

The Politics of Virtue
 Post-Liberalism and the Human Future
 By John Milbank and Adrian Pabst
 Rowman & Littlefield
 Pp. 418. \$39.95

'Metacrisis' of Liberalism

Review by Charles Pinches

For 20 years, John Milbank's voice has sounded powerfully in academic theology. His radical orthodoxy has reoriented theological discussion, partly because his learning spans so many disciplines that he is able to venture and defend comprehensive, theologically informed claims about our postmodern condition. This book, written with Adrian Pabst, further expands the scope of these claims.

Milbank and Pabst argue that liberalism — which is, in effect, the dominant modern anthropology that defines human nature as “fundamentally individual existence abstracted from social embeddedness” — has in all its spheres led, in Thomas Hobbes's phrase, to a “war of all against all.” The recent rise of radical Islam and the financial breakdown of 2008 help bring a “metacrisis” of liberalism into view. The book names four faces of the

metacrisis: capitalism, democracy, culture, and the nations. It moves successively through a description of each crisis in one chapter to a post-liberal alternative in the next.

For Milbank and Pabst, liberalism's fundamental atomism entails that individuals “freely” make their own morality rather than being formed in one, from which it follows that there is no real moral training in liberalism; and so it requires a strong nation-state to protect freedom and resist anarchy. The space between individual and state, lacking in genuine sociality and community, is the playground of capitalism. Yet — and here is the crisis — as liberalism proclaims that we are nothing more than self-interested individuals, it loses any possibility of instruction from nature and culture about how to live. It follows a secular logic that commodifies as it desacralizes nature and life. “The destination of production is always consumption,

which means a final destruction” (p. 97). For the authors, the alternative resides in receiving life as gift, which is also to acknowledge meaning in nature, from which we can learn. “Gift” thinking is stubbornly theological, and for Christians it is eucharistic: daily we receive the gifts of God for the people of God.

It follows that the crisis of liberalism resides in its implied secularism, its willful ignorance of the transcendent. Famously summed up by Dostoevsky, “without God everything is permitted.” Yet this simple diagnosis does not belie the complex way in which liberal, secular thinking has woven its way through modern life. This is the great contribution of *The Politics of Virtue*: its point-by-point analysis of how liberal thinking, with its secular and capitalist logic, has led to crises in civic, cultural, and national life.

A key theme in this detailed analysis is how education has lost its soul. The

book's title is a reminder of the classical assumption that politics is for formation in virtue. The formation we experience in liberal regimes, however, "dehumanizes" since it imagines the "spiritual" to be a merely private matter, and reduces the bodily to mere wanting and acquiring and controlling (p. 283). Education helps us get what we want, which also serves the state since it needs "educated" workers to sustain its economic life and its place among the nations.

The heart of the authors' discussion of education comes in "Culture as Formation," their eighth chapter, which re-

The heart of the authors' discussion of education comes in "Culture as Formation," which responds to liberalism's cultural metacrisis. Not only is its critique of current educational practices stingingly accurate but its suggestions for reform are interesting and concrete.

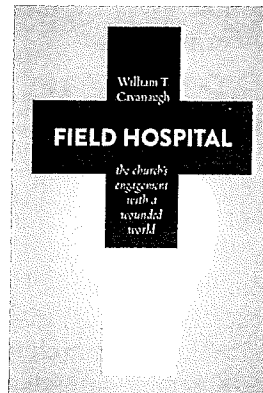
sponds to liberalism's cultural metacrisis. It is among their best; not only is its critique of current educational practices stingingly accurate but its suggestions for reform are interesting and concrete. For instance, they suggest coupling distinguished universities with regional technical colleges, encouraging the extension of the guilds in the latter, and the common commitment of both kinds of institutions to character formation.

