

The Undercurrent

"It was as if an underground stream flowed through the country and broke out in sudden springs that shot to the surface at random, in unpredictable places." Ayn Rand

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A Tale of Two Symbols

GROUND ZERO AND THE BATTLE FOR AMERICA'S SOUL

by *Gena Gorlin*

A peculiar and noteworthy feature of mankind can be observed in the importance we lend to certain pieces of matter. Consider the perilous quests on which men have launched, both mythical and historical, in pursuit of certain objects—like a wooden cup (the "Holy Grail") and a sheep's skin ("Golden Fleece") and tree branches (consecrating our honor through laurel wreaths, our love through red roses) and rectangles of colored cloth (ranging from a victorious blue ribbon to a nation's billowing flag).

This distinctly human function, of imbuing concrete objects with abstract symbolism, goes a long way toward explaining the controversy that recently raged over what will replace the fallen World Trade Center towers in New York.

Rarely does an architectural project, no matter how tall or expensive, capture the breathless attention of millions nationwide. Yet the name of Daniel Libeskind, a professor of architecture at Penn State, and of his critically acclaimed "Freedom Tower" design were prominently featured in the newspaper headlines. And in a May press conference, Donald Trump—one of the nation's foremost publicity hounds—has elevated the WTC question to the dimension of a sweeping saga by unveiling his own proposal: to build what are essentially replicas of the old twin towers—but one story taller.

Recently an uninspiring compromise design was selected over both Libeskind's and Trump's proposals. But the original controversy is still illustrative of the forces at work in American culture.

Libeskind's design was selected by an international panel of famed architects, government officials and philanthropists who favored his design for its symbolism. In the words of Robert Ivy, editor-in-chief of *Architectural Record*, Libeskind "authentically captures a shard of history without overwhelming us with the past....(The design) moved everyone who saw it, heard it, understood it" (*USA Today*). The occupied portion of the Freedom Tower was to comprise sixty stories and 1,100 feet, more than 250 feet shorter than the original Twin Towers. The next 400 feet comprised a lattice tower, and on top of that a 276-foot spire jutted into space. The height to the top of the spire was 1,776 feet—intended as a symbolic tribute to America's independence.

The preoccupation with symbolism, more than economic efficiency or practical structural concerns, dominated Libeskind's design. As he himself proclaimed, "Most architects are concerned with buildings—actually, I'm concerned with people....There's a big difference. Most architects are concerned with technology. I'm much more interested in the story a city tells, a story a building tells...."

To tell his story with adequate poignancy, Libeskind infused his design with symbolic elements. Apart from the height's obvious significance, the tower was graced with a Wedge of Light, a "public space" specially calculated so that no shadow would be cast on the morning of September 11. Moreover, the Freedom Tower was shaped like an arm stretched upward, which was supposed to suggest to us the nearby Statue of Liberty's upstretched arm. In accordance with Libeskind's intentions, every foot and every concrete block of the building wreaked symbolism—though less than half of it constituted an actual building.

But a majority of the "people" Libeskind was targeting do not seem to have bought into the story his design was supposed to tell. While it may have won the hearts of many architectural

critics, intellectuals, and politicians, including Governor Pataki, Trump's proposal unleashed a vehement protest against the "Freedom Tower" among the American public—particularly New Yorkers. After his initial criticism of Libeskind's design in the *New York Post*, where he expressed the view that "the World Trade Center should be rebuilt on the site, only stronger and a little bit taller," Trump was deluged with letters of support. And in every major poll—including a poll by CNN as well as the official Lower Manhattan Development Corporation poll—Trump's proposal won over Mr. Libeskind's design.

Why such overwhelming preference for an imitation of the fallen towers over a new, unique structure? The subsequent Letters to the Editor of major New York newspapers, which cried out almost unanimously in favor of renewed WTC towers, revealed that *symbolism* does, in fact, have a lot to do with it. It certainly has little to do with Trump's reputation; consider, for instance, this letter to the *Post*: "Donald Trump is a caricature of himself, and his arrogance is obnoxious....But I want him in charge of the rebuilding of the World Trade Center. Period. End of story....I'm on Trump's team, because someone who really loves New York has an innate knowledge of what is best for New York" (Terrence Lavin, May 20).

So it is not the character or reputation of Trump, but rather some quality of the design that irresistibly drew a New York lover to its defense. According to Mr. Lavin, a true New Yorker senses "innately" that the WTC design is superior to what the Freedom Tower offers. But then, didn't Mr. Ivy, the architectural critic, say with equal fervor that Libeskind's design "moved everyone who saw it, heard it, understood it"? Unless Mr. Ivy does not re-

ally love New York at heart, and he certainly claims to, there is a clash of "innate" understandings here.

Consider this letter, which addressed a bit more explicitly the source of the Trump design's luster. "Better to restore the site where some 50,000 people joyously worked, where thousands from around the world did business, and where all celebrated life. Build two new twin towers, as tall or taller than the originals, on the footprints from which they were taken" (Joe Wright, *NY Sun*). This Manhattan-dweller felt that restoring the actual substance of the WTC site—with all its height and its interior business and work space—would be the only appropriate symbol of America's resilience and pride.

On the other hand, the Libeskind design, in Trump's description
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Religion Versus Spirituality

by Simon Patkin and The Undercurrent Staff

With the passing of Pope John Paul II there have been more calls from the religious establishment for more spirituality. Indeed, in his first official visit to the gathered faithful in Bari, Italy, Pope Benedict XVI said, "It is not easy for us to live as Christians." From his "spiritual" point of view, the world in which we live is "so often marked by runaway consumerism, religious indifference and by secularism."

Christianity, like most religions, equates spirituality with the contemplation and reverence of beings from another dimension. Virtually every religion and new-age "spiritualist" doctrine claims some way of connecting man to another world. These include Zen Buddhists, Hindus and a plethora of other sects. For radical Muslims, spiritual devotion is expressed by suicide bombings that take as many innocent victims with them as they possibly can, on the premise that the bomber will be rewarded in the other world.

