

PROMETHEUS

Silicon Assassin: The Man of the Hour

By Jerry Jewett

Troubled times beget troubling art: witness Yevgeny Zamiatin's *We*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, or George Orwell's *1984*. When life has become torturous or fearsome for ordinary people owing to usurpations of their rights and liberties by high-handed "executives," "administrators," or "leaders," conflict and strife abound. And in the early phases of consolidation of power after a coup d'état, things often go still worse for the subjected hordes. The early Soviet era in 20th century Russian history, or Adolph Hitler's acts of brutal police power after the Reichstag Fire exemplify this.

Creative, freedom-loving people do not kneel to tyranny; they fight it. The two-third's complete work of taking Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* to the big screen, and the forthcoming release of the cinematic rendition of J. Neil Schulman's epic classic *Alongside Night* remind us that the voices of principled protest in opposition to tyranny can be powerful and informative while also entertaining and inspiring.

The powerful theme of resourceful human resistance to the unremitting jack-booted march of the Police Power against Individual Liberty is portrayed in *Silicon Assassin*. This production brings science fiction writing and sci-fi film-making to anyone with a quality notebook computer and a good Internet connection, including via the channel of *Mondo Cult* online.

Writer-producer Brad Linaweaver had a long-time friend and confidant in Chuck Hamill, a venerable libertarian activist and thinker. When Mr. Hamill died, he left a bequest inviting Mr. Linaweaver to produce a libertarian story-line showing the return to freedom of a subjected people, following an authoritarian takeover by the state. Linaweaver, with his extensive network of Hollywood industry connections on tap to complete the production, has outdone himself by crafting this series of episodes.

Science fiction legend Richard Hatch as The Silicon Assassin and horror movie icon Brinke Stevens as President Medusa play central roles as antagonists. This science fiction web series features work by people with many decades of experience in film-making, whether in front of the cameras, working the cameras, or working the many other elements that blend to make a good movie. A host of talents converge harmoniously in this recent (2012-2013) production. The episodes are as follows:

"Problem Child," directed by Richard Hatch;
 "Medusa Speaks," (an epilogue to "Problem Child") directed by Jeff Szalay;
 "The Wall," directed by Christopher Douglas-Olen Ray;
 "Dead Reckoning," directed by Edward L. Plumb;
 "The Medusa Meeting," directed by Christopher Douglas-Olen Ray;
 "Window of Opportunity," directed by Christopher Douglas-Olen Ray;
 "*Silicon Assassin* music video," directed by Marie Ilene (theme by Wendy Jacobson).

The time is the very near future, the film's locale is Los Angeles as the nexus of anti-government activity, and the situation is that President Medusa has consolidated all power in her own hands, ramrodding The American Godly Republic. That Republic is the corroded and dispirited residue of the United States of America. So many "emergency measures" and Presidential Orders have greased the skids of the slippery slope that the state has the upper hand and is consolidating all power. Political forces and interests under way in the autumn of 2013 has coalesced in Movie Time, creating a plausible dystopia where the economy is in shambles, the State claims all power, the citizen has been reduced to a subject, and hope seems lost.

If not for some atavistic Americans who recall "the old way," bolstered by a shadowy league of renegade scientists bent on restoring freedom using revolutionary technology, the battle would be over for suppression of the citizenry and the

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The newsletter of the Libertarian Futurist Society

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A Necessary End

By Sarah Pinborough and F. Paul Wilson
Shadowridge Press, 2014

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

Over the years, F. Paul Wilson's "Repairman Jack" series, most of whose early novels focused on their hero's helping crime victims, has increasingly gone back to the horror focus of *The Tomb*, the very first in the series. *A Necessary End*, a collaboration with British horror writer Sarah Pinborough not set in the Repairman Jack series, turns entirely to horror.

Horror fiction characteristically works by evoking various primal human fears: corpses, predatory animals, mutilation, rape, curses, and loss of self-command are all examples. The fears in *A Necessary End* are epidemiological and parasitological—that is, they focus on bodily decay and contagion. The vector of the contagion is portrayed in hard scientific detail; there's nothing obviously supernatural about it.

