

Book Review

Liberal Zealotry

The Anatomy of Antiliberalism. By Stephen Holmes.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993. Pp. 315, xvi. \$29.95.

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The common sense that advises against judging a book by its cover also instructs us to observe the judgments that the cover of a book makes. The grim, out-of-focus black-and-white photograph of columns of troops marching through a wide city street on the dust jacket of *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, which serves as a backdrop for the blood-red letters of the book's title, insinuates an ominous alliance. The indistinct photograph, entitled *Russian Revolutionary Parade, 1917*, suggests a connection between illiberal revolutionary politics and the critics of liberalism whom Stephen Holmes puts on trial in his new work. Holmes reinforces this connection in his opening lines by declaring that contemporary academic criticisms of liberalism reflect "muted versions" of the outlook that animated Stalin and Hitler, and he emphasizes that the nefarious political history of the "disparagement of 'liberalism'" casts a menacing shadow over criticism of liberalism in the present.¹ Yet, a few pages later, Holmes carefully disavows the comparison between fascist thought and the writings that he brings together and condemns

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1. STEPHEN HOLMES, *THE ANATOMY OF ANTILIBERALISM* xi (1993) [hereinafter *THE ANATOMY OF ANTILIBERALISM*].

under the rubric of antiliberalism. Exculpating through patronizing insult, Holmes stresses that the American professors whom he criticizes are naive and politically irrelevant.² Which is to be believed? The vulgar accusation implicit in the cover, or the cautiously qualified statement of intent set forth in the preface? Which indication is to be credited? The link between the politics of Hitler and Stalin and the academic criticism of liberalism declared by the opening paragraph, or Holmes' earnest insistence only two pages later that he does not "indulge in guilt by association"?³ Is Holmes a polemicist or a scholar?

Holmes, a professor of political science and law at the University of Chicago, seeks to defend liberalism against its most prominent academic critics. On the theory that the best defense is a good offense, Holmes comes out swinging, relentlessly pummeling members of what he calls the "anti-liberal" tradition.⁴ Holmes uses the first part of his book to assemble a rogues' gallery of antiliberals and, author by author, argues that the thought of each rogue is incoherent, utopian, and based on a crude misreading of classic liberal thinkers. In the second part of the book, Holmes identifies a number of common criticisms of liberalism and argues that each loses its force when viewed in light of the actual teachings of classic liberals.⁵

Holmes is a vigorous writer and an incisive thinker whose liberalism is ardent and unapologetic. As a polemic, his book is a smashing success. The Camille Paglia of liberalism, Holmes is never at a loss for the colorful insult, the witty put-down, or the biting sarcastic aside. However, Holmes does not know where to draw the line between bold rhetoric and shady sensationalism. A proud liberal, Holmes presumably is committed to the liberal virtue that he extols, a "willingness to listen to others."⁶ He explicitly proclaims that he wants to succeed on the basis of criticism that is "well-documented and fair;"⁷ accordingly, he deplores arguments that lack evidence.⁸ It is ironic, then, that the success of Holmes' polemical defense of liberal principles owes much to ignoring what his opponents actually say, to criticism that is poorly documented, and to ugly innuendo unsupported by evidence.

Indeed, as a scholarly work, Holmes' book is quite uneven. In criticizing liberalism's critics, Holmes exaggerates real ambiguities into outright contradictions, rips snippets from his opponents' works so as to put in their mouths crude views that they do not defend, and weaves together half-truths to caricature the opinions he purports to examine fairly. In contrast, in

2. *Id.* at xiii.

3. *Id.*

4. *Id.* at 2-3.

5. Among the classic liberals Holmes counts Spinoza, Milton, Locke, Montesquieu, Hume, Voltaire, Beccaria, Blackstone, Smith, Kant, Madison, Bentham, and John Stuart Mill. *Id.* at 3, 187-88.

6. *Id.* at 223, 227.

7. *Id.* at xvi.

8. *Id.* at 126.

reconstructing the spirit of classical liberalism, Holmes generously supplies missing historical information or textual detail to make sense of and vindicate the views that he supports. This combination of mean-spiritedness toward his enemies and charity toward his friends is a double standard that permits Holmes to vulgarize his opponents' views while interpreting liberal arguments in the most favorable light. Not only liberals, but all who love ideas and cherish fair play should be embarrassed by the unscrupulous methods Holmes employs to defend liberalism.

Nevertheless, in evaluating Holmes' achievement one must not repeat his errors. Despite his book's grave shortcomings, there can be little doubt that Holmes has made a timely contribution to the retrieval of a more nuanced, historically informed, and vital liberalism than the one currently on display in most scholarly writings. Liberalism needs a spirited and intelligent champion, and has found one in Holmes. Yet liberalism in particular needs a champion who is also principled. Holmes does not live up to his promise because his partisan passion impairs his judgment. He not only fails to appreciate fully the service rendered to liberalism by liberalism's critics, but takes extraordinary measures to conceal that service from view. Although Holmes wisely observes that viewing public disagreement as a creative force "may have been the most novel and radical principle of liberal politics,"⁹ he fails to appreciate the creative force stemming from thinkers who attempt to take a step back from liberalism and criticize it whole. Holmes' oversight reflects, among other things, a failure of self-understanding, for his admirable ambition to retrieve the lost classical meaning of liberalism is in part a reaction to, and inconceivable without, the provocations provided by liberalism's critics.

Because Holmes proudly defends liberalism against oft-repeated charges, liberals are likely to find themselves enthusiastically cheering Holmes on. Those sympathetic to the thinkers Holmes attacks are bound to be outraged by Holmes' repeated insinuation that liberalism's critics are a collection of megalomaniacs, cranks, and quacks. A more subtle response will come from a third type—a type, it should be noted, that Holmes' rigid dichotomy between liberals and "enemies of liberalism"¹⁰ systematically excludes. Unlike those who fall neatly into the categories of "us" and "them" into which Holmes aggressively divides Western political thought, friends of liberalism whose understanding has been enriched by ideas and traditions beyond liberalism's boundaries will be compelled to seek a more balanced judgment of Holmes' book, a judgment based on a recognition of both the virtues and the vices of Holmes' spirited defense of liberalism.

To form that judgment, I survey, in Part I of this Review, Holmes' account of antiliberal thinkers and his pointed reply on behalf of liberalism. In

9. *Id.* at 4.

10. *Id.* at 16; see also *id.* at 4.

particular, I call attention to the illiberal temper of Holmes' criticism of liberalism's critics. Next, I illustrate one of the disadvantages to liberalism arising from Holmes' overuse of the category "antiliberal" by exploring how Holmes vigorously mischaracterizes Leo Strauss as an enemy of liberalism. Finally, building on Holmes' own insight into the liberal spirit of toleration and the essential emphasis that liberalism places on basic political institutions, I suggest, contrary to the spirit of Holmes' argument, that one of liberalism's virtues is its ability to derive support from heterodox traditions of thought.

