

to market. The threat of litigation also hangs over every operator in the industry, further complicating the situation.

Heller coined the term 'anticommons' in 1998 to refer to fragmented ownership, resulting in a 'tragedy of the anticommons' where such fragmentation causes underuse of the resource in question. The book does not clearly distinguish 'gridlock' from 'anticommons,' although obviously the concepts are not intended to be identical. Both relate to fragmented decision-making, whether in the context of property rights or regulation; the former seems to refer to the complete stagnation of a market, the latter to underuse generally.

In any case, the main point of the book appears to be promotion of the idea of a 'gridlock economy' by way of catchy coinage. Heller stresses the importance of awareness of a phenomenon in order to address it: 'When we lack a term to describe some social condition, it is because the condition does not exist in most people's minds' (p. 23). It is curious, as Heller points out, that 'underuse' attracts a red squiggle of disapproval in Microsoft Word, while 'overuse,' its obvious opposite, does not. And while the Word spell check is far from a definitive reference point, there is also a striking discrepancy in the etymology of the two terms as reported by the Oxford Dictionary. The practical consequences of gridlock, such as drugs never brought to market, are often invisible to all but those immediately involved. Heller puts his flair for clever language to good use in promoting the existence of the condition of gridlock to the forefront of the reader's mind.

Heller's use of several examples

of gridlock encourages a rounded understanding of his thoughts. His chapter on post-socialist capitalism in Moscow, and the gridlock created by strangely structured property rights in storefronts and communal apartments, ensures the reader is not led to believe Heller opposes markets per se. The gridlock in that case, he makes clear, was not caused by the fact of transition to capitalism, but rather the poor form of property rights put in place of central control, a legal structure that inhibited normal functioning of real estate markets.

Heller also demonstrates the role of opaque politics and tangled regulation in facilitating the creation and perpetuation of gridlock through his discussion of the frustrations of negotiating red tape suffered by building developers. A series of impact statements, consultations and reports, as well as negotiation with several regulatory authorities, are usually required prior to the approval of any project. A small subset of a community can all too easily prevent a development that would provide substantial benefit to the whole in such circumstances. On a positive note, Heller also emphasises the ways in which regulation can potentially resolve gridlock, when appropriately structured and targeted.

Heller's approach to the issue of preventing and resolving gridlock is the only disappointment in what is otherwise an excellent book. This is particularly so in the context of gridlock in biotechnology, with Heller unable to suggest any concrete path through the patent maze. While he does discuss several mechanisms currently used to get past patent licensing issues, including the cooperative market mechanism of patent pools, he sounds anything

but optimistic about the chances of any of these to provide an effective solution.

Heller's policy prescriptions are limited to restructuring rights, such as in the Moscow example, or tweaking regulations, as would be appropriate in the property development context. The 'Solutions Tool Kit,' which wraps up the book, comprises little more than a laundry list of items with little apparent connection to one another. Heller notes, while discussing tragedy of the commons (the opposite concept to that of anticommons), that 'the tools to solve overuse tragedy all work by limiting access' (p. 168). Yet he declines to seize on the reverse of this statement, which could have provided a unifying concept for resolution of gridlock: that underuse might be resolved by *promotion* of access. Ironically for an author with such a talent for effective phraseology, Heller wastes an opportunity, in an engaging book that will surely attract a wide readership, to find an equally effective catchphrase for the solution as 'the gridlock economy' is for the problem.

Reviewed by Nikki Macor

Not with a Bang But a Whimper: The Politics and Culture of Decline

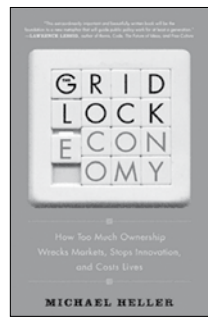
by Theodore Dalrymple

Ivan R. Dee, Chicago, 2008

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A challenge for every conservative writer is to avoid sounding like a cantankerous reactionary, and a quick glance at *Not with a Bang But a Whimper* suggests author Theodore Dalrymple has failed. Both the subtitle 'The Politics and Culture of Decline' and the author's



stern-sounding pseudonym (his real name is Anthony Daniels) suggest the rant of a grumpy aristocrat—perhaps an ousted hereditary peer—decrying all things crass and popular and youthful. The cover image, a gradually decaying apple, doesn't help.

These impressions are at least partly accurate. Dalrymple is a pessimist about the future of Western civilisation, and the essays that make up *Not with a Bang*, most of which are taken from his column in *City Journal*, convey an inescapable malaise that smacks of the old world.

Dalrymple's most fleshed-out thesis is that the ideas and ideals of progressive intellectuals have had a disastrous effect on the culture of the British underclass, promoting dependence, decadence, irresponsibility, and violence. Anecdotes of slum life, drawn from his experience as a psychiatrist and prison doctor, pepper many of the essays in this collection. One of Dalrymple's great gifts in these stories is to combine a deep sympathy for people's self-destructive behaviour with a bemused appreciation of their folly. Perhaps this gift is not unrelated to a trait that he elsewhere claims the British have lost: a 'sense of irony, and therefore of the inherent limitations of human existence.'