A further emphasis of this story is the disintegration of human societies under an overwhelming threat. We don't see a sudden total collapse, but a gradual failure of institutions such as the police and the National Health Service (the main setting is the United Kingdom). Most of the population attempts to accommodate itself to the new conditions, trying to minimize exposure to the threat and finding ways to provide for themselves as commerce and government shut down. Some of them have more extreme reactions, from mob violence to religious enthusiasm. There isn't any overt libertarian message to this story; it shows conditions under which any legal and political regime would break down.

The main character, Nigel, represents the effort to function normally. His career as a reporter gives him a view of the plague; after his return to England, he takes up a new story, about a vanished child, which drives much of the remaining plot. He encounters various people who have turned to religion either to protect them or to explain the plague, and responds to them in a rational, skeptical way. This drives the other major conflict, between Nigel and his wife Abby, a devout Catholic who sees God's will all around her—both in her own life and in the breakdown of human civilization—and hopes to bring Nigel to share her faith. An underlying theme of the story is theodicy, or how, in Milton's words, "to justify the ways of God to man." This is the point at which the supernatural comes in: Not as crude, brute force miracles that overthrow or set aside the laws of nature, but as subtler ones that work within them to produce improbable outcomes.

Or so, at least, Abby believes. One of the strengths of the story is that, at the end, the reader is left to decide if she's right. Is this the story of an apocalypse brought about by divine intervention? Is it the story of a purely natural catastrophe whose survivors attribute it to divine intervention as a way of making sense of the unendurable? Pinborough and Wilson offer carefully balanced evidence for both sides, making the reader a participant in one of the world's oldest philosophical debates.

Captain America: The Winter Soldier

By Anthony Russo & Joe Russo (2014)

Pyr, 2012

Reviewed by William H. Stoddard

Since Captain America's appearance in *Avengers #4*, fifty years ago, Marvel Comics has portrayed him as an anachronism: A superhero of World War II displaced forward in time. The first film about him in the Marvel Cinematic Universe series, *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), maintained that theme, starting and ending with a framing narrative in the present for the story of his World War II career. *The Avengers* (2013) showed him leading a present-day superteam; now, his second solo film examines his experience of the twenty-first century in greater depth. The note is established in the opening scene, when the newly introduced character Sam Wilson tells him about Marvin Gaye, and he adds the name to a list of things to find out about—written by hand, on paper, in a bound notebook. Much later, he refers to having been born in 1918, making him 96 years old—nearly seven decades more than his biological age.

The First Avenger made a point of being a period piece: A film whose hero lived by older, now half-forgotten American values. *The Winter Soldier* uses that same characterization to ask if those values may need to be better remembered now. In particular, it shows a United States and a world increasingly preoccupied with fear and eager for security, to the point where they are ready to give up liberty to obtain it (forgetting Benjamin Franklin's famous warning, "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety."). The same opposition was shown, briefly, in *The Avengers*, whose main villain, Loki, made a speech in Germany telling a crowd that he would save them from freedom—to be defied by an elderly man who said he had heard such offers before. The story of *The Winter Soldier* suggests that such fears have been deliberately created to make the bargain more appealing, and makes its hero a symbol of the rejection of fear. In doing so, it offers a pointed criticism of the security state—not only of the intensified form that has emerged over the past decade, but of its roots in the years following World War II.

Fitting this theme, a significant part of this film's conflict takes the form of debates. The film's opening action sequence features one over operational styles, between Captain America (Steve Rogers) and his fellow Avenger, the Black Widow (Natasha Romanov), who accompanies him on a mission, but is carrying out secret orders of which he wasn't informed. This expands into a debate between Rogers and Nick Fury, head of SHIELD, the ultrasecret agency Rogers and Romanov both work for, over the legitimacy of the preventive use of force. This in turn leads to the climactic struggle of the film, a battle within SHIELD itself over these very issues—and thus, over whether SHIELD will defend freedom, if by questionable means, or will become wholly committed to a totalitarian conception of "order."

These debates form part of a set of personal relationships portrayed with unusual subtlety for an action/adventure film.

