

unassertive, and selfless, she neither represents the virtues of local custom, like Pickwick, nor strains toward universality of value, like Myshkin. She is a figure at rest, in a setting where everything else is turbulent and false; she is sufficient unto herself, harmonious in nature, unqualifiedly responsive to others. She has no need to think about, nor in responding to her do we feel obliged to invoke, the Categorical Imperative, or any universalization of Christian values. Her goodness is a quality of being without any pressure to invoke whatever might be "higher" than or "beyond" goodness. The imaginative realization of this figure is so pure and lucid, mere ideas fade away.

Little Dorrit is not innocent, and rarely, if ever, sentimental. No one who has grown up in the Marshalsea prison could be innocent; no one who has had to put up with all those wretched Dorrits could long be sentimental. She knows quite enough about the varieties of selfishness; that's why Dickens has provided her with the family she has, to educate her in the ways of the world. And though she exists entirely within the world, she has no designs upon it, neither to transform nor to transcend it. She has no designs of any kind; she is simply a possibility, very rare, of our existence.

What seems to have inspired the creation of Little Dorrit was Dickens's residual sentiment of Christianity, a sense or memory of a faith unalloyed by dogma, aggression, or institution. This is a "religion," if religion at all, of affection, or an ethic without prescription or formula. Dickens himself, as he knew quite well, was far from embodying anything of the sort; but his imagination cherished the possibility, arousing in him the sort of upwelling emotions that the vision of Billy Budd must have aroused in Melville. The religious experience had largely been lost to Dickens, except insofar as it might leave a sediment of purity.

Little Dorrit is not at all a "Christ figure." She does not ask anyone to abandon the world's goods and follow her; she could not drive the money changers from the temple; nor can one imagine her on a cross, though she might be among those mourning near it. Nothing even requires that we see her as a distinctively Christian figure, though nothing prevents us either. The great demand upon the reader of *Little Dorrit*—it can bring on a virtual moral crisis—is to see her quite as she is, unhaloed, not at all "symbolic," perhaps sublime but in no way transcendent. She makes no de-

mands upon anyone, nor does she try to distinguish herself in any respect. Her behavior is geared entirely to the needs and feelings of those who are near her. She is a great comforter, which may be all that goodness can be in this world. No one could possibly say of Little Dorrit, as Aglaya says of Prince Myshkin, that she lacks tenderness and "has nothing but the truth." What can truth be to her, who lives by the grace of daily obligation?

Little Dorrit is an astonishing conception, perhaps the sole entirely persuasive figure of "positive goodness" in modern fiction. As against Dostoyevsky's prescription, she is drawn neither in the comic mode nor as an innocent. For modern readers she constitutes a severe problem. Some dismiss her as insipid, others find it difficult to credit her reality, and perhaps difficult to live with that reality if they do credit it. Finally, as with all literary judgments, we reach a point where exegesis, persuasion, and eloquence break down, and fundamental differences of perception have to be acknowledged. I feel myself that a failure to respond to the shy magnificence of what Dickens has done here signifies a depletion of life.

How does he manage? I wish there were some great clinching formula, but I do not believe there is—a part of critical wisdom is to recognize the limits of critical reach. Part of the answer, a fairly

small part, may be due to what some critics have seen as Dickens's limitation: his inability to conceptualize in a style persuasive to modern readers, or still more to the point, his lack of interest in trying to conceptualize. Dickens makes no claim for Little Dorrit, he fits her into no theological or theoretical system, he cares little if at all about her symbolic resonance. He simply *sees* her, a gleam of imagination. He trusts to the sufficiency of his depiction, a feat of discipline by a writer not always disciplined.

