the sole verifiable or fruitful object of knowledge is the particular set of changes that generate the object of study together with its consequences that flow from it, and no intelligible question can be asked about what, by assumption, lies outside.<sup>96</sup>

Dewey would also write, interestingly enough, that “struggle for existence (or realization) was . . . an ‘organic’ part of German thinking long before the teaching of Darwin, who, in fact, is usually treated by German writers as giving a rather superficial empirical expression to an idea which they had already grasped in its universal speculative form.”<sup>97</sup> Marx, despite his professed admiration, would also criticize Darwin for his “crude English style,” complaining to Friedrich Engels: “It is remarkable how Darwin recognizes among beasts and plants his English society, with its division of labor, competition, opening up of new

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94. *Ibid.*, 308.

95. *Ibid.*, 308, 311.

96. *Ibid.*, 311.

97. John Dewey, *German Philosophy and Politics* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1915), 131–32, as cited in Runkle, “Marxism and Charles Darwin,” 115.

markets, ‘inventions,’ and the Malthusian struggle for existence. It is Hobbes’ *bellum omnium contra omnes*.”<sup>98</sup> Engels would likewise observe that

the entire Darwinian teaching on the struggle for existence merely transfers from society to the realm of living nature Hobbes’ teaching on war of all against all and the bourgeois economic teaching on competition, along with Malthus’ population theory. After this trick has been performed . . . the same theories are transferred back and the claim is made that it has been proved that they have the force of eternal laws of human society.<sup>99</sup>

Considering Del Noce’s thesis and our analysis above, we might propose that Darwin’s theory succeeded so spectacularly in abolishing human nature, and indeed succeeded *more* decisively than Marx, precisely *because* it was “empirical,” “superficial,” and “bourgeois.” It was like speaking to like. As Marx stands to Hegel, so Darwin stands to William Paley and the mechanistic natural theology of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Darwin, as Stephen Jay Gould once said, simply “inverts” that tradition, substituting “natural selection for God as the creative agent” of evolutionary change.<sup>100</sup> To just that extent, Darwinism is the extension, in negative form, of the tradition upon which the American foundation rests. It represents what one might call, after Del Noce, the “suicide” of mechanical theology.<sup>101</sup> As such, Darwinism represents not only the ultimate failure of that tradition but also its success. And the fact that this success brings human nature fully within the purview of the empiricist and experimental vision is one reason, we might suggest, that its triumph *exceeds* that of Marxism. Marx may have understood himself to be founding a “science of society,” but Marxism never fully ceased to be philosophy or succeeded in becoming an empirical and experimental science in the Baconian sense. That

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98. Karl Marx to Friedrich Engels, as cited in Depew and Weber, *Darwinism Evolving*, 82.

99. *Ibid.*, 111.

100. Stephen Jay Gould, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (Cambridge, UK: The Belknap Press, 2002), 119, 127.

101. See Hanby, *No God, No Science?*, 150–249.

Darwinism did so succeed in a society already constituted by a pragmatic Baconian vision—and that it thereby succeeded in concealing, most notably from Darwin himself—the metaphysical underpinnings of his own theory is one reason Darwinism continues to provide a scientific and technological culture with its self-understanding well after Marxism has been superficially discredited. It is also a reason why “decomposed” Marxism now finds such a comfortable home here, as well as one *practical* source of the sexual revolution that is, as far as I know, completely ignored by Del Noce.

We have spoken previously of the reduction of nature to artifice. Darwin effects his own inversion of the traditional maxim that art imitates nature with the idea that nature mimicked the action of breeders in selecting the best and culling the worst stock. Darwin’s core concept of natural selection is the “mechanical” outworking of this idea, “the doctrine of Malthus,” Darwin admitted, applied “to the whole animal and vegetable kingdoms.”<sup>102</sup> With this Malthusian idea came the Malthusian anxiety that human benevolence could hinder the action of natural selection, and, conversely, the recognition that the evolutionary process might be brought under rational control. By the time of *The Descent of Man*, published a dozen years after *On the Origin of Species*, this “eugenic” anxiety would show itself in the pages of Darwin’s own writing. Soon, Darwin’s cousin Francis Galton would invent the term as a name for the new science of “good birth,” and by the 1930s eugenic science was an international phenomenon. Only the revelation of Nazi atrocities in the immediate aftermath of World War II slowed its advance, forcing a change of names, if not exactly a change of intent.<sup>103</sup>

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102. Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, 6th ed. (Amherst, MA: Prometheus Books, 1991), 3.