Fitting his portrayal as a man lost in time, Rogers has relationships both with people from his past (there's a moving scene of his visit to the woman he loved during World War II, now elderly and bedridden) and with people from the present. In an impressive piece of good judgment, the film doesn't show him falling in love with anyone new, and in particular it doesn't make him and Romanov a couple, showing how unsuited they are for each other. Instead, it makes them comrades in danger. Wilson becomes another comrade, a friendship growing out of the two men's shared experience of combat and the loss of friends, more than half a century apart; initially Rogers and Romanov look to him for a hiding place, but he turns out to have special skills that enable him to contribute to the final struggle.

There's also the Winter Soldier, who turns out both to be someone Rogers knows, and to be another super-soldier. In contrast to Rogers, who, as Thoreau describes it, serves the state not only with his body and his head but with his conscience, the Winter Soldier is only a tool, or a weapon, and is treated as such, sent on missions whose purpose is concealed from him—exactly the kind of missions that send Rogers to confront Fury in anger. The final struggle between them is not merely a physical fight, but a moral appeal.

And though the film is named for the Winter Soldier, he's not its true adversary; being deprived of moral choice, he can't be. Roger's greatest victory, and the true climax of the film, occurs earlier, when he takes over SHIELD's communication channels to warn against the threat to its mission—and the response of many of its agents reveals how much moral influence "the Captain" has gained. A further measure of that influence can be seen in Romanov's final decisive action, which shows how much of an example Rogers's integrity has set for her. This film genuinely is about heroism, in the sense not merely of physical courage but of using that courage to fight for the right things. "Captain America" is actually an embodiment of some important American values. And among these is reliance, ultimately, not on organizations, but on the men and women who make them and work for them.

This film is popular entertainment, but the best kind of popular entertainment. Its writers and directors understood that the essence of superheroes is not fights or superhuman powers, but embodiment of specific moral qualities. And its adversaries represent, in an iconic form, some of the most dangerous temptations to the further abandonment of liberty that currently emerging technology offers.

Prometheus Submission Guidelines

As the newsletter of the Libertarian Futurist Society, *Prometheus* publishes reviews and articles concerned with liberty and fiction. *Prometheus* seeks reviews, interview, essays, articles, and columns of interest to libertarian science fiction fans. Any individual may submit material — membership in the LFS is not required.

Contact the editor for more details via email at: editor@lfs.org

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obliteration of freedom in the sense that any common person could understand.

At the start of the movie, one gets the grim picture of a totalitarian state that would have been the envy of Erik Hon-ecker, East Germany's post-war dictator. The press has been quashed to "improve morale," though that effect is not visible. The sole-source American Channel (like a Voice of America speaking to a conquered America) carries the message that nothing is more dangerous than cheap fast technology that can fall into the wrong hands, while the announcer also voices the dogma (clearly official "party line" since it has cleared the censors and made the airwaves) that taxes and torture are the best things there are.

But the renegade scientists have fashioned a small crew of counter-agents. These are the Silicon Assassin team, human-looking cybermorphs, artificial computer-generated creatures, whose principle means of dispersion is via the Internet into and out of people's personal or laptop computers, though they also do WALK for short distances. The SA himself (Richard Hatch) has comely sidekicks, mainly Lady Twilight (Vickie Marie Taylor) and Bubbleblonde Girl (Paula LaBaredas) but also intermittently is joined by Deadly Tween (Victoria Plumb) and the occasional Lady Twilight #2 (Erica Duke). The lot of them are armed with the best ray guns, which noted armorer L.J. Dopp Arsenals can supply.

The task of the Silicon Assassin, Lady Twilight, and Bubbleblonde Girl is to destroy those humans who initiate the use of force against others, satisfying an elementary libertarian precept of using violence only in reaction, for the first use of violence is typically the province of Statists, Authorized State Agents, and highwaymen. The claim to be the only legitimate wielder of violence typifies State usurpers. Medusa and her followers assert that claim with a heavy hand and a high body count. She eliminates unemployment by mass massacres. Taking Medusa out of office via Direct Action is the ultimate goal, but destroying her toadies and minions also counts in the "Win" column.