Quite deliberately Dickens shrinks Little Dorrit in size, voice, will, and gesture. Though clearly an adult, she seems almost childlike. She loves Arthur Clennam, the thoughtful, melancholy man worn down by failure. They marry, not in a rush of sensuality but as a pact of "making do," two people bruised into tenderness. Other writers seeking to validate goodness have fixed upon their characters revealing flaws in order to retain some plausibility. Dickens, however, presents a goodness not through the persuasiveness of a flaw, but through the realism of a price. The price of Little Dorrit's goodness, as of her marriage to Clennam, is a sadly reduced sexuality—an equivalent, perhaps, to Billy Budd's stammer. It is as if Dickens had an unspoken belief that a precondition for goodness is the removal of that aggression which may well be intrinsic to the sexual life.

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## LOSING MORE GROUND

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### In Pursuit: Of Happiness and Good Government

by Charles Murray

(Simon and Schuster, 341 pp., \$19.95)

If happiness lies only in "justified satisfaction," as Charles Murray tells us in his new book, the pursuit of happiness can easily turn into a pursuit of justification. A pig seems happy when merely satisfied; but the happiness of a human being, or an entire society, uniquely requires that its satisfaction be justified. Fortunately, justifications are not difficult to find, especially since intellectuals, among others, are ever ready to contrive them. Intellectuals specialize in supplying the highest justifications, affording the deepest and most lasting satisfactions, and thereby contributing, in a

modest way, to the happiness of the species.

Though difficult to measure, the contribution of conservative intellectuals to human happiness must surely be the largest. I do not wish to disparage the work of liberals, but it only seems fair to recognize that conservative intellectuals have supplied justifications more reliably and to larger numbers of the satisfied. Some might think that the job would have been finished by now, but in fact it requires constant effort and endless ingenuity. Ever since the '60s brought satisfaction under suspicion,

and even more so when satisfaction made a comeback in the '70s and '80s, the tasks of conservative justification have had a special urgency. Conservative intellectuals have not been satisfied, moreover, merely to justify reductions already made in obligations to the poor. They have gone one step better, showing that because all public efforts backfire, we could do much less, perhaps nothing at all, and still be justified in our satisfactions. No one has done this work on behalf of human happiness better than Charles Murray.

Murray shows in his new volume that, if anything, we underestimated from his last book, *Losing Ground*, the scale of his philosophical and political ambitions. There he argued that anti-poverty efforts were a failure, and modestly proposed to scrap "the entire federal welfare and income support structure for working-aged persons, including AFDC, Medicaid, Food Stamps, Unemployment Insurance, Worker's Compensation, subsidized housing, disability insurance, and all the rest." Not a man to hesitate when the logic of his argument leads him into the abyss, he now invites us to dismantle the whole framework of the modern state, to return to what he describes, mistakenly, as a Jeffersonian vision of democracy.

**T**HE AMBITION of the new book is evident from its structure. Its first, rather brief part proposes that the true end of government is individual happiness, defined as "lasting and justified satisfaction with one's life as a whole." (What counts as adequate justification Murray declines to say, but there must be some.) In the middle portion, Murray explores four basic human needs—material resources, safety, self-respect, enjoyment—which he says must be minimally satisfied to enable people to pursue happiness. The final section, concerning Murray's philosophy of government, concludes that government should withdraw from its domestic functions, other than maintaining order, to "permit communities to be communities" and to leave people alone to "take trouble" over their own lives.

Many readers who find themselves engaged, if not convinced, by the first two parts of the book will find it hard to accompany Murray as he jumps to the third. Murray himself admits that his discussion of human needs could be used to argue for "socialist states or capitalist ones, communitarian states or lib-

ertarian ones." The first two parts, in other words, do not exactly lay a logical foundation for Murray's politics. They are, rather, a kind of psychological preparation for the political views that Murray anticipates most of his readers will not readily accept. Several times Murray calls upon the reader to relax, play with ideas, undertake little "thought experiments," contemplate basic questions. What is happiness, after all? Does money really matter? Is material poverty such a bad thing? Readers disarmed by these ruminations will only later find their wallets missing.

