

*Triumph of Conservatism*, 1977). Nonetheless, even skipping the economics chapter, Bergman's work is still helpful for understanding the impact of Darwinism on cultural norms and social policy.

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**The Road to Character.** By David Brooks. New York: Random House, 2015. Paper. 300 p. \$28.

David Brooks' *The Road to Character* is timely, eloquent, simple, and yet profound. Known for his insightful weekly columns in the *New York Times*, Brooks undertakes a mission of retrieval, aiming to revive a moral vocabulary lacking in today's mainstream "culture of authenticity" (249). Brooks outlines a cultural shift over the last century that entailed a radical change in moral ecologies. To make sense of the shift, Brooks introduces the figures "Adam I" and "Adam II" (terms credited to Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik). Adam I is power-hungry, self-centered, and ambitious, focused on cultivating "resume virtues," while Adam II is humble, other-oriented, and subservient to a larger calling, focused on cultivating "eulogy virtues." The shift is characterized by a move away from a cultural reverence and admiration for Adam II, since "in this age, the self is about talent, not character" (252). In today's age of immediacy, self-broadcasting, and self-help, Brooks suggests that individualism, narcissism, and moral apathy are the norm. The virtues of reticence, humility, self-effacement, modesty, and self-denial--inherent to cultural conservatism--are seen as archaic and oppressive, while the virtues of autonomy, independence, strength, self-assurance, and self-love are honored and praised in every facet of both popular culture and public discourse. Brooks traces the origins of this shift to the rise in affluence that followed World War II, but the most influential were the 1960s-1970s moral romanticism, humanistic psychology, and the accompanying myth of meritocracy.

Most interesting is Brooks' method of argument that surveys the distant and recent past in search of lives of character, using those biographies that exemplify specific long-lost virtues as "moral essays" (xv). His accessible writing style inspires the reader to admire and aspire after the varied moral heroes whose lives he surveys. Brooks understands that language, at its best, makes us want to be better humans. Although the individuals portrayed are incredibly diverse, what anchors these disparate lives in a single tradition is their shared belief that human nature is fundamentally flawed. This belief, he argues, led them to engage in a concerted and constant project of moral improvement that is at the core of the "moral realist" tradition (11), or what he calls the "crooked-timber" school of humanity (261)--clearly rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Brooks' sketches include the lives of St. Augustine, Samuel Johnson, Michel de Montaigne, George C. Marshall, Phillip

Randolph, Bayard Rustin, Dwight Eisenhower and his mother Ida, et al. In Chap. 2, "The Summoned Self," Brooks surveys the life of Frances Perkins, an early feminist and rights-activist who served as U.S. Secretary of Labor under FDR (1933-1945). Perkins' life exemplifies the idea that a successful life is not one that is wholly directed by individual passion, but rather, one that heeds the call of circumstance. Perkins' life was built upon a respect for duty, moral responsibility, and renunciation--values quite at odds with those of today's mainstream culture. In Chap. 4, "Struggle," Brooks highlights the life of Dorothy Day, the journalist and renowned social activist who established the Catholic Worker's Movement. Day's life demonstrates the value of suffering to the formation of character. Brooks understands Day's extreme piety as flying in the face of today's common sense, which proposes according to utilitarian logic that individuals ought to avoid suffering and seek pleasure at all costs. In Chap. 7, "Love," Brooks examines the life of George Eliot, the famous novelist, whose life exhibits the virtue of love. Although Brooks, at times, lapses into a lofty romanticism, this chapter reflects a keen attempt to counter the popular idea that love arises spontaneously, through no effort, and that it can be accomplished by mere means-end calculus. Brooks writes, "love is submission, not decision" (172). Against today's world of dating-services, hook-up culture, and chronic fears of missing out, Brooks makes the case that Eliot's partnership with her husband, George Lewes, reveals the transcendent aspect of love, the way in which, at its best, "love opens up the facility for spiritual awareness" (173).

Brooks chastises today's culture of self-centeredness, viewing it as improperly oriented, but his study could be read, in a sense, as belonging to the self-help genre. Although the book revolves around moral biographies of individuals in history who embodied specific virtues inherent to the moral realist tradition, they are used instrumentally to illustrate the kind of life we ought to be living. In reviewing the "crooked-timber school of humanity," Brooks suggests that true happiness does not come from cultivating or focusing upon one's self but, rather, through transcending one's self by means of surrendering to a purpose larger than oneself. While Brooks' moralism is clearly concerned about the state of public discourse and politics in an age of "authenticity," he notes that true human flourishing is at odds with today's norms. He argues convincingly that both society and individuals fare better when they are not wholly self-interested, when they are constrained and governed by ideals that transcend their material existence. Brooks' attempt to revive this older moralism is grounded in *enlightened* self-interest, served only by acting morally and advancing the common good, rather than mere selfish desires--what Brooks calls the "Big Me." In sum, Brooks offers a vivid portrait of the moral deficiencies of mainstream Western culture likely to provoke debate and reflection for some time.

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