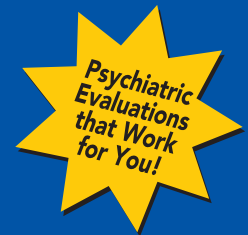




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Does our Democracy Need a Doctor?

by Pierre David

SO, THEY FINALLY PASSED THE HEALTH-CARE BILL. AFTER MORE than a year of politicking, the White House and congressional leadership finally managed to do what Harry Truman, Lyndon Johnson and Bill Clinton could not do. Reasonable people will disagree about the merits of the new law — or whether there should be a new law at all — but this much we can all agree on: There are better ways to transform a whole sector of the U.S. economy. Indeed, the way this change was foisted on the American people may ultimately eclipse the substance of that change. A new precedent has been set, and we should all be worried.

A majority of Americans, polls showed, didn't think much of the status quo, and they were open to reform, and they were willing to entertain all kinds of ideas from the left, right and center.

What they were not open to, what they vehemently opposed, was being ignored by the same people they had elected. Americans, reasonably enough, think that your elected representative ought to pay attention to the people he or she was elected to represent. Despite numerous surveys indicating widespread hostility or skepticism toward the health-care bill — the measure never had the backing of more than 40 to 45 percent of the electorate, and those who strongly opposed it vastly outnumbered those who strongly supported it — the Congress and the White House pressed on.

True, there's something strangely admirable about all this: Many Democrats, especially in the House, who voted for this bill did so because they care about extending coverage to those who

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The Hebrew Republic

by Eric Nelson

FOR AS LONG AS ANYONE CAN REMEMBER, THE CONVENTIONAL wisdom has stated that the rise of the modern state parallels the rise of secularism and the concurrent decline of religion. Indeed, our whole conception of “modernity” is inextricably bound up with science and reason — a science and reason that are thought to have transcended God. Eric Nelson’s new book, “The Hebrew Republic,” refutes that wisdom, asserting that, in fact, it was faith — and, more to the point, the embrace of Judaism by non-Jewish scholars and political theorists — in seventeenth-century Europe that helped lay the groundwork for the democratic revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. His account is original and fascinating.

We are accustomed to thinking of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a period of liberation from the old structures. It was during this time that Copernicus, with the help of Galileo, overthrew the yoke of Aristotle and the Church and placed the sun — not the earth — at the center of the universe. And it was during this time that Isaac Newton unearthed the laws of motion and created the calculus, opening up a scientific revolution that has made possible every great discovery since. The atom bomb, penicillin, the laptop and the iPad — to say nothing of the whole way we conceive of ourselves and our place, physically and metaphysically, in the world — are all inconceivable without the breakthroughs of the early modern era.

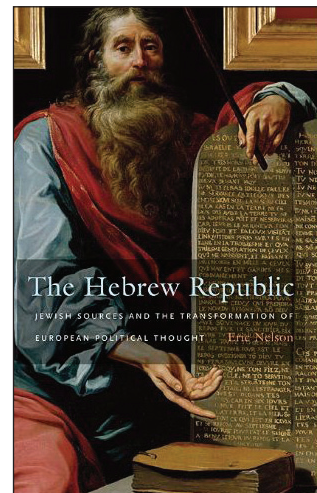
It was not an accident that, at the same time that Newton and his ilk were reimagining the very nature of human existence, a political science — a science of how men ought to organize themselves into ethically and logically conceived states — emerged. After all, why couldn’t the same science that had done so much to open up hitherto unknown vistas into the natural world be applied to the world of politics? Why couldn’t we use the same laws and methodologies to build a better polity? A perfect, scientifically based government was now within our reach.

As Nelson shows, this depiction of the evolution of the modern state is incomplete. The great political theorists of the seventeenth century didn’t imagine themselves building a scientifically determined state that was divorced from any religious underpinnings. Hardly. It would be more correct to say that they were inspired by Newton and the French philosopher Rene Descartes and many others, and that their inspiration blended with a profound interest in the Old Testament — an interest that had been stirred by the Protestant Reformation 100 years before.

In other words, scientific development made possible a rethinking of the ways we conceive of political organization. But the nature and substance of that revolution were not inherently scientific. They were, on the contrary, wed to a biblical and Talmudic tradition that, in Nelson’s view, pointed the way toward the future.

What’s most curious about “The Hebrew Republic” is not the many links Nelson establishes between the Bible and the modern state. Those connections are well argued, and Nelson does a good job at forcing us to reassess how we think of this period, but they don’t amount to a paradigm shift. There will be plenty of political philosophers and historians who reject his thesis, not simply because they don’t like it but because they don’t have to embrace it: There are plenty of

counterarguments that can be mustered in defense of the old way of thinking. What’s most curious about “The Hebrew Republic” is that it was written at all. For decades, academics and government policymakers have sought to portray development, progress, the future as decidedly, irrefutably, anti-religious. To the extent that faith intervened in the work of the state, that work was thought to have been compromised. Now a scholar from Harvard is telling us that the ideas that define our worldview, our “modernity,” are religiously derived. And not only that. People are reading his book, talking about it, thinking about it. Why? Perhaps, after all this time, after all the promises of earthly utopia and the destruction those promises have led to, we are beginning to rethink the wisdom of simply jettisoning that which came before. Perhaps we are finally seeking to build on, not override, the wisdom of our fathers. —PD



NEW PI TECHNOLOGY STOPS FRAUD

Fraud in California’s workers’ compensation system might be costing the state a fortune, but it’s sparking innovation too.