Professor Rand and his son are the renegade scientists who have made the Silicon Assassin team possible. Professor Rand is portrayed by Charles Hamill, father of Chuck Hamill, aforementioned. As the protagonists are introduced, estimable sci-fi writer John de Chancie makes a cameo appearance, interrupting the conference by hawking our well-beloved *Mondo Cult* magazine door to door (as it rightfully should be done, for the *New Yorker* of film magazines!).

Deadly Tween impetuously and thoughtlessly vaporizes him, as if nuisance value alone justified eradication, and all humans are targets. This is where the admonition to kill only those initiating force gets voiced.

This being a Linaweaver production, lithe, comely young lasses find many roles, as people in the "Underground," as the assistants to the Assassin, and also as assassins and agents for Medusa and her Central Government. Should such violent or combative roles devolve on women? Common wisdom holds that "battles are ugly when women fight" (Father Christmas to Lucy, *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*), but it is not so

bad when well-selected actress-models do the fighting. In fact, a disproportionate number of the females are such as to drive vulnerable adolescent males and certain adult men into rapturous fantasies.

Vickie Marie Taylor, the principal Miss Twilight, has a lean, self-assured sexiness that would make her the hottest regular character in the series, but for the fact that she is teamed with the exquisite beauty of Paula LaBaredas's Bubbleblonde Girl. The charitable will call the garment hugging Bubbleblonde Girl's pelvis a skirt, while the perceptive will see it for what it is, a wide belt with some fringe. Some like brunettes while others prefer blondes; *Silicon Assassin* gives generous measures of both. The honors divide equally, but both are necessary parts of this story.

As the episodes unfold, we see that a few people still cling to the hope of restoration of freedom, or at least, some of them live with the hope of escape. The legend of the Silicon Assassin circulates, with believers and doubters, True Believers and Betraying Doubters, if we may style it that way. An agonizing family conflict over belief in the Silicon Assassin between a husband and wife torn by grief over the death of their daughter, who lost her life in the fight for freedom, is interrupted by raiding agents of Medusa.

Their bloodthirsty style marks them as evil, but the husband, overcoming many hurdles, is able to escape to Free Mexico, which may not be as ironic as it seems at first glance. Even the Mexican Militia longs for the restoration of the free America of bygone days. Someone assembled considerable high-impact weaponry for this episode. When combined with the high-impact actresses who play the pursuers, the concatenation of smoldering beauty and deadly danger makes some kind of a high-water mark.

The next episode shows the arbitrary, pragmatic, and ruthless nature of the forces supporting Medusa, a cold-hearted, callous lot freely sprinkled with pathological killers, as well as political opportunists, along with people just concerned with which side of the bread gets the butter. Pitched battles, acts of torture, and treacherous, deadly conflicts spring up repeatedly through this series, as one would expect when natural order has been suspended and all rights exist by fiat, fraud or force.

In another episode, President Medusa supplies the public with some policy updates. She has been taxing the populace at 80%, but she is concerned that people are enjoying too many benefits and paying too little for them. The injustice of that is manifest to her: the people are "stealing" benefits from a benevolent State, clearly an intolerable situation. According to Linaweaver, Medusa is a bizarre combination of Che Guevara and Sarah Palin. The schizoid tension there is palpable yet credible to a high degree, too.

Pandering to apparently religious members of the populace, Medusa says, "God has been getting by with only 10%, and so can you!" Such a pep talk! George Orwell meets Thomas Hobbes when Medusa says, "True freedom is to obey me." Were I better read, I might recognize that as a Benito Mussolini quote, but the totalitarian tenor is unmistakable, whether the

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source is history or fiction.

Farther along, a vicious melee between the freedom fighters and the oppressors results in that ugly Lewisian event, a heroine getting her neck broken fighting a seemingly invincible bully character, before the Silicon Assassin arrives. He gains the upper hand with his ray gun, when, adapting a phrase common in the tactical community ('never bring a knife to a gun fight'), he mocks the aggressors, saying, "You fools bring guns to a ray-gun fight?" with a laugh as he vaporizes the bad guys.

Having prevailed, he turns to the hapless freedom fighters he saved, telling them, "The most difficult task of a freedom fighter is to change people's minds. You can change another human's mind, or you can kill him." This meets with relief and good cheer.