The book is weakest in its final section, in which it explores the metacrisis of the nations. Here difficulties emerge. Their earlier well-defended disdain for capitalism is extended in this section by the assertion that "the worst of the West," namely, capitalism,

which is spreading worldwide, should be counteracted by "the best of the West," which is for the authors the traditions bequeathed from Rome and Christendom on how to run an empire, with "good order" and "mixed government" (i.e., in which governance is spread among smaller formative communities such as family and guild). Indeed, for them the British Empire was perhaps the best modern exemplar of these traditions. The authors go so far as to favor a kind of European empire, with Britain and perhaps Germany in the lead (here Brexit is a complication, which the authors flag but cannot discuss at length).

With talk of empire the authors intend to suggest an alternative to the sovereign nation-state that liberalism has so accented, and clearly in our time nationalism threatens. Yet the history is too palpable. How might Africans, for instance, take to calls for a revival of European imperialism? But more importantly, it is difficult to reconcile praise for Roman imperialism with a theology that genuinely emerges in the community that worships Jesus Christ, crucified under Pontius Pilate. Indeed, while Milbank and Pabst occasionally extol the Church as a potential leader in cultural education, their book is principally interested in a new (post-liberal) world order, which might incorporate certain "Christian ideas" but is not, and cannot be, the Church. Unless chastened by an ecclesiology that remembers Jesus' teaching to his disciples about a world that will hate as it hated him, or even by an Augustinian suspicion of an earthly peace that can be used by Christians but never fully embraced, Milbank and Pabst risk squandering their many blazing insights about the modern liberal predicament on a parallel post-liberal program to run the world.

Charles Pinches is professor of theology and religious studies at the University of Scranton.



Field Hospital
The Church's Engagement
with a Wounded World
By William T. Cavanaugh
Eerdmans. Pp. 276. \$24

Spaces of Solidarity

Review by Mac Stewart

Pope Francis's image of the Church as a field hospital provides the connecting thread for this series of essays by William T. Cavanaugh. Echoing a famous interview with Francis in the first few months of his pontificate, Cavanaugh says in the introduction to these essays: "The kind of church I dream of goes out into the world and helps to bind wounds by taking on the suffering of others into the suffering body of Christ" (p. 5).

Cavanaugh sees field-hospital ecclesiology as a way of confounding "one of the standard dualities used to discuss the church's social engagement: the church either engages with 'culture' and 'the world,' or withdraws from them" (p. 4). The burden of this book is to show that compromise, on the one

(Continued on next page)

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The Politics of Virtue

Post-Liberalism and the Human Future

John Milbank and Adrian Pabst

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'Two men went up to pray; and one gave thanks,
Not with himself—aloud,
With proclamation, calling on the ranks
Of an attentive crowd

Thank God, I clap not my own humble breast,
But other ruffians' backs,
Imputing crime—such is my tolerant haste—
To any man that lacks

For I am tolerant, generous, keep no rules,
And the age honours me.
Thank God, I am not as these rigid fools,
Even as this Pharisee'

Alice Meynell, 'The Newer Vainglory'

'A gross error it is to think that regal power ought to serve for the good of
the body and not of the soul, for men's temporal peace and not their eternal
safety; as if God had ordained *Kings* for no other purpose than to fat up men's
souls like hogs and to see that they have their mash?'

Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*

'I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised, unbreathed, that
never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that
immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat'.

John Milton, *Areopagitica*

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We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to both our families: Alison, Sebastian, Arabella with Jim and now Aubrey, and Elena and Alexander. It is to them all that we dedicate this book.

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John Milbank and Adrian Pabst
Southwell and Muswell Hill, 19 July 2016

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John Milbank and Adrian Pabst
at Rowman and Muswell Hill, 19 July 2016