I. HOLMES' ANTILIBERALISM

Holmes' distinctive claim is that there is a tradition of non-marxist antiliberal thought, or simply antiliberalism. Holmes insists that the thinkers he examines are "kindred spirits" who "share a radical sensibility."¹¹ There are profound disagreements among them, Holmes acknowledges, but this merely reveals "the multiple faces of a single tradition."¹² Holmes' readers might be puzzled to note that none of these thinkers ever identified himself as a member of the antiliberal tradition that Holmes attempts to reconstruct. Nevertheless, Holmes argues, antiliberalism has a recognizable shape. Antiliberals "define their common enemy almost identically . . . as the secular humanism of the Enlightenment,"¹³ and antiliberalism is marked by inattention to the intellectual pedigree of its ideas in European fascism and the Catholic reaction to the Enlightenment,¹⁴ its advocacy of unrealistic political alternatives,¹⁵ and its deployment of internally incoherent arguments.¹⁶ Not only are antiliberals bound together by a common hostility to Enlightenment thought, but they also share an uncompromising opposition to liberal politics, "display[ing] a uniform contempt for liberal institutions and ideas."¹⁷ Liberalism properly understood, Holmes argues, stands for religious toleration, freedom of speech, personal security, individual liberty, democratic participation, and constitutional government based on a separation of powers.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Holmes charges, antiliberals tend to bypass analysis of liberal political institutions and practices in favor of *Kulturkritik*, blaming liberalism for the allegedly degraded culture and empty spiritual life that has grown up under its care.¹⁹

11. *Id.* at 10.

12. *Id.*

13. *Id.* at 13.

14. *Id.* at xiv.

15. *Id.*

16. *Id.*

17. *Id.* at 13.

18. *Id.* at 3-4.

19. *Id.* at 4-5.

Holmes begins his examination of the antiliberal mind with chapters on Joseph de Maistre and Carl Schmitt. His stated aim is to bring to light the "impressive historical pedigree" of antiliberalism.²⁰ Holmes' most important achievement in these opening chapters on the Catholic reactionary Maistre and the former Nazi Schmitt is the establishment of a disconcerting affinity between arguments deployed today by academic critics of liberalism and those developed by earlier thinkers who were extremists with unsavory affiliations. Yet Holmes goes far beyond noting conceptual likeness, claiming that Maistre directly inspired later antiliberal thought. Thus, Holmes declares, Maistre is "one of the principal shapers of the antiliberal mentality";²¹ "Maistre did as much as any early writer to determine the lineaments of the antiliberal mind";²² and Maistre "helped mold as well as inspire the antiliberal movement."²³ Yet Holmes does not provide evidence that Strauss, Unger, MacIntyre, Lasch, or the communitarian critics of liberalism read or were influenced by Maistre's writings.²⁴ Indeed, Holmes inflates the significance of his important observation about the disturbing similarities between politically disreputable and currently fashionable criticisms of liberalism by fabricating a causal connection out of thin air. Holmes' fallacious argument would suggest that two people who look alike must spring from the same parents and share the same character.

From Maistre and Schmitt, Holmes proceeds to Leo Strauss. Holmes correctly stresses that "Strauss's debt to Nietzsche was profound."²⁵ Yet, once again inferring a direct and simple cause-and-effect relationship from an interesting conceptual affinity, Holmes makes the unsubstantiated claim that specific illiberal passages from Nietzsche's work "provided the seed that eventually grew into Strauss' idea of a perennial conflict between 'philosophy' and 'the city.'"²⁶ Strauss, according to Holmes, was an atheist who believed that religion was a political necessity for the masses, a myth that should be maintained by the few to anesthetize the multitude against the brutal, hard truth that God is dead.²⁷ Holmes charges that Strauss, a radically aristocratic philosopher masquerading as a scholar, was undemocratic and illiberal in the sense that Strauss believed that the few like himself who were philosophers had nothing to learn from the unphilosophical many.²⁸ Strauss' real objection to modern philosophy was not its hedonism or relativism, but its egalitarian-

20. *Id.* at xii.

21. *Id.* at 14.

22. *Id.* at 24.

23. *Id.* at 27.

24. Holmes dismisses his subjects' claims to have been shaped by sources outside Catholicism and Fascism as "stylized, even sanitized." *Id.* at xii.

25. *Id.* at 75.

26. *Id.* at 76.

27. *Id.* at 65, 14.

28. *Id.* at 79.

ism.²⁹ Fixated on great thinkers and haughtily indifferent to empirical evidence, Holmes' Strauss defended such laughable theses as the claim that Machiavelli caused or "launched" modernity.³⁰ Although with most thinkers it is a sign of the richness and enduring significance of their thought that it sparks controversy long after its first appearance, and although Holmes admires disagreement when it comes to praising liberalism, he sees the still-heated debates among Strauss' students and other scholars over the interpretation of Strauss' thought as confirmation that Strauss himself was confused about the meaning of his writings.³¹

In contrast to Strauss, a "hard" antiliberal contemptuous of liberal protections and freedoms, Holmes characterizes Alasdair MacIntyre as a "soft" antiliberal who evades the harsh practical implications of his critique of liberalism.³² Holmes' application of the contrived categories of "hard" and "soft" antiliberals is somewhat unreliable. For example, as a "soft" antiliberal, MacIntyre "never blames liberalism for enfeebling a country militarily."³³ However, in his introduction Holmes derides MacIntyre for the apparently "hard" antiliberal view that "warfare breeds 'virtue'" and that martial glory "provides a solution to the spiritual emptiness of commercial society."³⁴ It is possible to save Holmes from this contradictory characterization of MacIntyre as both a "soft" and a "hard" antiliberal by noticing that Holmes has severely misrepresented the passage that he cites to implicate MacIntyre as a hard antiliberal. For MacIntyre does not say, as Holmes reports, that warfare breeds virtue. Rather, on the page to which Holmes cites, MacIntyre faces up to a challenge to his account of virtue by acknowledging that virtue may sustain practices that issue in evil, and offers the example that "an honorable resort to war can issue in savage cruelty."³⁵ Seen in context, MacIntyre's point—that just war can breed vice—is practically the opposite of the view that Holmes attributed to him. But saving Holmes by showing that he distorts MacIntyre's argument has a cost, since it calls into question the reliability of the textual evidence that Holmes brings forward to show that MacIntyre's work is torn by "philosophical incoherence."³⁶

The harshness of Holmes' criticism makes his reliability an issue. Although MacIntyre characterizes his argument in *After Virtue* as a history of ideas that chronicles the West's gradual loss of a moral vocabulary for virtue and the virtues,³⁷ Holmes puts forward an admittedly "unorthodox"

29. *Id.* at 81.

