

THE CHURCH IN EUROPEAN HISTORY

Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism

Larry Siedentop

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Reviewed by Kevin MacDonald

Sir Larry Siedentop is an Oxford University historian specializing in intellectual history. A basic premise of *Inventing the Individual* is that ideas matter, in particular, that beginning in the ancient world, the ideologies associated with Christianity had a profound effect on the West. As a culturally oriented evolutionary psychologist, I found it a fascinating account of the origins of Western individualism. To be sure, as discussed below, I stress ethnic factors as also playing a major role, but there is certainly room within evolutionary psychology for an idealist influences on history. Such a view rests on a powerful intellectual foundation.¹

That foundation is based on psychological research indicating two very different types of psychological processing: implicit and explicit processing. These modes of processing may be contrasted on a number of dimensions.² Implicit processing is automatic, effortless, relatively fast, and involves parallel processing of large amounts of information; it characterizes the modules described by evolutionary psychologists. Explicit processing is the opposite: conscious, controllable, effortful, relatively slow, and involves serial processing of relatively small amounts of information. Explicit processing is involved in the operation of the

¹ For an intellectually similar treatment of a historical phenomenon, see Kevin MacDonald, "The Antislavery Movement as an Expression of the Eighteenth-Century Affective Revolution in England: An Ethnic Hypothesis," in *Reasoning Beasts: Evolution, Cognition and Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Michael Austin and Kathryn Stasio (New York: AMS Press, 2016).

² See, e.g.: David C. Geary, *The Origin of Mind: Evolution of Brain, Cognition, and General Intelligence* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2005); Kevin MacDonald, "Effortful Control, Explicit Processing, and the Regulation of Human Evolved Predispositions," *Psychological Review* 115, no. 4 (2008): 1012–31; Keith Stanovich, *Who Is Rational? Studies of Individual Differences in Reasoning* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1999); Keith Stanovich, *The Robot's Rebellion: Finding Meaning in the Age of Darwin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

mechanisms of general intelligence³ as well as controlling emotional states and action tendencies.⁴

Religious beliefs are able to motivate behavior because of the ability of explicit representations of religious thoughts (e.g., eternal punishment in Hell as a result of sin) to control subcortical modular mechanisms (e.g., sexual desire). In other words, the affective states and action tendencies mediated by evolved implicit processing are controllable by higher brain centers located in the cortex.⁵ For example, people are able to effortfully suppress sexual thoughts, even though there is a strong evolutionary basis for why males in particular become aroused from sexually arousing imagery.⁶ Thus, under experimental conditions, male subjects who were instructed to distance themselves from sexually arousing imagery were able to suppress their sexual arousal.⁷ Imagine that, instead of a psychologist giving instructions, people were subjected to religious ideas that such thoughts were sinful and would be punished by God.

Ideologies such as the Christian ideology of the sinfulness of sexual thoughts are a particularly important form of explicit processing that may result in top-down control over behavior. That is, explicit construals of the world may motivate behavior.⁸ For example, explicit construals of costs and benefits of religiously relevant actions mediated in turn by human language and the ability of humans to create explicit representations of events may influence individuals to act by avoiding religiously proscribed food.

Ideologies, including religious ideologies, characterize a significant group of people and motivate behavior in a top-down manner. Ideolo-

³ Dan Chiappe and Kevin B. MacDonald, "The Evolution of Domain-General Mechanisms in Intelligence and Learning," *Journal of General Psychology* 132, no. 1 (2005): 5–40.

⁴ MacDonald, "Effortful Control, Explicit Processing, and the Regulation of Human Evolved Predispositions."

⁵ Kevin MacDonald, "Evolution and a Dual Processing Theory of Culture: Applications to Moral Idealism and Political Philosophy," *Politics and Culture*, no. 1 (April 2010); see also Kevin B. MacDonald, "Evolution, Psychology, and a Conflict Theory of Culture," *Evolutionary Psychology* 7, no. 2 (2009): 208–33.

⁶ See review in MacDonald, "Effortful Control, Explicit Processing, and the Regulation of Human Evolved Predispositions."

⁷ M. Beauregard, J. Lévesque, and P. Bourgouin, "Neural Correlates of Conscious Self-Regulation of Emotion," *Journal of Neuroscience* 21, no. 18 (2001): 1–6.

⁸ A. G. Sanfey, R. Hastie, M. K. Colvin, and J. Grafman, "Phineas Gauged: Decision-Making and the Human Prefrontal Cortex," *Neuropsychologia* 41, no. 9 (2003): 1218–29.

gies are coherent sets of beliefs.⁹ These explicitly held beliefs are able to exert a control function over behavior and evolved predispositions. There is no reason to suppose that ideologies are necessarily adaptive.¹⁰ Ideologies often characterize the vast majority of people who belong to voluntary subgroups within a society (e.g., a particular religious sect). Ideologies are often intimately intertwined with various social controls—rationalizing the controls but also benefitting from the power of social controls to enforce ideological conformity in schools or in religious institutions.

In the following I will describe Larry Siedentop's work on the role of Christian religious ideology in shaping the West.

THE PRE-CHRISTIAN ANCIENT WORLD

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of *Inventing the Individual* is Christian views on the family contrasted with the dominant aristocratic culture of the ancient world. Siedentop labels the dominant pre-Christian family structure of ancient Greece and Rome as "Indo-European" (9)—that is, the highly successful warrior culture that spread out over Europe and many areas of Asia beginning around 4500 BC.¹¹

It was a world in which "the family was everything," the paterfamilias acting not only as magistrate with power over all family members, but also as its high priest (9). In effect, the basic unit was "small family churches" (14). Worship of male ancestors was fundamental, so that in a very real sense each family had its own religion. Although based on blood ties among males, an adopted son could become part of a family by accepting the ancestors of his adoptive family as his own, while "a son who abandoned the family worship ceased altogether to be a relation, becoming unknown" (12).