Needless to say, religion does not justify the value of spirituality in terms of its practical, earthly benefits. Rather, Christianity and other religions counsel men to pursue spirituality as an alternative to the pursuit of this-worldly material values. For them, spirituality means denying themselves the pleasures of this earth.

Consider art, surely an important source of spiritual enrichment. Religion has long sought to suppress it, because delight in the pleasures of the earth has been seen as the antithesis of spirituality. In both Islamic and Jewish orthodoxy, painting portraits is forbidden. Both drama and dance, which are rightly described by many as modes of emotional expression and often of immense spiritual release, were outlawed by the Puritans and still are today by many fundamen-

talist religious sects. Most recently, the famed *Harry Potter* series has been condemned by the current Pope as an enemy of Catholic morality.

Religion's suppression of art is just the beginning of its opposition to the needs of the spirit. Not only does religion discourage the contemplation of beauty, but it stifles overall emotional well-being by inducing guilt and anxiety. Christianity even celebrates the "fear and trembling" of Abraham, driven by faith to murder his only son. Religion's celebration of faith, of the "evidence of things unseen," encourages men to doubt the evidence of their own senses, f o m e n t i n g distrust of the mind.

Man does have a spirit, but the spirit is more than our emotions. It is everything about us that is not simply material. This includes our hopes, our desires, our feelings, and our thoughts. If one acknowledges that "spirit" refers to man's non-material mind, then religious spirituality is decidedly *unspiritual*. The fact that the religions of the world pit the spiritual world against the material world is the first proof that religion is aimed not at *nurturing* your spirit, but at *stifling* it.

Real spirituality is the recognition that the mind, the spirit, is real and is of this world, and that its connection to this world must

be tended to properly, not subverted or negated. Spirituality is a natural, earthly component of being human.

Consider some activities known to provide moving experiences. Every two years, thousands flock to the Olympics to witness inspiring athletic excellence. Millions yearly visit museums to contemplate great art or attend ballets and stage plays and musicals. People use precious vacation time, their accumulated dollars, to

travel far and wide to experience the awe of some powerful sight, such as Niagara Falls or the breathtaking Manhattan skyline. Most people spend thousands of hours over the course of a lifetime cultivating their friendships and romances.

What does man accomplish by such pursuits? He does not improve his digestive system by basking in the sight of a "delicious" still life, nor does he cure any physical ailments by hearing his favorite band. It is, indeed, a *spiritual* need he fills. For instance, he gets renewed emotional fuel to pursue his goals: the sight of an Olympic ice skater, fiercely determined in her dance routine, achieving that long-pursued gold medal, can affirm a viewer's conviction that *his* hard work, too, can bring its just reward. And even apart from any practical inspiration it might serve, such an

experience is an emotional delight unto itself—a thrill that makes life more vibrant and worth living.

In the end, religion subverts the human spirit because it subverts the reasoning human mind. At its core, religion is a supernatural worldview accepted on blind faith. Yet the core of the human spirit is human reason. Our emotions are simply our mind's response to things in the world our mind judges to be important. We are happy when we achieve our long-planned and long-sought goals. We enjoy the sight of pristine painting because we value our own untrammelled faculty of sight. We fall in love with people who embody our most considered and cherished values. In opposing the centrality of human reason, religion denies us the possibility of these forms of fulfillment. In their stead, it leaves only the possibility of the neurotic satisfaction that comes from avoiding the cooked-up dangers of a rumored hell.

We should reject any mystical view of spirituality as harmful to our spirit. Let us embrace an earthly, rational spirituality—a love of the profound pleasures of this world, and of our human ability to enjoy them—because it recognizes that our spirits are a part of our selves and our lives on this earth. Our minds have to be tended to so they flourish and reach new heights.

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Members of The Undercurrent staff contributed to this article.

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Say No to the “Self-Esteem” Pushers

by Onkar Ghate

A recent article in *USA Today* (“Enough Already With Kid Gloves,” June 1) exposes some of the absurdities committed by the self-esteem movement in education, such as the prohibiting of red correction marks. It seems the color is “frightening” to students, and teachers should use more “pleasant-feeling tones.” But it is dangerous to dismiss such policies as overprotective and to downplay the importance of self-esteem, as the article does. The subject requires a deeper and more philosophical analysis.

Today’s educators, observing widespread self-doubt and despair among the young, believe that the way to get a student to learn is to inflate his self-image. They believe that the curriculum

should be designed, in the words of a resolution from the National Education Association, to “foster positive self-esteem.”

There is indeed a lack of self-esteem among our students. The real tragedy, though, is that the educators’ irrational view of “positive self-esteem” not only prevents a solution to this problem—but is itself the very cause.

Educators believe that self-esteem can be achieved by simply encouraging a child to “feel good” about himself. They continually exhort students to praise themselves—to praise themselves causelessly—by such means as chanting in class: “I am me and I am enough.”

The objective reality of the child’s life—the choices he

makes, the thinking he engages in, the effort he exerts, the actions he takes—is disregarded. As one guidebook on self-esteem explains: “Children have the right to feel good about themselves exactly as they are....A child’s value is unconditional. Nothing the child does, says or chooses can change it.”

Genuine self-esteem, however, consists not of causeless feelings, but of certain knowledge about yourself. It rests on the conviction that you—by your choices, effort and actions—have made yourself into the kind of person able to deal with reality. It is the conviction—based on the evidence of your own volitional functioning—that you are fundamentally able to succeed in

life and, therefore, are deserving of that success.

Since it is only through rational thought and action that one develops the ability to cope with reality, self-esteem results from an individual’s commitment to reason. A rational, productive person will possess self-esteem; a drug-addicted bum will not.