Soon, Twilight Lady and Bubbleblonde Girl interrupt a meeting of Medusa with her Emergency Committee, and begin vaporizing the closest cohort of Medusa. Only by this means do they discover Medusa had made a holographic appearance, and they remain empty-handed as regards capturing or killing her; for she has vanished unharmed.

Meanwhile, a shady cabal of Medusa supporters meets over a poker table with drinks and bets at hand, playing for high stakes while wrangling about loyalty and strategy in changing political circumstances. Well-known real-world collaborators Fred Olen Ray, Edward L. Plumb, and Brad Linaweaver (as Mr. Yog) serve as the card players.

In a scene to delight Linaweaver detractors while stunning his clique of supporters, the Ray character asks Mr. Yog his first name, produces a pistol, and says, "Shut up, Brad," as he blasts Mr. Brad Yog into silence. Anyone who has observed Linaweaver in the midst of an exhortation or disquisition will appreciate the tactic. In the right hall, this could provoke applause, but seen on-line, one must imagine the response.

In a sly cameo appearance, Chuck Hamill colleague and Agorist Advisor J.Kent Hastings (billed as Mr. Sothoth), seconds Medusa on the need to tax food and alcoholic drink, because people eat and drink too much. He then marvels that Linaweaver got away with writing his landmark, *Moon of Ice*, a shameless plug.

Do shameless plugs abound? A poster for Plumb's "Boneyard Collection" film, with Brinke Stevens's face featured thereon, provides another bit of levity for those privy to the "inside view." The Linaweaver and Hastings characters' names combine to

Yog Sothoth, Lovecraft's beloved menace.

There are probably other, subtler such items buried in this fast-moving, free-ranging political drama. With a subtle and scheming mind such as Linaweaver's involved, other hidden nuggets of reference or meaning may lurk, lying in wait to torment the viewer's subconscious in the small hours of the night. Only Mr. Yog and *The Shadow* know for sure.

Wry commentary on socialized medicine finds a scene. This could be a free-standing short feature on its own. An apparently deposed functionary of the New State, suffering a potentially fatal malady, stumbles into the lobby of an Emergency Room. He gasps that he needs help, only to be handed a clipboard with some forms which he must complete. Impatient and believing himself dying, he identifies himself as a High Government Official, hoping to over-awe the remarkably attractive young blonde lady working as receptionist.

Upon learning of his status, she produces a further stack of "forms" at least 3" thick, advising him that these additional forms must also be completed before he, a High Government Official, can be tended to. Growing desperate, he produces a fistful of cash, with which he hopes to bribe her for better terms and speedier service. In the perfect blend of astonished indignation and perhaps genuine compassion, this worker expresses regret that he has attempted to bribe her, with a modicum of sympathy for his plight. Just before he dies and new elements of dramatic conflict surge in, he says, "I should have gone to my herbalist," then expires.

This is clearly a commentary on Obamacare. Anyone who has been a patient or even an astute observer at a big public healthcare operation that cares for the indigent (County USC in L.A. comes to mind, but analogs are probably present in many larger population centers) will recognize some themes present in this scene.

The arc nearly complete, the Showdown comes. Medusa is trapped between foes on a footbridge. Faced with capture or destruction by others, she makes Hitler's Choice: suicide, by killing herself with a dagger, thus ending her reign. But as a teaser at the end reminds us, what with holograms and other tech tricks, we can't know that this is really her final bow. Maybe she has tricked us one more time.

Whether Medusa returns or not, the threat she represents remains, as America continues to be bidden to choose between authoritarianism and totalitarianism, with nothing else on the menu but chaos, the supposed chaos that would boil up if the state failed to exercise or increase its steely grip. And everyone knows that anarchy and chaos are bad, don't they?

Long-time *Mondo Cult* favorite Wendy Jacobson (aka The Fabulous Miss Wendy) wrote and performs a fine collection of tunes to support and illustrate this masterful venture of Linaweaver's. Knowing a lot of the right people helps in putting together an imaginative production. Miss Wendy puts on killer live shows, but who knew she was a masterful studio musician, as well? Now we know: she is, and her music adds value here.