This was a patrilineal system, with women marrying into another family and adopting the ancestors of the husband. Importantly, the boundary of the family was also a moral boundary: "Initially at least, those outside the family circle were not deemed to share any attributes with those within. No common humanity was acknowledged, an atti-

⁹ John Gerring, "Ideology: A Definitional Analysis," *Political Research Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (December 1997): 957–94; Kathleen Knight, "Transformations of the Concept of Ideology in the Twentieth Century," *American Political Science Review* 100, no. 4 (2006): 619–25.

¹⁰ MacDonald, "Evolution, Psychology, and a Conflict Theory of Culture."

¹¹ David W. Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

tude confirmed by the practice of enslavement" (13). Affection and charity were compartmentalized—restricted to within the boundaries of the family (15). This resulted in a familial sense of duty, affection, and religious belief—*pietas*.

Also in opposition to individualism, property belonged not to the individual but to the family—the eldest son possessing the land in trust for ancestors and descendants (16). Society was thus an association of families, not individuals. The fundamental chasm was between public and familial, not public and private.

While the family so construed formed the base of the social system, there were also wider groupings, the *gens* (extended family), clans (Greek: *phratries*; Latin: *curiae*), and tribes in ever wider circles of genetic distance (14). These were groups of families tied together by religious ideology: "These wider associations acquired their own priesthood, assembly and rites" (20). Cities developed when several of these larger groupings (tribes) came together, establishing their own worship. This did not erase the religious connotations of lower level groups going down ultimately to the family. "The city that emerged was thus a confederation of cults, an association superimposed on other associations, all modelled on the family and its worship" (21). It was not an association of individuals.

The religiously based rules prescribed action in all spheres of life, leaving no room for individual conscience. Laws were seen as following from religion rather than voluntary inventions. This produced intense patriotism, as religion, family, and territory were entwined. "Everything that was important to him—his ancestors, his worship, his moral life, his pride and property—depended upon the survival and well-being of the city" (25). Indeed, attachment to civic gods was the main reason for the difficulty of combining cities in Greece (27). Exile was therefore an extreme punishment because such a person had no legitimate identity.

This concept of citizenship came under fire from those excluded from this family-based system in the fifth and sixth centuries BC in both Greece and Rome (e.g., patricians versus plebeians in Rome), but change was slow. In Rome, the *plebs* was originally composed of immigrants who had no sense of ancestors or relatedness to citizen families. These people pushed to expand the limits of citizenship, with the result that from the sixth century to the origins of the Empire the main conflicts were social class conflicts between the patricians and the plebeians, with the plebeians gradually obtaining more rights and political power. The success of these efforts meant that many plebeians achieved upward

mobility and the status of aristocrats themselves.¹² As in other historical eras, the barriers between Indo-European aristocratic elites and the people they ruled over eventually became porous, and upward mobility was possible, if slow to come.¹³ Thus the decline of the aristocratic model of citizenship and the ethnic basis of the aristocracy had declined well before Christianity.

There were also gradual changes toward ending primogeniture and reducing the power of the *paterfamilias* over extended branches of the family. Clients (originally little better than slaves) became free to own property—analogueous to the process in Europe in the Middle Ages whereby slaves became serfs and serfs eventually became owners of their own land.

These changes did not lead to a concept of individual rights, and those who were not full citizens were not seen as fully rational (33). However, the expansion of citizenship led to important changes in public culture as the skills required for careful argument and effective persuasion in the assembly became valuable.

Logic and rhetoric thus came into existence as public disciplines. The ability to make a coherent case, defend it and present it persuasively to an audience of equals became a *sine qua non* for leadership in the city. The development of these critical and imaginative capacities contributed by the fifth century BC, to the emergence of abstract, philosophical thinking out of religion and poetry. Athens became both its centre and a symbol. . . . Reason or rationality—*logos*, the power of words—became closely identified with the public sphere, with speaking in the assembly and with the political role of a superior class. Reason became the attribute of the class that commanded. (34–35)

The ideas of “natural hierarchy” and “natural inequality” so central to this system were fundamentally aristocratic attitudes. There is a “superior class entitled by ‘nature’ to rule, constrain and, if need be, to coerce” (35). Thus Plato’s “just society” as depicted in *The Republic* was to be ruled by philosophers because they were truly rational. There is an assumption that there are natural differences in rationality. This is the

¹² Gary Forsythe, *A Critical History of Early Rome: From Prehistory to the First Punic War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

¹³ Kevin MacDonald, “The Indo-European Contribution to European Peoples and Culture,” in Richard Spencer, ed., *untitled*, in press.

idea, expressed in the modern language of behavior genetics, that there are genetically based individual differences, but with the added concept that people are naturally born into their social roles they are best suited for—natural inequality. For example, Aristotle's followers believed that some people were slaves "by nature" (52), resulting in a natural hierarchy. Reflecting common themes in Indo-European culture,¹⁴ the ancients prized fame and glory (positive esteem from others) resulting from genuine virtue and accomplishments, not indolence and love of luxury. Labor was not highly valued because laborers were often slaves and the rightful booty of conquest.

CHRISTIANITY IN OPPOSITION TO THE ANCIENT GRECO-ROMAN SOCIAL ORDER

Siedentop argues that St. Paul fundamentally turned this world of natural hierarchy upside down.¹⁵ Western philosophers had developed the idea of *logos* in which the universe had a rational structure that even god could not change or contravene. Most critically, the individual replaced the ancient Indo-European family as the seat of moral legitimacy. Christian ideology was intended for all humans, resulting in a sense of moral egalitarianism rather than natural hierarchy. Individual souls had moral agency as having equal value in the eyes of god. Nevertheless, Christian universalism was built on intellectual developments within the Greco-Roman world.