Introduction

From the Ethics to the Politics of Virtue

THE ARGUMENT

At the end of the twentieth century, the triumph of capitalism and democracy seemed so complete that it raised once more Hegel's spectre of the 'end of history' – the convergence towards a final form of human government that embodies the supposed universality of liberalism. But then the twenty-first century quickly revealed a recommencement of history that called into question both the complacency and the character of the West. First came the extra-civilisational challenge of Islamism after 2001, and then came the intra-civilisational financial and civil breakdown after 2008. Both challenges exposed the limitations of the two liberalisms that have dominated Western politics for the last half-century: the social-cultural liberalism of the left since the 1960s and the economic-political liberalism of the right since the 1980s. These liberalisms have provided greater personal freedoms and individual opportunities for some, but can now also be seen as atomising and authoritarian. For together they have served the purposes of the central state and the globalised market, which have collusively brought about an unprecedented augmentation of power and concentration of wealth in the hands of a few.¹ In consequence, a new, rootless oligarchy now practises a manipulative populism while holding in contempt the genuine priorities of most people.²

The two liberalisms were always in tacit, secret alliance. They have now more explicitly fused to proffer a creed shared by the left that has embraced economic liberalism together with an impersonal statism, and by the right that has openly espoused cultural liberalism in scorn of its own natural constituency. This book will suggest that, instead, politics now needs a novel and paradoxical blend of two older and nobler traditions: a combination of honourable, virtuous elites with greater popular participation; a greater

sense of cultural duty and hierarchy of value and honour, alongside much more real equality and genuine creative freedom in the economic and political realms. This would be enabled by a newly mutualist approach to both domestic and foreign affairs that substitutes for the dominance of market, state and technocracy the primacy of society, culture and interpersonal relationships.

To understand more deeply what this new approach involves, it is necessary to attend closely to the intended sense of the notion 'post-liberalism'. 'Post-' is different from 'pre-' and implies not that liberalism is all bad, but that it has inherent problems and deficiencies. Long centuries and recent decades of liberalisation have afforded some protection against the worst transgressions upon the liberty of some by the liberty of others. But evermore individual rights and untrammelled economic contract alone cannot provide security, prosperity and human flourishing for the many. Appeals to emancipation and social justice ignore the relationships that can provide substance to such abstract norms. That is why there is a need to invent or discover new, more participatory modes of self-restraint and responsibility, of economic justice and shared well-being.

The Metacrisis of Liberalism

It is not merely the twin liberal revolution that is now in question. Instead, the whole liberal tradition faces a new kind of crisis because liberalism as a philosophy and an ideology turns out to be contradictory, self-defeating and parasitic on the legacy of Greco-Roman civilisation and the Judeo-Christian tradition, which it distorts and hollows out. The triumph of liberalism today more and more brings about the 'war of all against all' (Hobbes) and the idea of man as self-owning animal (Locke) that were its presuppositions. But this does not thereby prove those presuppositions, because it is only liberalism that has produced in practice the circumstances that it originally assumed in theory.³ In this manner, liberalism marks the unnecessary victory of vice over virtue – of selfishness, greed, suspicion and coercion over common benefit, generosity, a measure of trust and persuasive power. Just as liberal thought has redefined human nature as fundamentally individual existence abstracted from social embeddedness, so too liberal practice has replaced the quest for reciprocal recognition and mutual flourishing with the pursuit of wealth, power and pleasure – leading to economic instability, social disorder and ecological devastation.

The alternative to this anthropology is, first, the antique notion of humanity as 'a political animal', expanded by Thomas Aquinas to 'social animal'. This means that, paradoxically, by *nature* we are also the artificial shapers

of a polity, and live our specific contrivance of social and legal co-sign.⁴ Second, it is the specifically universal value of the person (not a norm) inherently realised through to things through a dynamic, ess ordered and transcendent *Logos*.⁵

So in theory and practice, libera the universe we inhabit, as captu current crisis is neither merely a t crisis, but rather a 'metacrisis', si to be revealed in its full nihilistic more specifically in its evermore reality and yet to reduce everythin leaves an irreducible *aporia* betwe and imagined laws of nature and nature' (as for Hobbes) or conflict that requires the remedies of coe In this way, liberal ideas and insti simistic anthropology that incenti as we see today, the fantasised st expose the limits of the solutions edly automatic coordination, and as artificial devices to naturally re raw. In such a fashion, liberalism salve to the reality of human vice it claims to save from rival ideolo

