

Stephen Palmer's Review

The first thing I want to say is how much I love the fresh, dialectic perspective in the book. It has depth than you'll find in most political and economic books and discussions. I get so tired of rehashing stale, either/or, black/white arguments of conservative versus liberal, republican versus democrat, capitalism versus socialism, individualism versus collectivism.

There's truth in every perspective, and by buying into either/or debates we lose depth, substance, nuance, we stifle our intellectual progress, we make enemies unnecessarily, we lose a sense of balance, and ultimately we lose freedom.

Truly free citizens see beyond those black and white, right and wrong debates. They don't view Republicans as good and Democrats as bad.

Of course, it takes intellectual maturity to do this. Boxing up ideologies, ideas, and philosophies with black and white labels is a very natural thing to do. It makes life easier for us. It means we don't have to think as hard.

What makes this kind of thinking difficult is not that we're trying to choose which side is right and good and which side is wrong and bad, but rather that we're trying to reconcile the good of two sides, which are seemingly contradictory.

Nobel prize-winning physicist Niels Bohr: "The opposite of a correct statement is a false statement. But the opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth."

Roy H. Williams:

<http://mondaymorningmemo.com/newsletters/read/1716>

Good things come into conflict. And there is no choice so difficult as the choice between two good things.

Justice or mercy?

Honesty or loyalty?

Inspiration or accuracy?

Time or money?

Science or romance?

Which way do you lean?

A weak student will choose one side of a duality and disparage the other side while a brilliant student will stand between the poles and feel the energy that passes between them.

F. Scott Fitzgerald put it this way, "The test of a first rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function."

*Life is a tightrope.
Leaning is dangerous.
Balance is what you need.*

I'm not suggesting that you seek watery compromise, that mind-numbing "happy medium" cherished by the frightened and the weak. I'm suggesting you find the electricity that flows when two poles of a duality are brought into close proximity.

Electricity is not a compromise. It is an altogether third, new thing that emerges from two potentials.

*Can you see the truth in opposite possibilities?
Your opponent isn't always an idiot.
Your adversary isn't always evil.
Learn to love your enemy and feel fully alive.
Reach for the electricity.*

Roy H. Williams: "The key to miracles is to recognize *the beauty of both sides* of a duality - black *and* white - while not allowing yourself to [get trapped](#) in the perspective of either side."

Not only is it important to see the good in all sides, but also to identify the bad.

Having said all of that, here's a perfect example from the book:

"If by capitalism is meant, not diffused ownership of property, but monopolistic capitalism in which capital bids for labor on a market, and concentrates wealth in the hands of a few...then from an economic point of view alone, the Church is just as much opposed to capitalism as it is to communism. Communism emphasizes social use to the exclusion of personal rights, and capitalism emphasizes personal rights to the exclusion of social use. The Church says both are wrong, for though the right to property is personal, the use is social. [As a side note, reference the story of Jesus telling the rich man to sell all that he owned and give it to the poor.] It therefore refuses to maintain capitalism as an alternative to the economic side of communism. Monopolistic capitalism concentrates wealth in the hands of a few capitalists, and communism in the hands of a few bureaucrats, and both end in the proletarianization of the masses. The true Christian must rid himself of the delusion that in opposing communism the Church thereby puts itself in opposition to all those who would seek thus to

change the present economic system. The Christian concept denies there is an absolutely owned private property exclusive of limits set by the common good of the community and responsibility to the community. The more anonymous and impersonalistic property becomes, the less is the right to it. The Church agrees with communism in its protest against the injustice of the economic order, but it parts with it in the collectivity being made by the sole employer, for this reduces the individual to the status of a serf or a slave of the state. Concentration of wealth is wrong whether it is done on the Hudson or the Volga.”

See, it's not a debate between private property *or* communal property, individual rights *or* community responsibilities. That's a flawed construct that can, by default, never lead to truth.

If you want to arrive at truth, you must first start with the right questions. In other words, the framework of the intellectual query must be structured properly.

So the question must become not which of those is right or preferred, but rather a recognition that both are good and HOW to properly balance the two with your forms of government and culture. How can you protect individual rights while simultaneously providing for communal goods, such as caring for the weak and poor, building schools, libraries, roads, etc.

The first step in answer the question of “How” is to take as many factors as possible into consideration, to see the whole picture and to approach it from a holistic perspective.

