

## Cultural Renewal: The Principle of Religious and Ethical Restraint

Joseph Baldacchino

IT IS A SIGN of the low estate of late twentieth-century American culture, perhaps, that a book entitled *Cultural Conservatism*<sup>1</sup> is given over largely to advocacy of a public-policy agenda and only secondarily to discussion of the substantive issues of culture. Many of the book's policy prescriptions may be quite sound. Particularly valuable are some of the book's suggestions for strengthening the family, restoring discipline and purpose to the schools, and promoting a renewed sense of order, stability, and community in our cities and neighborhoods. Also encouraging are several key affirmations put forward by authors William Lind and William Marshner that portend a departure by American conservatism from overreliance on abstract libertarian formulations. One is their statement that "government, including the Federal government, has legitimate tasks and duties, including not only upholding public order but also promoting the general welfare and the common good"—a general proposition with which one can agree without assenting to all of the authors' specific proposals for government involvement.<sup>2</sup> Another is their recognition that property rights, though essential to the good society, are not absolute in any abstract sense and imply certain corresponding duties, such as a "commitment to community, charity, and capital formation."<sup>3</sup>

Though overshadowed by the book's heavy concentration on policy questions, much of what Lind and Marshner say about the substance of culture, beginning with their definition in the introductory chapter, hits the mark. Culture, they note,

is the ways of thinking, living and behaving that define a people and

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underlie its achievements. It is a nation's collective mind, its sense of right and wrong, the way it perceives reality, and its definition of self. Culture is the morals and habits a mother strives to instill in her children. It is the obligations we acknowledge toward our neighbors, our community, and our government. It is the worker's dedication to craftsmanship and the owner's acceptance of the responsibilities of stewardship. It is the standards we set and enforce for ourselves and for others; our definitions of duty, honor, and character. It is our collective conscience.<sup>4</sup>

Lind and Marshner penetrate to the heart of the matter with their recognition that a healthy and vibrant culture will embody "living habits of restraint," rooted in "the long view" of human history and experience. Cultural conservatism, they write, is consonant with "virtually all the world's

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great religions and philosophies" in emphasizing "that limits on instinctive human behavior are necessary for individuals to live rewarding, satisfying lives." By contrast, cultural radicals, or liberationists, "see traditional limits on behavior as unnatural restrictions on happiness."<sup>5</sup> It is not too much to say that the clash between these warring views of human nature—and the recent ascendancy of the "liberationist" position among cultural elites and opinion molders—constitutes the central challenge of our age.

At the same time that the authors should be commended for stressing the ethical core of culture and the centrality of moral restraint, one must question their tendency to

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underestimate, if not neglect, the importance and influence of what may be summarized as "the arts" or "the humanities," for example, creative literature, theatre, music, painting, and teaching in these areas. Here Lind and Marshner reflect a general tendency among American conservatives to view the arts as relatively insignificant in the shaping of society. A related and notable weakness in their understanding of culture is a populist prejudice that culture is something that bubbles up from the great mass of people. Although people in general do become carriers of culture in a good society and can sometimes be counted on to have sound reactions against provocations from a decadent cultural elite, they cannot be relied upon for the great and truly creative contributions to culture that renew and inspire society. Culture is to this extent inherently elitist, even though in a healthy society there exists a living connection and a natural reciprocity between elite culture and more popular forms of culture.

Nevertheless, for supporters of "the long view" of human culture, the big question today is how best to address the "liberationist" challenge. The authors of *Cultural Conservatism* propose a broad array of public policy initiatives. Though many of their proposals merit respectful consideration, it is highly doubtful that short-term legal enactments and related political activism by themselves can turn the cultural tide: a point that is actually implicit in much of the book. Misguided public policies can certainly wreak havoc relatively quickly on long-established institutions and relationships that have proved beneficial to man's moral and intellectual development. But, once cultural decline has become pronounced and widespread, revitalization is not easily set in motion by mere political activism. At that point, issuing proposals for new laws or regulations in line with traditional values becomes akin to "preaching to the choir." Those for whom the old institutions—family, local community, the church—still provide meaning will applaud, though they may be at the same time confused by contrary signals emanating from other sectors of the elite and popular cultures. The trend-setters in a declining society will regard the proposed new policies as threats to their autonomy as individuals. For them, arguments in favor of policies that are consistent with time-honored standards, however tightly reasoned, will have no concrete relation to their own personal experience and, hence, will prove ineffectual. They will perceive such policies as wholly unnecessary restrictions on their ability to go where the pleasure of the moment leads. They will bitterly resist these policies and will frequently succeed in defeating them. Well-inspired laws and regulations, even if adopted, can have but limited influence if they fly in the face of strong desires that have become part of society's ethos. "Without a culture that roots the law in living habits of restraint," as Lind and