But in the view of our Dewey-inspired educators, logic is a “straitjacket.” Students are taught by “progressive” educators that there are no rigid principles in life, and that emotion, not reason, is one’s link to reality. Thus, if a child is somehow made to feel good about himself, he is good—irrespective of whether there exists any objec-

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Star Wars: Revenge of the Self

by Ash Ryan

Last May, perhaps the most highly-anticipated new film of the new millennium opened to rave reviews and record-smashing box office receipts, eclipsing another, more modest film that had opened just a few days earlier.

Both films were more than just entertaining summer spectacles, or “popcorn flicks,” though they were certainly that. They have something else in common: a profoundly philosophical theme, portraying their respective creators’ most deeply-held views about the nature of the world we live in and the meaning and value of human life. For each, the theme is an examination of the struggle between good and evil within one man’s soul. And in both, the protagonist’s ultimate choice comes as a result of his loyalty to his highest values—his friends, his family, and his self-esteem.

Here, however, at this most abstract level, all similarities between the two films cease; for in one of them this loyalty to attaining and defending values leads the protagonist to choose evil and become a monster, while in the other it leads to the hero’s renunciation of everything monstrous in his past, to his redemption.

By now, you have probably guessed that the first film is George Lucas’ final installment in the *Star Wars* saga. But you may not be aware of the second: writer/producer Luc Besson’s martial arts action flick *Unleashed*, starring Jet Li.

Star Wars Episode III: Revenge

of the Sith explores the question of what could cause the descent of the once heroic Anakin Skywalker to the evil Dark Side. Yoda answers this question when he advises young Anakin to let go of his personal attachments and consign himself to the will of the Jedi Council, whose duty and sole purpose for existence is the protection of the Republic. Because it would interfere with this duty, one of the rules of the Council is that a Jedi may not have a spouse; Anakin, however, has secretly married Amidala in *Episode II*. The remainder of the film illustrates Yoda’s advice as Anakin’s love for Amidala causes him to put his personal desires above the good of others, leading him eventually to massacre innocent children because he is apparently stupid enough to believe that this will help him protect his wife’s life.

The film perfectly concretizes its creator’s philosophy. Lucas is a self-described “Methodist Buddhist.” From Methodism, he takes the Christian view that altruism is the moral ideal, that our lives only have meaning and value if we sacrifice ourselves for the sake of somebody, anybody, else. Thus, Anakin must sacrifice his love for Amidala and serve the Republic as a Jedi. From Buddhism, he takes (among other things) the idea that Life Is Pain, that only by renouncing all of our values and embracing a life of asceticism can we avoid suffering and achieve a lasting peace (in Zen, even the Self is demolished). Hence, the ascetic

lifestyle the Jedi impose on themselves. This actually makes a certain kind of sense: it is easier to sacrifice one’s values for others’ alleged benefit if one has already renounced his capacity to value.

But there are inconsistencies in both viewpoints. There is a double-standard inherent in the altruist position that another’s benefit is more worthy than one’s own. If valuing isn’t good for you, then it must follow that whatever value your sacrifice bestows upon others would actually be bad for them as well. And the Buddhist avoidance of suffering is itself motivated by the fear that it seeks to prevent. But the annihilation of the Self will not solve the internal inconsistencies of altruism.

Lucas is able to ignore these problems, however, because his ideology allows it. From both Christianity and Buddhism he takes the belief that logical reasoning based on observation is deceiving, and that one must thus rely on one’s “feelings,” which are taken as unexplainable insights. This idea has permeated the franchise ever since the original *Star Wars*, in which Obi-Wan trained Luke by having him don blinders and let his “feelings” guide him, and Luke ultimately prevailed by trusting his “instincts” rather than using a computer.

Of course, “following his feelings” is precisely what Anakin is doing when he turns to the Dark Side. But ultimately, even this isn’t such a bad thing since the exis-

tence of the Dark Side is necessary to bring “balance” to the force (another Buddhist idea). Still, there is a tension between Lucas’ Buddhism and his Christianity, betrayed by such blatant contradictions as Obi-Wan’s declaration that “Only a Sith deals in absolutes!” followed not ten minutes later his absolute statement that “The Sith are evil!” Is Lucas a relativist or an absolutist? Even he doesn’t seem to know. But, as we have seen, consistency is not the hobgoblin of his mind.

Which also explains why George Lucas, who jealously guards his personal values (both spiritual and material) in real life, seems like the biggest hypocrite in the galaxy.

But what could a filmmaker who was unhampered by this intellectual chaos do with a similar theme? Fortunately, that question is answered by another film that happens to be in theaters simultaneously with *Star Wars*.

Unleashed tells the story of Danny (Li), who has been enslaved since childhood by gangster Bart (Bob Hoskins) and trained as an attack dog. He is forced to wear a collar, and when one of Bart’s “clients” doesn’t cough up protection money, the collar comes off, signaling Danny to beat them to a bloody pulp. But when Danny escapes during an attack on Bart by one of his rivals, he is taken in by a gentle, blind piano tuner, Sam (Morgan Freeman). Sam and his stepdaughter Victoria (Kerry Con-

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There is one thing on which our lives depend. It is woven into the very fabric of our culture. It sustains us. It is the lifeblood of any venture we attempt—from the construction of a skyscraper to the discovery of new physical laws. It gives us the power to act just when we think we have run out of steam. It gives us the will to go on just when we feel that it is impossible. It is our god, the great god coffee.

Our cities are filled with coffee shops—franchises trading in specialty brands, offering a dozen different varieties. Coffee is enormous business. Last year alone the coffee sales in the US totaled over 19 billion dollars, amounting to just about 6 million gallons of coffee, or 424 cups per person—making coffee second only to water in terms of consumption. Coffee has taken on a special significance in our culture.

The reason for coffee's popularity is self-evident. It enhances your mind's ability to function, whether by keeping you alert when you begin to tire or by giving you an extra edge whenever the need arises. It is this attribute, more than its taste, or availability, or Starbucks' marketing campaign, that explains coffee's popularity. It is its ability to boost your potential that creates its demand.

