two Americas: “an America loyal to the older Western heritage, to the legacy of biblical theism and the natural-law tradition, and another America committed to the ideological secularism and ethic of human autonomy that issues from the radical Enlightenment.” These two versions are locked in a culture war, and there is a need for “a fundamental rethinking of American Catholicism’s cultural orientation.” There is also a need for wisdom and courage as American Catholics evangelize the world around them, an exhortation echoed in Stephen Krason’s Afterword.

The papers in this volume explain that the current situation is quite precarious. Moreover, the papers make it clear that there aren’t any quick fixes. The problems we face won’t be solved by a favorable Supreme Court ruling or two. The problems are far deeper and are largely cultural.

*The Crisis of Religious Liberty* is a valuable contribution to the ongoing debates about religious liberty. As is true with the other volumes in Rowman & Littlefield’s Catholic Social Thought series, *The Crisis of Religious Liberty* should be a part of any serious academic library.

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**Wilfred M. McClay and Ted V. McAllister (editors), *Why Place Matters: Geography, Identity, and Civic Life in Modern America.***

Edmund Burke famously argued that modernity prizes disembodied virtues. In our day the Enlightenment values of equality, freedom, and rationality are overwhelmingly expressed using technological criteria like mobility, access, and efficiency. The authors in *Why Place Matters*, the brilliant fifth title published by *The New Atlantis: A Journal of Science and Technology*, argue that this bodes ill for virtues grounded in the skills, experiences, dependencies, and limits of the concrete human body. Its essays represent the profound efforts of poets, philosophers, historians, and geographers to grapple with the effects of globalization, technocracy, and an ascendant cosmopolitanism on human culture and well-being. In their place the authors offer diverse and robust accounts of a “localism” that emphasizes the ways we are shaped by the architecture of our homes and cities, by the use and maintenance of our tools, and by the narratives imbibed with our mother’s milk.

The volume is particularly adept at challenging three contemporary theses. First, popular liberal narratives about technology tend to conflate
material and moral progress, believing that the wider distribution of ever more efficient technologies is synonymous with improvements in the human condition. This mistake encourages technophiles to respond to their critics by invoking the technological imperative that one shouldn’t “stand in the way of progress.” Second, the volume challenges the view that functional descriptions of artifacts are ideologically neutral. Rather, the authors argue, we should neither reduce nor conflate technological function with meaning or value: the use of new technologies may very well lead to a corruption of moral, cultural, or aesthetic meaning by encouraging us to evaluate human institutions and practices using inappropriate criteria. Finally, the volume challenges the still-popular technological determinism of Marx by showing how artifacts are contingent cultural “assemblages” reflecting specific values and choices which only loosely preclude alternatives. That contingency entails that current assemblages are open to critiques of the manner in which they embody assumptions about progress, agency, space, time, dignity, identity, justice, privacy, and the eschatological destiny of the human person.

“GPS and the End of the Road,” the opening essay by Ari Schulman, encourages us to think about the value of journeying over and above the efficiency with which we arrive at our destinations, and so stands as a fitting metaphor for the book as a whole. Articulating the corruption thesis, Schulman argues that our delegation of navigation to GPS devices has made questing a thing of the past. The hope of an Odysseus or Huck Finn in the mysterious future, pregnant with possibility, diminishes when all events and destinations are foreseen. Against the determinist thesis, Schulman argues that there is nothing necessary about the micromanagement of drivers by machines, and against the technocratic imperative, he argues that GPS-direction is regressive rather than progressive: rather than designing navigation systems that aid users in learning where they’re going by increasing independence and skill, we’re designing technology that makes drivers obsolete.

Other essays in the volume argue similarly, though always with great insight and style. Several essays assess the appeal and dangers of cosmopolitanism, that modern multicultural virtue that respects different worldviews while being beholden to none. While writers since the dawn of capitalism have written about the degree to which globalization undermines local identities, Russell Jacoby here draws on René Girard to argue that its homogenizing tendencies make people more antagonistic rather than more peaceful or moral, as others such as Jürgen Habermas and Martha Nussbaum have argued. Mark Mitchell challenges cosmopolitanism’s claims that respect for individual dignity and human rights requires secularism, metaphysical nominalism, and perfectibility, arguing that such respect is better grounded in a historically and metaphysically ‘encumbered’ view of the self.
A fascinating set of essays in the center of the volume deals with the impact of urban design on human flourishing. Witold Rybczynski inductively argues that modern urbanites prefer denser, walkable, historically sensitive, and beautiful multi-use urban areas, and thus that responsible urban planning need not entail economic sacrifice. In contrast, “New Urbanism” architect Phillip Bess and his long-time philosophical defender, Roger Scruton, argue that modern cities are ugly and centrifugal precisely because urbanites have lost a shared metaphysical view of the world. This is reflected in the pointless, self-referential, and anonymous glass and steel monstrosities that are not built to human scale and that fail to communicate the transcendental longings of the human heart.

William Schambra and Brian Brown capitalize on Aristotle’s thesis in *Politics* 7.4 that political justice is dependent on appropriately sized communities; we cannot justly distribute offices, rewards, or punishments anonymously. Both advocate a return to localist politics, what the Catholic Social Tradition would call subsidiarity. Pete Peterson likewise cautions against government by detached technocratic experts, but also cautions against the tendency of localism to degenerate into a corrupt coterie in modern communities in which few people identify with or actually participate in government.

Wilfred McClay ends the volume in a beautifully meditative essay, which ruminates on these lines of Robert Frost:

The land was ours before we were the land’s.
She was our land more than a hundred years
Before we were her people.

What makes a space a place, McClay suggests, is a “quality of spirit” and memory (249), a “deep and rich investment of time and labor and history and particularity and shared suffering that make for a sense of belonging, of peoplehood” (241). As Frost says, this investment is both given and gifted, the organic outcome of a community’s devotion and struggles with itself, its land, its narrative and its circumstances. With the best of the conservative tradition, McClay argues that the truly human polis rises from the messy and particular cares and activities of local communities struggling to articulate and achieve the common good; flourishing cannot be forced upon us by anonymous, disinterested technocrats ruling from a distance. That is something all good Christians own: grace does not destroy nature but perfects it. This volume is a ringing testimony to that truth.

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