Marshner aptly note, “the ‘rule of law’ is a constitutional fiction.”<sup>6</sup>

We see, then, that, when a culture is in trouble—when those classes or groups that are widely emulated come to value too highly the wrong goals—no “quick fix” is possible. A society in this state is fundamentally at odds with itself. It is mired in confusion. Despite the fond hopes of many, it cannot be “jump started” by changing this or that law, a whole series of laws, or the entire Constitution, for that matter. Lind and Marshner seem to sense this problem intuitively. Yet, over the last several decades, most of American conservatism has fallen into the practice of looking almost exclusively to public policy studies and partisan political activity as the way to improve the situation. This unfortunate habit may have become so ingrained by now that even those who sense the inadequacy of the policy approach find it hard to change direction. The old tools that once served well—philosophy, ethics, literature—have grown rusty through long disuse. As a result, few are now able to recognize that a revitalization of culture must begin with the renewal of the humanities and the arts.

WE HAVE POINTED to *Cultural Conservatism*'s heavy concentration on public policy questions as an important indicator of the current condition of American culture. It is equally symptomatic that, in a book as explicitly friendly to religion and its role in culture as this one, the authors feel constrained in their chapter on “Religious and Moral Institutions” to approach the subject from a preponderantly utilitarian perspective. While dwelling on “the contribution which religious beliefs generally make to the stability of our families, the safety of our streets, the morals of our youth, and the honesty of our work-places,”<sup>7</sup> Lind and Marshner give little attention to the substance of religion or the nature of religious experience. It is not that they are oblivious to these questions. In a chapter note they mention that their utilitarian emphasis is not meant to “deny . . . that religion is transcendental in its purpose,” that it “does not exist to provide a public benefit in this world, but to bring men into harmony with God and the demands of a higher world.” They add that, “[w]hen cultural conservatives attribute benefits to the generic thing, ‘religion,’ rather than to this or that religion, they are enjoying a luxury of Western culture, where almost all of the influential religions have been variants of Judaism or Christianity.” There have been other cultures, they acknowledge, “where an influential religion has sometimes been quite destructive.” Among other examples, they point to the “cultus of the Hummingbird Wizard,” which “cost an estimated two million human lives in Aztec Mexico,” “the medieval Islamic heresy called the Assassins,” and “the sect of the thuggees in India.” They conclude that, “*in the last analysis*, the social benefit

of a religion cannot be separated from its theological and moral content, nor from the question of its truth. But the last analysis is not the only analysis, and a shallower level of discussion may be adequate for many public-policy purposes.”<sup>8</sup>

While there is a sense in which this last statement is correct, one cannot help thinking that many of the maladies of our time, even in the public-policy realm narrowly understood, are the result of too great a willingness to discuss ultimate issues at a “shallower level” than their nature warrants. Even if it was true in the past that we in the West could afford the “luxury” of discussing religion in a loose sense thanks to our common Judaic-Christian heritage, today it must be questioned whether that luxury remains available in the United States. If, in considering the effect on society of religious practice and belief, we have in mind traditional Jewish and Christian faith, how are we to deal with the growing number of first- and second-generation Americans from non-European cultures who adhere to other faiths such as Islam or Buddhism? How are we to understand and relate to foreign cultures? And what of the recent proliferation of fledgling cults and “spiritual” movements, many of them spawned by the 1960s counterculture? Do they deserve to be accorded the same respect as the world's great religions that have stood the test of centuries or millennia? On the other hand, should newness, even if one grants that it makes claims to truth more suspect, be considered disqualification in this respect? Less obvious, but no less real, is the problem that people profess adherence to one of the traditional faiths while holding ideas and practicing ways of life that are fundamentally different. Miguel d'Escoto and Mother Teresa of Calcutta both belong to Roman Catholic religious orders, but do they really have the same religion?