Coffee fuels productivity on all scales—from the zealous businessman trying to make the day last 25 hours—the conscientious scientist reviewing the latest discoveries—the sleep-deprived student rushing to his morning class after a coffee drenched night studying for a midterm. Its chief role is in situations where time is a key variable.

Coffee allows a man to act

A Tribute

by Vecheslav Silagadze

beyond his immediate means—it allows him to surpass his biologically given nature and gain greater control over his mind. Coffee increases the duration of man's waking hours by allowing him to defer the need to rest.

Coffee does to a mind the same thing credit does to an economy. Credit allows an entrepreneur with limited resources to create wealth on a larger scale, by allowing him to use existing resources belonging to someone else—in exchange for interest—resulting in greater long term earnings. So too coffee allows a man to use energy that would have otherwise not been available to him, in order to allow him to function for just long enough to complete a crucial task. This flexibility allows a man to achieve a greater capacity for productive work in the long term, at the expense of some discomfort in the short term.

In the case of the credit, there is the implication that somewhere there is a creditor ready to collect the debt when it is due. In the case of coffee, the creditor is simply ones self—with reality as the repo man. With credit, the bank will do its best to put a stop to any vicious cycle of borrowing and default, but with coffee that responsibility lies with the drinker. And this is where the wider significance of coffee becomes clear.

Caffeine, like any drug, effectively circumvents the body's automatic control mechanisms.

When there is a disconnect between the behavior of your brain and your conscious mind's intentions, coffee allows you to make the call. When your body demands you sleep, while you consciously decide to stay awake, you simply drink a cup of coffee and force your brain to conform to your wishes. The reason this step is at all necessary is that, while our conscious minds are able to project long-term, the brain and body only behave in accordance with the short term.

Our body is incapable of knowing that a certain action will be beneficial in the long term, while being extremely detrimental in the short term. An ideal example of this conflict is a surgery. For its duration, the surgery is utterly destructive, only realizing its benefits within days, weeks or even years of its end. As a result our body is in excruciating pain for the whole process (unless inhibited by drugs). Our conscious mind on the other hand knows for certain that although the surgery will be harmful in the short term it is ultimately good, and even necessary. This is why we allow a surgeon to give us the anesthetic, totally subverting the pain mechanism of our bodies.

Unlike animals, men have the distinctive ability to see the long range consequences of our actions. If a dog owner attempts to give a dog a needle, or even try and wash the thing, the dog will do everything in its power to stop the dog owner—it will jump

and twist and moan because the long term effects of a given action are simply beyond its grasp. So coffee, or aspirin, or morphine—drugs in general—are our means of conforming our brain's activity to the full context of our knowledge. In effect it is the last step in our evolution of control over our body.

This should be the great pride of our culture—that coffee shops dot our towns, our campuses, our concrete jungle. This is representative of the value of an active mind. From the physicist to the janitor, all must exercise their mind to be even remotely productive. This is what made us what we are. The mind is the source of wealth, and our love of coffee is a direct result of that fact. Coffee per se is not responsible for all of western civilization's glory, but it is symptomatic thereof.

We have a healthy obsession with efficiency and coffee fits nicely into the picture. We strive for ever greater heights, ever more momentous achievements, and having attained nothing short of godlike powers we have now become our own limiting factors. Nature will not suffice—not in the caves it once provided us for shelter and not in the sleep cycle we inherited from our chimp cousins. We have built the world we wanted, with tools commanding nature, and now the time has come to rebuild ourselves—to bring the once automatic functions of our body into the scope of our volition. Thus, coffee; a simple tool for audacious men not content to let nature take its course.

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Say No to the "Self-Esteem" Pushers

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basis for that conclusion.

Of course this approach cannot work. A child who makes bad choices—who does not think but drifts in class, who shuts down his mind at the first sign of difficulty, who heads for the mall instead of exerting the effort that learning requires—will not acquire self-esteem. Constantly getting the answers wrong in class and feeling bewildered by the world outside, such a child experiences only uncertainty, helplessness and self-doubt.

How then will educators

make him "feel good" about himself? By attempting to obliterate any facts that lead him to a negative estimate of himself. Accordingly, they teach him that there are never any wrong answers.

This is what gives rise to such nightmarish phenomena as inventive spelling, whereby a fourth-grader who spells "favorite" as "ffifit" is lauded by the teacher for expressing a "creative feeling." This viewpoint infects even the most objective of disciplines, mathematics. One educator explains the root of a girl's errors in mathematics: "She was trying to get these problems right. The alternative was to get them wrong. ...So this is a situation within the win-lose world in which there's no way the child can feel good about the assignment."

Erase the concept of truth—

these educators maintain—and a child will never discover that he is thinking or acting wrongly. If he is taught that anything he does is right because he feels it, he will always "feel good" about himself. For this reason a Minnesota Education Association's guide to self-esteem tells students: "Express your beliefs... as your point of view—not as the 'truth.'"

Today's child lacks self-esteem precisely because modern educators encourage him to dispense with his mind, and to indulge his feelings. Self-doubt is the inevitable result, as the child realizes that he lacks the tool by which to comprehend reality.

Yet, to solve the problem they themselves have created, educators propose to continue the same anti-reason, emotional-

ist approach to teaching.

There is certainly a crisis of self-esteem among America's students. But don't look to the modern pushers of pseudo self-esteem for the remedy. Their ideas are the disease.

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The life of the mind has a friend in modern culture: the coffee house. Sprinkled throughout college towns, dotted at the feet of financial-district high-rises, tucked away in the fashionable corners of middle-America hometowns, cafes wait to welcome the intellectual. Coffee has become more than the tool by which we force sleep from our eyes and focus to our brains; it has become the cultural-signpost of intellect.