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So faced with the double fai model that nationalised the ecor vatised the state, we argue for a ciation and mutualisation. We prc responsibilities and resources wl requirements both for varied se contribution.

of a polity, and live our specifically human animal lives only through the contrivance of social and legal convention based on the artifices of tool and sign.⁴ Second, it is the specifically Christian idea of the uniqueness and universal value of the person (not an individual, atomic example of a general norm) inherently realised through constitutive relations to other persons and to things through a dynamic, essence-exceeding participation in an infinite, ordered and transcendent *Logos*.⁵

So in theory and practice, liberalism goes against the grain of humanity and the universe we inhabit, as captured by such older traditions. Therefore, the current crisis is neither merely a temporary or cyclical nor necessarily a final crisis, but rather a 'metacrisis', since now, at last, this perversion is starting to be revealed in its full nihilistic scope. The metacrisis of liberalism consists more specifically in its evermore exposed tendency at once to abstract from reality and yet to reduce everything to its bare materiality. This twin tendency leaves an irreducible *aporia* between human will and artifice on the one hand, and imagined laws of nature and history on the other – the violent 'state of nature' (as for Hobbes) or conflict-ridden human association (as for Rousseau) that requires the remedies of coercive state control and market competition. In this way, liberal ideas and institutions rest on a violent ontology and a pessimistic anthropology that incentivise and reward bad behaviour. Eventually, as we see today, the fantasised state of nature returns, but now in reality to expose the limits of the solutions of social contract or impersonal, supposedly automatic coordination, and to give the lie to their purported capacity as artificial devices to naturally restrain nature in its falsely imagined human law. In such a fashion, liberalism not only undermines its claim to offer the salve to the reality of human vice. It also undoes itself and erodes the polity it claims to save from rival ideologies.

The only genuine alternative is a post-liberal politics of virtue that seeks to fuse greater economic justice with social reciprocity. It rejects the double liberal impersonalism of commercial contract between strangers and individual entitlement in relation to the bureaucratic machine. Instead of the mixture of contract without gift, plus the unilateral and poisoned gift from nowhere that is state provision at its worst, it proposes gift-exchange or social reciprocity as the ultimate principle to govern *both* the economic and the political realms.

So faced with the double failure of the post-war 'embedded liberal' model that nationalised the economy and the neo-liberal model that privatised the state, we argue for a new settlement that is centred on association and mutualisation. We propose a reciprocalist model of sharing risk, responsibilities and resources wherein reward is reconnected to personal requirements both for varied self-fulfilment and for rendering a social contribution.

Defining Virtue Ethics

In our usage, 'virtue' is not an empty, moralistic word. Instead, it indicates an ethical and political approach that calls into question basic liberal and secular habits of mind that have become so ingrained that we scarcely notice them.⁶ These habits assume, above all, that most of reality has nothing to do with either good or evil, that it is just 'there' in its underived givenness. This applies first and foremost to the surrounding physical environment in which we are located and included. But in the second place, this inclusion is taken to mean that most of human reality also – our consumption, production, exchange and linguistic expression – shares in the same natural neutrality. In consequence, all normal human activity and political or socio-economic processes are regarded as being, at best, amoral, if not often also inevitably flouting of any perceived moral imperatives. The ethical is not seen, as it was for previous Western traditions, as self-grounded in the reality of the good, regarded as the real factual *and* valuative object of human pursuit.

Entirely otherwise, virtue ethics runs with our spontaneous inclination to see goodness in nature, in the mode of the flourishing of all things insofar as they fulfil their given character and realise their innate ends to circulate, grow and propagate. It follows that for this alternative and traditional outlook, the primary dimension of the ethical is *continuous*. A moral stance does not ask, first of all, what I should do faced with such and such a predicament, but rather what I should consistently be doing *at all*. What sort of shape might my entire life appropriately take? What sort of character do I want to be and how should I order this desire in an acceptable way to my relationships to others? And those questions, even though they are unavoidable, especially at the key transition points of life, can only be answered if we also ask what sort of society all of us want. What aims should it pursue and then what individual tasks might be set by this society? How can individual aspiration fall together with a collectively shared one? For naturally no one ever really projects for herself a role *ex nihilo* – we all of us pursue, in however rebellious a form, initial social promptings.