It seems clear that we can no longer confine discussion of religion and morality to the secular benefits that they bring, confident that all parties to the dialogue will intuitively know what these terms mean. Rather, we must seek to determine in as much depth as is necessary the nature of genuinely religious and moral activity. We must be able to distinguish spiritual life from types of experience which, though claiming the special dignity of religion, are diametrically opposite religion in character.

That many have shied away from these questions, despite their centrality to any adequate view of culture, is not surprising. Those of a positivist orientation deny the very possibility of reliable knowledge about the transcendent. Even among professed Christians, interdenominational disputes over doctrine and liturgy—complicated, to be sure, by natural human jealousies and status resentments—have led large numbers to conclude that it is prudent, in matters of social thought particularly, to avoid examination of substan-

tive religious issues. To skirt these dangers without ignoring religion entirely, many have sought a common frame of reference in the merely secular ramifications of various religious creeds. It is hoped that men might be able to approach some agreement on these matters even if there can be no agreement about ultimate issues. This approach is tempting for obvious reasons. But, as a means of apprehending reality, of understanding what is actually happening in the world, it leaves much to be desired. Lind and Marshner describe religion's social benefit as a mere "spillover effect, an 'externality,' " of genuine religious practice. But to focus disproportionate attention on the former at the expense of the latter is to try to achieve desirable outcomes without even attempting to learn what one can about their nature and origin. Especially in a time of rampant spiritual and ethical confusion, it is like patching the roof while averting one's gaze from floodcurrents that are undermining the foundations below.

It remains to consider whether it is possible to get closer to the center of religion without becoming bogged down in interdenominational and interfaith rivalry. Does genuinely religious experience transcend adherence to any one faith or written creed? In that case it may be open to discussion in terms whose meaning is accessible to men and women of divergent cultures and beliefs. Or must it be assumed that true religion is necessarily bound up with the rituals, dogmas and canonical writings of one particular faith to the

exclusion of all others? In that case "membership in good standing" becomes the criterion of religious insight.

When St. Paul says that the law is written in men's hearts and conscience, he seems to be suggesting that the former is true: that, at least in part, God reveals Himself directly to man through normal intuition or consciousness. What is most important in the religious life, according to St. Paul, is not that men and women belong to a certain group or have access to some special teaching but that they defer in their own particular actions or will to the transcendent will that is knowable by all intuitively—*provided* that they are willing to pay attention. "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness . . ." <sup>9</sup> In a reference to this passage, the late Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr observes: "Following St. Paul, Christian thought has consistently maintained that the law must be regarded, not simply as something which is given man either by revelation, or for that matter by the authority of society, but as written in the heart. This can only mean that the requirements of action, dictated by man's essential nature, are a part of his real self."<sup>10</sup> Summing up the traditional Christian view of flawed human nature, Niebuhr writes that man achieves his highest self-realization in "the subjection of [his] particular will to the universal will," <sup>11</sup> yet "at the very centre of the human personality" man is beset with a conflicting orientation of will that resists any such subjection.<sup>12</sup>

Another thinker who has described man's essential moral predicament in terms of contrary inclinations of will is the early twentieth-century Harvard professor and critic Irving Babbitt. Babbitt was not a professing Christian, but what he says of man's moral nature, based on historical experience crossing many times and cultures, coincides in central respects with the orthodox Christian view. Concerning Babbitt, a contemporary scholar has written:

His religious views have a decidedly generalist cast and belong to what should be called the universal moral order. In contemporary religious parlance, Babbitt could be termed an "ecumenist," though this word would be apt to imply nonselective and nondefined religious elements that Babbitt would find antipathetic. Babbitt's religious search goes beyond the frontiers of historical Christianity and is more inclusive in its figures, goals, and essences, as he makes clear when he writes: ". . . if there is such a thing as the wisdom of the ages, a central core of normal human experience, this wisdom is, on the religious level, found in Buddha and Christ and, on the humanistic level, in Confucius and Aristotle. These teachers may be regarded both in themselves and in their influence as the four outstanding figures in the spiritual history of mankind." <sup>13</sup>

Babbitt describes the existence within the human breast of two competing elements of will: the "lower will," which is manifested in man's self-indulgent, expansive desires, and

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the transcendent “higher will,” which is experienced as a propensity to restrain those desires in favor of a nobler and more deeply satisfying goal. “As against the expansionists of every kind,” he writes,

