

crease of problematic social behavior here dealt with was paralleled by the substantial postwar immigration from the former British colonies. This writer is under the impression that members of some of these groups, West Indians in particular, are significantly over-represented among criminal offenders in Britain, as are corresponding ethnic groups in the United States. It is widely disputed why these groups disproportionately contribute to certain social pathologies, but the contribution cannot be ignored. It may be explained, at least in part, by patterns of socialization and impulse control, the decline of traditional communities, "the culture of poverty" or "culture conflict"—none of which are incompatible with the larger themes of this book.

In the concluding chapter there are references to and comparisons with the social problems and pathologies in Sweden and in the United States. While the author repeatedly observes the far greater weight and influence of religious institutions and values in American society he does not pause to comment on the fact that these factors in American society have not, as a whole, reduced social pathologies. To be sure, it might be argued, and there might be data supporting the argument, that deeply religious individuals (whatever measurable indicators of such religiosity are used) engage in significantly less deviant or criminal behavior. Nevertheless, there are not enough people of such persuasion to effect the overall levels of social pathologies in American society.

While this book is a convincing demonstration of the importance and the influence of moral factors in criminal and other anti-social conduct in Great Britain, Davies may want in his future work to give fuller consideration to the broader historical, social, and cultural forces that, by undermining religion, also undermined morality and in turn the moral regulation of individual behavior.

Neither Greek nor Jew

Mark Shiffman

Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization, by Rémi Bague, *South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2002. 205 pp.*

IT HAS BEEN SAID that the core of the spiritual vitality of the West is the fundamental tension between Athens and Jerusalem. True as it may be, this claim leaves in complete obscurity the character of the West that enables it to harbor and sustain such conflicting sources, a character which cannot be explained by recourse to one of the two poles without rendering the tension between them something less than fundamental. According to Rémi Bague's *Eccentric Culture*, this omission finds its remedy in reflection upon a third city: Rome.

But this formulation (and, incidentally, the subtitle of the English edition of Bague's book) is slightly misleading. Bague is emphatically not writing about "Western Civilization," since he considers the Orient/Occident distinction ultimately untenable. Bague's learned and brisk historical, cultural, philosophical, and theological meditation is about *Europe*, about what makes Europe a distinct cultural entity, and therefore about what it means to be European. This stimulating book is meant in part as an antidote to the cultural suicide being carried out in Brussels, as well as to the reactionary re-

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sponses it provokes.

“Romanity” is the name Brague gives to a salutary inferiority complex at the heart of European culture. In the original case, the Romans recognized the Greeks as their superiors in attainment of the true and the beautiful and in suppleness and vigor of language. “To be ‘Roman,’” Brague remarks, “is to have above one a classicism to imitate and below one a barbarity to subdue.” It is to recognize the imperative of liberal education as traditionally understood, which is always a soul-forming education in the language and literature of peoples other than one’s own. Thus Rome, for Brague, is not another cultural content to be compared to Athens and Jerusalem. Rather, it is the form of cultural appropriation that allows Athens and Jerusalem to be the content of an education. Such an articulation helps to explain what appears to be a relatively common experience, especially among conservative students, of marveling at the Greeks but feeling more affinity for the Romans: to marvel at the Greeks is itself to experience affinity with the Romans.

What most characterizes Romanity is the consciousness of “secondarity,” the consciousness that one’s cultural origins and points of reference do and ought to have their source in another culture. As Brague puts it: “To say that we are Roman is entirely the contrary of identifying ourselves with a prestigious ancestor. It is rather a divestiture, not a claim. It is to recognize that fundamentally we have invented nothing, but simply that we learned how to transmit a current come from higher up, without interrupting it, and all the while placing ourselves back in it.”

A central but not entirely lucid development of Brague’s thesis is his analogy from the Rome/Greece relationship to the Christian/Jewish relationship, his claim that as Christians, “[our] Greeks are the Jews.” Like the Romans, who had to learn what was home-grown for the Greeks,

Christians have to be inducted into the covenant that is itself constitutive of the Jews as a people. Without the Hebrew Scriptures and their categories of Creation, Sin, Covenant and, above all, Messiah, the central Christian doctrine of Incarnation is wholly unintelligible. Thus, it is the Incarnation that renders Christians conscious at once of both the distinctness and the provenance of their tradition from that of the Jews—which is to say, of their religious secondarity.

Now, the cultural connection of Rome to Greece is an arguably accidental (and unarguably mortal) grounding of one historical civilization upon another. The rootedness of Christianity in the Jewish covenant and Scriptures, however, is a providential and sempiternal grounding of one relationship between man and God upon another. By thus elevating secondarity from the level of the contingent to that of the absolute, the Church ensured the permanence of secondarity as a model for culture itself. As T.S. Eliot argued, European humanism cannot long sustain itself as a cultural impetus without the Christian religion to steady it. For Brague, the decisive moment of this enshrinement of secondarity in the religion of Europe is the Church’s repudiation of the heresy of Marcion, who tried to radically oppose the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, rejecting the former. “It may be then,” observes Brague, “that Saint Irenaeus, from his polemics against Marcionism and his affirmation of the identity of the God of the Old Testament with that of the New, is not only one of the fathers of the Church, but also one of the fathers of Europe.” But do not expect to see a portrait of Irenaeus on the Euro.

