

be achieved by increasing parental leave periods, making high-quality childcare universally available, and reorganising work practices to give parents more flexibility.

Manne's argument that the 'get to work' strand of feminism has captured family policy is convincing. The federal government has expanded the subsidies available to parents for child care, while at the same time restricting payments made to stay-at-home parents. The Productivity Commission is investigating the possibility of paid maternity leave. Family policy appears increasingly designed to lure mothers back into the workforce.

Likewise, Manne is right to doubt the real benefits of child care, as evidence indicates that institutionalised child care only has significant developmental benefits for children from very disadvantaged backgrounds.

But her sensible recommendation that we should 'adopt active neutrality as the guiding principle of family policy' is weakened by her obvious bias towards parental care. A truly neutral policy should not assume institutional care is best for children, but nor should it assume that parental care is best. This should be something for individual parents to decide.

Manne's recommendations are essentially a wish list for more government spending on family policy, and more cultural change in the workplace. Extending parental leave, paying child care workers more, and introducing flexible work practices such as gradual re-entry into the workforce will result in the Scandinavian-style system that Manne espouses.

But this model does not adequately correspond with the goal of adopting 'active neutrality as the guiding principle of family policy.' While parental leave and child care is extensive and universal

in the Scandinavian countries, it has been designed to support full employment among fathers *and* mothers. Rather than giving parents choice, the Scandinavian model prescribes an 'ideal' pattern where one parent stays home until parental leave expires and then both parents work full-time, putting the child in institutional care.

OECD statistics show that in Denmark and Sweden, more than 70% of mothers with children under three are in paid work. In Australia, the figure is 45%. In Australia, 66% of working women with a child under six work part-time. In Sweden the figure is 41.2%, and in Denmark it is only 5.1%. In the Scandinavian countries, more women with young children are in the workforce, and the majority of these work full-time. It seems that emulating these countries will result in more children in institutional childcare, not less.

Manne's interpretation of the social conditions that have led to the current debate on work-family balance is insightful. However, her prescriptions for what is to be done about it are ultimately unconvincing.

Reviewed by Jessica Brown

The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West

by Mark Lilla

Knopf

New York, 2007

\$44.95, 334pp

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Mark Lilla's *The Stillborn God* explores the retreat and partial revival of political theology in Western civilisation. As one would expect from the author of *The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics*

(2003), it is a deeply perceptive and informed exploration of the history of ideas.

Lilla starts by noting the contemporary return of the sixteenth-century arguments about politics and religion, 'over revelation and reason, dogmatic purity and toleration, inspiration and consent, divine duty and common decency,' which was not supposed to happen. He then takes us through how unusual Western civilisation became by separating political arguments from their grounding in God or other religious authorities. This is what he calls the 'Great Separation': the supplanting of political theology.

With considerable subtlety, the first chapter sets out the broad outlines of Christian political theology. It notes unusual features—'in Christianity, versions of every species of political theology can be found, all at war with one another ... In Christian thought all the possibilities of political theology are exposed to view, as are its attendant difficulties'—and the crisis political theology reached with the Reformation.

The second examines the Great Separation as essentially the creation of Thomas Hobbes. 'All political theology,' writes Lilla, 'depends on a picture, an image of the divine nexus between God, man and the world.' Hobbes achieved separation from the divine nexus by starting with new subject matter: human psychology. He replaced the God-centred view of political theology with a human-centred view of why people believe. Religion became a human phenomenon flowing from our fear and ignorance, and one that made the conflict inherent in social life worse. Hobbes's solution was a Leviathan, the 'earthly God' of the autocratic sovereign, fear of whom would keep us all in line and allow social order to be created and maintained. Hobbes 'successfully

changed the subject' of European political discourse.

Locke and Hume then liberalised Hobbes' vision of autocracy as the answer to fear. This led to modern liberal democratic politics, based on the 'art of intellectual separation' that Hobbes originated. At least, it did in Anglo-American world.

French and German thinking took a somewhat different turn, the subject of part 2 of the book, which starts, naturally, with Jean-Jacques Rousseau. His notion that religion expresses the goodness of man both undermined Hobbesian political psychology and outraged Christian opinion. This idea relied neither on reason (which led to scepticism) nor on revelation (declared to be superfluous, having been undermined by reason), but on human sentiment. In *Émile*, particularly in the Savoyard Vicar's profession of faith, Rousseau turned attention from God to man's need for God.

After reading *Émile*, Immanuel Kant had a burst of intellectual productivity, in which he proved to be a child of Rousseau but not a disciple. Kant—as he said of himself—restricted knowledge to provide room for faith. As Stephen Hicks lucidly explains in his book *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault*, the disappointed devotees of socialism have been busily replicating this move in our time.

But Kant was much more convinced than Rousseau that there is a dark side to human nature. Rousseau had faith in people, believing all could be right if society was just 'fixed.' Kant was somewhat less sanguine, but still thought collective action to reduce human evil was possible.

So—unlike the 'modern Epicureans' Hobbes, Locke, and Hume—Rousseau and Kant held that the

human need for God was a central social issue. This reopened the path to political theology, politicising a profound sense of human alienation and the burden of Protestant guilt. As a result, the divine nexus was no longer cordoned off from politics.

And so Lilla comes to Hegel, for whom history—as a process where humans resist the alien separateness of the world, leading to growing knowledge then finally to resolution—became the agent that reconciles alienated humanity with reality. Hegel's near-deification of the Protestant state as the culmination

of said reconciling history—the ultimate religion, which takes the expression of human nature by religious imagery as far as it can go, yet is subordinated to a rational state—may seem banal. As did the liberal modernism that followed, Hegel's thought illustrated the enduring tendency of political theology to end up sanctifying a present political arrangement. But the darker side of such reconciling ambitions (after various would-be purifications-by-mass-homicide) is now painfully obvious.