From this point we can realise, against any form of ethical 'situationism',⁷ that relatively abiding virtuous character is just as much assumed and acquired from the social exterior as is any momentary response to contingent circumstance.⁸ It is untrue that consistent virtue is an illusion, which some form of behaviourism exposes, because *both* publically prescribed roles *and* the inward life of the person exhibit patterns of consistency that are always linked, the one with the other. Without this there could be no possibility of lived or described *narrative* – neither as history, nor as autobiography, the two being always complexly entangled and reciprocally presupposing. Certainly historical situations and events can shock us with a life-changing

trauma, or bend our existing habits always exemplify non-identically a form, as much as they jolt then 'ism' is merely in league with the porous liberalism to render us all shock and accumulators of transitional aspect of liberal metacrisis – very coherence of its principles is

It will then be apparent that virtue ethics is not a mere alternative to utilitarianism or general consequentialism (the imperious imperative of duty to preserve flourishing as a normal and essential ingredient of life). Virtue ethics is performed unconsciously and is not a saintly means to be exceptional. It is an everyday matter of performing well towards parent, friend, colleague and citizen. If goodness is *given* in nature and is not made from time to time, then simple goodness is

Defining a Politics of Virtue

This alternative but more traditional outlook is insofar as it is immediately and essentially of the genitive, the politics of *virtue*. The intended inversion indicates that it is a pious new demand for more moral integrity, something alien to the political pragmatism and realistic exigencies of modernity. It is that there can *be* no human practices that are aiming for the good in some way and successfully pursue it. Thus it is an optional extra for either the historical or the contemporary. It can be cynically related as a story of the failure of a measure of inaccuracy. For it is in the nature of the specifically human, that courage, imagination and creativity are not so, then it could not also be a catastrophe – of lamentable failure to achieve them and a tendency also to pursue other purposes.

One might negatively ask whether the Victorian outlook that has rightly

trauma, or bend our existing habits in new directions. But events themselves always exemplify non-identically the repetitions of habit, in however novel a form, as much as they jolt them into new deviation. Thus a pure 'situationism' is merely in league with the doomed but dangerous attempt of contemporary liberalism to render us all spiritless and passive subjects of spectacular shock and accumulators of transient sensation. The attempt to do so is a crucial aspect of liberal metacrisis – its *reductio ad absurdum*, which calls the very coherence of its principles into question.

It will then be apparent that virtue ethics is less moralistic than either liberal consequentialism (the imperative of happiness) or liberal deontology (the imperative of duty to preserve freedom). For it assumes that the ethical is a normal and essential ingredient of human action. Most good human actions are performed unconsciously and with nothing like a 'saintly' attitude, if to be saintly means to be exceptional. The most fundamental human goodness is an everyday matter of performing your job well, being a good lover, spouse, parent, friend, colleague and citizen, or even enjoying a game or a trip. For if goodness is *given* in nature and not something we contrive with difficulty from time to time, then simple gratitude is a crucial aspect of virtue.

Defining a Politics of Virtue

This alternative but more traditional approach to ethics is also less moralistic insofar as it is immediately and even primarily *political*. Inverting the import of the genitive, the politics of *virtue* is also the *politics* of virtue. This equally intended inversion indicates that by a 'politics of virtue' we do *not* mean a pious new demand for more morality in public life, as if the ethical were something alien to the political in the first place, and in tension with its more pragmatic and realistic exigencies. Instead, the point crucial to virtue ethics is that there can *be* no human practice, which is always collective, unless we are aiming for the good in some sense, and have some idea how to recognise and successfully pursue it. Thus for virtue ethics, morality is not a kind of optional extra for either the historical or the political process. History cannot be cynically related as a story of mere necessities and expediencies without a measure of inaccuracy. For it is also and inevitably – on account of the very nature of the specifically human, historical event as such – a story of human courage, imagination and creative effort to achieve honourable ends. Were it not so, then it could not also be the tale of both intermittent and continuous catastrophe – of lamentable failure to project sufficiently good aims, failure to achieve them and a tendency also to distort them for lazy, greedy or sadistic purposes.