In the course of these preliminaries,

Murray slips in assumptions that begin preparing the ground for his laissez-faire conclusions. He says that since government can only enable people to pursue happiness, not achieve it for them, government can attempt to meet human needs only by creating certain minimum enabling conditions. "Minimalism," according to Murray, is "intrinsic." His next move is to stand on its head the hierarchy of human needs originally developed by Abraham Maslow. Material wealth, we all know, does not guarantee happiness, and poverty does not preclude it. Hence, under Murray's happiness standard for public policy, we need

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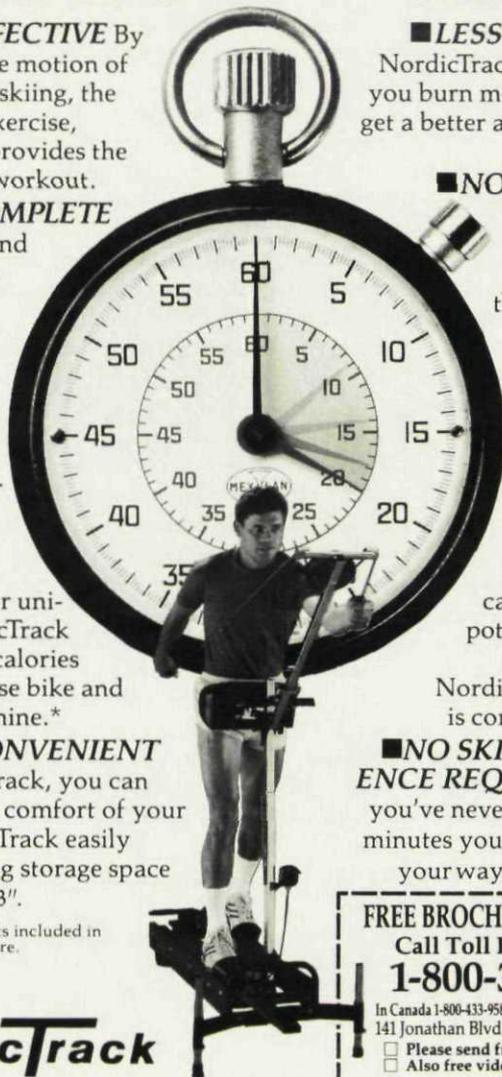
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not regard poverty as an obstacle that must first be overcome before meeting the non-material needs. Indeed, Murray suggests, we should be willing to impose hardship, if by doing so we can better satisfy other human needs such as self-respect and enjoyment (which he views as individual and internal capacities). This is the conservative equivalent of granola: money doesn't matter, what counts is in your heart. Except that instead of justifying retreat into oneself, the anti-materialist ethic now becomes a prescription (of poverty) for others.

**L**IBERAL-MINDED readers may first think that the basic framework of Murray's argument assumes that government has some responsibility for meeting the whole hierarchy of human needs. Quite the contrary. Murray's point is that government meets its social responsibilities best by not purporting to meet any. For whatever government does, it dilutes the sense of individual responsibility, which Murray believes must be total. At one point, for example, he slides from talking about the responsibility people ought to feel "for their actions" into talking about the responsibility they ought to feel "for their lives." But surely our lives are not the outcome solely of our own actions. It should be possible to insist that people are responsible for their actions while acknowledging a public responsibility for circumstances of life that are beyond any individual's control.

After conceding that human needs so conceived could justify a variety of regimes, Murray lays all the weight of his political argument on what he calls "an idea of man." This idea is that human nature is divided in two: "man acting in his private capacity—if restrained from the use of force—is resourceful and benign; while man acting as a public and political creature is resourceful and dangerous, inherently destructive of the rights and freedoms of his fellow men." No evidence for this notion is adduced. Here, as so often in the book, Murray appeals to the reader's intuition, and falsely calls upon the Founding Fathers in support of his view.

The public man/private man distinction will simply not take the weight that Murray puts upon it. It is hard to believe, for example, that differences in the behavior of governments and private corporations are best explained by a gaping split in human nature. Large organizations of all kinds diffuse the sense of individual responsibility; private corpo-

rations are no exception. Not even the rosy glow of conservative illusion, moreover, can obscure all the many petty tyrannies and deep cruelties in the history of families and insular communities. That Murray should consider men acting privately to be generally benign is evidence of his frame of mind, but it does not qualify as an argument.