The coffee house develops that black, bitter drink into an intellectual atmosphere. It offers quiet corners in which to concentrate and comfortable couches for the relaxed discussion of ideas. Bookshelves flank the couches, and magazines scatter the tables—the substance and product of thought, and its further stimulus. Artsy décor provides an environment friendly to intellectual values, and compare that laidback jazz/indie-rock mix to the blaring television of a sports bar. Even the barista behind the counter is a grad student working his way to a Ph.D. The coffee house is the only place in town where a \$2.50 mochacino buys 5 hours of study time, and the servers get friendlier the longer you hang about with your copy of *The Undercurrent*. In countless ways, the café provides the perceptual environment in which thinking best thrives.

The coffee house isn't a new idea. It grew during the 18th century, as a philosophic spirit took root in Enlightenment civilization. In Paris, London, and Amsterdam, the café served much the same purpose as it does today. To quote the Economist, "the coffee-houses that began to appear in European cities...were

Coffee Culture

How to Celebrate the Human Mind

by Rebecca Knapp

adorned with bookshelves, mirrors, gilt-framed pictures and good furniture, in contrast to the rowdiness, gloom and squalor of taverns." The Enlightenment middle class explicitly viewed coffee as a brain-stimulating alternative to liquor's dulling effects. Merchants frequented coffee houses for news of their trade, authors read and discussed their work with coffeehouse critics, revolutionaries traded pamphlets and scientists demonstrated experiments to onlookers. Whatever your area of concern, if you were interested in the exchange of ideas, the coffee house was your social center.

So it is today—Americanized. Starbucks and its competitors have taken the European coffee shop model and brought it to middle America. Starbucks' brilliant new retailing concept has taken the life of the mind and marketed it to the average American consumer. The forest-green mermaid has recognized that coffee fulfills a particular human need—the need to stay fully aware. She has developed a marketing scheme that consistently serves that need, through more than just the product it sells, and has created an entire coffee-culture that implicitly glorifies the mind. Scores of independent coffee shops have picked up the trend. It's a pleasing spectacle, a great place to study, and the perfect first date.

If there is a downside to this tale, it is the question of to what extent the life of the mind is truly

valued in modern American culture. The coffee-shop provides a spectacle of intellect, and yet men of the mind are so often ignored, or vilified. Who exercises reason? Who engages in the intellectual process?

Well, who drinks coffee?

The answer, of course, is *everyone*.

And everyone, in every job, from car mechanic to novelist to corporate executive, uses his mind to do his work. Everyone needs to focus on a problem—fixing a waterlogged engine, negotiating a tricky plot twist, or choosing a new product line—and use his knowledge and his reasoning faculty to solve it. This is not to say that everyone is *an intellectual*—in the sense of someone who professionally deals with ideas. It is to say that everyone engages in an intellectual process to live his life and conduct his work. We all need to use our minds.

That, in a nutshell, is why Starbucks is so blooming successful. Everyone has work of the mind to do, and thus everyone can gain from an environment that acknowledges it. The implicit message Starbucks sends to you when you walk in the door is: "The work you do is important and difficult. We appreciate that you need to be in top mental form to do it. Let us help to make your job a little easier."

A little message like that can go a long way in circles where the tremendous intellectual effort

required to do the job is too often scoffed at by the rest of society. I speak, of course, of the business world.

When those intellectuals who believe they have a monopoly on the name shun Starbucks in favor of Indie Coffee, they are shunning Starbucks as a symbol that the needs of the mind are mainstream. It is as though they are asking, "Who are those corporate rats to think that they can drink coffee? Who are they to take an Enlightenment symbol of intellect, commercialize it, and plunk it down on every corner of the financial district? That symbol belongs to *us*, not *them*."

But they're wrong. Starbucks' needs-of-the-mind image is highly marketable to businessmen precisely because businessmen need to use their minds to such a high degree. Coffee does not belong only to the academics, or the artists, or the pure-scientists. It belongs also to the pharmaceutical industry, and to Wall Street. It belongs to engineers, advertisement agencies, computer nerds, movie producers, lawyers, retail-chains, and the kings of real estate. Coffee serves and represents these intellectuals as much as it does those in ivory tower; that their thinking is applied does not make it any less the work of the mind. When America realizes this, and loves Bill Gates along with Voltaire, the symbolic coffee-culture return to the Enlightenment (and to the Industrial Revolution which resulted from it) will become fully honest.

In the meantime, I'll grab my laptop and head to Starbucks.

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tion, was a "skeleton"; a "building that's not really a building" (NY Post, May 12). This meshes with Libeskind's own description of the design as an abstract "story" rather than a technologically sound building (which might explain why the Freedom Tower's launch date was subject to so many delays before the design was finally sacked altogether). Libeskind's professional philosophy, in effect, is symbolism-over-substance.

But then why did New Yorkers preferring the symbolism of Trump's revamped WTC towers, which were little more than cop-

ies of the frankly not-so-creative original design, to Libeskind's symbolically sophisticated shell of concrete?

Precisely because it was a shell.

Libeskind proposed that we build a carcass; an empty pretense that is all words and abstractions, but no substance. But America has not traditionally been a nation of empty abstractions. As Calvin Coolidge famously quipped, the business of America is not talk but *business*. That means that Americans value productive action and concrete achievement, from the pursuit of great monetary wealth to the most ambitious advances in medical and automotive technology. The terrorists were not stupid in choosing the World Trade Centers to attack; symbolically, they repre-

sented the heart of the American spirit. It is true that we value creativity and intellect: after all, the creation of iPods and heart monitors and spaceships and, indeed, corporate skyscrapers requires plenty of creativity, and of intellect to boot. But the Freedom Tower abandons the fundamental conviction that the terrorists attacked—that our ideas are practical, and that they bring us, not pious communion with an other-worldly Allah, but paradise on earth.

The fact that so many down-to-earth Americans yearned for a return of the WTC towers means we have not yet been defeated—at least not in spirit. But unfortunately that spirit of earthly pride is *not* "innate." It needs to be articulated by those who understand its abstract, intellec-

tual root. Unfortunately, Trump lacked the capacity to articulate it. And President Bush, in articulating our intellectual cause in the "War on Terror," has not done much better. It is an intellectual defense of the American spirit that America needs.