I do not hesitate to affirm that what is specifically human in man and ultimately divine is a certain quality of will, a will that is felt in its relation to his ordinary self as a will to refrain. . . . The idea of humility, the idea that man needs to defer to a higher will, came into Europe with an Oriental religion, Christianity.<sup>14</sup>

The New Humanism or American Humanism, of which Babbitt (along with Paul Elmer More) was the acknowledged leader until his death in 1933, was highly controversial; and this has added to the large amount of confusion concerning the meaning of Babbitt’s ideas. For example, his identification of the moral sense with restraint has led to the charge that the higher will is purely negative. Babbitt did describe the higher will as an “inner check,” an ethically inspired pause in the moment of action, which may be linguistically expressed in such questions as: Should I do this? or Is this right? While the higher will blocks many

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impulses, it lets some pass into action. The higher will both restrains impulses and gives our lives a positive direction. Over time the result for the individual is a life of deepening satisfaction and inner peace (what Aristotle called true happiness, which is distinct from mere, short-term pleasure) and community with others who are similarly ordering their lives.

Of course, people are constantly restraining incipient actions for reasons having nothing to do with ethics or the transcendent good. A miser, for example, may restrain his impulse to spend money. How are these merely prudential “checks,” which are part of what Babbitt terms man’s ordinary or natural self, to be distinguished from the Inner Check that constitutes man’s higher or moral self? A clue is found in this quotation from Babbitt: “That man is most human who can check . . . his passion, even his ruling passion . . .”<sup>15</sup> Thrift is a virtue when it is motivated by a (genuine) desire to do what is intrinsically right, such as when a parent makes provision for the future needs of children, but, in the same man or woman of character, the thrift would be balanced against countervailing obligations to be charitable, generous, and so forth. In the miser, by contrast, thrift is not a virtue but the vice of avarice. Though he restrains the temptation to part with money, this act of restraint is itself a manifestation of unrestraint – his unbrid-

led passion for hoarding wealth. The criterion of ethics is one of motive. Ethical actions are intended to do what is good for its own sake; all other actions serve some other purpose.

Of the many and varied aspects of Babbitt’s thought, the one that is perhaps least understood and that has elicited the most intense criticism is his religious viewpoint. Secularists and naturalists abhorred him because of his unflinching belief in, and unique intellectual defense of, a supreme power of good that rules the universe. Yet he came under fire from many Christians, including his student T. S. Eliot, for his refusal to embrace all of the dogmas of their faith. A major charge of the latter group was that Babbitt regarded the higher will, not as a transcendent and wholly separate personal God in the Christian sense, but as part of man himself. This position, they argued, betrayed a lack of humility on Babbitt’s part, belying his emphasis on the importance of this virtue, in that it suggested that man could attain morality on his own, in contrast to the Christian emphasis on man’s need for God’s help in the form of “grace.” But in defense of Babbitt it should not be forgotten that there is an essential ambiguity in the way man actually experiences the higher will. As Folke Leander points out:

On the one hand man experiences “virtue” as a “gift of God,” on the other hand he is conscious that “virtue can be acquired.” . . . On the one hand man is intensely conscious that he himself wills, on the other hand he is conscious that his *power to will* is a divine gift. The individual man can evidently fix his attention on the one or the other pole of the ambivalence and thus stress either grace or works (free will). Aristotle embraced the latter alternative; Christianity, to the extent it seeks to avoid Pelagianism on the one hand and Augustinianism on the other, mediates between the two alternatives by—metaphorically speaking—“cleaving” the higher will into free will and grace.<sup>16</sup>

Leander quotes St. Bernard on this issue: “The acts are not in part Grace, in part Free Will; but the whole of each act is effected by both in an undivided operation.”<sup>17</sup> And St. Thomas Aquinas: “We attribute one and the same effect both to a natural cause and to a divine force, not in the sense of that effect proceeding in part from God, and in part from the human agent. But the effect proceeds entire from both, according to a different mode: just as, in music, the whole effect is attributed to the instrument, and the same entire effect is referred to man as the principal agent.”<sup>18</sup>

While in his accounts of his own moral experience man may sometimes emphasize the higher will as something immanent and at other times as something transcendent, the higher will is actually both, simultaneously. “What Babbitt calls the higher will,” Claes Ryn has explained,

is in one sense particular and mutable; it is experienced by individual

men and has an effect in the unique circumstances of *their* lives. But this will is also the same in all men; it is universal and immutable in that it pulls all in the same direction, towards the special quality of life which is its own reward by satisfying man's deepest yearning. The higher will draws each individual towards its own transcendent purpose by ordering his impulses. . . . In moral action, individuality and universality, immanent and transcendent, merge. The good is "incarnated." 19