One might negatively ask here whether this is not a kind of seemingly Victorian outlook that has rightly not survived the horrors of the preceding

century, and the continuing horrors of the present one. However, the counter-question to that now typical stance would be this: supposing the horrors are in some measure a self-fulfilling prophecy, supposing the gradual Western slide into theoretical nihilism and cultural despair were in part responsible for a political disintegration of goodness in practice?

However that may be, if all human historical action is ethical just *because* it is human action, then the immoral is also a failure of action as such, a failure of the practical really to be so. Therefore immoral action is of its very nature unrealistic, because the immoral by definition means a mistaking of true fulfilment and a deficient or incompatible way of pursuing it. To put it in the simplest possible way: to do something wrong is also to do something badly, to botch things up in a way that is bound sooner or later (even if decades or centuries later) to fail, because vices are hard to sustain and ultimately self-defeating. Lies get found out, lack of trust leaves people alone, poor workmanship damages even our material well-being, and unreliable products tend eventually not to sell well or do not sell at all – even though this usual circumstance is today massively distorted by the blandishments of brands. But even there, the unhealthy or ugly can be but artificially kept alive and may always suddenly fail, like the crudest forms of fast-food or post-war architecture.

So part of the claim of this book, which we hope to make good in detail, is that contemporary politics is failing because it mistakes the very nature of the realistic – this being finally coincident with the ethical. According to the eighteenth-century Neapolitan ‘civil economist’ Antonio Genovesi, ‘Virtue is not ‘an invention of philosophers ... [but instead] a consequence of the nature of the world’.⁹ By contrast, ever since the dawn of early modernity, liberalism has privileged vice by pursuing a kind of simulacrum of real association, which consists in the ‘automatic’ balancing of fear with fear, egoism with egoism and selfishness with selfishness. This, indeed, seems to work, yet it also engenders an ever-faster spiralling social and ecological crisis.

An ethics of virtue therefore counter-diagnoses *merely* cynical verdicts as themselves always insufficiently realist. It is certainly true that in history virtuous endeavours habitually fail – from the decline of craft skills to the corruption of ruling echelons. Yet this does not alter the fact that they are the only possible endeavours, and that the challenge is *not* to balance ethical considerations with pragmatic ones, but to try to act more humanly. This means with more skill, more art, more tact, more forceful subtlety – and with more vision, given that an unrealistic vision is not a vision at all, but an illusion.

And if we act in this way, then we also act with more receptive gratitude, more communicated generosity, and in such a way that in turn opens up the possibility of trust and further self-giving on the part of others. For virtue and gift are inseparable: virtue, as we have seen, begins in grateful wonder and is sustained only through an honourable ‘seeming to be virtuous’ as well as

having the inwardly right intention *offered*, and the highest outcome that is friendship, upon which – a liberalism – the human city is founded from external, manifest honour. If it is really to abide.

Therefore to act with honourable adjectivally as ‘virtuous’. Our task instead, to act *in more political terms*: necessary and properly shared teleological justice – or a distribution and calling. Thus politics is a shared and regard, since justice and friendship.

