

people, including 45 counts; four teachers of grammar, logic, and philosophy; two dancing masters; two fencing masters; two organists; eight masters of horse; and one “Keeper of the Camel-leopard” (or giraffe). My favorite work of art at the palace is Frederico’s bed, but there were more glamorous accomplishments. Artists who worked at Urbino in his time included Justus of Ghent, Piero della Francesca, and Paolo Uccello; later, Raphael and Titian painted portraits of the dukes and duchesses of Urbino. Though it is impossible to overlook such distinguished contributions, even such a level of achievement is not quite the supreme plane on which the measure of Urbino may be attempted.

The Ducal Palace and its integration into the town says much about the social cohesion of that community in its greatest days. The luminous beauty of the stonework and the siting of the town itself all speak to something more grand even than great works of art—I mean the vision of Urbino as an exalted image of the ideal community, of the Yeatsian Unity of Being. Castiglione alluded to Plato and Aristotle in his dialogues; Duke Frederico was a patron of learning who amassed a superb library and whose Studiolo was decorated with pictures of the masters of learning and wisdom, such as Moses and Solomon, Homer and Virgil, Boethius and St. Thomas Aquinas.

Now having said so much, let me add that “to be human” means also to be flawed. The glory of Urbino had its source in revenues derived from violence, and there remains the possibility (if no more) that Frederico’s accession to the throne may have implied his own foreknowledge of the assassination of his half-brother, Oddantonio. And I will add that, although the synagogue in Urbino is centrally located and Jews were a notable part of the town’s commercial life, the antisemitic *predella*, *The Profanation of the Host* by Uccello, can only be accounted a perversely twisted product of the imagination and an unworthy, because groundless and cruel, subject for art.

To me, the best thing about Urbino is its scale. In this, it is truly human, for not being monumentally overbearing. Urbino lives on in its beauty and in its university, founded by Guidobaldo in the early 16th century. We need to maintain contact with Urbino if we wish to maintain a connection with our own beleaguered humanity. For helping us to do that in all the fullness of the tale and in the splendor

of its illustrations, we must be obliged to June Osborne and her colleagues.

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A Brief History of Evil

by Fr. Michael P. Orsi

Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy

by Susan Neiman

Princeton: Princeton University Press;
358 pp., \$29.95



The problem of evil has confounded humans throughout history. Philosophers and theologians have perennially constructed systems and myths to assuage the perception of the contingency of life. Religious belief, at least in Western civilization, usually filled in the gaps between the “ought” and the “is” that conflicted in the minds of those affected by the calamity caused by natural evil, or so-called acts of God. For Jews and Christians, Original Sin and the break it caused within the moral order also disrupted the natural order; this concept provided a systemic understanding of why evil exists. For Christians, the Resurrection is the proleptic fulfillment of mankind’s hope that the moral “ought” is on its way to rectification, making life bearable. With the Enlightenment, however, the world became disenchanting. It relied on science to solve man’s problems, and, when this failed, philosophers eventually accepted the futility of existence and proclaimed the death of God. For postmodern men, neither traditional belief nor “modern thought” is acceptable, according to Susan Neiman. She contends, rather, that both solutions fail to satisfy the man who wishes to know not only why evil exists but how to control it.

Neiman identifies two crises in history that reflect breaks with the dominant worldview of the time. The first was the metaphysical disconnect between human behavior and so-called acts of God, Who had previously been believed to control the natural realm, effecting good or ill in response to human behavior. The

second denied moral evil, when philosophers could no longer discover the necessary human intention in the perpetration of human evil acts, e.g., murder, theft, adultery. Neiman dates the first of these dislocations from a 13th-century earthquake that devastated Lisbon and for which, despite the accusations of the clergy, the reprobate King Alfonso refused to take responsibility. The second, she believes, was produced by Auschwitz, where “the banality of evil” seemed to negate evil intentions and, therefore, responsibility for the consequences of evil actions.

Inspired by the cataclysmic events of September 11, Neiman challenges the Kantian dualism that separates the ideal from the real world. She also shows that the pessimism of Nietzsche and Freud is contrary to human experience. Neiman posits instead a theodicy of hope, which she believes is constitutive of human experience and necessary for human survival. For her, September 11 was an apocalyptic moment. The truths to be learned from it, she believes, are essential to understanding the precariousness of contemporary human life and to making life more intelligible and more secure in the future. Neiman sees the events of that date—whose causes and damages so resembled the destructiveness of nature (acts of God) but were nevertheless born of human intention—as the rejoining of metaphysical and moral evil.

Although Neiman does not posit a transcendent source of meaning for the world, she seems to move in the direction of a “god within humans” who may now, through a shared will for a more just and humane world, construct the reality of it. While this is not the stuff of religion, it does reintroduce the idea that there is more to the world than meets the eye. Besides achieving a wonderful exposé of the inadequacy of modern thought from Kant to Rawls, Neiman’s book provides the reader with useful insights and a reinforced faith in humanity. The acceptance of nonscientific truth by postmodern philosophy may lead some to go further in searching out the root of those myths that give structure and meaning to life. Here, Christianity remains a realistic possibility for a world in search of hope. Certainly, Neiman’s book will give, short of faith, a glimmer of hope for those seeking to comprehend the tragedy of September 11.

