

Book Reviews

Defending Marriage: 12 Arguments for Sanity, by Anthony Esolen, softcover, 175 pp, ISBN 978-1-61890-604-5, Charlotte, N.C., Saint Benedict Press, 2014.

Anthony Esolen presents the case that marriage, by nature, cannot be anything other than the union between a man and a woman, and that efforts to pretend that it is otherwise have a profound effect on everyone in society.

Dr. Esolen is a professor of English at Providence (R.I.) College, the author of the *Politically Incorrect Guide to Western Civilization*, and the translator of the Modern Library edition of *Dante's Divine Comedy*. *Defending Marriage* is inspired and instructed by the great works of Western literature, including Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*.

The second of Esolen's 12 arguments is that we must not enshrine in law the principle that sexual gratification is a personal matter only, with which the society has nothing to do. He writes:

The sexual drive is the most powerful among our animal motives, most dynamic when well governed, and most destructive when it is not. It's absurd to say that the public, by custom and by laws that flow from those customs and sustain them in turn, should have no right to guide the single thing most determinative of what kind of culture we will live in, if any culture at all.

His fourth argument is that we must recover the virtues of modesty and purity. The concept of purity "suggests something full of light and innocence, free of the encumbrances of baseness, lies, ignorance of true worth, and scorn." His embodiment of purity is Rosalind in Shakespeare's

As You Like It, "as far from a delicate hothouse flower as it is possible to be." Esolen notes that all human languages are at one in the insight that when we treat with contempt something that claims our reverence, we cast dirt upon it. "The old word for pornography was smut, meaning filth." The effects of indulgence in filth, he writes, cannot be confined to individuals.

A man living in a land riddled by bribe-taking politicians will be immiserated if he attempts to preserve his honesty, Esolen writes. He will be compelled to do business in a context in which all the right decisions will hurt him in the short run, and in the long run may destroy him. "He is denied the cultural support that he deserves. He is denied, if you will, healthy air to breathe and clean water to drink. He must adapt to the evil game." Similarly, those who wish to live up to the demanding virtue of purity must live in a perverse anti-culture while treated with scorn and disdain.

The fruit of the sexual revolution is loneliness, Esolen writes. He develops this further in his fifth argument that we should not foreclose the opportunity for members of the same sex to forge friendships with one another that are chaste, deep, and physically expressed. Such a friendship was that between Sam and Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*. Also, there were the friendships between Abraham Lincoln and Joshua Speed, between David and Jonathan in the Bible, and between Robert Falcon Scott and those who ventured with him into the Antarctic, where they died together.

Esolen writes: "The stigma against sodomy cleared away ample space for an emotionally powerful friendship that did not involve sexual intercourse,

exactly as the stigma against incest allows for the physical and emotional freedom of a family." Esolen thinks that the way in which the latest twist of the sexual revolution hurts boys in particular is not just by leaving them more vulnerable to be preyed upon by older men, but that the defiant promotion of homosexuality makes the natural and once powerful friendship among boys virtually impossible.

If you read the correspondence of Louis Pasteur, Esolen states, you will come away thinking that "the entire edifice of chemical research in France and Germany was built upon male friendship." Other such collaborations were formed by Thomas Edison, by Louis Agassiz with his comrades who mapped and studied glaciers, and by George Gershwint.

In his eighth argument, Esolen states that we should not normalize an abnormal behavior, and in his ninth states that to celebrate an abnormal behavior will make things worse, not better, for those inclined to engage in it.

The most interesting part of the book is his discussion of what is normal. It is not to be confused with the concept of statistical frequency. In the latter, one might say it was normal for Nazi officers of the SS to treat people brutally because it was common in that group. However, it was not normal at all, Esolen writes, but rather the manifestation of a national psychosis. The word "normal" derives from the Latin *norma*, which means carpenter's square. "The poet Lucretius, commenting on the life of man, says that if you begin with false principles, you will be like a man whose straight edge is crooked and whose *norma* is out of square."

Esolen considers in some depth the

libertarian concerns about “imposing morality.” That is, after all, what law does, Esolen explains. The libertarians would agree with his 11th argument that we should not give God-like powers to the state. They will not agree with him in asserting that redefining marriage is to do exactly that.

The book is beautifully argued, and the literary allusions are a feast. My favorite citations are to Edmund Spenser, *Milton’s Paradise Lost*, the *Trilogy of Aeschylus*, and wonderful sequences from the witches in *Macbeth*.