Kudos to all involved for a professional, thought-provoking, yet fun production.

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Classifieds

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Only Thin Outside:

A Comparative Review of Butler Shaffer's *A Libertarian Critique of Intellectual Property with A Moral Basis for Liberty* by Robert Sirico

By Jerry Jewett

Prometheus readers may know Butler Shaffer as a long-time libertarian/anarchist/agorist activist. He actively champions liberty and challenges the state by writing books and articles, he lectures as a law professor at Southwestern Law School where he skillfully plants the seeds of doubt as to the putative virtues of the State, and he expands on libertarian themes in interviews and panel discussions. Among his honors, the Von Mises Institute has given him its Lifetime Achievement Award, while the Karl Hess Supper Club has conferred the Chaunticleer Award.

Robert Sirico is a Roman Catholic priest and one of the founders of The Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty. The Church as an institution has often fostered a dim view of property and commerce, but Fr. Sirico brings a rational breath of fresh air to this discussion. He acknowledges that a free and virtuous society runs best with private property, minimum state intervention and optimal social interaction, based on voluntary choices informed by a non-relativistic moral code. Promoting a free and virtuous society, minimizing the role of the state, and educating people about the moral foundations of economic choices, are among the purposes of the Institute, of which he is President.

Shaffer, agorist to the core, finds agreeable and comprehensible only those customs and practices which arise out of voluntary dealings and agreements, in full accord with libertarian root doctrine. Though two or several individuals may contractually bind themselves to the observation of property rights in intellectual property (hereinafter IP), current IP law arises not from custom and practice, but by statute, most particularly from Article I, section 8(8) of the United States Constitution, empowering Congress “to promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries.”

When Gutenberg made printing a less labor-intensive venture than the older hand-copying procedure, powerful commercial forces used the press to extol the virtues of their products, services or schemes, and denigrate competitors, while the sphere of politics used the printed word to incite support and rebuke opposition. Those who could afford to print the most material got their story told the best, or at least most widely. Anything can be printed, whether true or not. During this period, kernels of truth might lie alongside fanciful speculations, intentional distortions, and outright falsehoods in the same tract or broadside. The attempt at content control was almost foreseeable.

Proponents and apologists for copyright law have been numerous over the centuries, with the usual jousting of vested interests to get the best legislative protection their money could buy. All do well to recall that state concern over publications did not begin with a concern for a creator's IP rights in her property, but in state interest in censorship. To the extent we

can depend upon Wikipedia, it is there written, “As the ‘menace’ of printing spread, governments established centralized control mechanisms, and in 1557 the English Crown thought to stem the flow of seditious and heretical books by chartering the Stationers’ Company. The right to print was limited to the members of that guild, and thirty years later the Star Chamber was chartered to curtail the ‘greate enormities and abuses’ of ‘dyvers contentyous and disorderlye persons professinge the arte or mystere of pryntinge or selling of books.’ The right to print was restricted to two universities and to the 21 existing printers in the city of London, which had 53 printing presses.” Clearly, pre-publication access to and critical control over writings benefit the State enormously, corking the information flow and bullying independent writers.

The property interests of creators took second place in the copyright scheme, subject to state control of publications. Protection of creators’ IP interests is usually vaunted as justification of IP law and practice, with the typical barrage of excuses for monopoly.

Here is an older justification: “The foundation of all rights of this description is the natural dominion which every one has over his own ideas, the enjoyment of which, although they are embodied in visible forms or characters, he may, if he chooses, confine to himself or impart to others. But, as it would be impracticable in civil society to prevent others from copying such characters or forms without the intervention of positive law, and as such intervention is highly expedient, because it tends to the increase of human culture, knowledge, and convenience, it has been the practice of civilized nations in modern times to secure and regulate the otherwise insecure and imperfect right which, according to the principles of natural justice, belongs to the author of new ideas.” *Baldwin's Century Edition of Bouvier's Law Dictionary*, William Edward Baldwin.

Raising the natural justice principle provokes some thought, for typically when natural law and positive law interact, positive law prevails to the detriment of natural law. To illustrate that proposition, this: “In each case [of infringement of copyright law] half of the penalty to go to the proprietor of the copyright and the other half to the use of the United States;” (Baldwin). So much for the protection of the creator's IP interests, when the State gets half the damages!