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Last Ride

Every city needs cemeteries, and not just for the obvious reason. Like public buildings and monuments, they are a visible—and spiritual—link to the city's past, a reminder that others have traveled the path that we trod, and still others will follow in our footsteps. Placed prominently on the edge of residential or commercial areas or alongside churches, they, like the church on a hill so common in Midwestern towns, lift our thoughts from the merely mundane and help us to focus on the most permanent of the permanent things.

The pious—by which I do not necessarily mean *religious*—practice of visiting cemeteries has all but disappeared. Just a few blocks west of our house sit two of Rockford's largest and oldest burial grounds, Greenwood Cemetery—the final resting place of world-famous Egyptologist (and Rockford native) James Henry Breasted—and the Catholic cemetery now known as St. Mary's/St. James. On most days, you can wander either without seeing another living person. While both are well kept, there are relatively few flowers or other ornaments placed on graves, and not simply because of increasingly draconian rules designed to minimize the amount of time needed to mow the cemeteries (and, thus, eliminate the need for full-time caretakers).

Cemetery visitation has dwindled for a variety of reasons. The descendants of the dead have often, in another sense, passed away, victims of economic necessity or simply the American spirit of restlessness. Walking among the tombstones in St. Mary's/St. James, I recognize names of families who still play prominent roles in Rockford—Lorden, Gambino, Morrissey, Vecchio, Goral, Sweeney, Castrogiovanni, Doran—but others (Kuchefski, Lapinskas, Wrzosek) seem to have disappeared. One of the most prominent names, scattered throughout the cemetery, is Pendergast; today, there is only one Pendergast listed in the Rockford phone book.

Unlike many modern cemeteries, St. Mary's/St. James makes extensive use of family plots, with a large central monument bearing the family name surrounded by the graves, marked with individu-

al gravestones, of family members. The largest plot belongs to the Schmauss family, whose patriarch, Leonard Sr., was born September 29, 1825, in Schnaidtach, Germany, the birthplace as well of his wife, Margaret. They rest here, in front of the family monument, with 43 of their descendants and their spouses. There is room in the plot for perhaps five or ten more graves. But there are no more Schmausses in Rockford.

Mobility is not the only reason fewer people visit cemeteries. Religious piety continues to decline, and the attitude of many—if not most—people, on those rare occasions when they think of those who have gone before, seems to be a perverted reading of Longfellow's line from "A Psalm of Life": "Let the dead Past bury its dead." But natural piety—the eternal contract between generations written on the souls of men—is vanishing as well, and not simply because we are rootless, unchurched, or too busy to visit cemeteries but, in significant part, because of deliberate and largely successful attempts over the last century to erase men's ties of kinship and to replace them with an abstract devotion to the nation-state.

Because of a number of factors, not the least of which is the size of the United States, non-Anglo-Saxon European ethnic groups have historically remained segregated—often physically, but certainly ethnically—and, thus, tended to perpetuate their own cultures, traditions, and even languages rather than assimilate to the broader British culture that, between the framing of the Constitution and the Civil War, served as the basis of an emerging American nation. Overall, this was not a curse but a blessing, a true and beneficial diversity reflecting that of Europe, but it came to a rather abrupt end in the early 20th century, particularly in the era between the two World Wars. The Yankee ruling class at that time was facing its own declining birthrate, and at least some of its members were developing an unhealthy obsession with eugenics and with imposing birth control on non-Anglo-Saxons. This was precisely the moment when the American ruling class decided to launch a campaign to "Americanize" the non-Anglo-Saxon Eu-



ropean ethnic groups who had stubbornly stuck to their roots. Because the ethnic vitality of the ruling class which they were presumably to take as their model had itself begun to decline, the experiment was likely doomed to failure from the beginning.

The campaign had two prongs—stripping ethnic groups of their attachment to their European roots and grafting them on to new, Anglo-American stock—and it failed precisely because the first of those prongs succeeded all too well. True national identities are not abstractions; they develop slowly, organically. They are the result of shared experience; of a common language, which implies close contact with one another; of common food, shared over a long time, which historically has required a certain lack of mobility and an attachment to a particular piece of land. National identities are a result, too, of a common faith, one not simply professed but lived, and of a shared history and storytelling.

The proponents of Americanization understood all of this, but, with true Yankee efficiency, they believed that such elements could be manufactured in a relatively short time and imparted through public education. Why wait for an overarching national identity to develop organically, especially if that might mean that some of the elements of that identity would come disproportionately from non-Yankees? For instance, with the influx of Southern and Eastern European immigration in the early 20th century, before the immigration acts of 1921 and 1924, Catholicism was becoming a larger force in American life—and this was not the staid English Catholicism of Maryland or the refined French Catholicism that was confined largely to Louisiana but a robust, earthy, peasant Catholicism, reeking of garlic and bursting with babies, and that simply