Nor should we take seriously his statement that men acting politically are "inherently destructive" of rights and freedoms. First of all, we would not have any rights and freedoms if people did not act politically. Politics is what secures freedom. A nation made of "men acting privately" is sure to lose it. Second, it is a presumption of democratic government that the very process of public deliberation can lead "private men" to see interests broader than their own, to arrive at policies that separately they might not have understood or imagined.

The Founding Fathers were committed to this idea—to government by discussion—or else we would not have had a republic at all. Murray's suggestion that the Founding Fathers shared his idea of man—benign when private, destructive when public—is utterly false. In *The Federalist Papers*, in a passage that Murray quotes, Madison observes, "If men were angels, no government would be necessary." In other words, men acting in private capacities cannot be assumed to be benign. Not that Madison assumed political men to be benign, either. The distrust was equal. Defending the idea of checks and balances, Madison remarks, "This policy of supplying, by opposite and rival interests, the defect of better motives, might be traced through the whole system of human affairs, private as well as public." The point of building such internal checks into the federal government was not to cripple it, but to ensure its steady control, just as the designer of a car installs strong brakes not to guarantee a slow speed, but to permit a fast one. The authors of *The Federalist Papers* were arguing, after all, for a stronger government, not a weaker one. If Murray wants support for his notion that politics is inherently destructive, he is looking in the wrong place.

Murray claims that in thinking about public policies, we have had thoroughly mistaken standards of evaluation. In particular, he proposes to substitute his standard of individual happiness for the misguided conception of the public

good. The problem here, it seems, is "aggregation." Consider his example. Research indicates that the 55 mile per hour speed limit has saved some 7,466 lives each year since its enactment. Murray does not dispute the figure. He insists, instead, that this is the wrong perspective. No longer should we hold "in our head a concept of the aggregate public good, nor . . . estimate savings for the nation as a whole." Murray wants us to look at it purely from an individual viewpoint. Assuming a 250-mile trip between Washington and New York, as Murray does, the added safety from the 55 mile per hour speed limit comes to a reduction in the chance of being killed from 0.00000006 to 0.00000004. On the other hand, the result of the speed limit is a loss of time. There is, according to Murray, no balance to be struck: "The effective value of the safety variable is zero."

This is an extraordinary view. At a single stroke, it abolishes the entire field of public health, most concerns about the environment, occupational and consumer product safety—indeed, any arena of public policy where the stakes involve small probabilities of large harms. And Murray's central assumption, of course, is not that happiness should be the standard. It is that the rationality of a policy can be tested entirely from a single individual's *ex ante* perspective. Murray's own thinking about risk perfectly illustrates the short horizons of private judgment that public deliberation often helps to extend—to the great benefit of those thousands of people whose happiness, we may assume, may be lessened by their being killed.

**B**UT MURRAY is not a pure individualist; he has a tender regard for the "little platoons" of community life—"little platoons" being a phrase of Edmund Burke now superseded by George Bush's (or rather, Peggy Noonan's) "thousand points of light." Murray has a zero-sum view of the relation between governments and communities. The more services undertaken by government, the more voluntary community action wilts. Conversely, take away government benefits, and communities will regain their vitality. Unlike Murray's rather idiosyncratic assault on the "aggregate public good," this view of governments and communities is a pervasive and deep assumption of much conservative argument.

But the zero-sum view is wrong as history, and it is misleading as a premise

for policy. Undoubtedly, geographically defined communities have lost much of their importance. But they have lost that importance because they no longer match the scale of economic organization or mass communication, not because government stole vital functions away from them. Voluntary organizations continue to play a vital role, often in channeling public benefits; rather than being a substitute for government, they are, typically, a partner. Many of those thousand points of light would grow dim without public electrification. To expect purely voluntary effort to substitute for public expenditure is a chimera. While taxes may be detested, they can be collected at relatively little expense. Anyone familiar with the techniques of private fund-raising (benefits, direct mail, door-to-door campaigns) knows that the fund-raising itself consumes a large portion of what it brings in. If the idea of taxation were forgotten, tired fund-raisers would dream it up all over again.