Virtue so construed also breaks the elite. For in the first place, virtue is to all, especially the supreme virtues of forgiveness and reconciliation, whether avowedly Christians or not, in the second, it is also benignly non-requires guidance through time and wise at every level of society. Faced with largely self-serving elites today desperately needs honourable leaders who can lead by example in a way where there can be no guidance as to im-

Beyond Communitarianism

A post-liberal politics of virtue thinking. We do build on the communitarian account accentuates the role of friendship, not merely ‘given’ ethical and cultural, but admittedly ‘ineffable’ and indefinable and time with a more purposive aim around shared aspiration and ideal human roles and traditions.¹⁰

Moreover, we try to develop a post-liberal communitarian thinking is either silent or else views the market as more or less appeals almost exclusively to the mercantile exchange.¹¹ The reason for this is either an undisturbed preceding

having the inwardly right intention. Deeds must be publicly enacted and so *offered*, and the highest outcome of virtuous practice is the reciprocal giving that is friendship, upon which – as for the older Western tradition, but not for liberalism – the human city is founded. In this way inner virtue is inseparable from external, manifest honour. Like justice, it must be seen to be performed if it is really to abide.

Therefore to act with honourable generosity is not at all to qualify politics adjectivally as ‘virtuous’. Our title is really an unavoidable misnomer. It is, instead, to act *in more political terms* as such. It is to resume politics as a necessary and properly shared teleological purposiveness, and as an attempted architectonic justice – or a distribution of roles and resources according to capacity and calling. Thus politics is a shared demand for a manifest mutual recognition and regard, since justice and friendship are co-original and inseparable.

Virtue so construed also breaks with the usual contrasts of people *versus* elite. For in the first place, virtue is democratic because its practice is open to all, especially the supreme virtues of love, trust, hope, mercy, kindness, forgiveness and reconciliation, which we have all in the West, whether avowedly Christians or not, inherited from the teachings of the Bible. But second, it is also benignly non-democratic because the practice of virtue requires guidance through time by the already virtuous, skilled, generous and wise at every level of society from the plumber to the wing-commander. Faced with largely self-serving elites that are corrupt and nihilistic, society today desperately needs honourable and much more widely distributed leaders who can lead by example in all walks of life. For without good examples, there can be no guidance as to initiation into good practice.

Beyond Communitarianism

A post-liberal politics of virtue is not simply a rehash of communitarian thinking. We do build on the communitarian critique of liberalism, but our account accentuates the role of free and newly shaped associations beyond merely ‘given’ ethical and cultural solidarities. We also seek to link the admittedly ‘ineffable’ and indefinable nature of given community in place and time with a more purposive and culturally pluralist shaping of association around shared aspiration and ideal purpose, which seeks to integrate different human roles and traditions.¹⁰

Moreover, we try to develop a post-liberal ‘civil economy’ where communitarian thinking is either silent on matters of economic organisation or else views the market as more or less inevitably devoid of virtue and thus appeals almost exclusively to the state in order to limit the damages of commercial exchange.¹¹ The reason for this is that it wrongly sees community as either an undisturbed preceding ground for embedding the market, or else

as a compensatory tempering of its ravages.¹² This flies in the face of all the evidence of the power of hyper-capitalism both to disembed the economy from society and to invade the familial, social and cultural sphere, as Karl Polanyi argued. Hence, unless one can achieve a genuine 'social market', society itself will be ever-further eroded. Communitarian thinking does not take seriously enough the possibility that market activity can have a proper *telos* and that virtuous behaviour is compatible with both just returns to the individual and social benefit.¹³

Equally, communitarianism tends to lack a real political dimension, confining itself to a nostalgic one-sided appeal to group rights, autonomy and plurality, however important this emphasis must be. Our book tempers this approach, which can expand into nationalism and atavistic ethnocentrism. It also qualifies the usual demand by the mainstream left and right for simply more freedom, equality and democratic choice, which history has shown often to produce evermore terrible and arbitrary tyrannies. That is why we match our programme for a civil economy with a political one that renews a Classical and Christian centrality of the mixed constitution, the priority of education as *paideia* for domestic affairs, and the primacy of cultural association and shared sovereignties for external ones.