[Christian universalism was] profoundly indebted to developments in Greek thought. For the discourse of citizenship in the polis had initiated a distancing of persons from mere family and tribal identities, while later Hellenistic philosophy had introduced an even more wide-ranging, speculative "universalist" idiom. That intellectual breadth had, in turn, been reinforced by the subjection of so much of the Mediterranean world to a single power, Rome. (61).

In other words, the tendencies toward individualism were already developing prior to Christianity *within* Western societies beyond those already apparent in ancient aristocratic culture, likely ultimately stemming, as noted above, from the large influx into Greco-Roman societies

¹⁴ Ricardo Duchesne, *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

¹⁵ Siedentop notes that even though many were interested and very positive toward Judaism in the first century BC, "circumcision and diet preserved the tribal identity of Judaism" (53).

of peoples with no family connections to the original aristocratic elements and thus with an interest in developing theories in which family and tribal elements were relatively unimportant. This is not surprising given the tendency for group boundaries to become permeable over time in Indo-European cultures.¹⁶

Thus the social roles ascribed by natural inequality no longer defined the person; people were now defined subjectively, by their conscience, and they were free to make voluntary associations and assume voluntary roles in a no longer rigidly hierarchical, hereditary system. Individual identity rather than identity as members of a group became paramount. Again, there was a strong assumption of moral equality—“an almost ferocious moral universalism” (64).

Another subversive aspect of Christianity was that Christian heroes were martyrs, whereas Indo-European heroes were aristocratic warriors who came from leading families and were often associated with the founding cities. The ancient hero was “typically male, strong, wily and successful” (79). Christian martyrs were the opposite, but they “gained a hold over the popular imagination” (80).

Siedentop emphasizes the cruelty and lack of restraints on the powerful in the ancient world. Christians by the end of the third century became “spokesmen of the lower classes,” developing a “rhetoric founded on ‘love of the poor’”—“a kind of Christian populism” (82). Bishops reached out to “the servile, destitute, and foreign-born, to groups without standing in the hierarchy of citizens. They were offered a home. It was an irresistible offer” (83).

“The equality of souls in search of salvation was at the heart of Christian beliefs” (88). Such beliefs began to have a wide social influence in Roman society in the second century.¹⁷ As an indication of how much Christian attitudes had pervaded Roman society, when Emperor Julian tried to restore paganism in the 350s, “the new priesthood he sought to create was to have as its test ‘the love of God and of fellow men,’ while ‘charity’ was to be its vocation” (89)—hardly an aristocratic world view. Rather, it was a worldview that “at least approximated to Christian

¹⁶ MacDonald, “The Indo-European Contribution to European Peoples and Culture.”

¹⁷ It is interesting that St. Augustine was motivated to say that the demise of the older deities was not responsible for Alaric’s sack of Rome in 410, “arguing that all human institutions were subject to decay and disaster” (89). Would a robust aristocratic society have been better able to defend itself?

moral intuitions" (99).¹⁸

In the fourth century, monasticism began to be organized rather than restricted to lone ascetics; a group identity based on voluntary association was developed. Unlike the aristocratic world view that viewed work with disdain, work had dignity. St. Basil (c. 330–c. 378) based his monastic community on equality and reciprocity, lack of personal property, and public service (schools, hospitals). The disrepute that monasticism fell into since the sixteenth century,

makes it hard to recapture the prestige it had enjoyed in its earlier centuries. Yet at the end of antiquity the image it offered of a social order founded on equality, limiting the role of force and honouring work, while devoting itself to prayer and acts of charity, gave it a powerful hold over minds. Monasticism preserved the image of a regular society when the *pax romana* was being undermined, first by the overthrow of the Western empire (476) after the Germanic invasions, and then by Muslim conquests in the East. (98–99)

St. Augustine's philosophy was deeply influenced by St. Paul. Because of his emphasis on the will (which mediated between appetite and reason), some have attributed the rise of individualism to St. Augustine (101). Whereas a bedrock proposition of ancient Greek philosophers was that reason was motivating (113), Augustine argued that reason does not act in isolation, and is influenced by emotions (e.g., "delight" [102])—a proposal that any modern psychologist would have to agree with. But this opens up a need for prayer and grace in order to behave morally. Humans need "divine support" to act uprightly (105). Yet we can never achieve moral perfection.

Given this, there is the impression that individualism has the consequence of seeking but never attaining moral perfection. "For Augustine (and Kant), none of us can ever claim to be a success in moral terms. We all fail, and it is this failure—tragic, but also humbling—that contains a powerful egalitarian message" (107). Relative moral perfection becomes the ultimate measure of a person's worth—something that should be kept in mind in the present age when subscribing to multicultural ideology and displacement-level immigration has been successfully propagated as a moral imperative throughout the West.

¹⁸ In the early church, bishops and presbyters were chosen by "general consent," but this was not the case when the Church became wedded to the Empire (93).

Despite a lesser role for reason in Christian thinking, the spirit of disputation and logical argument so apparent among the Greeks persisted: “Christian convictions were submitted to the disciplines of logic and metaphysical speculation, to the requirements of disciplined argument” (113). “The habit of disputation—of disciplined argument—was preserved by the church in later antiquity. . . . The habit of disputation became engrained in the life of the church” (113).

Christianity, by lessening the power of the paterfamilias, also meant less power of fathers over children and a higher status for women (114). Wealthy women were crucial to the success of the early church, and adultery was seen as a sin for both men and women. There were also humanitarian changes in the law of slavery due to Christian influence, although Siedentop does not claim that Christianity ended slavery. There were both Christian apologists (e.g., Augustine) and opponents of slavery (e.g., Gregory of Nyssa¹⁹) (118–19).

Nevertheless, there was a profound egalitarian thrust of Christianity in the late Roman Empire. The rhetoric of urban bishops was highly inclusive: “It was a rhetoric that encouraged women, the urban poor and even slaves to feel part of the city in a way that had not previously been possible” (121).