103. The Galton Chair of Eugenics at University College London, for example, became the Galton Chair of Genetics; genetic hygiene became genetic counseling, and so on. On the history of eugenics, see Daniel Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Heredity* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1998). The term “new eugenics” was coined to describe biotechnical developments after World War II and the discovery of the double-helix. On this, see Robert Sinsheimer, “The Prospect of Designed Genetic Change,” *Engineering and Science* 32, no. 7 (1969): 8–13, as cited in Evelyn Fox Keller, “Nature, Nurture, and the Human Genome Project,” in Daniel J. Kevles and Leroy Hood, eds., *The Code of Codes: Scientific and Social Issues in the Human Ge-*

Phenomena that we now associate with the emancipatory side of the sexual revolution, the global birth control movement that sprang up at the turn of the twentieth century, for example, were first launched not as instruments of sexual liberation but as a method of eugenic control. Indeed, the contemporary medical regime of contraception and abortion, genetic screenings and broader prenatal diagnosis, continues to function eugenically even now. It is just that the mechanisms for enforcing the “new eugenics,” operating internally through the unreflective acceptance of new social archetypes and externally through the diffusion of market and medical incentives, are more powerful if less obviously coercive than the state-mandated mechanisms of the old eugenics.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, the so-called “lesbian baby boom” of the 1990s, made possible by the newly available in vitro fertilization and other assisted reproductive technologies, was an important precursor to the legal redefinition of marriage by the American courts. Hans Jonas has explored in great depth the interminable dynamism of technological society, how its achievements precede the will for what they make possible, thereby determining the conditions of our thought and action as a kind of fate.<sup>105</sup> That such technological developments *became* instruments of “liberation” likewise reveals something important about the relation of theory to technological practice in the sexual revolution and in technological society more generally.<sup>106</sup> Even now, the most dramatic victories of the sexual

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*nome Project* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1992), 281–99. For considerations of its long-range implications, see The President’s Council on Bioethics, *Beyond Therapy: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Happiness* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2003), 1–100. See also Brendan P. Foht, “While Bioethics Fiddles,” *The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology and Society* 57 (Winter 2019): 26–35.

104. See Michael Hanby, “*Humanae Vitae* and the Technological Conquest of Humanity,” in Theresa Notare, ed., *Humanae Vitae, 50 Years Later: Embracing God’s Vision for Marriage, Love and Life* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 43–64.

105. See Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 188–210; *The Imperative of Responsibility*, 1–24; *Philosophical Essays*, 45–70.

106. This relation is undoubtedly complex, and I want to be clear that I am not contending for another “philosophy of *praxis*.” I would wish to distinguish between two kinds of priority, mirroring the old Aristotelian distinction between the order of being and the noetic, historic, and intentional orders. All *praxis* is inherently responsive to whatever exigencies the structures of being

revolution to date, more radical than even Del Noce could foresee, would have remained permanently unimaginable were it not for antecedent technical development. Same-sex marriage, which Del Noce did anticipate, would have been unthinkable without the assisted reproductive technologies and commercial surrogacy that make it possible to provide children to homosexual couples.<sup>107</sup> Likewise, we would never have imagined that a man might “really” be a woman if we did not also imagine it were possible to transform him into one by surgical or pharmacological means. The sexual revolution, in other words, is substantially the human outworking of the *technological* revolution.<sup>108</sup> It presupposes and promotes *both* the reduction of the human body to the status of a biological machine at the theoretical level, an archetype that invites and indeed necessitates further biotechnical intervention, *and* the technical conquest of human reproductive biology at the practical level. It is no accident that America, the world’s *essentially*

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may impose upon it, and it depends for its intelligibility upon theoretical judgments about these structures entailed in its self-understanding, which may be more or less (usually less) conscious. So I would maintain that *theoria* is first in itself, that is, first in the order of being, and that the truth of being is to some degree operative within *praxis* itself irrespective of whether the agent is aware of it. At the same time, *praxis* may be first in the historical order of operations by which we come to think about a given matter. To say, then, that technological *praxis* may precede theory in the sexual revolution is not to deny *theoria* its absolute priority but to speak of the way that our thought at any given instance is shaped by the practical consequences of technological interventions in history that are themselves the vehicle of prior metaphysical judgments.

107. This is certainly true in the United States. However much the movement to redefine marriage may have initially depended upon severing the relation between marriage and procreation and advancing a “companionate” definition of marriage, so-called “marriage equality” could not be achieved without granting homosexual couples a right to children that adoption, as dependent upon the sexual activity of married couples, could not provide. Thus, in theory and in fact, the conceivability of same-sex marriage depends upon the possibilities created by assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs), and, conversely, the normalization of same sex-marriage means the elevation of ARTs to a normative form of reproduction and the archetypal redefinition of the human realities of man, woman, mother, father, child, and sibling. The work of Courtney Megan Cahill, Douglas Nejaime, and others shows how deeply these implications are insinuating themselves into American legal theory.