30. *Id.* at 84.

31. *Id.* at 86.

32. *Id.* at 88, 258.

33. *Id.* at 88.

34. *Id.* at 10 (quoting ALASDAIR MACINTYRE, *AFTER VIRTUE* 200 (2d ed. 1984)).

35. MACINTYRE, *supra* note 34, at 200.

36. THE ANATOMY OF ANTILIBERALISM, *supra* note 1, at 120.

37. MACINTYRE, *supra* note 34, at 1-5, 226-40.

interpretation.³⁸ In Holmes' view, MacIntyre's argument is a call to return to unthinking premodern moralities, a call motivated by a fear of skepticism and rational doubt.³⁹ According to Holmes, while MacIntyre sometimes presents classical antiquity as his preferred alternative to liberal modernity, his criticism of the Enlightenment really has "religious roots."⁴⁰ Finding "sign[s] of prevarication" in allegedly flawed or implausible arguments, Holmes accuses MacIntyre of lying in order to conceal that "his ultimate loyalties lie with biblical theology rather than with Aristotelian teleology."⁴¹ Furthermore, Holmes argues that for all their learning and vividness, MacIntyre's writings are hopelessly incoherent. MacIntyre's repeated appeals to contradictory approaches, principles, and authorities, Holmes explains, stem from MacIntyre's craving to believe and belong and his cowardly inability to live in the light shed by Enlightenment rationalism.⁴² In sum, Holmes accuses MacIntyre not only of having committed poor philosophy but of cowardice and lying. These are extremely serious accusations and they demand from the accuser a high degree of credibility, the very thing that Holmes squanders through the low standard of care that he exercises in reconstructing MacIntyre's thought.

The work of Christopher Lasch, the next villain in Holmes' tale, throws the "anti-technological syndrome" in antiliberal thought into sharp relief.⁴³ Although the distrust of science and technology seems to arise from many sources and spill over partisan lines,⁴⁴ Holmes once again speaks of a monolithic influence. In the case of the antiliberal critique of science and technology, Martin Heidegger is the alleged source. And again, in his resolute effort to link the criticism of liberalism to thinkers with sordid pasts, Holmes fails to provide evidence that Lasch's criticisms of the spirit of manipulation that underlies modern technology has roots in Heidegger's thought.⁴⁵ It is almost as if one were to describe Holmes as a disciple of Allan Bloom because both trace the decline of American intellectual life to the influence of popularized versions of the thought of Heidegger and Nietzsche.⁴⁶

In fact, for Lasch, the belief typical of liberal modernity, that technology can cure all ills, is but one feature of the general loss of a morality that respects limits. In exploring the character and causes of this loss, Lasch

38. *THE ANATOMY OF ANTILIBERALISM*, *supra* note 1, at 93.

39. *Id.*

40. *Id.* at 95.

41. *Id.* at 95-96.

42. *Id.* at 119-21.

43. *Id.* at 124.

44. For example, Vice-President Gore, whose liberal credentials are difficult to impugn, deplors the hubristic manipulation of the environment through modern technology. AL GORE, *EARTH IN THE BALANCE: ECOLOGY AND THE HUMAN SPIRIT* (1992).

45. *THE ANATOMY OF ANTILIBERALISM*, *supra* note 1, at 122-24, 129, 137.

46. See ALLAN BLOOM, *The Nietzscheanization of the Left or Vice Versa*, in *THE CLOSING OF THE AMERICAN MIND* 217 (1987).

summons the viewpoints of a great variety of thinkers, including Marxists, Christians, progressives, civil rights activists, populists, and indeed liberals. Holmes finds Lasch's capacity to learn from a range of traditions so objectionable that he snidely implies that Lasch has covered up his convictions, characterizing him as a "cultural conservative cloaked in a leftish fleece"⁴⁷ despite the fact that Lasch discusses the eclectic roots of his thoughts in detail.⁴⁸

Lasch defends a morality of limits against what he sees as the steady weakening of inner and outward constraints on human conduct. He acknowledges and deplores the illiberalism of the lower-middle-class ethnic whites whom he regards as the chief contemporary carriers of this morality, but he does not want their failings to obscure the merits of their morality.⁴⁹ Furthermore, he does not restrict his analysis of the characteristic morality of petty bourgeois culture to white ethnics. Indeed, Lasch devotes an entire chapter to showing that the early civil rights movement in general, and the activism of Martin Luther King, Jr., in particular, was driven by a morality of limits. Emphasizing that the southern black civil rights movement was sustained by a petty-bourgeois ethic, the Protestant religion, and the black churches, which furnished institutional as well as moral support,⁵⁰ Lasch calls attention to the extraliberal sources that enabled the early civil rights movement to summon liberalism to live up to its highest principles.

Holmes' critique fails to register this kind of contribution to the understanding of liberalism.⁵¹ Nor does Holmes acknowledge other aspects of Lasch's book that his own professed standards should have led him to admire. For example, in discussing the civil rights movement, busing, abortion, and the rise of neoconservatism and the so called New Class, Lasch's book presents the kind of historically informed analysis of the actual impact of liberal sensibilities and policies on the lives of citizens that Holmes purports to favor, but that is strikingly absent from his own book. Moreover, in contrast to Holmes' brief examination of fragments from the texts of classical liberal thinkers, Lasch looks at a variety of critics of, and participants in, American political life who have reflected on the meaning of American liberalism to Americans. One would never guess from Holmes' mocking account that Lasch's book contains provocative discussion of Croley, Dewey, Arnold,

47. THE ANATOMY OF ANTILIBERALISM, *supra* note 1, at 125.

48. CHRISTOPHER LASCH, THE TRUE AND ONLY HEAVEN: PROGRESS AND ITS CRITICS 25-35 (1991).

49. *Id.* at 17 ("I have no intention of minimizing the narrowness and provincialism of lower-middle-class culture; nor do I deny that it has produced racism, nativism, anti-intellectualism, and all the other evils so often cited by liberal critics. But liberals have lost sight of what is valuable in lower-middle-class culture in their eagerness to condemn what is objectionable."); *see also id.* at 529-32.

50. *Id.* at 387-94.

51. Holmes vulgarizes the cultural, moral, and religious forces that Lasch found to be crucial to King's early successes by reducing them to "tribal politics." THE ANATOMY OF ANTILIBERALISM, *supra* note 1, at 133.