CHRISTIANITY IN POST-ROMAN EUROPE

Siedentop notes that, whereas invading Germanic tribes at first had separate laws for themselves and Roman citizens, there was a gradual fusion of societies and a general trend toward laws covering a particular territory as opposed to tribal laws for a particular people (138). Again, Indo-European cultures in Europe did not maintain barriers between peoples over long stretches of time.

There were also trends toward egalitarianism influenced by the church. The Visigothic Code in particular was deeply influenced by the clergy and was more egalitarian than other Germanic codes. Egalitarian-

¹⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, who is regarded as a Church Father, was an ardent anti-Semite. His opposition to slavery was likely partly motivated by his concern about Jews owning Christian slaves at a time when Jewish enslavement of Christians was a major issue. See Kevin MacDonald, *Separation and Its Discontents: Toward an Evolutionary Theory of Anti-Semitism* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2004; originally published: Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), chap. 3, *passim*. Gregory wrote that “[Jews are] murderers of the Lord, assassins of the prophets, rebels against God, God haters, . . . advocates of the devil, race of vipers, slanderers, calumniators, dark-minded people, leaven of the Pharisees, sanhedrin of demons, sinners, wicked men, stoners, and haters of righteousness.”

ism was especially strong in the monasteries—"a moral authority, founded on and constrained by the consent of the community" (139). Great effort was expended to influence Germanic customs, but these were not always successful: "The church and the survivors of the Roman educated class met with reverses more often than successes in dealing with the newcomers" (143).

Christian moral intuitions of moral universalism "began to impinge on the Carolingian conception of the proper relations between rulers and the ruled. But . . . it did so only within limits" (152). For example, Charlemagne was famously ruthless against unbelievers—Saxons and Muslims. Christian influences on the laws on slavery reined in the power of masters—slaves could only suffer capital punishment with a public trial; married slaves could not be separated (154). There was thus a blend of Germanic customs and Christian influences.

Siedentop sees feudalism as "the prelude to modernity rather than its antithesis" (165), and emphasizes that there was no return to ancient slavery under feudalism. He follows nineteenth-century French historian François Guizot in suggesting that the conditions of rural laborers predated the Germanic and Roman conquests, "a social form primitively established among the peoples of Western Europe, whether Italic, Celtic or Germanic" (166). This suggests a primitive Indo-European hierarchical social structure in which farmers were dominated by a military elite. These rural laborers were tied to the land as members of a clan or tribe and could not be bought and sold like real slaves. They owed rents in kind and military service to their chief. In Roman parlance, they were *coloni*, not *servi*.

There was thus no basic change from Gallic chieftains to Romans to Germans—suggesting that this is an Indo-European universal, at least within Europe; perhaps Roman slavery was an adjustment to an urban situation where rents in kind were not practicable (167). Nevertheless, slavery persisted, and slaves and *coloni* coexisted in the ninth and tenth centuries, the distinction gradually blurring (173). Slavery became less common, appearing mainly on smaller estates by the end of the tenth century (168).²⁰

Despite the general tendency for *coloni* rather than *servi*, Siedentop credits the church with preventing full-blown slavery from emerging under feudalism. "The church adjusted to an emergent feudalism, but

²⁰ Siedentop suggests that the *coloni* system was more efficient than slavery because farming by families tied to the land owing rents to a chief would have encouraged individual initiative.

could not endorse it" (170). He takes a middle ground between attributing the end of slavery to the church and supposing it had no role at all (170). Church attitudes opposed some practices of slavery. For example, the church defined marriage as applying to everyone, including slaves, and deplored separating families, as could occur with slavery. Slaves were welcomed into the fold as Christians.²¹

The collapse of the Carolingian Empire created a lack of central authority and increased localism, presenting new challenges for the church. It responded by attempting to be a unifying, centralizing force, but this was hampered because during this period (the tenth century), the church had become compromised by secular elites, the pope a "mere plaything of local aristocratic families" (179). In West Francia (i.e., proto-France), bishops were being appointed by secular elites; these bishops and abbots gave away church properties to the followers of these military elites; moreover, church offices were often purchased (simony), and clergy were often married or had concubines, thus violating the practice of celibacy.

THE PAPAL REVOLUTION

What followed was incredibly important for the subsequent influence of Christianity on the West. One can imagine that if secular military elites continued to be able to control the clergy within their domains, there would have been a resurgence of some variant of basic Indo-European social organization.

However, seeing its power and influence on the wane, the church responded by reforming itself and aggressively claiming sovereignty over secular authorities. An important harbinger of things to come was the action of Hincmar (the archbishop of Reims) and Pope Nicholas I (a key contributor to idea of papal sovereignty [185]) in the mid-ninth century to prevent the attempt by Lothar, king of Lorraine, to divorce his childless wife and marry a woman with whom he had children—a practice that would have been entirely legitimate in pre-Christian German society (183).

Siedentop claims that three things were necessary for the papal revolution: a reformist elite, a credible claim of papal supremacy, and a well-developed body of canon law (225). Beginning in 1073, the papacy devolved to "monkish popes"—popes with a monastic background. There were major increases in papal councils, papal legates, and papal corre-

²¹ Some of the peasant uprisings in the tenth century had egalitarian overtones (176).

spondence (226). The church developed a relatively sophisticated legal system that was far more predictable and organized than secular legal systems of the period. The huge amount of litigation strengthened its claims to supreme legislative and judicial authority.

The monasteries (most importantly, Cluny) took the lead in reform (early ninth century) at a time when the episcopacy was corrupt (185). Cluny restored the prestige of monasticism "as a truly Christian life" (186). Again, as in previous eras, monasticism was most successful in propagating an emotionally compelling image of the church, stimulating "a remarkable outburst of lay piety" (189). "From the beginnings of monasticism in Western Europe monks had enjoyed a special standing among the poor. They aroused respect and even affection because they were understood as representing the Christian life more fully than any other group, including – perhaps especially – the secular clergy" (282). (The secular clergy were often corrupt, living with concubines, etc.)