108. See Michael Hanby, “The Brave New World after *Obergefell*” (unpublished manuscript, December 9, 2019), available at [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3501246](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3501246).

technological nation, has been the epicenter, the “Wild West” of this revolution. Its triumph would have been unthinkable without what I have elsewhere called the “Darwinization of everything.”<sup>109</sup> The Hereditary Commission was founded under the Theodore Roosevelt administration in 1906. The Eugenics Records Office at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory was created in 1910. The First International Eugenics Congress, presided over by Charles Darwin’s son, Leonard, and attended by a young Winston Churchill, preceded the Russian Revolution by five years and the publication of Wilhelm Reich’s *Sexual Revolution* by nearly a quarter century.

The impact of the Darwinian revolution upon the world of American Protestantism, and thus upon subsequent American culture, cannot be overstated. Emancipated from Platonism and having abandoned nature to the mechanistic philosophy and Baconian science from which Darwin himself emerged, American Protestantism at the end of the nineteenth century had no choice but to assimilate itself to the progressive vision of nature or try to stand athwart history on the fideistic grounds of biblical literalism, a resistance that was doomed to fail. The story of American Protestantism in the first decades of the twentieth century is largely the story of its practical assimilation to the Darwinian vision, even among evangelicals and others who imagined themselves opposed to Darwin’s theory on doctrinal grounds, by the agency of eugenical assumptions that were establishing themselves as cultural axioms. Besides the forced sterilization laws and court decisions such as *Buck v. Bell*, the artifacts by which these axioms were instilled in an unphilosophical population—the eugenics sermon contests for Protestant ministers, the “fitter family” competitions at World’s Fairs, the job opportunities for enterprising young women as eugenics records keepers, the none-too-subtle magazine advertisements propagated among young mothers pushing the improvement of the race, the new regime of measuring and testing infants and the rise of “scientific” parenting—are shocking now, though largely unknown to us, as we have invisibly internalized so many of their assumptions.<sup>110</sup>

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109. Hanby, *No God, No Science?*, 377.

110. Two excellent books detailing and analyzing this remarkable history are Amy Laura Hall, *Conceiving Parenthood: American Protestantism and the Spirit of Reproduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); and Christine Rosen, *Preach-*

This was the era in which Reich's *Sexual Revolution* could eventually find an audience. This fact does not *exclude* Reich and the later iterations of Marxist theory as a causal factor in our present civilizational catastrophe; if anything, it explains how decomposed Marxism *could* become such a factor. By the time one comes to the feminist Shulamith Firestone writing about "seizing the means of reproduction" in the 1970s, or Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* in the 1980s, it is clear that both strands of revolutionary thought, the Marxist and the technological, had been fused.<sup>111</sup>

What this analysis does suggest, however, is that the decomposition of Marxism is not sufficient by itself to explain the new totalitarianism of our present moment, that this decomposition is, after all, but a chapter in a still more comprehensive story, and that the philosophy working itself out as our history may not be exactly the one Del Noce imagined. Hegel once defined philosophy as "the comprehension of one's own time in thought."<sup>112</sup> According to this definition, Augusto Del Noce's thought is true philosophy. He has understood our contemporary political and social crisis, our disintegrating civilization, in its metaphysical depths. His categories of revolution, scientism, and eroticism are indispensable to understand the new totalitarianism that increasingly defines our present but has remained, at least until recently, largely invisible. Given the depths of the crisis he has

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ing *Eugenics: Religious Leaders and the American Eugenics Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Catholics, who were often the objects of eugenic concern—in *The Descent of Man*, Darwin laments that the Irish on the streets of London "multiply like rabbits"—were the staunchest opponents of the eugenic vision, which forms the cultural background for the 1930 encyclical *Casti connubii*. Even so, Catholics were not invulnerable to the eugenic temptation, and, according to Christine Rosen, among all faiths "the evidence yields a clear pattern about who elected to support eugenic-style reforms and who did not. Religious leaders pursued eugenics precisely when they moved away from traditional religious tenets. The liberals and modernists in their respective faiths—those who challenged their churches to conform to modern circumstances—became the eugenics movement's most enthusiastic supporters" (*Preaching Eugenics*, 184).

111. Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1970), 11.

112. Georg W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 21.

helped to reveal, he is undoubtedly correct: “For the first time in history worldly survival is entrusted to religious conversion.”<sup>113</sup> The translation of his essays into English comes at a crucial moment, when our time is in most need of comprehending what is at stake. Even so, the passage of time, the suicide of the American revolution, and the advance of the new totalitarianism beyond even Del Noce’s prophetic imagination, suggest that the “crisis of modernity” will not be fully comprehended until we have understood the American experiment and grasped more deeply the historical novelty and philosophical meaning of the quintessentially modern nation. □

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113. *CM*, 45.