Myrdal, Niebuhr, and others. In the end, Lasch's combination of historical, political, and textual analysis enables him to raise a question that Holmes evades: what is it about liberalism that has given rise to harsh criticism and persistent dissatisfaction?⁵² Unlike Holmes, whose focus on professors (whom he regards as politically irrelevant) blinds him to the ample testimony from the sphere of politics that liberalism is indeed troubled, Lasch seeks to account for the political failures of liberalism and to explain the felt dissatisfaction with liberalism that gave rise to the right-wing counter-movement of the 1980's. In so doing, Lasch has rendered a service to liberalism that Holmes' vituperation obscures.

After focusing on conservative critics of liberalism, Holmes attempts to show his evenhandedness by criticizing the thought of Roberto Unger, a "soft" or "postfascist" antiliberal who criticizes liberalism from the left. A "counter-cultural radical," Unger "wants to poeticize ordinary life, to democratize the rare."⁵³ In earlier writings, Unger sought to grasp and criticize liberal thought and liberal society as a whole. According to Holmes, the "self-contradictory attack on liberalism" that marks Unger's *Knowledge and Politics* is also characteristic of *After Virtue* and Michael Sandel's communitarian critique of liberalism.⁵⁴ By exposing Unger's alleged incoherence, Holmes aims to identify a recurring defect in antiliberalism; thus, Holmes raises the stakes in showing where Unger goes astray.

But the high stakes do not call forth from Holmes a suitably high degree of care. For example, according to Holmes, Unger both asserts that liberalism "blinds us to the healthy social and psychological reality before our eyes" and contends that liberalism "thoroughly mutilated Western societies, flattening them into conformity with its perverse doctrinal premises."⁵⁵ Of course liberalism cannot blind us to a healthy reality if it has thoroughly mutilated reality. Yet the quotations that Holmes brings forward, indeed the very sentence fragments that he reproduces in his book, reveal that this is not what Unger argued. According to the words that Holmes adduces to convict Unger of self-contradiction, Unger did not say that we are blinded by liberalism, but more moderately that real life "is obscured by the influence of liberal principles."⁵⁶ Moreover, Unger does not blame liberalism for thoroughly mutilating political reality, but rather speaks more carefully of liberalism's "representation" of and ability to "illuminate" many of the regrettable features of social and political life it has helped to create.⁵⁷ Indeed, in Unger's formulations, as opposed to Holmes' unreliable reformulations, there really is

52. LASCH, *supra* note 48, at 21-39, 476-532.

53. THE ANATOMY OF ANTILIBERALISM, *supra* note 1, at 143.

54. *Id.* at 146, 181-82.

55. *Id.* at 146.

56. *Id.* (quoting ROBERTO M. UNGER, KNOWLEDGE AND POLITICS 197 (1975)).

57. *Id.* (citing UNGER, *supra* note 56, at 145, 140).

no contradiction. If one thinks that human beings are single-minded utility maximizers, one is likely to support policies and engage in practices that encourage others to see themselves as utility maximizers. The widespread acceptance of dubious principles can lead to their institutionalization, which in turn lends those principles greater credibility. The phenomenon of a self-fulfilling prophecy is well known. Contrary to Holmes, it is not self-contradictory to argue, as the quotations that Holmes introduces show that Unger in fact does, that liberal principles illuminate some features of our moral and political reality and obscure other important aspects from view. One need go no further than the pages of Holmes' text to see how he has transformed his opponent's defensible arguments into self-contradictory nonsense.

According to Holmes, Unger's later writing, most notably his multivolume *Politics*, envisages a new politics, a "superliberalism" that aspires "to carry liberal individualism to Dionysian extremes."⁵⁸ Whereas Lasch attacked liberal restlessness, Unger accuses liberalism of stultifying the human capacity for overcoming limits and remaking the world. Whereas Lasch opposed the Promethean strains in liberalism, Unger seeks to purify and radicalize the Prometheanism at liberalism's core. Holmes unleashes a withering criticism of Unger's romantic celebration of context smashing, his contempt for stability and routine, and his utopian political proposals.⁵⁹ Here many of Holmes' criticisms hit their target, but the distortions around them weaken their impact.

Holmes completes his survey of antiliberalism by examining communitarianism, a currently fashionable form of criticism of liberalism. Holmes castigates communitarians and (despite his disavowal of indulging in guilt by association⁶⁰) "communitarian-sympathizers"⁶¹ for their theoretical mistakes and historical misdescriptions. Although communitarians arise on the right (MacIntyre) and on the left (the early Unger), there are some things, all bad, that communitarians share. Holmes argues that communitarian critics of liberalism commonly invoke a nebulous ideal of harmony or social solidarity which, they say, liberal political institutions corrode, but the communitarians fail to consider the costs of alternative nonliberal political institutions that would secure community.⁶² Sketching an ideal communitarian type, Holmes argues that communitarians suppress the fact that traditional tight-knit communities can be cruel, invoke crude dichotomies that obscure the range of political possibilities within liberalism, inconsistently characterize communitarianism as both an alternative and a supplement to liberalism, and argue as if "a criticism of liberal theory, by itself, entails a remaking of liberal soci-

58. *Id.* at 159.

59. *Id.* at 158-65.

60. *Id.* at xiii.

61. *Id.* at 176. Holmes uses a similar sinister locution later in his book, characterizing the distinguished sociologist Robert Nisbet as "another well-known antiliberal sympathizer." *Id.* at 190.

62. *Id.* at 177-78.

ety.”⁶³ Many of Holmes’ criticisms of the communitarians hit home, yet they form an expressly generalized critique of communitarianism.⁶⁴ Holmes’ choice of method here is ironic, since he criticizes liberalism’s critics for employing an ahistorical and abstract critique of liberalism.⁶⁵

The second and considerably shorter part of Holmes’ book undertakes to correct the misunderstandings of classical liberalism that its critics have promulgated. Holmes aims to correct historical distortions “by citing chapter and verse, by juxtaposing hostile [antiliberal] accusations with opinions found in a series of indisputably liberal texts.”⁶⁶ His strategy, however, is marred by a serious defect: it obscures the important distinction between merely asserting a doctrine and asserting a doctrine coherently and defensibly. It is, for example, no defense against the charge that liberal doctrines encourage moral skepticism for Holmes to assert that “the opening sentence of Locke’s *Treatise* suggests a commitment to a nonarbitrary distinction between good and bad.”⁶⁷ The hard question, suppressed by Holmes’ procedure, is whether Locke, on the basis of his premises about nature, human understanding, and human nature, can credibly sustain a nonarbitrary distinction between good and bad.