To elucidate this deep relationship between religion and culture, Brague examines an exemplary foil to Christian culture (and a tradition in which he is deeply learned as a scholar), the absorption of classical learning in the medieval Islamic world. Islam lacks a sense of

secondarity in religion. It views earlier biblical revelations as only fragmentary versions of what is perfected in the Koran, and moreover, as versions preserved only in texts corrupted by the religious communities who adhere to them. The earlier texts are thus wholly superseded by the Koran. Consequently, the Arabic language of the Koran is the ultimate language, the chosen language of God. This means that Greek texts translated into Arabic have passed from an inferior language to a superior, so that once the work of translation is done there is no need to preserve the superseded originals or continue cultivating the skills needed to read them. No religious secondarity, no cultural secondarity. Consequently, despite the fact that the Islamic world shares with Europe the double heritage of Greek philosophy and Biblical religion, it cannot sustain the fundamental tension between them as durably or as energetically as Europe has. The history of Europe from Charlemagne forward is a history of renaissances propelled by recourse to original sources dutifully preserved and recopied. Islam has religious revivals, but no real renaissances.

Brague's project, as is evident from the bibliography of articles in which he has developed aspects of his thesis (many of which have appeared in the theological journal *Communio*), concerns at heart the relationship between Christianity and culture. The concept of secondarity provides a helpful lens for bringing that relationship into focus, and Brague does a marvelous job of unwinding many strands that radiate from this central insight. "Admiration" would be too weak a word for what one feels before Brague's range and depth of learning and thoughtfulness, as well as the light and deft touch with which he deploys those depths. Yet the book seems to promise a synthesis that in the end the reader is likely to find lacking. Is there any necessary or causal connection between Roman *cultural* secondarity

and Christian *religious* secondarity, or only a fortuitous formal resemblance? The Rome:Greece ratio provides Brague a chord that he plays in several keys, but it is hard to discern which key, if any, is dominant in the composition. That may be due to the genre of the book, which, as Brague clearly indicates, is an extended essay. If Brague is often as urbane as Montaigne in this style of presentation, he is also as meandering—delightfully so, but not always to the benefit of coherent exposition.

On the other hand, it is a great merit of this book (beyond the sheer pleasure of reading it) that it provides powerful correctives to a number of influential distortions. Most conspicuously, it supports the argument of Pope John Paul II against the Eurocrats that the preamble to the E.U. constitution ought to include explicit reference to the role of Christianity in the formation of European culture. Instead, the document now notes vaguely that the E.U. draws its "inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, democracy, equality, freedom and the rule of law." Brague argues that it is demonstrably Christianity—not as *content* but as *form* of European culture—that has enabled all the diverse elements that make up the cultural content to survive and thrive. To evade that fact is as much a deliberate choice of cultural amnesia as is the effort in the English-speaking secularist intellectual world to replace the chronological markers B.C. and A.D. with B.C.E. and C.E.—which refer to an utterly meaningless "common era" inexplicably beginning with what was traditionally believed to be the date of Jesus' birth, but whose sole *raison d'être* is to erase all reference to that event.

A second clarification concerns the modern return of Marcionism. Brague

notes that Eric Voegelin characterized the modern project as “a resurgence of Gnosticism,” but he also observes that Voegelin rarely discussed the Gnostics themselves, of whom Marcion is a prime representative. Voegelin tended to focus on the changed relationship to the future in what he famously called the “immanentization of the eschaton.” Brague emphasizes that central to Gnosticism is a fundamental break with the past. Thus, he might well agree with the celebrated European philosopher Jurgen Habermas that the defining characteristic of modernity is its intention to found itself wholly out of itself. But whereas Habermas endorses and abets this project, Brague recognizes in it a rejection of cultural secondarity that can hardly fail to issue in a capitulation to self-satisfied barbarism.

Finally, though Brague lauds Leo Strauss for his defense of the Athens-Jerusalem conflict, he also shows implicitly why this framework can never be adequate for understanding Christianity and its legacy. For Strauss, the principles that are here in conflict, namely reason and revelation, are irreconcilably opposed. This is because they provide divergent solutions to the problem of the best life. Biblical religion solves the problem by providing an answer in the form of divine law communicated by a personal and mysterious God in a revealed text. Philosophy, on the other hand, considers all answers subject to question, and requires a complete account of human nature and of the whole; lacking such a completed metaphysics, the best life can only be a life spent pursuing an understanding of the fundamental questions. But, Brague points out, for (non-fundamentalist) Christians the revealed object is not a text but rather the person of Christ himself. As God become Man, Christ is the complete revelation of human nature; as the fulfillment of creation, Christ is the revelation of a complete metaphysics.

Since this revelation surpasses the capacity of any individual intellectual power, it is an object of interminable wonder. Since Christ perfects the law in a way that surpasses any human ability, what is revealed is something more than a law. Christ is the *way*, and only as such can Christ be the *truth* and the *life*.

The French title of Brague’s book is *Europe: La Voie Romaine (Europe: The Roman Way)*. It is the essence of Rome to be a way, an aqueduct. Perhaps herein lies the source of a fundamental harmony between Romanity and Christianity.

Enhancement Technologies

Peter Augustine Lawler

Better Than Well: American Medicine Meets the American Dream, by Carl Elliott, *New York: W.W. Norton, 2003.*

VARIOUS ENHANCEMENT TECHNOLOGIES now promise to make us “better than well.” Not only is American medicine responsible for the healthiest society in history, but sophisticated and prosperous Americans are employing and will continue to employ medical enhancement technologies not merely to perfect but to improve upon their natures. Until now, the modern conquest of nature was limited by the intractability of human nature. The most radical program for historical human transformation we have hitherto known—communism—was easily defeated by the limits we have been given by nature. To a

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