Esolen believes that our culture, or marriage, has hardly “evolved.” Whatever one’s opinion on same-sex marriage, it is hard to make a case that boys and girls, or men and women, are healthier than they were in the days pictured by Norman Rockwell.

Jane M. Orient, M.D.
Tucson, Ariz.

The Black Book of the American Left: the Collected Conservative Writings of David Horowitz.

Volume I, My life and Times, by David Horowitz, hardcover, 418 pp, \$27.99, ISBN-13: 978-1594036941, New York, N.Y.: Encounter Books, 2013.

Volume II, Progressives, by David Horowitz, hardcover, 343 pp, \$21.00, ISBN-13: 978-1886442955, Second Thoughts Book, 2014.

Volume III, The Great Betrayal by David Horowitz, hardcover, 256 pp, \$15.87, ISBN-13: 978-1886442962, Second Thoughts Book, 2014.

David Horowitz is a former communist/socialist, son of parents who were teachers and Communist Party members in New York City, a “red diaper” baby. In his life he has authored and co-authored more than 20 books, and is a prolific essayist and polemicist on political issues. Horowitz, disillusioned by the conduct of the Left and the Black Panthers’ killing of his friend, converted to conservatism in the 1980s.

He founded a conservative website, FrontPage.com, and a publishing organization, Freedom Center, which sponsor his and others’ writings on conservatism and political advocacy. His current areas of urgent interest are Islamic jihadi and communist threats, domestic and foreign, and the moral decay created by postmodernist and Marxist/socialist influences.

The first of a 10-volume series of his collected writings explains in depth the work of the Left and its major players, some not known even to political junkies because they operate behind the scenes and are not elected, but are influential in academia and the chattering class.

A book review can’t do justice to Horowitz’s wealth of knowledge about the Left and the many political developments of the last 50 years, from his experience as an activist and intellectual force, a doyen first for, and then against, communist/socialist crusades and strategic efforts.

As Sun Tzu advised, it is best to know yourself and know your enemy, then you will never lose, and you will choose effective short- and long-term strategies. The enemy is, in this case, a lethal one. Horowitz should know, since he was for many years in the vanguard of the cultural destruction machine that is socialism, even rising to the status of editor of the one of the most influential American socialist magazines, *Ramparts*.

His substantial knowledge and eloquence was brought to my attention many years ago in his biography *Radical Son* (The Free Press 1997), essential reading for an understanding of the most monstrous and powerful political movement of the past century.

The first volume of the series tells his odyssey from left to right, and his reassessment of commitment to the Left. He takes the time to show how utopian leftist rhetoric hides its evil intention to destroy, and how it allows for success of the deceptive propaganda campaign domestically and internationally.

The second book of the series, *The Progressives*, tells of the characters of the Left, reaching back and coming forward. Horowitz takes the time to tell

more about the characters you might know a little about, but not enough, the icons of the left/progressive/socialist mindset: the Weathermen, the Black Panthers, the academics, the political activists, the moral nihilists, the historical revisionists, the Islamists, the feminists, the anti-Semites, and all the gangs of thugs. But most of all he tells of the postmodernist/socialist wrecking crew and how and why their talk hides an agenda of anarchy and destruction.

The third volume of the series, *The Great Betrayal*, focuses on the despicable behavior of the Left in the face of the Sept 11, 2001, Islamist attacks on America, and the approval of the war to remove Saddam Hussein. It’s an unprecedented story in American history, but is easily explained by reviewing the behavior of the Left in the Vietnam War and its aftermath.

Horowitz details why the conduct of the Left during the Iraq War and after set the stage for the election of Obama and for continued ineffective and dangerous foreign policy that resulted in drift and irresolute and cowardly appeasement of Islamist savages, and betrayal of allies. That drift continues today to make American foreign policy and military/defense strategy ineffective and irresolute, the work of utopian leftist nonsense thinking.

Domestically, the Left has elevated thugs and criminality. Internationally, the Left has pushed America in the direction of timidity and cowardice (think of the current Secretary of State or his predecessor), jeopardizing national security and world peace, even in response to the bellicosity and criminality of tyrannical states actively engaged in terrorism and savagery, such as Iran, the “Islamic State in Iraq and Syria,” and North Korea.

These books are collections of essays, so they can be read in bites, but I would advise against bedside reading because the stories and characters are frightening or irritating to any person who cares about civilization and proper government.

John Dale Dunn, M.D., J.D.
Brownwood, Tex.