In prior works, Shaffer sets forth the criteria for recognizing what may fall subject to ownership as property. Claim, boundary, and control are the watchwords. With IP issues, anyone can see a creator's claim, as originator, but boundary and control become diffuse in a quick hurry. Alfred Korzybski spent all of *Manhood of Humanity* and much of *Science and Sanity* propounding the view that all human progress ties directly to time-binding, where time-binding is understood

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as the accumulation or accretive process of incorporating all relevant prior knowledge and using it as the springboard for innovation and development, with time-binding also as the root of civilizing forces. Shaffer concurs fully in saying, “The notion that the anticipation of monopolistic rewards such as patents and copyrights is essential to the creative process, is negated by much of human history.”

Still, Statism’s voice echoes from the corridors of power. “By allowing a creator to establish a limited monopoly over the invention, the sciences and useful arts are promoted. Society reaps the benefits of the invention during and after the grant of monopoly.” *Mind Over Matter* (Michael A. Shimokaji and Phillip L. Gahagan). As Korzybski and Shaffer so effectively note, most of the underpinnings of civilization sprang up without IP protection, while it is plain that monopoly pricing works to the detriment, not the benefit, of those consumers abstractly dubbed “society.”

“When the coercive powers of the state are invoked to benefit some and to restrain others, the creative processes will always suffer and, as a consequence, so will the vibrancy of a civilization...Creative behavior depends upon synthesis and cross-fertilization, by what Arthur Koestler referred to as ‘creative anarchy.’” Shaffer closes, “Can one, consistent with a libertarian philosophy, respect any ‘property’ interest that is both created and enforced by the state, a system defined by its monopoly on the use of violence?” Well, of course not!

And what does Fr. Sirico say? In *A Moral Basis for Liberty*, 3d Ed., Foreword by Edmund Opitz, (2012, The Action Institute, Grand Rapids, MI), he acknowledges that Christianity has largely been ambivalent at best about understanding economic practice as an essential part of liberty. “[E]conomic liberty is far from having captured the high ground in public debate...[W]e are squeamish about asking...whether it is better to have property commandeered by political authority or put to voluntary use by market participants.”

Speaking of the evident bias on this issue by academics and ecclesiastics, he asks, “How can the institutions of liberty survive and flourish so long as the moral opinion-makers are so overwhelmingly sympathetic to only one side of the debate?” “So long as economic liberty—and its requisite institutions of private property, free exchange, capital accumulation, and contract enforcement—is not backed by a generally held set of norms by which it can be defended, it cannot be sustained over the long term.”

“A social and economic order dominated by a voluntary exchange matrix, the essence of the business economy, is a free social order. On the other end of the spectrum is the social order dominated by networks of regulators, revenueurs, monetary managers, and state social workers.”

Sirico means us to recognize a strong link between morality and liberty. “Only human beings with volition can be said to be moral, and in order to act in a moral way one must have liberty. Liberty is not so much a virtue by definition as it is the essential social condition that makes virtue possible. It is widely understood that individual physical aggression against person or property is wrong. Difficulties arise when the same moral criterion is applied to society at large. Despite conventional

wisdom, wrong does not become right when morally identical acts are committed at the political level by the state.” This is a statement with which Ayn Rand could be predicted to agree, one which should confound those critics of Christianity who think Christianity prefers to finance compassion for the less fortunate out of the wallets of the more fortunate.

Writing in England in 1842, where a State-supported Church undertook the systematic care of the poor by imposing rates, Herbert Spencer wrote: “Forced contributions rarely appeal to the kind feelings. The man who is called upon for a rate does not put his hand in his pocket out of pure sympathy for the poor; he looks upon the demand as another tax, and feels annoyance rather than pleasure in paying it. Nor does the effect end here: the poor man who is struggling hard with the world to maintain his independence, excites no pity; so long as there is a poor law he cannot starve, and it will be time enough to consider his case when he applies for relief; the beggar who knocks at his door, or the way-worn traveler who accosts him in his walk, is told to go to his parish; there is no need to inquire into his history, and to give him private assistance if found deserving, for there is already a public provision for him.” (*The Proper Sphere of Government*, Herbert Spencer.)