Reform was thus energized by the prestige and power of monasteries, with their ascetic lifestyle, combined with "the creation of a clerical elite determined on systematic reform" (196). Pope Leo IX was central. Ultimately, the credibility of the church depended on an image of ascetic, celibate clergy; this was substantially achieved during the High Middle Ages.

As indicated by the example of King Lothar, a central aspect of the Papal Revolution was the Church's stand on marriage: consent between spouses, no divorce, elaborate rules against consanguineous marriages (which had the effect of lessening the power of extended kinship relations, as aristocratic families were forced to look far afield for mates), and lessening the power of the paterfamilias (192). Essentially, the church was choosing marriage as a key battleground in its effort to increase its power over secular rulers, presumably because issues of marriage and sexuality lent themselves to moral and religious strictures. By interpreting marriage as a sacrament and thus within its proper purview, the church had an important weapon in extending its power over secular rulers.

There is a long history of popes disciplining or at least attempting to discipline secular rulers. In 390, St. Ambrose, Archbishop of Milan, excommunicated Emperor Theodosius because of a massacre in Greece, with Theodosius submitting by doing penance at a cathedral in Milan. By the Middle Ages, the church had already had a long history of involvement in civic affairs, stemming from its role in governing during the political vacuum that often occurred during the barbarian invasions.

But the real revolution began in the mid-eleventh century with stronger papal control over bishops. Popes came to be elected by the College of Cardinals (1059), rather than simply auctioned off to powerful Roman families (202).

Pope Gregory VII (known as Hildebrand before he became pope) completed the revolution with his conflict with the German emperor, Henry IV. His *Dictatus Papae* laid out the claims for papal authority over investiture of bishops and even claimed the ability to depose emperors (203); this was often termed *plenitudo potestatis*—plenitude of power. Gregory established the church as a legal system based on its “moral primacy” (204). He not only had power to excommunicate, but at times encouraged subjects not to obey rulers. There is an assumption of moral equality in Gregory’s pronouncements, as in his quoting Augustine: “He who tries to rule over men—who are by nature equal to him—acts with intolerable pride” (206).

The papal revolution resulted in a clear distinction between secular and sacred. Whereas prior to the revolution, kings routinely felt able to appoint clerics and interfere in the affairs of the church, the success of the revolution meant that this was no longer possible. They withdrew “their right to govern the sacred” (252). The church never completely won the battle over investiture, but in general the secular authorities acknowledged the autonomy of the church.

The perceived need for a legal framework for the church renewed interest in Roman law, but canon law combined Roman law in such a way that it conformed to Christian moral intuitions. Gratian (mid-twelfth century), a principal codifier of canon law, assumed that equality and reciprocity were antecedent to just laws (216); this contrasted with Roman law which prioritized a person’s status (e.g., paterfamilias or not), therefore assuming natural inequality. Thus Pope Innocent III, writing in the early thirteenth century, stated: “You shall judge the great as well as the little and there shall be no difference of persons” (218).

Canon law thus had a strongly egalitarian tenor, while status—so important to ancient law—was irrelevant. Canon law got rid of trial by ordeals and privileging testimony from family and friends (which led to more powerful families getting favorable judgments). In general, “this moral vantage point [emphasizing ‘equality and reciprocity’] fostered a mildness in canon law which distinguished it not only from customary and feudal law but also from Roman civil law” (231). Canon law emphasized public punishments aimed at inducing guilt—“to reach and stir the conscience of the offender” (231).

Other aspects of canon law directly challenged traditional Germanic practices and thus challenged key privileges of the secular elites. Critically, there was an emphasis on consent in marriage (which was opposed to family strategizing that was often aimed at strengthening kinship ties), prohibiting divorce, and delegitimizing concubinage by preventing bastards from inheriting. For example, in 1202 the pope ruled against a count who sought a dispensation so that his bastard son could inherit (233).

In general, consent and voluntary association became key. Unlike the ancient world, corporations with judicial and legislative authority over their members did not have to be approved by authorities but were based simply on associations among members (234). Major decisions had to be made with consent of members rather than representatives. (In Roman law, representatives were appointed by authorities.) Corporations thus were voluntary associations that existed by consent of their members.

Natural law theorist Gratian and others argued that all humans have an "intrinsic moral nature" (244). "If Paul and Augustine conjured up a vision of moral freedom, it was the twelfth-century canonists who converted that vision into a formal legal system founded on natural rights" (245). By the fourteenth century, several rights were defended—property, consent to government, self-defense, marriage, and procedural rights. Further, canonists began arguing that the right to property entailed a duty to share in time of need (248). This led to the idea that the poor had rights, the intellectual ancestor to the modern welfare state (249).

The interests of both kings and the church opposed feudalism. Medieval cities, which were often relatively egalitarian, often had bloody conflicts with feudal lords, with church policies favoring the former. Thus people fleeing serfdom went to cities and were protected by the church (270). Many towns gradually did achieve freedom from feudal overlords (272)—encouraged by kings wishing to rein in the power of the lords. These towns did not have complete sovereignty—kings had rights over them, such as the adjudication of capital offences—but they were often free of feudal obligations or royal taxes (274). These urban areas resulted in a middle class that "contained the seeds of a modern constitutional order" (276), although there certainly were oligarchic tendencies.

By the second half of the eleventh century, Europe "was acquiring a moral identity" (193) centered around Christian moral intuitions. The Crusades were defining events, resulting in or implying a shared identi-

ty as Christians despite coming from different areas of Europe. Thus the murder of Archbishop Thomas Becket in 1170 had repercussions throughout Europe, his place of death becoming a pilgrimage site.