Until then, intellectuals like Libeskind, will go unopposed on the battleground of ideas. And instead of a return to the spirit of the Twin Towers, we will be misled by the expedient compromises of politicians like Pataki. Unless the Libeskinds and Bush's are opposed by a new breed of intellectuals, we may be left with but an empty shell of the America we loved.

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Inquisition of the Airwaves

by Paul Marshall

In the run-up to the election last fall, religious conservatives intensified their campaign to censor “obscene and indecent broadcasts” on television and radio. Constant nagging from groups such as Parents Television Council, Family Research Council and Morality in Media met with success: The FCC slapped fines on CBS for an insipid Super Bowl half-time show featuring Janet Jackson baring her breast, on Clear Channel Communications for Howard Stern’s nihilistic prattle, and on Fox for titillating scenes of the absurd reality show “Married by America.”

True, these broadcasts are objectionable—although it is hard to pin down which is worse: the rotgut quality, or the brainless jiggling of flesh.

But beware. Leading the charge for censorship is the prudish wild-eyed preacher and Sunday schoolmarm bloc of the religious right that considers pagan cheer per se offensive. You know the type. Remember when John Ashcroft ordered that a curtain be constructed to cover the idealized nude sculptures of “Spirit of Justice” and “Majesty of Law” in the Great Hall of the U.S. Justice Department?

The fact remains that no one forces an individual to turn on his TV set, sit still and watch objectionable programs. There are countless ways for parents and their children to avoid such tripe, including hundreds of channels to choose from, content blocking devices and even—if worst comes to worst—adult supervision.

Censorship, however, is not the answer.

The Founding Fathers recognized that if we desire to live in society with other people and not end up killing one another, we have to settle differences of opinion, not by resorting to brute force, but by rational debate. This requires that we be left free to communicate our thoughts—even if what our neighbor says is mistaken, immoral, offensive or irredeemable. Accordingly, governmental authorities must be

banned from issuing fines to shut you up when they and their constituents don’t like what you’re saying. Outlawing censorship preserves the type of civilization in which one is free to argue for what is true and moral—and free to express these thoughts in art and entertainment.

America was created as just such a civilization. The First Amendment protects an individual’s right to express his thoughts. So how are the cultural nannies at the FCC able to get away with censoring broadcasters when our Constitution reads, “Congress shall make no...law abridging the freedom of speech?”

Well, you can blame the regulatory architects of the New Deal era. In 1927, Congress—under the pretext of solving the problem of radio chaos caused by frequency interlopers who were interfering with established radio stations—drafted the Dill-White Radio Act, which seized the airwaves from broadcasters and declared them “public property.” In 1934, this legislation was further entrenched with the Communications Act.

As the airwaves were now deemed “public property,” Washington was able—even obligated—to control the content of what broadcasters aired in order to ensure that the “public’s property” was used in the “public’s interest.”

Acts of Congress notwithstanding, airwaves are not “public property.” Airwaves are simply another form of private property akin to land, oil and intellectual property.

A broadcaster works to transform barren airwaves into radio

transmissions, just as a farmer works to transform barren tracts of land into farmland. The right of a farmer to keep the product of his labor was protected by the Homestead Act of 1862, which guaranteed him sovereign control of 160 acres of undeveloped land if he worked on it for five years. As Ayn Rand pointed out in her article, “The Property Status of Airwaves,” Congress ought to have enacted similar legislation for the first generations of broadcasters. Both radio transmissions and farmland are products of an individual’s thought and effort and thus ought to be his *private* property to control and profit from.

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The drafters of the Radio and Communications Acts, however, brushed aside the Constitutional protection of property rights in their bid to control who and what ought to be on the airwaves.

To manage this newly looted “public property,” Congress installed government minders—the FCC—whom they charged with awarding broadcast licenses, forcing broadcasters to use the airwaves to serve whatever Washington happened to deem was in “the public interest, convenience and necessity,” and keeping “communications containing profane or obscene words or language” off the air.

More than half a century later, the FCC’s stranglehold on broadcasting remains uncontested. The liberals—for the sake of the “public interest”—want to use its power to break up media conglomerates like Clear Channel Communications. And conservatives—for the sake of the “public interest”—want to

squash indecency.

This whole notion of the “public interest” is empty. The public is nothing more than a large number of individuals. So what serves the interest of the individual? The freedom to think and to profit from his hard work, which, in part, requires that his property rights be protected. Not only does such freedom encourage the creators of material and intellectual goods—including news and entertainment programs—to create more such goods, but it also sustains a just society.

Nevertheless, invoking the shibboleth of the “public interest” allows both liberals and conservatives to dress up their desire to arbitrarily control the goods created by productive individuals, under the ruse that, as members of the public, the producers may somehow benefit from such pilfering too, or at least that it is the “right thing to do.” The unvarnished truth—“our clique wants to hijack the radio that you have spent countless hours to create”—is just too nasty an assertion to get away with, at least in America.

So, by nationalizing the “public airwaves” and establishing the FCC as a watchdog for the “public interest,” New Deal era politicians handed today’s religious right the mechanism for censoring broadcasters on grounds of “indecentcy.” An even more ominous development, however, is the fact that today’s liberals are handing the mechanism for censoring political speech over to the despots who loom ahead.

Liberals have long advocated using the “public ownership” of the airwaves to meddle with political speech. The Communications Act contained a provision known as the Equal Time Rule, which requires broadcasters who grant air-time to a politician from one party to provide an equal amount of air-time to his opponent. The Fairness Doctrine, an FCC policy issued in 1949, pushed governmental interference in the realm of ideas even further by requiring broadcasters who aired editorial

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(continued from previous page) opinions to seek opposing opinions for rebuttal.

While these regulations do not rise to the level of full-blown censorship, they certainly infringe upon the station owner's right to speak freely on his radio station. Think of the injustice of the devil's bargain that forces a broadcaster to choose either to be silent on what may be a life-or-death issue, or to give a soap box to people who he thinks are wrong. In fact, the Fairness Doctrine itself, which was suspended in 1987, only stifled political discourse, as broadcasters would simply avoid putting political opinions on the air rather than lose audience ratings during the required but unpopular rebuttal broadcast.