**T**HE RETURN to community has been the perpetual romance of all the prophets of anti-modernism. In its conservative form, the communitarian myth is particularly dangerous because it calls for reducing the capacities of government without any corresponding reduction in the scale or the power of private economic organization. Small government in a nation of small-scale production and local markets is one thing. Small government in a world of great corporations and international markets is another. Murray casts his vision as a return to Jeffersonian democracy, but there will be no return to a world of small producers and little island communities dispersed in a largely rural society. The founders of THE NEW REPUBLIC saw early in this century that Jeffersonian ends now had to be pursued with Hamiltonian means. In a world where corporations had become national, the venue of public deliberation had to change, too. Murray and other conservatives have the opposite formula: they want to use Jeffersonian means both to pursue and to disguise Hamiltonian ends, but it is a formula that cannot work. In the world we live in, strong capitalist economies with small Jeffersonian states make up an empty set.

It is an odd feature of Murray's book that he attempts to develop a theory of good government without any reference to economic life. In Murray's world, cor-

porations do not exist, and there are no business cycles, no depressions, hence no concern for economic stabilization. If modern government has anything to do with such instabilities, we would never know it from Murray. Indeed, economic reasoning is not exactly his strong suit, if we can judge by one section of his book that explains why raising teachers' salaries will likely lower the quality of people attracted to teaching. Murray's argument is that if teachers' salaries are kept low, the only people interested in teaching will be people who love to teach and love children. These will be wonderful teachers. To be sure, if we raised salaries to \$100,000 a year, we would secure first-rate teachers. However, if we give teachers more modest and practical raises, we will attract the sort of people who teach only for the money: "the marginal teacher, the second-rater, the very person we want to get rid of." These bad teachers will pollute the whole climate of the schools: "Introducing into such an environment people who are in it for the money is like introducing a virus into a system with no immunity."

Murray is entirely right that if salaries are low, some people who teach will be doing it more for love than for money.

But why he should assume that he will get enough teachers of this kind is mysterious. Those who love teaching may also love their families and want to provide them with a decent living. It is entirely arbitrary for him to assume that a raise, even a moderate one, will attract only second-raters, but that without a raise the schools will be able to hire enough teachers without reaching down to the poorly qualified and poorly motivated. On the same theory, we ought to improve the quality of many fields by reducing pay. I should be interested to hear Murray's cure for the current nursing shortage.

But why stop with professions followed primarily by women? Surely he cannot be implying that only women work more for love than for money. If we apply his argument to its logical conclusion in fields where men predominate, we should achieve the very highest performance in medicine, law, and investment banking not merely by reducing compensation, but by insisting that those who wish to practice these arts pay for the right to do so. This is an inspiring vision. Perhaps in his next book Murray will extend his theory of reverse incentives from teaching to the many other

## How many undeserved radar tickets were issued last year?

- a) 1,012,317    b) 649,119    c) 0    d) No one knows

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fields where its application is even more desperately needed.

Murray uses the case of teachers' salaries to illustrate his more general argument that all social programs fail. His view is categorical: "No social program, no matter how ingenious, can anticipate and forestall the myriad ways in which people will seek to get their way and thereby frustrate, with or without intent, its aims." This is conservatism taken to its absurd extreme. The last successful political reform that Murray seems able to recall was the Constitution. But the Constitution was a framework for a changing nation; it would have been a colossal failure if it was the last political reform to succeed. Murray's faith is quite different from that of the Founders. Madison expresses a confidence in the balancing of opposite and rival interests. Murray simply believes rational policy is beyond the capacity of democratic government.