Christian Europe had become a moral community based on Christian religious beliefs rather than one based on, say, an ethnic or national identity. Correspondingly there was an upsurge of the culture of courtly love, a code of courtesy and honor, and less brutality among knights. Identity as a Christian became central to personal identity. Prior to this, Siedentop claims that knights were little more than hired thugs, but during this high point of church influence, they developed a code of honor, pledging, for example, to protect the weak.

Essentially the church created a moral community, with the papacy at the top defining morality based on Christian moral intuitions. Siedentop sees this as a prelude to the modern proposition nation: “The example of the church as a unified legal system founded on the equal subjection of individuals thus gave birth to the idea of the modern state” (207).

THE REALISM VERSUS NOMINALISM DEBATE

Siedentop devotes considerable attention to the debate between realism and nominalism associated with two monastic orders, the Dominicans and the Franciscans, respectively. These orders had a high profile in the cities and were very popular among the poor (286). They developed rapidly in the thirteenth century and had a prominent role in establishing the intellectual milieu at universities.

The Dominican tradition, associated mainly with St. Thomas Aquinas, was Aristotelian and biased toward rationalism, reflecting the world view of the ancients based on natural inequality. On the other hand, Siedentop sees the Franciscan tradition beginning in the fourteenth century with Duns Scotus and especially William of Ockham (295) as carrying on the tradition of Christian egalitarianism, inspired by St. Augustine. The Franciscan tradition was based on nominalism (the philosophy that classes are constructions of the human mind and that only particular objects exist) and empiricism (that facts must be discovered by experience rather than deduced rationally from first principles). A morally upright will was under voluntary control and thus accessible for everyone; hence it was an egalitarian concept. Will was more important than reasoning ability, which the ancients like Plato saw as unevenly distributed among people and hence anti-egalitarian (300). Morally correct action required more than reason; it required grace.

The Franciscan tradition, following Augustine, saw moral inequality

as the common assumption of ancient philosophy. Contrary to the Aristotelians, Ockham distrusted the ability of humans to explain the world as resulting from "rational necessity" (306). God could have made things differently—"God's freedom." Ockham's nominalism thus "celebrated contingency rather than rational necessity" (307)—inductive reasoning that had to be verified by the senses rather than deductive reasoning from first principles. If God was free to make the world any way He wanted to, then reality is contingent and must be discovered by observation and experiment, thus paving the way for modern science.

Because humans are free agents, individuals can make mistakes in good conscience—a doctrine with profound implications. Within the church, canonists developed idea that legitimacy depended on consent, not coercion or power. But this included the power of the church (323), thus providing a clear path to Protestantism. The principle of non-coercion also led to theories of representative government and corporations as consisting of consenting individuals with equal status. (325) Bishops did not have *dominium* in the ancient sense (radical subordination), but rather the entire community of believers had dominion over the church.

POST-MEDIEVAL EUROPE

Siedentop argues that Christian moral intuitions centered around individual conscience and moral egalitarianism ultimately caused the downfall of the church as a hegemonic religious institution. Liberal thought "emerged as the moral intuitions generated by Christianity were turned against an authoritarian model of the church" (332). By the fourteenth century, there were calls for representative government within the church. These were resisted by the papacy, resulting in widespread "agitation" against the church (Pietists in Germany, Lollards in England) (330). These were essentially democratic movements that disliked the top-down structure of the church, promoted individual devotion, and wanted to be able to read the scriptures in native languages—obviously harbingers of Protestantism.

Thus basic liberal ideas predated Protestantism but were contradicted by the church's own structure (332). In the end, basic liberal ideas—equality of status, individual liberty, freedom of conscience, and representative government—opposed the interests of the church as well as most Protestant sects. This resulted in the religious wars of the Reformation, after which there came to be general skepticism about the wisdom of enforcing religious orthodoxy. These trends toward liberalism

continued, so that by the eighteenth century clericalism was seen as the enemy of liberal secularism (e.g., Montaigne). The attitude developed that “uncoerced belief provides the true foundation for ‘legitimate’ authority” (335).

Siedentop concludes by arguing that acknowledging and understanding Europe’s Christian roots provide a potent moral weapon in combating the influence of Islam, which tends to oppose the secular individualism that is a legacy of Christianity. However, intellectuals, and particularly the left, are loath to acknowledge the Christian roots of European secularism, essentially because in their minds, Christianity was “almost inseparable from an aristocratic society” (361). He argues that liberalism must be defined by its moral core, not by consumerist utilitarianism or by individualism that retreats from social responsibility into a world of family, friends, and, I would add, pleasure-seeking.

“If we in the West do not understand the moral depth of our own tradition, how can we hope to shape the conversation of mankind?” (363).

DISCUSSION

Siedentop presents a strong case for the role of Christianity in the development of Western culture beginning in the ancient world. However, there is evidence, some of it mentioned by Siedentop, that the roots of European egalitarianism and individualism are far deeper. As an evolutionary psychologist, my first forays into European history were concerned with the institution of monogamous marriage. With the exception of European societies, there is a powerful tendency in human societies beyond the hunter-gatherer level of economic development (i.e., agricultural and pastoral societies) for powerful males to have large numbers of wives and concubines, as in classical China where the emperor typically had hundreds or thousands of concubines.²² And yet in European societies, there were strong trends toward monogamy in the ancient Roman and Greek world, long before Christianity. This results in a substantial degree of sexual egalitarianism among males, and from an evolutionary perspective sexual egalitarianism is a critical component of any truly egalitarian system. Indeed, the moral egalitarianism emphasized by Siedentop would mean little if wealthy males were able to con-

²² Kevin MacDonald, “Mechanisms of Sexual Egalitarianism in Western Europe,” *Ethology and Sociobiology* 11, no. 3 (May 1990): 195–238; Kevin MacDonald, “The Establishment and Maintenance of Socially Imposed Monogamy in Western Europe,” *Politics and the Life Sciences* 14, no. 1 (February 1995): 3–23.

trol large numbers of females and have legitimate children with them, whereas (as in classical China) poorer males would be unable to mate.