The main reason most people can't get to the correct framework is because their debate is very 2-dimensional, meaning it's limited to the 2-party political sphere. The debate revolves around the limited question “What is the proper role of government?”, rather than the more holistic question, “How is ideal society created and sustained?”

In our current two-party monopoly, generally speaking Democrats focus on the power of government, while Republicans focus on the power of business. So in the first place it creates a flawed construct of either government or business, where debaters label one good and the other bad.

But on an even deeper level, it doesn't even take into consideration five other fundamental societal institutions, namely family, community, religion, academia, and media. When you include those in the mix, a whole new world of possibility opens that was never considered before.

I love how the book offers a *cultural* perspective, rather than a political one. It goes deeper than the question of the proper role of government to provide a coherent

cultural philosophy, an ideal society, a prescription for right living. And culture includes all 7 societal institutions, not just government and business.

A few key points from the book:

First, the idea that sustainable culture must be built around spiritual ideals, and that economics must be subservient to those, rather than a primary goal.

"It is the goal of economics to harmonize the material with the spiritual, namely to create the conditions that allow for greater spiritual development. Ultimately, economics must be tied to salvation itself. If it is not, economics will, of necessity, lead us in the opposite direction...Both capitalism and socialism are materialistic in focus; they're both focused on how to produce and distribute material goods and achieve temporal prosperity. Using these economic theories as the basis of a society erodes the foundations of true culture, which must be spiritual in nature."

"A society awash in material goods could still be emotionally and spiritually poor. This is the poverty of advanced socialist and capitalist economies in which the industrial cycle has replaced the life cycle."

Still, all that is philosophy, and doesn't yet address the really practical, day-to-day living "how."

My hunch about the experience of most of our readers with us tonight, is that the book really resonated with you, but throughout you were asking "How?" Meaning, "How would this be instituted?" It sounds ideal, it resonates, I'd love to live in that kind of society. When you read:

"...a society based on small self-sufficient regions, empowered communities, vibrant neighborhoods, gainfully employed families, individual self-satisfactions, decentralized politics, local economies, sustainable organic agriculture, cooperative work, environmental humility, and careful nurturing of the earth."

...doesn't that just resonate? It makes sense, right? We'd all like to live in that kind of community.

But how exactly can the philosophy be practically applied, and particularly without enforcing it through the law and government policy?

And that's precisely why it resonated with me—because I'm confident that I have found that practical "how." In fact, I've been studying that practical "how" long before I found the philosophical "why" and "what" found in this book. That "how" is agricultural urbanism (www.agriculturalurbanism.com), which is a specific way to build community that fosters all the ideals of Distributism in a very free, natural, and sustainable way.

So in this book I found the philosophical underpinnings and the cultural fabric of a practical community form. In other words, I'd been putting together a few pieces of a larger puzzle, and the book gave me the complete puzzle.

Now to respond to Oliver DeMille's review of the book, which can be found here: <http://www.thesocialleader.com/2011/06/free-enterprise-beyond-capitalism-socialism/>

I totally believe in what he says about free enterprise.

However, I think he's limited the debate to politics and economics, which are certainly major aspects of culture, but not culture itself. I wholeheartedly agree with his political and economic perspective on free enterprise.

However, Distributism is a cultural philosophy that goes deeper than that. The two major components of the philosophy that Oliver didn't discuss in his review are 1) the idea that widespread property ownership is an intrinsic good, and 2) agriculturalism as an intrinsic good.

Regarding the first:

Oliver says:

The desire for popular support is normal for all political groups, but the idea that Distributism "would at some point require those with massive and inordinate wealth to give it up" is alarming at best.

Why would the wealthy have to "give it up?" Why is that necessary in free society? The word "required" is the problem.

Fortunately, Ahlquist clarifies that this would be voluntary, so it isn't Marxist, but it still makes me wonder, why?

... In the Distributive ideal, where no institution can be allowed to be too big, the clear flaw is that any institution powerful enough to keep all the others small will have to be, well, big.

That means big government. The Distributists would presumably want the government to be local, but strong enough to keep all the other institutions small.

Again, I agree with Oliver that widespread property ownership should not be forced through law. Still, I believe it should be held as a cultural ideal. For the rich that would take the form of voluntary charity, and for the poor that would take the form of striving toward ownership.