Even worse is the Federal Elections Campaign Act of 1971, which limits the amount that individuals can give to candidates or political action committees. Such "reforms" actually limit the speech of American citizens, who are prohibited from communicating their thoughts simply because they choose to give others money to speak on their behalf. In 2002, this censorship of political speech was put into overdrive with the McCain-Feingold Act, which introduced outright bans on airing over the "public airwaves" any issue ads that mention a candidate 60 days before a general election.

And then there is the left's crusade to break up large media corporations. Outraged over such trivial matters as their contention that media consolidation has resulted in bland music programming, and fueled by a scary desire to silence conservative talk radio, liberals have lobbied the FCC to strictly limit the number of stations a broadcaster can operate, in an attempt to hobble media outlets such as Clear Channel Communications. While they may succeed in tightening media ownership limits, this crusade achieves another purpose. The FCC's regulatory Sword of Damocles gives liberals the means to threaten conservative broadcasters and thereby affect the content of their programming. A broadcaster such as Clear Channel has to think twice before airing anything that might give the left ammo at an upcoming FCC re-licensing hearing.

The left's media anti-consolidation stratagem underscores the fact that private ownership is required for free expression of ideas. In order to communicate his thoughts, an individual must use some sort of physical means—whether that be a pen and paper, a computer, a lecture hall, a printing press, or a portion of the airwaves. If he does not own these means of communication, then he can be silenced by their confiscation, or,

with the mere threat of confiscation, intimidated into silence. The FCC's power to revoke a broadcaster's license and divest him of stations is no different than the power to take a computer from an author, a lecture hall from a professor, or a printing press from a newspaper.

The fat hit the fire last fall when the liberals threatened to use this half-century stockpile of regulations to censor the media. The target of liberal ire was Sinclair Broadcasting, which, with its 62 television stations, was set to air a news documentary criticizing John Kerry just prior to the election.

A number of parallels can be drawn between Sinclair Broadcasting's documentary and the infamous *60 Minutes* segment on George W. Bush's National Guard record—barring the blatant difference that the Sinclair documentary wasn't based on forged documents. Both were news broadcasts; both had producers who were arguably sympathetic to the opposing candidate; both focused on the long-past military records of the candidates; both were scheduled to air before the election.

The response they drew, however, was not parallel. While the *60 Minutes* piece received justifiable verbal flack from the right for relying on faked documents, the left threatened to throw every

available piece of political speech regulation at Sinclair. The Kerry campaign—and some liberals who crawled out of the woodwork—insisted that the Equal Time Rule permitted them to hijack air time on Sinclair's channels to counter, not political ads this time, but news programming. The left then threatened to bring their crusade against media consolidation to bear on Sinclair, urging the FCC to set ownership limits that would

force a breakup of Sinclair Broadcasting—urges that were heard loud and clear by thuggish FCC commissioner Michael Copps, who described Sinclair's actions as "proof positive of media consolidation run amok." A number of liberals even argued that the McCain-Feingold campaign finance regu-

lation prohibited Sinclair from broadcasting the documentary within sixty days of the election.

The result: Sinclair caved in to the threats and only aired a few minutes of the documentary in a news special subtitled "Politics, Pressure and the Media." How much longer will it be before these threats are actually carried out on other news programs, like *60 Minutes*?

Such speech controls imposed on the "public airwaves" are the tools that a home-grown Vladimir Putin or Ayatollah Khomeini may someday use to silence the media. Imagine the scenario: Just before an election an antagonistic media is accused of supporting the opposition and is prevented—in accordance with campaign finance laws and FCC regulations—from airing anything critical of the candidate over the "public airwaves." Sadly, this outlandish scenario doesn't seem so outlandish anymore.

And yet, it will not be the secular left who drags us into despotism. With the world-wide collapse of communism, liberals are stuck in the doldrums without an all-encompassing cause to rally behind. The winds of the future appear to belong to religious fundamentalists, who—with an organizational zeal that would shame the Bolsheviks who began their bloody crusade a century ago—are making their presence

known at the ballot box, on the best seller lists, and even on Ivy League campuses.

This does not bode well for the future of free speech in the United States. While religious conservatives have long called for the censorship of obscenity, only the lunatic fringe has called for political censorship. But historically—and today in the devout Middle East—political censorship and religious authority have gone hand in hand. Indeed, the list of religious censorship is almost endless: the suppression of Greek and Roman thought during the Dark Ages, the Inquisition in Italy and Spain, the Puritans in Colonial America, the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Mullahs in Iran.

This correlation is not a coincidence. The basis of religion is faith—that is, the acceptance of beliefs in the absence of evidence. Without evidence to point to, the faithful cannot persuade non-believers through rational discourse. In fact, any discussion of evidence that contradicts the faithful's dogma becomes an intolerable threat to their religious conviction and must be silenced. Hence the history of religious censorship.

Take the case of Galileo. The Church Inquisitors who censored Galileo had—on the basis of faith—accepted the idea that the earth was the center of the cosmos. Indeed, in an orthodoxy assessment in 1616, the Church's Holy Office ruled that Galileo's argument for the Copernican doctrine that the Earth revolved around the Sun was "heretical inasmuch as it expressly contradicts the doctrines of Holy Scripture." In the face of Galileo's evidence the Church authorities were at a loss for words; they could not endeavor to change his mind by showing him evidence to the contrary, for, in the end, all they had to back up their dogma was empty faith. Thus they chose to shut him up.

This has been the path that the faithful have taken throughout history and the path that they will take in the future.

With such a storm gathering on the horizon, it is urgent that we privatize the "public airwaves," abolish the FCC, and strike all legislation regulating political speech from the books; all in order to keep the mechanisms of censorship out of the hands of those who wish to keep us silent.