There is little irony, though, in the collection's most powerful essay, 'A Murderess's Tale.' The 'murderess' of the title had an awful underclass upbringing: raised with a violent stepfather and sexually abused by her brother as a child, she had become an alcoholic by age twelve, and had fled to a children's home by age fifteen. At age eighteen, she stabbed her sixteen-year-old lesbian lover to death after a pot- and alcohol-fuelled argument.

Dalrymple is asked to give a psychological assessment of the

girl before her trial. For much of the essay, he agonises over the idea of 'diminished responsibility' for those with personality disorders, who he suggests are more likely to re-offend upon release from prison than the mentally sound, and less likely to express remorse for their crimes. The girl in this case belongs indisputably to the latter category, meaning Dalrymple's testimony, if honest, could condemn her to an unduly long jail sentence.

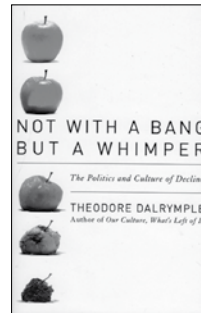
The essay is sprinkled with insightful observations. After describing how the murderer's mother 'caught pregnant' (apparently a common colloquialism) from her third lover who, like the previous two, subsequently abandoned her, Dalrymple quips that 'in the welfare state, experience teaches nothing.' The piece ends with a long denunciation of liberal assumptions about crime, after which Dalrymple concludes that the 'social universe liberals have wrought' has 'no place for children or childhood in it'—an inevitable consequence of a lack of reasonable, dependable rules. The underclass world he describes seems to have no place for adulthood either. 'A Murderess's Tale' is Dalrymple at his best: balanced, perceptive, and informed by experience.

At its worst, however, *Not with a Bang* approaches middle-of-the-road conservative whinging. One essay, 'It's This Bad,' about political correctness in the British police force, reads like a highbrow tabloid beat-up—little more than an exposition of Dalrymple's own sense of shock. And the writing sometimes descends into right wing clichés, for example, in the many passing references to 'liberal intellectuals'—a slur as vague and facile as 'neoliberal' and 'neoconservative' have become.

The weakest essay in this respect, and by far the worst in the collection, is the opener, 'The Gift of Language.' Linguistic 'decline' is a constant hobbyhorse for conservatives, and though the piece is a little more balanced than most of its type, it is light on evidence, and caricatures the position of the great majority of linguists who oppose prescriptivism.

The essay also shows up one of Dalrymple's least plausible theses: that high culture—in this case, standard English—is a prerequisite for self-examination. For Dalrymple, high culture has a 'liberating power' and 'universal appeal,' and is intimately bound up with civilisation and self-restraint. But what about the nihilism of much of the avant-garde, or the profundity of, say, *Peanuts*? Or the middle class work ethic of many migrants who are totally uncultured? Dalrymple's offhand dismissal of popular culture seems to be born of ignorance.

One of the better essays in the collection is a critical take on the so-called 'new atheists': Hitchens, Dawkins, Onfray, Harris, Dennett, and Grayling. Thankfully, and despite his anti-reductionist, anti-rationalist temper, Dalrymple steers clear of the kind of aesthetic, social utility and 'negative capability'-type fluff employed by many agnostics and religious liberals. Though he tells us early on that he is himself 'not a believer,' Dalrymple attacks the new atheists for their petulant tone, unoriginal arguments, and condescension towards religious ideas, which he claims answer the 'profound' problem of 'transcendent purpose.' His own position seems to be similar to the one he attributes, in a different essay, to anticommunist author Arthur Koestler: that on the



meaning of life, reason has ‘rejected the answer without abolishing the question.’ (Sam Harris, who receives a disproportionate share of Dalrymple’s derision, has a response to the article on the *City Journal* website, where the original is also available.)

This preference for existential earnestness extends to the new atheists’ Enlightenment forbears. In a different essay, Dalrymple calls Voltaire’s philosophical novella *Candide* ‘crude,’ ‘shallow,’ and ‘sneering’ in comparison to Samuel Johnson’s ‘subtle’ and ‘profound’ *Rasselas*. ‘What perhaps most compels respect,’ he writes, is Johnson’s ‘moral seriousness’—a virtue Dalrymple himself also clearly aspires to, and often achieves.

Unfortunately, he may have also picked up what seems to be one of Johnson’s only defects, ‘stylistic orotundity.’ At the end of one essay, for example, Dalrymple writes that there is no formula ‘for avoiding the Scylla of zealotry on the one hand and the Charybdis of abandonment of responsibility on the other.’ In another, he repeatedly describes the British bureaucracy as ‘Orwellian, Gogolesque, and Kafkaesque.’ Such padded phrases stand out against the punchy American writing that fills the rest of *City Journal*.

But for all that is wanting in Dalrymple’s writing—open-mindedness towards popular culture, evidence beyond the anecdotal, stylistic tightness—he has a unique

position within the conservative commentariat as a thoughtful and very British moralist with a sense of humour. For this reason, *Not With a Bang* deserves to be read, although if you already own one of Dalrymple’s more recent essay collections, you’ll know exactly what to expect.

Reviewed by Leon Di Stefano

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