It's a recognition—at the level of culture, not instituted by law—that power, whether political or economic, centralizes and expands, and when wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few, society eventually degenerates and collapses.

So while I disagree with some of the authors' suggestions on taxation schemes, I appreciate the focus on widespread property ownership. Free enterprise, as Oliver has described it, is the idea that people should be free to own and administer property as they see fit, and every individual and entity should be treated equally before the law. But it doesn't formally and prominently prescribe widespread property ownership as an intrinsic good.

Certainly, under a truly free enterprise system, property would naturally tend to be more widespread than it is today, but I still believe that ideal should be woven into the fabric of culture.

Now regarding the second point of agriculturalism—growing food—being an intrinsic good.

I believe that how food is produced and consumed is a fundamental component of healthy culture that has been completely lost in our convenience society.

Specifically, we lost culture when food began to be grown and processed by corporations, rather than family farms in strong communities.

In "[The Four Lost American Ideals](#)," Oliver DeMille asserts that ownership, or entrepreneurship, can replace the ideal of Georgics, but I don't think that's the case. I firmly believe that nothing can replace the spiritual and practical lessons that come directly as a result of growing food.

Growing and eating real food—not buying pre-packaged junk at the grocery store—connects us directly with nature and natural law. It teaches us patience, natural cycles, consequences, meaning the principle that we reap what we sow, dependence on God. It has a direct, fundamental, and abiding influence on how we see ourselves and our place in the world. It teaches us to be generational thinkers—to think and live for posterity, to leave a legacy for them, rather than to think solely or even primarily for ourselves.

Another of my favorite books, and one that should be read side-by-side with *Beyond Capitalism and Socialism*, is [The Other Greeks: The Family Farm & the Agrarian Roots of Western Civilization](#) by Victor Davis Hanson:

In the book Hanson quotes the ancient Greek dramatist Menander, who said "For all humans the farm is a teacher of virtue and of the life devoted to freedom."

A few more quotes from the book:

“There are, as I see it, at least twelve fundamentals of Western civilization that originated exclusively in the agricultural practice of the polis. They have rarely, if ever, been acknowledged in their proper agrarian pedigree as the discovery of farmers, not urban intellectuals:

- 1. Private ownership of land*
- 2. Free choice and independence in economic activity*
- 3. An economic mentality that sought to improve productivity*
- 4. Liberation from oppressive and capricious taxes and rents*
- 5. Constitutional government based on local representation*
- 6. Chauvinism of a cohesive middle stratum, neither wealthy nor poor*
- 7. Notions of egalitarianism and equality of property holding*
- 8. Private ownership of arms*
- 9. Citizen composition of amateur militias*
- 10. Absolute subservience of military organization to civilian political control*
- 11. Desire to limit and control defense outlay*
- 12. Preference in warfare for decisive engagement and frontal assault”*

“The typical Greek farmer...has no belly for the prancing aristocrat and even less for the mob on the dole. He idealizes his ten acres—not much more, rarely less—and he wants others like him to have about the same. He walks rarely into town, and then mostly just to vote and go home, disgusted at the noise, the squalor, and the endless race for pelf and power. And because he suffers no master, he speaks his due, fights his own battles, and leaves in imprint of self-reliance and nonconformity, a legacy of independence that is the backbone of Western society.”

“No ingredient is so dramatically successful in agriculture as free will, the ability to implement a new idea, to develop a proven routine, to learn once, not twice, from the hard taskmaster of error, to be left alone from government planning to grope for a plan of survival. Self-initiative, once turned loose on the soil, can result in spectacular results for both the farmer and the surrounding community. Never have I encountered a farmer who could believe long in big government, centralized control, and benign bureaucracy.”

“Trees and vines are to be passed down to children and grandchildren. They force the agriculturalist to invest for the future, rather than for the current year alone. They harness him bodily to his orchard and vineyard, changing his way of thinking from mere production to stewardship of a lifetime’s investment. Mistakes cannot simply be ploughed away in the fall. They cannot be replaced by a fresh animal.”

“...where will be the needed counterpoint to our amoral philosophy, to our national ethos? Where will be the singular critic, the often unpleasant individual, the

cratered veteran of a continual, a personal struggle with nature, the cultural dissident who will still choose to go it alone in order to protect the old notion of a community, who will have innate distrust for authoritarianism, large bureaucracy, and urban consensus? Where will be the person prerequisite to, the exemplar for, democratic and egalitarian government?