By redescribing liberalism “at a sufficiently high level of abstraction” so as to “usefully bring out a core of common beliefs,”⁶⁸ Holmes evades the serious challenges that liberalism’s critics raise to liberalism’s beliefs, challenges concerning the unstated assumptions, internal coherence, and unforeseen implications of those beliefs. Furthermore, Holmes uses this procedure despite his own earlier attack on antiliberals for constructing an abstract liberal doctrine not held by any particular thinker.⁶⁹ Although he complains of the “typically antiliberal reliance on double-standards,” Holmes’ argument reveals that antiliberals scarcely have a monopoly on allowing themselves liberties that they deny to their opponents.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, Holmes is informative and incisive as he discusses in quick succession a dozen “standard distortions” (many alluded to in the first part of the book) characteristic of the antiliberal attack on liberalism.⁷¹ In Part II, Holmes convincingly shows that liberalism is richer than its critics tend to give it credit for. Holmes accomplishes this by placing liberal writings in political and historical context and by sympathetically displaying the considerable resources classical liberalism can marshal to defend itself against recognizable and oft-heard criticisms. These are the best chapters in the book; one is

63. *Id.* at 178-83.

64. *Id.* at 176.

65. *Id.* at 145, 148, 153.

66. *Id.* at 187.

67. *Id.* at 235.

68. *Id.* at 188.

69. *Id.* at 148.

70. *Id.* at 107.

71. *Id.* at 189.

impressed with the range of Holmes' learning, his lively prose, and the vitality of the liberal ideas he champions. Nevertheless, his effort to correct misunderstandings of liberalism raises a very serious problem for his overall argument: the critics of liberalism whom Holmes has examined attacked liberal society as well as liberal ideas, but Holmes counters these attacks with theory alone. Of what relevance is it to the criticism that liberal society is atomistic and destroys traditional bonds to bring textual evidence that John Locke "was not unmindful of social life" and that David Hume defended liberal political institutions while rejecting the idea of an original compact made by asocial individuals?⁷² There is something decidedly abstract and ahistorical about a defense of liberalism today that relies exclusively on the stringing together of isolated passages from books written by theorists from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Holmes appears to have himself committed what he regards as the antiliberal sin of confusing the defense of liberal society with the vindication of liberal theory.⁷³

Indeed, there is hardly a sin of which Holmes accuses his antiliberal opponents that he himself does not flagrantly commit in the course of his prosecution of antiliberalism. While he castigates Maistre for his Manichean view of the universe⁷⁴ and criticizes Schmitt's abuse of the distinction between friends and enemies,⁷⁵ Holmes devises an antiliberal rubric that divides the world of modern political thought into two conflicting, antithetical forces, liberals and their enemies.⁷⁶ While he repeatedly belittles Strauss for teaching the political efficacy of myths,⁷⁷ Holmes sympathetically insists that metaphysically dubious or even downright false theses invoked by liberals must be understood as useful fictions that liberals proclaimed publicly to further liberal political goals.⁷⁸ While he reproaches Strauss and Lasch for blurring their voices with those of the authors they discuss,⁷⁹ Holmes' own rambling, contemptuous summaries constructed out of fragmentary citations from a variety of sources often make it impossible to determine where his reporting of opinions ends and where his sarcastic censures begin. While he complains of poorly supported causal claims in the writings of others,⁸⁰ Holmes neglects to provide evidence to support his major causal claim that Maistre, Schmitt, Nietzsche, and Heidegger crucially determined the thought

72. *Id.* at 191-92. *See generally id.* at 190-95.

73. *Id.* at xiv-xv, 184.

74. *Id.* at 24.

75. *Id.* at 40-41. Holmes also disparages the distinction between friends and enemies in Maistre. *See id.* at 29-30.

76. Holmes denies that he imitates the alleged Manicheanism of the thinkers he criticizes. However, his denial of Manicheanism is overwhelmed by his powerful and repeated expression of it, as in his Manichean characterization of liberalism's critics as "enemies of liberalism." *Id.* at 16.

77. *Id.* at 14, 22.

78. *Id.* at 153, 193-94, 214, 225, 234, 236.

79. *Id.* at 75, 125.

80. *Id.* at 75, 83-85, 96-97, 126, 137, 183.

of the American university professors who criticize liberalism from a non-marxist perspective. And, while he indignantly accuses antiliberals of severely distorting the liberal tradition,⁸¹ Holmes severely distorts the thought of his opponents. In other words, Holmes' defense of liberalism abounds in the very kinds of scholarly deficiencies and intellectual confusions that he claims characterize antiliberal attacks on liberalism.

Holmes' reconstruction and criticism of an antiliberal tradition betrays a pronounced affinity with the antiliberal temper he seeks to discredit, a kindredness of spirit that both directs his polemic and is partly concealed by it. As a result, everybody loses: liberals are deprived of a fair contest with worthy rivals, and liberalism's critics are denied the benefits of a serious and searching response to their diagnoses of liberalism's weaknesses.

II. THE DISADVANTAGE OF HOLMES' ANTILIBERALISM

Holmes' case against Leo Strauss is of special interest because of the light it sheds on Holmes' peculiarly misleading distinction between liberals and antiliberals. His case against Strauss is also noteworthy because, according to Holmes' own judgment, "[a]mong liberalism's critics, [Strauss] remains in a class by himself."⁸² Holmes' decision to analyze Strauss as an antiliberal is a strange one. For—as Holmes grudgingly acknowledges in the very last footnote of his chapter on Strauss—the fact is that Strauss defended liberal institutions.⁸³ Indeed, at least according to Holmes' definition, Strauss clearly was not an antiliberal. According to Holmes, "[a]ntiliberals sneer at liberalism and describe it as one vast mistake."⁸⁴ But Strauss favored reforming liberalism from within.⁸⁵ Holmes also insists that antiliberals "display a uniform contempt for liberal institutions and ideas."⁸⁶ Yet Strauss both openly and subtly stressed the clear superiority of the liberal regime to all practical rivals.⁸⁷ Certainly Strauss was attracted to and sought to make attractive a tradition of thought that lies beyond the boundaries of classical liberalism. But according to Holmes' view, liberalism focuses on institutions and practices rather than on opinions, or at least focuses upon opinions about institutions and practices. What compels Holmes to defy his own definitions and classify a

81. See, e.g., *id.* at 150, 189.

82. *Id.* at 87.

83. *Id.* at 87 n.66. Shadia Drury (in what Holmes regards as a "marvelously clear overview of Strauss' work", *id.* at 277 n.3) contradicts Holmes' characterization by stating that "Strauss makes it clear that he is not an enemy of democracy." SHADIA DRURY, *THE POLITICAL IDEAS OF LEO STRAUSS* 194 (1988).

84. *THE ANATOMY OF ANTILIBERALISM*, *supra* note 1, at xvi.