More and more private investigators are following claimants who might be falsifying their injuries. And now a new hand-held device – the PI Camstick 2 – is receiving rave reviews on PI blogs. It’s lauded for helping investigators capture on video applicants bending and lifting, carrying heavy packages, shopping or exercising when they’re supposedly out on a workers’ compensation claim.

As you might expect from its name, the Camstick resembles a pack of gum or a computer memory stick. It fits easily into the palm of your hand for smooth trailing, can be clipped onto the exterior of a jacket pocket, or be set down discretely on a table next to a book or computer

Looks like playing hooky just got a little harder.

— Sabrina Leigh Schaeffer

Does our Democracy Need a Doctor?

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cannot take care of themselves more than they care about getting reelected. Some of those same Democrats are now retiring to avoid defeat — Bart Stupak, the Michigan representative who helped corral the final “yes” votes, is a case in point — and others will almost certainly go down this November.

But that’s not the way government is meant to function. It’s not how the Founders intended things. And, for the most part, it’s not how government has behaved since then. The social-health initiatives with which Obamacare is generally compared — Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid — all passed the House and Senate with large bipartisan majorities. Americans, then and now, may disagree about the merits of these measures, but there’s no denying that majority sentiment had coalesced behind them.

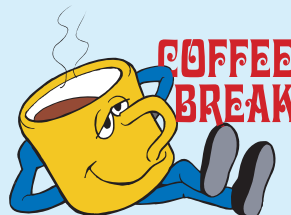
That is not what happened here. What happened here is the president and Democratic congressional leaders failed to move popular opinion and, instead of bowing to that opinion, ignored it. They used every parliamentary trick available. They sidestepped the opposition (not just conservatives but moderates). And instead of leading — instead of telling Americans why they were right and their rivals were wrong — they maneuvered. They alienated rock-ribbed Republicans, who are appalled by this latest government expansion, and they alienated progressives who correctly pointed out that the new law does not represent systemic change so much as an enlargement of a preexisting program. For a while there, Tom Coburn, the conservative Oklahoma senator, and Howard Dean, the good doctor from Vermont and former chairman of the Democratic National Committee, were united in their opposition. It should come as no surprise that so many voters, on the right and left, are so angry.

Both Democrats and Republicans contend the new law will transform the way medicine takes place in the United States. Maybe. The government is ramping up its regulation of nearly one-fifth of the economy, and millions of Americans who previously did not have health insurance (because they couldn’t

afford it or, in many cases, because they chose not to buy it) will now have it. But all this is premised on the assumption that the new law stands, or that Republicans won’t block funding for it. We’ve now entered an age in which politicians no longer pay attention to their constituents so anything is possible. Instead, politicians now pass laws, and then they hit the campaign trail to promote what they’ve just adopted. One wonders what the Democrats who spearheaded this bill were thinking. Yes, they’ve won this Pyrrhic victory. But what happens when the GOP takes back the Congress or the White House? Will they be shocked when conservatives, no longer tethered to the cares or interests of their constituents, start passing bills that large majorities of the electorate oppose? It was popular opinion that prevented Newt Gingrich’s Republicans from defunding Medicare in the 1990s and George W. Bush from semi-privatizing Social Security in 2005. In the future, when that opinion no longer matters nearly as much as it once did, what will Democrats do? Will they beat their collective chest and declare their outrage? Or will they finally acknowledge that we’ve crossed the Rubicon, that something strange and a little bit dangerous has happened? This is not how democracy is supposed to work. We will all suffer for it. —PD

People with lifetime Posttraumatic Stress Disorder AND major depressive episode MDE:

- A. never commit suicide
- B. are significantly more likely to make a suicide attempt
- C. are not really depressed
- D. rarely have personality disorders



ANSWER: B
People with PTSD and MDE are at high risk for taking their own lives. They really are depressed and often have personality disorders.

PRO-FOOTBALL CALLING IT QUITS IN CA?

With March Madness behind us most sports fans are looking ahead to baseball season. But for football fans fall can’t come soon enough.

Unfortunately, this year many Californians are in for a football letdown. The Arena Football League (AFL), with 15 teams and two conferences, is growing in popularity and already negotiating expansions into four new cities for the 2011 season.

But it looks like California might not be able to enjoy a game anytime soon. In fact, according to a recent report in the New York Times, the AFL recently lost the Central Valley Coyotes, based out of Fresno, because of California’s costly worker’s compensation system. League commissioner Jerry Kurz acknowledged that California’s system allows retired players to collect large sums for claims that don’t qualify in

other states. “I bring it up in the first conversation I have with anyone interested in bringing a team to California,” Kurz told reporters.

The AFL maintains a league-wide insurance policy, which distributes costs evenly among the 15 teams, regardless of location. But the buck stops with the Golden State. The state’s liability is so high that the ownership group in California is required to cover additional costs through a supplemental policy.

Since the AFL’s profit margin is significantly slimmer than that of its NFL big brother, even a few additional insurance claims can lead to serious financial trouble. And that’s a play the AFL just can’t afford to make.

— Sabrina Leigh Schaeffer

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