“...What are professions are there now in this country where the individual fights alone against nature, lives where he works, invests hourly for the future and never for the mere present, succeeds or fails by his own intellect, physical strength, bodily endurance, and sheer nerve? In what other vocation now does an American care so little about his own appearance, about the type of car he is to drive, about the title of the job he is to enjoy, about the status of his associates, and so much about the promptness of his action, the unambiguity of his intent, and the value of his promised word?

“Will our contemporary and abstract policy-making or learned philosophical discussion, will the novelists among us, will the American university professor and consultant of the day, will the institutionalized scholar, government planner, and academic theorist on the Left and Right, will they provide the needed counterpressure, the necessary barricade to the growing tyranny of a uniform, materialistic, urban, selfish, and ultimately Hellenistic culture?

“Or at long last, when we seek in vain for our lost American polis, will we look for it amid the ghosts of our own georgoi, now gone to a world beneath our feet?

Notes Taken During the Discussion:

www.persnicketyclothing.com

Roy H. Williams: www.mondaymorningmemo.com, www.wizardacademy.org

www.agriculturalurbanism.com

Celestia Shumway asks, do you agree or disagree with Chesterton's quote that "the obligation of wealth is to chuck it."?

I'd have to see the context to say anything intelligent.

Elizabeth Shultz: Where is the John Locke reference on property rights?

2nd Treatise on Government

Celestia Shumway says: the quote is on page 38 in my book, the end of chapter 4.

Great question by Richard Armstrong:

How do all these theories of property usage by families (distributism) and agricultural urbanism help us deal with the wanton overspending of government and expansion of entitlements and unlimited money supply (credit) expansion that will bankrupt our nation and put millions out of work with no means of production? How does this help us cope with the collapse of the dollar's purchasing power and flagrant debt?

Richard, I have many thoughts on this, but too long and complex to type here.

Audrey Crozier asks: Who decides what is "right for someone to own?"

My answer is the individual—but not from a perspective of subjective reality. From a cultural/philosophical perspective, I would say there is an objective reality to which each individual should conform. So in a free society with a healthy culture, it would be understood that there is a concept of rightness, but it wouldn't be enforced by law—except, of course, in cases of infringing on the rights of others.

Celestia responds to Audrey: Yes, Audrey, who decides who gets what land ? and where does the money come from for each family to buy that land?

Mike Wilson: Stephen, In answer to Audrey: The implementation of this idea is more of an internalization of these ideals, whether you own your own property or choose to avoid dependence on government or corporation in whatever way in life you choose to. Also, there is a natural limit to what one can own without government coming in and helping someone to own more than they can use.

Movie referenced by Shanon: Mclintock

What Shanon is saying is becoming more and more feasible through CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture), farmer's markets, etc.

By the way, we have at least 2 CSA represented on the call that I'm aware of. Monte & Laura Bledsoe and Allen and Martha Levie

Peacefield Farm CSA in Cedar City, Utah

www.peacefieldfarm.net

<http://www.quailhollowfarmcsa.com/>

<http://polyfacefarms.com/>

Liz Quist:

Additional implementation ideas from the book (p.158) to add to what Dr. Brooks is saying:

-Live close to where you work go to school and church. - Support small business that brings your neighborhood to life. -Grow food in your backyard, community plot or farm. - Share meals at the table together. - farmers markets, share produce locally - don't let technology be your pagan god, look to living things - get away from TV which is the direct path to sloth and stupidity and state/capitalistic control - choose alternative education - invest in morally sound businesses - take responsibility for your non-major medical care.

"Anywhere this can be done a merely local, small-neighborhood level, involving just tens of families, it should be; and to the extent that it is done, it will be a victory.

If you are an apartment city dweller you can still grow a lot of your own produce. See windowfarms.org

Gary Randleas says: Is there any way you could email some of these CSA website links? garyrandleas@gmail.com My wife and I are entertaining the idea of an organic farm in our area. We need ideas and mentors.

Yes, I'll email these notes. Also, check out this post on CSL:

<http://www.thesocialleader.com/2010/08/links-resources-sustainable-agriculture/>

www.shanonbrooks.com

www.fourlostamericanideals.com

Another farm is that of Oliver's brother's, William. The web site is

www.realfoodfarming.com.