85. See, e.g., LEO STRAUSS, *What is Liberal Education*, in *LIBERALISM ANCIENT AND MODERN* 3 (1968) [hereinafter STRAUSS, *What is Liberal Education*]; LEO STRAUSS, *Liberal Education and Responsibility*, in *LIBERALISM ANCIENT AND MODERN*, *supra*, at 9, 24-25 [hereinafter STRAUSS, *Liberal Education and Responsibility*].

86. *THE ANATOMY OF ANTILIBERALISM*, *supra* note 1, at 13.

87. See LEO STRAUSS, *THE CITY AND MAN* 1-6 (1964) [hereinafter STRAUSS, *THE CITY AND MAN*].

thinker who defends liberal institutions as an antiliberal? How does Holmes manage to mischaracterize Strauss as belonging to a tradition that regards liberal institutions and ideas as one vast mistake?

The short answer is that instead of expounding Strauss' opinions, Holmes caricatures them. Sometimes, to demonstrate Strauss' perversity, Holmes perverts Strauss' meaning. For example, in a paper delivered nearly forty years ago criticizing social science, a social science in a very different condition than our own, Strauss saw a relativism that, "if it were acted upon, would lead to complete chaos."⁸⁸ Strauss' point was that social science research *had not* led to chaos because social scientists did not recognize, or at least shied away from, the implications of their assumptions. Yet Holmes has Strauss, in this passage, uttering a quite different thought, namely, that the relativism that marks social science "has led to 'complete chaos.'"⁸⁹ Lifting the words "complete chaos" from Strauss' sentence, and twisting them to suit his purposes, Holmes ascribes to Strauss the silly, apocalyptic notion that politics revolves around the ideas of scholars, when Strauss actually stressed that scholars' moral presuppositions have little impact on political life.

Sometimes Holmes attributes the opinions of the thinkers that Strauss is interpreting to Strauss himself. Indeed, by persistently blurring the distinction between Strauss' interpretations of others and his exposition of his own opinions, Holmes is able to attribute to Strauss any doctrine, however extreme, that Strauss happens to be examining. For example, where Holmes attributes to Strauss the statement that religion "breed[s] a salutary 'deference to the ruling class,'"⁹⁰ Strauss is explicitly expounding Machiavelli's opinion of "the multitude or the people."⁹¹ Where Holmes ascribes to Strauss the belief "that the cosmos is 'an absolutely terrifying abyss,' wholly indifferent to our irreversible obliteration,"⁹² Strauss is in fact explaining Martin Heidegger's opinion.⁹³ Where Holmes imputes to Strauss the idea that "[A] law of nature is intelligible only as a 'declaration of the will of God,'"⁹⁴ Strauss is plainly presenting John Locke's account of natural law.⁹⁵ And although Holmes writes, "[A]s Strauss put it: 'the life devoted . . . to the service of others is not the life according to nature,'" the fact is that Strauss here is not presenting his

88. See LEO STRAUSS, *THE REBIRTH OF CLASSICAL POLITICAL RATIONALISM* 12 (1989) (emphasis added) [hereinafter STRAUSS, *THE REBIRTH OF CLASSICAL POLITICAL RATIONALISM*].

89. *THE ANATOMY OF ANTILIBERALISM*, *supra* note 1, at 68 (emphasis added) (citing STRAUSS, *THE REBIRTH OF CLASSICAL POLITICAL RATIONALISM*, *supra* note 88, at 12).

90. *THE ANATOMY OF ANTILIBERALISM*, *supra* note 1, at 64.

91. LEO STRAUSS, *THOUGHTS ON MACHIAVELLI* 230 (1958) [hereinafter STRAUSS, *THOUGHTS ON MACHIAVELLI*].

92. *THE ANATOMY OF ANTILIBERALISM*, *supra* note 1, at 65.

93. LEO STRAUSS, *SPINOZA'S CRITIQUE OF RELIGION* 11 (E.M. Sinclair trans., 1965) [hereinafter STRAUSS, *SPINOZA'S CRITIQUE*].

94. *THE ANATOMY OF ANTILIBERALISM*, *supra* note 1, at 70.

95. LEO STRAUSS, *NATURAL RIGHT AND HISTORY* 202 (1953) [hereinafter STRAUSS, *NATURAL RIGHT AND HISTORY*].

own opinion, but quite obviously is outlining the doctrine of the poem *On the Nature of Things* by the Epicurean Lucretius.⁹⁶ As the instances of putting other people's words in Strauss' mouth pile up, one begins to wonder what so galls Holmes about Strauss that Holmes sacrifices his own credibility in a crude attempt to discredit Strauss.

Holmes may reply, and does in fact state disapprovingly, that "it is often impossible to determine if [Strauss] is paraphrasing others or speaking in his own name."⁹⁷ This may be true. Yet it is also often very easy, as in the previously noted examples. Moreover, Holmes' relentless misrepresentation suggests that he really does not care about identifying Strauss' opinions accurately. Indeed, his explicit acknowledgement that Strauss' position is often hard to determine because of his dense style would seem to place Holmes under an obligation to show extra care and restraint in summarizing Strauss' opinions.

Perhaps Holmes' most extreme distortion comes in his effort to characterize Strauss as a disciple of Nietzsche and Heidegger who never broke free of their radical illiberal teachings.⁹⁸ Holmes paints an ugly portrait of Strauss as a thinker endowed with an almost superhuman contempt for ordinary human beings, a thinker who criticized fascism not for its inhumanity but for its humanity: "Strauss's argument here is stupefyingly paradoxical. Indeed, it is so foreign to our ordinary way of thinking that it is at first difficult to absorb. From a Platonic perspective, it turns out, fascism was excessively democratic and egalitarian. Like Christianity and liberalism, it wholly neglected 'the best human type.'"⁹⁹ Although Holmes' sensational accusation makes a good story, it has the disadvantage of being untrue. Indeed, a remarkable surprise is in store for the reader who consults the passage that Holmes cites as evidence of Strauss' radically antiliberal and antidemocratic propensities. When one restores to their context the four little words—"the best human type"—that Holmes quotes to show Strauss' hostility, in the spirit of Nietzsche and Heidegger, to any doctrine that bears the smallest trace of democracy, one actually finds Strauss expounding, contrary to the spirit of Nietzsche and Heidegger, a provocative *defense* of democracy.

Strauss' defense opposes the attacks on democracy unleashed by Nietzsche and Heidegger, and stems from a novel interpretation of Plato's *Republic* at odds with the interpretations of Plato that Nietzsche and Heidegger championed:

96. THE ANATOMY OF ANTILIBERALISM, *supra* note 1, at 80 (citing STRAUSS, NATURAL RIGHT AND HISTORY, *supra* note 95, at 113). Holmes also cites to *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, but the page cited deals with skepticism about the theoretical status of modern science and the decline in the belief in progress; it lends no support to the claim he is making about Strauss' belief. STRAUSS, THE REBIRTH OF CLASSICAL POLITICAL RATIONALISM, *supra* note 88, at 241.