According to Babbitt, the higher will manifests itself on two levels. For most men and women, the higher will is experienced as a will to the goodness of civilized life: the obligation to subordinate one's impulsive self to the imperative of justice. But for a few, such as the most devoted imitators of Christ, the higher will is felt as a will to saintliness: a call to give more than justice demands. Babbitt often reserves the word "religion" for those following the path of saintliness, while describing life according to more "worldly" ethical obligations as "humanism." Here, on the other hand, the term "religion" is employed in a broader sense, more in accord with common usage, as encompassing both levels of spiritual striving. Both require what Babbitt calls "inner working," the hard task of subordinating one's natural self to the transcendent good.

At this point, an important distinction should be drawn. Babbitt's "humanism" is not to be confused with what is known today as secular humanism. The latter movement embodies the tendency that Babbitt referred to as "naturalism" or "humanitarianism." It assumes that man is naturally good and that brotherhood and prosperity will flourish if only men and women will give free rein to their sympathetic impulses. To the extent that evil in the world is conceded, the secularists or naturalists shift its locus or source outside the human breast to the institutions of society. This obviates the need for "inner working"—the difficult effort to build moral character through control of man's lower inclinations. In its stead, secular or sentimental humanitarians glorify "outer working"—the control and reshaping of the external world, be it other human beings (society) or natural forces (the material universe)—in the name of sympathy or "compassion."

What Babbitt called "outer working" can assume a great variety of forms. All of the vocations known to mankind are included: business, scientific research and invention, agriculture, the military, the arts and humanities, politics. Nothing written here is meant to suggest that such endeavors—not least among which are the making of laws and formulation of public policy—are unimportant or unnecessary. Jesus said that man lives not by bread alone; He did not say that man can or should live without bread. By his very nature man has material and emotional needs that must be met by plenty of energetic activity, "outer working," if he is to have a good life. High among such necessary

activities, it should be emphasized, are the making of laws and formulation of public policy. Precisely because man is torn between good and bad potentialities, we cannot depend upon his always or even usually doing what the higher will calls for simply because it is right. Often less worthy motives, including fear of punishment or the desire for financial profit, must be relied upon to advance the goal. Good laws and other social structures—e.g., checks and balances, federalism, the market economy, certain customs and taboos—can sometimes enlist mere self-interest in the service of moral ends. Such institutions are good precisely to the extent that they are inspired and shaped by concern for the ethical good. Sometimes these institutions will continue to exert salutary influence in society even though the moral spirit that engendered them has begun to dissipate, but this effect can be counted on only temporarily. As Ryn has observed,

in a society where men are growing insensitive to the demands of the ethical life, their enlightened self-interest, too, will be increasingly difficult to discern. . . . Whereas ethical conscience, the will to the common good, used to give to the constitution and the laws generally an aura of dignity which made it easier for the citizens to recognize allegiance to the lawful order as being in their long-term interest, they are now going to look at the laws with less reverence and not be as predisposed against breaking them, if it would serve their own immediate goals and go undetected.<sup>20</sup>

The key point is that, absent religion in the broad sense—i.e., self-restraint in deference to the transcendent good—there can be no genuine justice, peace, community,

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or happiness, no deeper sense that human history has meaning; the good society in any real sense becomes unthinkable. As Russell Kirk frequently reminds us, without the ordered soul, there can be no order in the commonwealth. This insight has enormous implications for man's approach to a wide range of issues—education, politics, economics, literature and the arts, philosophy and epistemology—that are beyond the scope of this article.<sup>21</sup> Suffice it to say here that to approach any social or political question from a merely utilitarian, or "practical," vantage point, as though the deeper ethical or religious issue can be ignored or kept in the background, is doomed to irrelevance.