Structure of the Book

The book applies this conception of a politics of virtue to the economy, politics, culture and international relations. Throughout it involves a blend of political and social theory with consideration of our current human predicament. Each of the five parts combines a critique of liberalism with post-liberal alternatives. The first part provides a novel account of the limits of liberal political thought and the shape of post-liberalism, while the second part turns to the metacrisis of capitalism and the civil economy alternative. In the third part, the shortcomings of liberal democracy are detailed and the mixed constitution alternative is proffered. The fourth part focuses on the metacrisis of liberal culture and ways in which we can renew a true culture of formation. In the final part, we analyse the unravelling of the liberal international order and set out a post-liberal vision of international relations with a specific emphasis on culture, covenant and commonwealth.

Our entire argument will suggest that in the long run, nobility is more realistic than mere realism. That is because nobility is about the sustaining of a high quality of action and an honourable social ethos that generously recognises and advances every essay of the good, however fragile. Without these characteristics, no specific mark of our humanity can remain. For this reason the return to the common good is the least implausible of all the admittedly implausible positive alternatives to the contemporary metacrisis of liberalism.

1. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957).

2. David J. Rothkopf, *Superclass: The Making of a New World Elite* (London: Little, Brown & Co, 2012); *Or a Very British Oligarchy* (London: Plutocrats: *The Rise of the New G* (London: Penguin, 2013).

3. Jean-Claude Michéa, *The Republic*, tr. David Fernbach (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

4. John Milbank, *Beyond Secularism: A Representation of the People* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012).

5. Adrian Pabst, *Metaphysics*. Eerdmans, 2012), 54–151, 201–71; *A Synthesis of Philosophy, Theology* 187–215.

6. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Duckworth, 1981); *Whose Justice?*

7. The idea that human behaviour is determined by external factors (rather than internal, stable motivational factors).

8. Lee Ross and Richard E. Nisbett, *The Man Who Shot His Dog* (Temple University Press, 1991). For a discussion of 'Reason and Virtue Ethics', *Ethos* 114 (2004).

9. Antonio Genovesi, *Lezioni di Filosofia* (Pensiero, 2013), II.10.xiii, 349.

10. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperable* (University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2000).

11. Michael Sandel, *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* (2010); *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Dilemmas of Capitalism* (2013).

12. Elizabeth Anderson, *Value in Ethics* (University Press, 1993).

13. Luigino Bruni and Robert Sugden, *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 2

NOTES

1. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001 [1944]).
2. David J. Rothkopf, *Superclass: The Global Power Elite and the World They Are Making* (London: Little, Brown & Company, 2008); Ferdinand Mount, *The New Few, Or a Very British Oligarchy* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2012); Chrystia Freeland, *Plutocrats: The Rise of the New Global Super-Rich and the Fall of Everyone Else* (London: Penguin, 2013).
3. Jean-Claude Michéa, *The Realm of Lesser Evil: An Essay on Liberal Civilisation*, tr. David Fernbach (Cambridge: Polity, 2009).
4. John Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 114–269.
5. Adrian Pabst, *Metaphysics: The Creation of Hierarchy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 54–151, 201–71; Nicolaos Laos, *The Metaphysics of World Order: A Synthesis of Philosophy, Theology and Politics* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 187–215.
6. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1981); *Whose Justice? What Rationality?* (London: Duckworth, 1988).
7. The idea that human behaviour exhibits no general traits (except perhaps reason and intelligence) and that it is determined by external, ‘situationist’ factors rather than internal, stable motivations.
8. Lee Ross and Richard E. Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991). For a critique, see Rachana Kandekar, ‘Situationism and Virtue Ethics’, *Ethos* 114 (2004): 458–91.
9. Antonio Genovesi, *Lezioni di economia civile*, ed. F. Dal Degan (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2013), II.10.xiii, 349.
10. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, tr. Peter Connor et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, tr. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
11. Michael Sandel, *Justice: What’s the Right Thing to do?* (London: Penguin, 2010); *What Money Can’t Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (London: Allen Lane, 2013).
12. Elizabeth Anderson, *Value in Ethics and Economics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).
13. Luigino Bruni and Robert Sugden, ‘Reclaiming Virtue Ethics for Economics’, *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 27:4 (2013): 141–64.

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