97. THE ANATOMY OF ANTILIBERALISM, *supra* note 1, at 75.

98. *Id.* at 75-77, xi.

99. *Id.* at 77 (citing LEO STRAUSS, WHAT IS POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY? 36 (1959) [hereinafter STRAUSS, WHAT IS POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY?]).

The severest indictment of democracy that ever was written occurs in the eighth book of Plato's *Republic*. But even there, and precisely there, Plato makes it clear—by coordinating his arrangement of regimes with Hesiod's arrangement of the ages of the world—that democracy is, in a very important respect, equal to the best regime, which corresponds to Hesiod's golden age: since the principle of democracy is freedom, all human types can develop freely in a democracy, and hence in particular *the best human type* [emphasis added].¹⁰⁰

Thus the passage that Holmes cites to accuse Strauss of the grotesque view that fascism was bad because it was too democratic in fact argues that democracy is good because it is open to the aristocratic concern with "the best human type." Whereas Holmes wants to read Strauss as an enemy of democracy who disapproves of any political regime that bears the slightest trace of it, Strauss instead offers a compelling reason why even aristocrats of various stripes might admire and be loyal to a democracy that guarantees freedom—that is, a liberal democracy. And whereas Holmes caricatures Strauss as wishing to repudiate modernity and return to antiquity, Strauss provides an interpretation of Plato that shows how an appreciation of the ancient concern with the best regime and the best life can lead one to embrace liberal democracy as the best practicable regime in the circumstances of modernity.¹⁰¹

Why then does Holmes regard Strauss as a rival rather than an ally? For far from being an antiliberal, Strauss was a friend of liberalism. While Strauss critically scrutinized the foundations of liberal thought and harshly criticized many of its extreme tendencies, and clearly preferred the political wisdom of Plato and Aristotle to that of Hobbes and Locke or Kant and Hegel, Strauss nevertheless found liberal democracy superior to all its realistic rivals, a regime worthy of vigorous defense. Precisely as a student of Plato and Aristotle, Strauss distinguished between the best regime and the best practicable regime that could reasonably be hoped for under the circumstances.¹⁰² The same per-

100. STRAUSS, WHAT IS POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY?, *supra* note 99, at 36 (emphasis added). Strauss expounds this defense of liberal democracy several times in his writings. See also STRAUSS, THE CITY AND MAN, *supra* note 87, at 130-33; STRAUSS, *Liberal Education and Responsibility*, *supra* note 85, at 24.

101. Ironically, in his conclusion Holmes criticizes Strauss for having overlooked liberalism's openness to the individual quest for superiority. THE ANATOMY OF ANTILIBERALISM, *supra* note 1, at 263. Yet this is precisely what Strauss emphasizes in the passage Holmes cites to show Strauss' allegedly extreme antiliberal and antidemocratic propensities.

102. Holmes obscures this simple distinction, suggesting that Strauss was a prisoner of the silly idea that it is possible and desirable to replace liberal democratic regimes with the Platonic city in which philosophers rule. *Id.* at 74. Holmes thus disregards the fundamental distinction that Strauss drew, following Plato and Aristotle, between the best regime and the best practicable regime under the circumstances. While Holmes saddles Strauss with the absurd ambition to seek in classical philosophy a blueprint for *establishing* the best regime here and now, Strauss actually studied the account of the best regime provided by the classics because he believed the best regime so understood could provide a standard for *evaluating* actual political regimes, including liberal democracy. See, e.g., STRAUSS, THE CITY AND MAN, *supra* note 87, at 11 ("Only we living today can possibly find a solution to the problems of today. But an adequate

spective that enabled Strauss to see liberalism as a distant second to the best regime also enabled him to see contemporary liberal democracy as vastly superior to all its practical rivals. By what definition of liberalism could this opinion be regarded as antiliberal? Must a step outside conventional liberal assumptions about the best life and the best regime place one beyond the pale? Rather, isn't liberalism—with its fundamental and flexible distinction between public and private, its openness, and its commitment to the principle that “public disagreement is a creative force”¹⁰³—the political and theoretical doctrine most likely to tolerate and benefit from those who harbor theoretical reservations about its tendencies but in practice are devoted to its welfare?

Although Holmes defends liberalism by insisting that it is a political theory primarily concerned with political practices and institutional arrangements, he reverses course when it comes to attacking liberalism's critics. Thus, he seeks to establish that Strauss is an antiliberal not on the basis of Strauss' views about political arrangements, but by pointing to Strauss' supposed fundamental beliefs about the cosmos, nature, and human nature. For Holmes, apparently, only a strictly liberal criticism of liberalism is to be sympathetically evaluated; only a purely liberal discontent with a liberal society is to be given a serious hearing; only a “perfectly liberal procedure” for criticizing liberal theorists is to be tolerated.¹⁰⁴ A self-appointed Grand Inquisitor, Holmes searches the hearts of those who do not fully subscribe to liberalism's fundamental principles and basic tenets, and he passes sentence on those he finds wanting. Defending liberalism's ideological purity, Holmes condemns Strauss because he judges the premises and motivations of Strauss' defense of liberalism to lie beyond the pale of orthodox liberalism. Yet, if toleration is an identifying mark of the spirit of liberalism, and if the spirit of liberalism focuses attention on practices and institutions and away from the “inward persuasion of the mind,”¹⁰⁵ then it cannot be the liberal spirit that excites Holmes' blinding intolerance of unorthodox defenses of liberalism.

III. LIBERALISM'S VIRTUE

The critics of liberalism whom Holmes puts on trial and condemns are united in the search for a moral standard and an account of the human condition beyond the horizons of liberalism, a framework grounded in tradition, in religion, or in philosophical speculation.¹⁰⁶ For Holmes, this effort

understanding of the principles as elaborated by the classics may be the indispensable starting point for an adequate analysis, to be achieved by us, of present-day society in its peculiar character, and for the wise application, to be achieved by us, of these principles to our tasks.”).

103. *Id.* at 4.

104. *Id.* at xv.

105. JOHN LOCKE, A LETTER CONCERNING TOLERATION 18 (Patrick Romanell ed., 1950) (1689).

106. THE ANATOMY OF ANTILIBERALISM, *supra* note 1, at 260-61.

to go beyond liberalism is the core of antiliberalism. But does the spirit of liberalism, especially the spirit of the original and enlightenment liberalism that Holmes champions, require one to restrict one's gaze to specifically "liberal" discontents, "liberal" ideals, and "liberal" virtues? Does liberalism demand that "liberal" principles and "liberal" norms exclusively define our hopes, our self-understanding, and our understanding of the world in which we dwell?