In his *Literature and the American College*, Babbitt points to the prevalence in the modern world of two main types of naturalists or secularists. On the one side, there are the

“scientific naturalists” or “scientific humanitarians,” who believe, like Francis Bacon, that power over things (better technology, more efficient organization of society) constitutes the road to human progress. On the other, there are the “sentimental naturalists” or “sentimental humanitarians” in the mold of a Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Because these last are “idealists” with hearts full of emotional sympathy for mankind in the abstract, they mistake their own fluttering passions for virtue. They believe that to follow their whims as they oscillate between romantic feelings of brotherhood and revolutionary violence is the height of human goodness. On the surface, says Babbitt, the scientific rationalist and the sentimental dreamer seem like polar opposites, but they are as one in what matters most: their evasion of the hard truths of the inner life and neglect of the ethical discipline of character. Hence, he concludes, the influence of both groups is pernicious.

One would have been hard put three or four decades ago to find a self-professed intellectual conservative who did not see the danger posed by these two superficially contending forces. Awareness of this danger gave rise to a large volume of writing against positivism and neglect of universal values during that period. Unfortunately, intellectual conservatives never absorbed Babbitt’s penetrating analysis of the interplay between scientific rationalism and sentimental humanitarianism. Confusion in this area has left them inadequately prepared to meet major challenges over the years, including those posed by social reformers speaking in the name of “compassion” and the Rousseauistic excesses of the 1960s counterculture and related New Left movements.<sup>22</sup> So traumatic for conservatives was the radical upheaval associated with the counterculture that many came to view Baconian humanitarianism as good by comparison. Indeed, some, perhaps unknowingly, have confused this tendency with conservatism itself. To the extent that *Cultural Conservatism* foreshadows, however tentatively, an awakening from this philosophical stupor, its publication can be described as intellectually and politically significant.

## Notes

1. *Cultural Conservatism: Toward a New National Agenda* (Washington, D.C.: The Institute for Cultural Conservatism, Free Congress Research and Education Foundation, 1987).

2. *Ibid.*, 23. They emphasize, for example, that recognition of a role for the federal government should be limited by “subsidiarity (often called federalism) and reliance on mediating institutions.” Yet their proposal (pages 82-87) that mediating institutions such as volunteer organizations and churches become conduits for the distribution of federally funded welfare services entails a danger that (notwithstanding precautions intended to assure the independence of these institutions) their nature may be subtly transformed in deleterious ways. Instead of organizations truly intermediate between the individual and centralized government, such institutions may become, willy-nilly, mere instrumentalities or

appendages of that government. For an excellent analysis of how such institutions can be corrupted with unintended consequences, see Robert Nisbet, *The Quest for Community* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), esp. Chapter 11.

3. *Cultural Conservatism*, 71-72.

4. *Ibid.*, 4.

5. *Ibid.*, 5-10.

6. *Ibid.*, 5.

7. *Ibid.*, 104.

8. *Ibid.*, 108-09, Note 6.

9. Romans 2:14-15. See also the related passage in Romans 2:9-11: “Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also to the Gentile; But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: For there is no respect of persons with God.” And see Romans 2:6 and 13: “[God] will render to every man according to his deeds . . . (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified . . . .)”

10. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1941), Volume I, 274-75.

11. *Ibid.*, 252.

12. *Ibid.*, 16.

13. George A. Panichas, “Babbitt and Religion,” in *Irving Babbitt in Our Time*, ed. George A. Panichas and Claes G. Ryn (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 34-35.

14. Irving Babbitt, *Democracy and Leadership* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1979), 28.

15. Irving Babbitt, *Literature and the American College* (Washington, D.C.: National Humanities Institute, 1986), 101. Here and in what follows I am indebted to the Swedish philosopher Folke Leander (1910-81). See his *Humanism and Naturalism* (Göteborg, 1937), esp. 136-224. See also his “Irving Babbitt and Benedetto Croce,” in *Irving Babbitt in Our Time*.

16. Leander, *Humanism and Naturalism*, 106-07.

17. *Tractatus de Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, cap. XIV, § 47; quoted in *Humanism and Naturalism*, 202.

18. *Summa contra Gentiles*, III, c. 70; quoted in *Humanism and Naturalism*, 202.

19. Claes G. Ryn, “History and the Moral Order,” in *The Ethical Dimension of Political Life*, ed. Francis J. Canavan (Durham: Duke University Press, 1983), 97-98.