This coheres closely with *A Moral Basis*. “The defense of the right of property ownership should not be seen as the defense of detached material objects in themselves, but of the dignity, liberty, and very nature of the human person. The right to own and control justly acquired property is an extension and exercise of authentic human rights.” Any objection to this would be hard to base on libertarian grounds.

Being a minister of the Christian faith, Sirico points to natural law as the lodestone for liberty in society. Shaffer has distanced himself from an early stated interest in natural law, yet he recommends *The Law of the Somalis: A Stable Foundation for Economic Development in the Horn of Africa* (Michael van Notten & Spencer Heath MacCallum), to those interested in a stateless society. This review is the wrong place to show how *The Law of the Somalis* rebuts typical misconceptions about Somalia.

But it is worthy of notice how this book concludes by rebuking the United Nations for trying to sustain the unworkable political cultures imposed by force during colonialism. “The United Nations’ biggest problem is that it doesn’t understand that law and order can prevail without a central government, without a state.”

Nevertheless, “only those rules can be considered laws that conform to timeless criteria that have universal validity. The laws that governments enact do not meet that standard. . . . The universal laws of human society pre-exist political government and continue to exist in its absence.” These universal laws are, of course, natural law.

Yet another voice can be heard in support of natural law, one from a most unlikely background, that of the die-hard Marxist utopian, Ernest Bloch. In the translator’s introduction to *Natural Law and Human Dignity* (Ernst Bloch), Dennis Schmidt notes “Bloch is aware that such a wedding of traditions requires a creative revision of their contents, but he also sees that without such a marriage between the traditions of social

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—*Only Thin Outside*, continued from page 7

utopias and of natural law no full realization of the content of the unalienated society is possible.” Bloch recognized that attempts to reorganize societies along utopian lines tended to become lethally repressive, so he reasoned that natural law had to be invoked, even though many of his ilk saw natural law as a bourgeois construct. Bloch’s endorsement should make natural law more difficult to disdain for those inclined to do so.

Sirico continues, “More importantly for the development of liberty and especially economic liberty, it [natural law] establishes the sanctity of the individual as a rational being who can interpret the relationship between the individual and the community in terms of free association and contract.” Despite this, Sirico observes: “With few exceptions, the religious establishment views entrepreneurs (people whose profession requires risking scarce capital in markets to create future goods and services) as one of the least favored groups in society,” another point with which Rand would likely agree.

“A more proper economic analysis teaches that entrepreneurs are impressarios, visionaries who organize numerous factors, take risks, and bring resources into connection with each other to create something greater than the sum of the parts. They drive the economy forward by anticipating the wishes of the public and creating new ways of organizing resources.” Thus, those in “the vocation of enterprise” must “teach others to become independent and to produce wealth themselves.”

Sirico warns against complacency and delegation, saying, “Christians have a moral obligation to the poor; for what we do to the least of Christ’s brethren, we do to Christ himself. Church leaders, however, have too often conflated Christian duty to help the poor with a supposed moral duty to support the Leviathan enterprise we call the welfare state.”

“Charity is supposed to represent obedience to the dictates of conscience; its character changes when it disintegrates into simple obedience to government agencies.” Indeed, there is some risk that “rendering unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s” may degenerate into Caesar-worship. Most Christians may argue that they would never do that, but the adulation in which The United States as a political entity is held gives rise to some wonder, and likewise the unfathomable and whole-hearted support for a U.S. Military which has not defended on the ground against an incursion since the days young George Patton served with General Pershing along the Southwest border. Is there a Patriotism Exemption to the First Commandment?

Whatever the reply to that last question, we have here two books of tiny physical stature but abundant moral weight. Though starting from divergent premises, they both move in the direction of less state and more liberty, showing a convergence that is the more remarkable owing to their different starting points. Further, neither one is involved or intricate reading, while both can challenge the reader to reflect on and re-assess the sorry state of the positive law in America today, while perhaps stimulating renewed interest in natural law. Highly recommended, alone or in tandem.



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