Thus early Roman marriage practices departed from Indo-European patterns by eschewing bridewealth (payment for wives by husbands) that is common in tribal societies around the world and closely linked to male sexual competition (wealthy males are able to purchase more females). Monogamy was maintained by controls on sexual behavior (bigamy and polygyny were illegal) and laws relating to legitimacy (bastards suffered social opprobrium; marriage with slaves was typically prohibited); inheritance laws penalized children who were not the products of monogamous marriage (bastards could not inherit; the children of slaves retained the status of the mother). In an intensively polygynous society such as classical China, none of these occurred, so that, for example, the offspring of a concubine was entirely legitimate and could inherit property, depending on the wishes of the father.

There were also ideological components of Roman monogamy. High priests, who were from the patrician class during the Republic, had monogamous marriages (termed *conferreatio*) that could only be dissolved by death. Vestal Virgins, who were highly venerated as part of the state religion, were daughters of patricians; they were paragons of chastity who retained their virginity through their reproductive years. Finally, Stoicism, which became a powerful movement among artists, intellectuals, and politicians during the Empire, extolled the ideal of the monogamous family based on conjugal affection and sexual restraint for both sexes. This last comment fits with Siedentop's point, noted above, that Christian universalism was built on intellectual developments within the Greco-Roman world.

There were also egalitarian political trends, as the plebeians gradually achieved considerable power and opportunities for upward mobility. These changes parallel the general finding among Indo-European cultures that barriers between groups tended to gradually be erased, and upward mobility was possible, especially for males who had military talent.²³ And, as noted above, even from the earliest times, Roman marriage departed in important ways from the earlier Indo-European pattern. Indeed, it should be recalled that Indo-European culture should not be thought of aristocratic *simpliciter*. As Ricardo Duchesne emphasizes,²⁴ Indo-European culture is best thought of as aristocratic-egalitarian—as

²³ MacDonald, "The Indo-European Contribution to European Peoples and Culture."

²⁴ Duchesne, *The Uniqueness of Western Civilization*.

hierarchical but with egalitarianism among aristocratic peers. Ending the practice of bridewealth and delegitimizing offspring outside of monogamous marriage, as occurred in Republican Rome, may then be considered an extreme version of aristocratic egalitarianism.

Thus, although there is no question that Rome had strong features of an aristocratic society, as maintained by Siedentop, these features were by no means absolute, and elements of egalitarianism can be traced from the very earliest history of Rome. Christianity, then, appearing during the Empire after the huge influx of peoples to Rome, should be seen as exacerbating tendencies that were already apparent in Roman culture. From an evolutionary perspective, these new peoples were unrelated to the founding aristocratic stock and had an interest in deposing the aristocratic system of natural inequality. Christianity championed their interests in doing so in an emotionally compelling manner.

There are other reasons to emphasize the underlying ethnic component of Western individualism and egalitarianism. These trends toward moral universalism and egalitarianism were not apparent among Christian groups in the Middle East, which generally remained tribal, thereby reflecting the culture of the area.²⁵ Moreover, there were important differences between Western and Eastern Christendom, and within Western Christendom. Regarding the latter, from the early Middle Ages, the Western family pattern delineated by the famous “Hajnal line”²⁶ was confined to northwest Europe, particularly the area encompassed by the Frankish Empire,²⁷ but found also in Britain and Scandinavia. This family structure, which many scholars point to as critical for understanding the rise of the West, fails to include significant parts of Western Chris-

²⁵ Kevin MacDonald, “Socialization for Ingroup Identity among Assyrians in the United States.” Paper presented at a symposium on socialization for ingroup identity at the meetings of the International Society for Human Ethology, Ghent, Belgium, July 29, 2004.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308059453_Socialization_for_Ingroup_Identity_among_Assyrians_in_the_United_States_Paper_presented_at_a_symposium_on_socialization_for_ingroup_identity_at_the_meetings_of_the_International_Society_for_Human_Etho

²⁶ The Hajnal line encompasses territory west of a line from Trieste to St. Petersburg (but excluding Ireland and southern Spain) characterized by late marriage, the conjugal nuclear family separated from other relatives, and large numbers of single adults.

John Hajnal, “European Marriage Pattern in Historical Perspective,” in *Population in History*, ed. D. V. Glass and D. E. C. Eversley (London: Arnold, 1965).

²⁷ Michael Mitterauer, *Why Europe? The Medieval Origins of Its Special Path*, trans. Gerald Chapple (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010; orig. German edition, 2003), 62.

tendom.

Outside of Western Christendom, a basic problem with supposing that Christianity per se was the cause of European family practices is that lineage, compound families (where brothers would set up households together), and patrilineal patterns retained importance in Christian southeastern Europe (i.e., the Balkans, where both Eastern and Western Christianity prevailed) and in Russia. Given that many scholars attribute Western uniqueness to the unique family patterns of northwest Europe,²⁸ Christianity therefore cannot be the sole source of Western uniqueness, which, after all, Siedentop is attempting to explain.

Parenthetically, it is worth noting that other religions besides Christianity, such as Islam, are universalist and desire all humans to be members. However, Christianity, uniquely, worked energetically to achieve temporal power and to use that power to overcome tribal, clan-type structures—a major effort during the early Middle Ages. Islam is universal but it never tried to undermine the tribal, kinship nature of society, and Islamic societies throughout the Middle East remain tribal into contemporary times—a major difficulty for the nation-building programs, such as the Iraq War, that have been such a prominent feature of Western foreign policy in recent times.