In a famous letter to John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, the embodiment of the enlightened liberal and democratic spirit, wrote with a generous sprinkling of Greek learning of the connection between virtue and good government:

For I agree with you that there is a natural aristocracy among men. The grounds of this are virtue and talents. Formerly, bodily powers gave place among the aristoi. But since the invention of gunpowder has armed the weak as well as the strong with missile death, bodily strength, like beauty, good humor, politeness and other accomplishments, has become but an auxiliary ground of distinction. There is also an artificial aristocracy, founded on wealth and birth, without either virtue or talents; for with these it would belong to the first class. The natural aristocracy I consider as the most precious gift of nature, for the instruction, the trusts, and government of society. And indeed, it would have been inconsistent in creation to have formed man for the social state, and not to have provided virtue and wisdom enough to manage the concerns of the society. May we not even say, that that form of government is the best, which provides the most effectually for a pure selection of these natural aristoi into the offices of government?¹⁰⁷

Holmes' contrived category of antiliberalism would compel us to regard Jefferson as an enemy of liberalism for having recognized a moral standard or a good beyond liberalism, in this case virtue, that is indispensable to good liberal government.¹⁰⁸ Faced with this bizarre prospect, it is reasonable to put Holmes' category aside, if only to pursue more effectively Holmes' own admirable goal of understanding original or classical liberalism sympathetically and in context, and defending contemporary liberalism vigorously in light of the specific challenges that it confronts today.

Indeed, if we study the spirit of modern liberalism as Holmes urges, we find, I think, that the vitality of liberalism depends on qualities outside the supervision of liberal political institutions and beyond the liberal political theorist's specific knowledge of the human heart and mind. To paraphrase Roberto

107. Letter from Thomas Jefferson to John Adams (Oct. 28, 1813), in *THE PORTABLE THOMAS JEFFERSON*, at 533, 534-35 (Merrill D. Peterson ed., 1975).

108. True, Holmes offers a very brief discussion of liberal virtues. *THE ANATOMY OF ANTILIBERALISM*, *supra* note 1, at 227-28. But liberal virtues are those that liberal regimes presuppose and foster. Holmes considers neither the conditions for the maintenance of liberal virtues, nor liberalism's dependence upon virtues—non- or extra-liberal virtues—that it neither actively summons nor formally supports.

Unger, we are human beings as well as liberals, and liberal principles and liberal sensibilities do not exhaust our knowledge of ourselves, of others, or of the world.¹⁰⁹ Human beings, equal in some respects, are unequal in others. While declaring that human beings are equal in rights and equal before the law, liberalism does not compel us to ignore the respects in which people differ. Indeed, some of liberalism's specific virtues—its open-endedness, its skepticism, its reluctance to take sides on questions about fundamental conceptions of the best life—prepare it, as few rival political theories are prepared, to make room for sensibilities beyond the one it sustains and to recognize the discontent it engenders.

Liberals, committed to the distinction between public and private and skeptical of comprehensive doctrines, should be the last to equate a good liberal citizen with a good human being. Citizen virtue is good, but sometimes, even in public life, it must be supplemented by moral and intellectual virtues that the more basic requirements of citizenship do not exhaust. The dependence of the public good upon private virtue is the basis of the liberal dependence on extraliberal understandings.

Liberalism is neither so endangered that it must demonize its critics nor so secure that it has nothing left to learn from those who challenge through argument its first principles and basic tenets. Indeed, as the best parts of Stephen Holmes' book suggest, liberalism has the internal resources to mount a respectable reply to its critics. Such a reply would recognize, as Holmes' reply too often does not, that the critics of liberalism are a precious resource to liberals. Probing criticism keeps liberals vigorous, self-critical, and alive to the weaknesses and disadvantages of the things they hold dear. Evaluation from alternative perspectives can spur liberals to restate the classical teachings of liberalism with a view to both the enduring challenges of self-government and the special demands that liberal democracies face today. And an informed appreciation of the claims that moral virtue and religious belief continue to exercise over many can enable liberals to maintain their justified wariness about comprehensive doctrines of the good while recognizing the advantages that accrue to liberal democracy by having in its midst those who seek to excel and to answer the call of a higher duty.

To his credit, Holmes belatedly acknowledges in his final pages that liberals can learn important lessons from liberalism's severest critics.¹¹⁰ Yet the lessons that Holmes boasts of learning are one-sided and self-congratulatory. Prematurely characterizing his book as "an exercise in demolition," and justly worried that it will be perceived as exclusively critical, Holmes contends that by examining the charges made by liberalism's critics, liberals can acquire

109. UNGER, *supra* note 56, at 198.

110. THE ANATOMY OF ANTILIBERALISM, *supra* note 1, at 261-64.

a deeper self-understanding and a greater self-confidence.¹¹¹ Yet the lessons Holmes draws merely confirm his conviction of the vitality, goodness, and wisdom of liberal politics. What kind of self-understanding leaves no room for acknowledging shortcomings? What kind of self-confidence cannot afford to admit defects? It is incumbent upon liberals and their friends to state that Holmes does liberalism no favors by flattering liberal vanities. Given the partiality and incompleteness of all things fashioned by human hands, it is doubtful that the principles of liberalism are secure when its champions are unable to discover anything of value about its weak points and unwise tendencies from such a diverse array of critics as Holmes presents.

Judith Shklar loved to teach John Locke's lesson from the *Second Treatise*, that liberal political institutions depend fundamentally upon trust.¹¹² Government cannot be strong and free unless citizens trust one another and their representatives. Yet this trust is fragile and reversible; it is easily broken and can quickly be withdrawn. What is true of liberal political institutions is no less true of the liberal defense of liberalism. Betraying the good will and trust of his readers, Stephen Holmes recklessly besmirches the liberalism he seeks to defend by marshaling in its name trumped-up charges against liberalism's critics and by deploying unscrupulous methods to convict his opponents of twisted motives and incoherent thought. Liberalism deserves better. By demonstrating that liberals are vulnerable to zealotry in the very defense of their principles, Holmes provides unwitting testimony to liberalism's dependence on virtue.

111. *Id.* at 264.

112. See, e.g., JUDITH N. SHKLAR, *ORDINARY VICES* 183-84 (1984). Shklar noted her debt on this point to John Dunn, who subsequently published observations on Locke and trust in two essays. See JOHN DUNN, *What is Living and What is Dead in the Political Theory of John Locke?*, in *INTERPRETING POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY* 9, 23-24 (1990); JOHN DUNN, *Trust and Political Agency*, in *INTERPRETING POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY*, *supra*, at 26, 35-44.