20. Claes G. Ryn, *Democracy and the Ethical Life* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 25.

21. On education, see Babbitt’s *Literature and the American College* (available directly from NHI for \$9 plus \$1.50 for postage and handling) and Joseph Baldacchino, ed. *Educating for Virtue* (Washington, D.C.: National Humanities Institute, 1988; available from NHI for \$5 plus \$1.50 postage and handling). See also the numerous books and articles on the subject by Russell Kirk. On politics, see Babbitt’s *Democracy and Leadership* and Claes Ryn’s *Democracy and the Ethical Life*. On economics, see Wilhelm Röpke, *A Humane Economy* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1971). For a short overview, see Joseph Baldacchino, *Economics and the Moral Order* (Washington, D.C.: National Humanities Institute, 1985). On literature and the arts, most of Babbitt’s books are useful, as are those by Matthew Arnold and works of criticism by John W. Aldridge and George A. Panichas. For a popular statement, see Duncan Williams, *Trousered Apes: Sick Literature in a Sick Society* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1972). For the effects of imaginative works on man’s perception of reality, see Claes G. Ryn, *Will, Imagination and Reason* (Chicago: Regnery Books, 1986; available from NHI for \$15 plus \$1.50 postage and handling).

22. See Claes G. Ryn, “American Intellectual Conservatism: Needs, Opportunities, Prospects,” *Modern Age*, XXVI (Summer/Fall 1982).

## Dialogue

In a review of *Cultural Conservatism* by William Lind and William Marshner in the Spring 1988 issue of *Policy Review* Philip F. Lawler takes issue with the authors' advocacy of inculcating "values." "That word, 'values,' suggests a radically untraditional approach to morality," Lawler argues. "We all uphold principles, and beliefs, and articles of faith; these are (or we perceive them to be) *facts*, whose existence is independent of our will. But *values* are, almost by definition, things we create ourselves; things have *value* if we, by an act of will decide to attach value to them." Russell Kirk has frequently objected to the word "values" for the same reason. As a caution against moral relativism or value subjectivism Lawler's and Kirk's point is well-taken. But one does not have to be a moral relativist to see value in the word "values." Lawler's argument overlooks the existence of objectively distinct qualities of will, from which it follows that there are objectively good values and objectively bad values. On those occasions when man acts (wills) in conformity with the transcendent will he does indeed create new value. By participating in the universal good man brings particular examples of good into historical existence. As a practical guide to further willing, man can make generalizations about good acts that have become part of historical reality. These generalizations are the "principles" that Lawler mentions. But whether an act is good or bad ultimately depends on the quality of will that motivated it. Viewed from this perspective, society needs the inculcation of good values, particularly in children. As persons mature, however, the usefulness of "inculcation" tends to diminish while that of "inspiration" from a variety of sources (e.g., religion, philosophy, literature and the arts, tradition) increases.

-JB

## Worth Noting

☒ The Winter 1988 issue of *Modern Age* (Suite 100, 14 South Bryn Mawr Avenue, Bryn Mawr, PA 19010) contains a valuable symposium on Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*. NHI Chairman Claes G. Ryn finds the book laden with shortcomings, including a "deep prejudice against traditional communities and social hierarchies" and a preference for Rousseauistic egalitarianism that is fundamentally at odds with the American system. "Bloom's depiction of the American approach to politics," Ryn writes, "calls to mind the passions of the French Jacobins for spreading *liberté, égalité, and fraternité* in the world." Other contributors to the symposium are Milton Birnbaum, Donald J. Devine, Gottfried Dietze, Peter Augustine Lawler, John Lyon, Thomas Molnar, Marion Montgomery, Ewa M. Thompson, and Stephen J. Tonsor.

☒ There has been a flurry of recent publishing involving titles by NHI Director and Treasurer Russell Kirk. The seventh revised edition of Kirk's classic *The Conservative Mind* is available from Regnery (\$19.95 cloth, \$12.95 paper), as is his *The Wise Men Know What Wicked Things Are Written on the Sky* (\$17.95 cloth, \$9.95 paper). His *Edmund Burke: A Genius Reconsidered* (\$8.95 paper) and *The Intemperate Professor* (\$7.95 paper) can be obtained from Sherwood Sugden, 315 Fifth Street, Peru, IL 61354.

☒ NHI welcomes Robert A. Nisbet to its Academic Board. Nisbet, one of the most profound political and social observers of our time, has recently published *The Present Age* (Harper and Row, \$17.95 cloth) and *Roosevelt and Stalin: The Failed Courtship* (Regnery, \$14.95 cloth).

-HLC

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