As a nation we would not have come this far, and we could go no further, with the total privatization of life and

thought that Murray wants us to adopt. The economic challenges that confront us demand public investment in our common future—investments in education, skills, and research that "men acting in their private capacities" will not make. The injustices that continue to mar our world demand a vision of public obligations that men wholly absorbed in their private lives will not take the trouble to see or to understand. No democracy of any kind could survive if its citizens showed Murray's loathing for public life and public action. If Murray's book holds any interest, it is only as an index of how far some conservative thought has moved in the direction of pure privatism. There is a line between reasonable prudence and policy nihilism. Murray and those conservatives who follow him have crossed it.

PAUL STARR

Paul Starr is professor of sociology at Princeton University.

of December 19, rabid sectionaries burst into Malesherbes to arrest its household and transport its members to sentencing, and then to prison, in Paris. Several of the family were executed in April 1784, including the doughty old magistrate himself, who expressed no regret at sacrificing his life for his king and his liberal principles. The young Tocqueville couple miraculously survived, though Hervé's hair turned white in prison. A decade later, in still cramped but less ominous Napoleonic times, their third son, Alexis, was born.

He would display, in his way, the greatness of his forebears. Through his maternal connection, Alexis de Tocqueville had a prominent cousin who would help him in his literary debuts: François-René de Chateaubriand. On his father's side, he was descended from Norman vassals of William the Conqueror. He had kinsmen in some of the wealthiest parts of French nobility. Equally endowed by descent and intellect, he was destined to become the Montesquieu of the 19th century. Liberalism—which Alexis de Tocqueville understood primarily as independence against everything despotic or debasing, self-involved or mean-spirited, be it monarchical or republican—coursed in his blood. It was counterbalanced by a love of order. It did not have to be inculcated by social envy, or learned from abstract manifestos of the Enlightenment. It was a liberalism that had nothing to do with "human rights," or an investment portfolio, or "making it," or the self.

Tocqueville's singular merit was his aristocratic or qualitative understanding of the predicament of "democratic ages," combined with his conviction that they were inevitable. The experience of his ancestors supplied the anxiety and the security, the rigor and the suppleness, needed to conceive a "new science of politics" for modern times. He had the capacity to absorb himself in tradition (his closest friends were mostly men of his own breeding) and yet to abandon it in his thinking: to travel, to observe, to take notes, all the while framing his curiosity with propositions about different societies that were substantial and edifying. His style was his own, though his *maîtres de pensée* were Pascal, Montesquieu, Rousseau.

He wrote in a new way. His was surely not any ordinary kind of history (which is what Guizot or Thiers, or even Michelet or Quinet, were writing); nor was it sociology (as conceived by its

## THE DEMOCRAT MALGRÉ LUI

Tocqueville: A Biography  
by André Jardin

(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 550 pp., \$35)

The Two Tocquevilles, Father and Son: Hervé and Alexis de Tocqueville on the Coming of the French Revolution  
by R. R. Palmer

(Princeton University Press, 252 pp., \$28.50)

The Strange Liberalism of Alexis de Tocqueville  
by Roger Boesche

(Cornell University Press, 288 pp., \$29.95)

On January 31, 1793, the young Hervé de Clérel, comte de Tocqueville, arrived at the tree-lined estate of Malesherbes, near Orleans, to visit his betrothed, Louise. She was the daughter of Louis Le Peletier de Rosambo, president of the *Chambre des vacations* of the lately abolished Parliament of Paris; and also the granddaughter of the château's proprietor, the renowned Lamoignon de Malesherbes, twice royal minister and former president of the Paris *Cour des Aides*. Ten days be-

fore this, Malesherbes, as defense counsel for Louis XVI, had been unable to save his monarch from the guillotine. Despite the pall of bitter grief that hung over the château, its rhythm of life seemed "gentle" to Hervé, as spring gave way to summer, and summer turned to autumn.

Yet, as he adds, "the horizon was growing darker and darker." The September terror was "on the agenda." In October, France was submitted to revolutionary government. On the morning

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