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• STAFF EDITORIAL •
The Needs of the Mind

Different sectors of our culture, usually divided over matters political, are curiously united in their opposition to something called “materialism.”

The secular left decries business and commerce as “crass” and “alienating,” bemoaning the relentless acquisition of gas-guzzling SUVs and cookie-cutter suburban homes. Not to be outdone, the religious right warns how the delights of the eyes may distract us from higher truths. In his first Republican convention speech, our president urged that prosperity “can be a drug in our system—dulling our sense of urgency, of empathy, of duty.”

There *is* something wrong with an exclusive concern for material goods—but not for the reasons typically offered by the left and right. Man *does* have a spirit, with special spiritual needs—but not in the way our cultural authorities usually explain it. The articles in these pages help show how dominant secular and religious forces are anathema to genuine spiritual needs, when the human spirit is understood for what it really is: the human *mind*.

The familiar leftist critique of “materialism” insists that material possessions add no meaning to life. This much is true: mere *possession* of material objects adds nothing to human happiness. But

rational individuals don’t seek material goods to hoard possessively for the sake of impressing other people; they seek goods in order to use them. A rational man doesn’t buy an SUV and “McMansion” as a status symbol; he buys them in order to more comfortably travel with and house his busy family. He does not purchase his morning coffee as an act of gluttony; he uses it to focus himself on the tasks at hand. Far from encouraging “crass” consumption, corporations like Starbucks may in fact be helping to foment greater creativity from Pittsburgh to Peoria (“A Tribute” and “Coffee Culture”).

The secular opposition to “materialism” is hollow, anyway. True to their Marxist roots, most on the left are in fact *philosophic* materialists, denying the existence of the human spirit, maintaining that we are instead mere products of our genes, our environment and/or our socioeconomic class. No wonder the left urges us to indulge *indiscriminately* in matters of the spirit, whether artistically, romantically, or educationally. To them, the mind is unreal and its use is unimportant, one way or the other.

Yet the mind is real, with a definite nature and definite needs. Foremost among these is the use of *reason*, the source of all human values from productiveness to self-esteem (“Say ‘No’ to the Self-Esteem Pushers”).

Religion does not deny the existence of the spirit; instead it elevates the importance of the spirit *above* the material world (“the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak”). Accordingly religion urges asceticism and chastity as a means to “higher” spiritual fulfillment. Yet the real human spirit, human *consciousness*, is situated in and dependent upon its material setting. Its objects are primarily the material things which bear on our physical survival, or which enable esthetic contemplation and reflection on our own nature as spiritual beings (“Religion vs. Spirituality”).

Of all the needs of the human mind, perhaps the greatest in a social setting is *freedom*. The secular left purports to advocate freedom for the mind, even as its shackles man’s body through its socialist economic policies. The religious right, by contrast, grants some econom-

ic freedom while at the same time seeking ever greater controls over the mind in cultural and scientific realms. Left and right together evade the crucial connection between mind and body. By shackling property rights with fraudulent concepts like “the public interest,” the left aids and abets the censors of the right (“Inquisition of the Airwaves”).

The human mind works in symbols and even needs symbolism that embodies its own efficacy. The fight over the World Trade Center design is a fitting dramatization of this need. The Twin Towers were eloquent symbols of the innovation of the human mind and of American freedom and capitalism. Destroyed by religious dogmatists opposed to these concepts, the towers were to be rebuilt by secular intellectuals using empty (or decadent) symbolism. (“A Tale of Two Symbols”).

But our culture cannot defend the principles of Americanism intellectually as long as it continues to substitute the concept of the human spirit with the idea of an otherworldly essence—the same essence upheld by our terrorist enemies. The pursuit of happiness means pursuit of happiness in *this* material world, with the aid of man’s spirit—his reasoning mind.

Revenge of the Self

(continued from page 3)

don) introduce him to a peaceful, happy life filled with pleasures like music and ice cream, not to mention friendship and love.

This is so diametrically opposed to the life of violence and death that he was accustomed to that when he is recaptured by Bart, Danny refuses at first to even defend himself, unwilling to mete out death at his “owner’s” command. His cry of “No more killing!” is a truly touching moment, which, along with his climactic decision of whether or not to kill Bart in revenge, makes this the only martial arts action film in memory to convey a “violence is not the answer” message

without seeming hypocritical.

But the film’s deeper meaning is that it is a man’s own personal values, from his favorite flavor of ice cream to the love of a kindred spirit, that inspire him to struggle for a better life. Further, this struggle is the moral purpose of his life—not service to the “needs” of others, and certainly not self-sacrifice. While *Star Wars* sends the message that the selfish pursuit of values leads to unspeakable evil, *Unleashed* declares that the alternative to selfish values is slavery.

The philosophy this represents is virtually unknown in today’s society, at least in explicit, consistently defended terms. I do not know Luc Besson’s sources for his personal philosophical convictions (or even what those convictions are, beyond what one

can glean from his films), but this attitude toward values most closely resembles that held by the Ancient Greeks, or by Ayn Rand. On this view, human beings are individual, metaphysically distinct entities, not part of a collective, and thus the proper beneficiaries of their own actions. This ethical egoism does not suffer from the internal inconsistencies of the Christian or Buddhist views.

Unfortunately, however, *Star Wars* has proven by far the more popular of the two films, grossing a third of a billion dollars in its first month (as compared to a paltry 24 million by *Unleashed*)—which means that the crowds flocking to see the movie aren’t bothered by its philosophic message. They take for granted the ethics that Lucas espouses. It is difficult to disagree

with the portrayal of selfishness as climbing over piles of corpses when that is what you have been taught your whole life.

But if you put aside what you have been taught and look instead at the facts of reality, it becomes quite easy to disagree. Do your feelings for your loved ones cause you to become a children-slaughtering monster (or do anything bad, for that matter), or do they bring you mutual happiness and growth, to the detriment of no one and the benefit of all concerned? Clearly, *Unleashed* paints the more rational picture of selfish values.

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