In part 3, Lilla explores the various stages attempts to create a modern political theology have gone through. This is a journey through the thought of various Protestant and Jewish theologians—first liberals, then their critics—who were very influential in their own time but are largely forgotten now.

As a theology, liberal modernism failed doubly. First, its confidence in the benign direction of history became grotesque in the face of the horrors of World War I. Despite killing twenty million people, this war was actually much less proportionately destructive than, say, the Thirty Years War, but was a slaughter-of-millions indictment

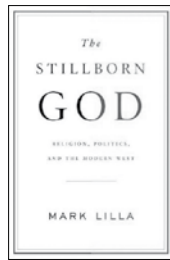
of banal and hubristic confidence in moral progress. Second, the pallid God of liberal theology was simply not able inspire passionate conviction and the emotional relief it often confers.

This is not to say that passion can be exorcised from human life, but with the right constitutional order its political impact can be muted. Lilla points out that the American constitutional order has persistently shown itself much more capable of muting the impact of political passion—be it religious or otherwise—than European polities, though he holds this American achievement to be partly good luck.

In early-twentieth-century Europe, particularly Germany, war and revolution led to yearnings for redemption and apocalypse. But the sense that religion has a dark side—something obvious to Hobbes, Locke, and Hume—had been lost. The language of redemption and apocalypse was used for deeply illiberal ends.

An enduring problem is that the critics of the Great Separation have often produced richer thinking on religion than its supporters have. Lilla detects complacency about religion in the modern West. We err in not seeing that we are the exception, the experiment, in human history. Lilla wants to impart a sense that the Great Separation is fragile because we humans have trouble letting God be. Lilla rejects the 'mythical thinking' of grand impersonal forces removing religion from history, which is beloved by contemporary European thought.

What Lilla writes is thought-provoking, and much of it is persuasive. Yet I am not convinced by Lilla's tendency to treat the history of ideas as the history of arguments and propositions. His method is to examine the way that certain positions possess internal logics that



work their way out over time. While I agree that this is so, ideas have to resonate to engage—so a particular set of concerns generally reflects social circumstances. Lilla notes that Anglo-American political thought took a much more practical direction than eighteenth- or nineteenth-century German thought, which tended to be more abstract. This is hardly surprising: participation in politics was much broader much earlier in Anglo-America, and this naturally encouraged a more practical focus. Just so, separation from practical politics encourages a more abstract outlook.

Lilla does not ignore the context to his history, but it is one of grand happenings and ideas rather than of institutions. Still, that is a caveat rather than an indictment. *The Stillborn God* displays a deep and subtle, yet clearly expressed, understanding of the problems involved in the interaction between religion and politics.

Reviewed by Michael Warby

Comeback: Conservatism That Can Win Again

by David Frum

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‘Is the new Republican era over before it began,’ asks former Bush speechwriter and US conservative commentator David Frum in his new book, *Comeback*. How could a political party with the seeming electoral dominance enjoyed by the Republican Party in the Bush administration and in Congress only a few years ago become the spent political force we see today? Frum tries to answer this question by analysing

the failure of US conservatives to, as he sees it, adapt their deeply held ideological convictions to the realities of today’s America.

Frum’s starting point is the legacy of the Reagan years, considered by many Republicans and conservatives to be their ‘Camelot.’ Frum observes that the Reagan agenda has become more of a liability for Republicans and conservatives than the popular vote-winner many on the right still believe it is. Quite reasonably, Frum argues that the Reagan administration pitched its policies perfectly to an electorate tired of Carter’s pessimism, defeatism, and regulatory approach. In the 1980 presidential election, Americans wholeheartedly embraced Reagan’s call to patriotism, national pride, and economic freedom.

According to Frum, the Reagan era set the tone for later Republican tilts at the White House. Taking their lead from Reagan, Republicans and conservatives in the 1990s ran on essentially the same platform as Reagan in 1980: on the economy, less tax and small government; strong on law and order and gun ownership; supportive of the pro-life cause and traditional morality; and advocating tough-minded realpolitik in defence and foreign policies. This approach to politics, Frum argues, reached its high point in 1994, with sweeping Republican electoral victories over the Democrats in congressional elections. Sick of the first Clinton administration’s early advocacy of a greater role for government in the economy, voters turned to Republicans in droves.

However, Frum argues that this was in fact a false victory for Republicans and conservatives. Having forced Clinton to take on more conservative economic policies after

1994, Clinton essentially achieved what Republicans and conservatives had always wanted: balanced budgets, lower income tax, and a wide-ranging reform of the social welfare system. However, having achieved these goals, Frum argues that many Republicans and conservatives continued to advocate the same policies without regard to the changing views of the electorate.

To enhance his arguments, Frum produces a range of polls and studies that paint a picture of modern-day America. One fascinating chapter revolves around the way in which Frum believes Americans have changed their views on so called ‘life issues,’ such as stem-cell research, abortion and euthanasia.

While Frum argues that most Americans remain strongly opposed to liberal abortion laws, they are not so inclined to restrict further scientific research into the medical applications of stem cells, or to completely rule out euthanasia rights in

certain circumstances (such as for the terminally ill). Frum argues that according to recent research, most Americans are relatively comfortable with the status quo on abortion (restricted to the first two trimesters, with late-term abortion banned) with both pro-life and pro-choice activists essentially sidelined from the mainstream abortion debate. Americans also overwhelmingly support stem-cell research and seem unfazed by the destruction of human embryos in the process.

Frum also believes Americans have moved away from their overwhelming support for conservative, anti-statist, market-friendly policies seen in the 1980s and early 1990s, towards a greater desire for government assistance. He argues that the conservative battle for smaller,