Nevertheless, the power of the church does seem important to include in any complete analysis. The church is without doubt unique among the religious institutions of the world in successfully shaping the wider culture.²⁹ In my own writing on the maintenance of monogamy in post-Roman Europe, the role of the church in being able to control marriage was paramount.³⁰

The question from an evolutionary perspective is: How does one explain an institution that seems so obviously contrary to evolutionary impulses toward kinship and maximizing reproduction? It was noted above that in the ninth century, the church was sliding toward being a pawn of the aristocracy, with church offices bought and sold and churchmen having wives and concubines. The Papal Reform movement changed all that, but it is important to think about why the reform was

²⁸ See review in Mary S. Hartman, *The Household and the Making of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

²⁹ In his *Why Europe?* Mitterauer also emphasizes the special role of the imperial church in establishing Western uniqueness.

³⁰ MacDonald, "The Establishment and Maintenance of Socially Imposed Monogamy in Western Europe."

so popular and so powerful. A central feature seems likely to have been the image of the church as reproductively altruistic:

The image of reproductive altruism was central to the public image of the Church. During the tenth and eleventh centuries, thousands of monasteries were founded. ... Whatever the motivations involved, these societies of celibate and ascetic males “set the tone of the spirituality of the whole church, in education and in art [and] in the transmission of culture....”³¹ Five of the six popes during the critical reform period of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries had a monastic background and that their influence

reflected a powerful movement to gain command of all life in society and organize it according to monastic views. The legacy of the church Fathers and the early Middle Ages was reinterpreted and reformulated in terms of monastic hegemony: theology, cosmology, anthropology, morality, and the law were recast to provide a foundation and justification for the preeminence of monks with the rigid social categories that subdivided and disciplined society.³² ...

Genuine reproductive altruism is suggested by the fact that during the thirteenth century, the mendicant friars, who were typically recruited from the aristocracy, the landed gentry, and other affluent families, often had parents who disapproved of their decision—an indicator that they often did not view the celibacy of their children in positive terms: “It was a nightmare for well-to-do families that their children might become friars” (Southern, 1970: 292).³³ These families began to avoid sending their children to universities because of well-founded fears that they would be recruited into religious life...³⁴ ... Monastic standards of appropriate behavior then set the standard for other Christians, includ-

³¹ Gerd Tellenbach, *The Church in Western Europe from the Tenth to the Early Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 101.

³² Giovanni Miccoli, “Monks,” in Jacques LeGoff (ed.), *Medieval Callings*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 53.

³³ R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1970).

³⁴ C. H. Lawrence, *The Friars: Impact of the Early Mendicant Movement on Western Culture* (London: Longman, 1994).

ing especially the clergy and the members of lay confraternities of the mendicant orders (many of whom were wealthy and high-born), who adopted the ascetic lifestyle of mendicant orders—except they were married³⁵³⁶

During the height of its power from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, the church had successfully carved out a moral sphere as distinct from power politics, violence, warfare, etc. — of spiritual versus temporal power (133). Nevertheless, as Siedentop notes, in fact there is ample evidence that the church often used its spiritual power to achieve temporal power (e.g., by excommunicating kings who attempted to divorce their wives or have their illegitimate offspring inherit). "The church persisted in its moral enterprise, which was, after all, its *raison d'être*" (146). Excommunication only works if the faithful would reliably side with the church over their aristocratic rulers.

This concern with temporal power was apparent from the origins of institutionalized Christianity in the fourth century, when the church exerted its power, not to regulate the sex life of aristocrats, but to combat Jewish power.³⁷ Indeed, Christian theology as it developed during this period was at its core anti-Jewish, and the rise of the church to official status coincided with a decline in Jewish power and enactment of laws against Jews owning Christian slaves. Moreover, although far from consistent, the church continued to rein in Jewish power as, for example, with the Lateran Council of 1215 that mandated the wearing of distinctive clothing for Jews. And although the mendicant friars were models of reproductive altruism, they also spearheaded the anti-Jewish attitudes of the medieval period. This was also an important part of why Christianity was so compelling during this period.

This ideological shift (in which "Jews were portrayed in a more malevolent light") coincided with an active campaign against Judaism. "The friars encroached upon the actual practice of Jewish life, forcibly entering synagogues and subjecting Jews to offensive harangues, participation in debates whose outcomes were predetermined, and the violence of the mob. The intent of the friars was

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 112ff.

³⁶ MacDonald, "Mechanisms of Sexual Egalitarianism in Europe," 9–10.

³⁷ Kevin MacDonald, *Separation and Its Discontents: Toward an Evolutionary Theory of Anti-Semitism* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2004; originally published: Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), chap. 3.

obvious: to eliminate the Jewish presence in Christendom—both by inducing the Jews to convert and by destroying all remnants of Judaism even after no Jews remained”³⁸ A contemporary Jewish writer stated that the Franciscans and Dominicans [which, as noted above, were the intellectual leaders of the church and dominated universities] “are everywhere oppressing Israel. . . . [T]hey are more wretched than all mankind”³⁹⁴⁰

Devout kings, such as Louis IX of France, were instrumental in preventing Jewish exploitation of non-Jews. A contemporary biographer of Louis, William of Chartres, quotes him as determined “that [the Jews] may not oppress Christians through usury and that they not be permitted, under the shelter of my protection, to engage in such pursuits and to infect my land with their poison.”⁴¹

During the medieval period, the church therefore chose the moral realm to carve out as an area of influence. The effectiveness of this policy depended ultimately on belief—kings and aristocrats feared excommunication because they would lose the support of their people. One might ask, what else could a non-military organization do to attain power over the aristocracy, kings, etc.? From a strategic perspective, the church chose areas that were *prima facie* moral and therefore came under religious purview.

The church therefore chose the arena of ideology to combat a thoroughly militarized aristocracy. Its influence would derive from the strength of Christian beliefs in controlling lower brain centers, cementing popular allegiance to the church even in opposition to secular military power. In doing so, it tapped into deep wellsprings of Western individualism, whose ethnic basis is particularly robust in northwest Europe.⁴²

³⁸ Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Emergence of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 97.

³⁹ In *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁰ MacDonald, *Separation and Its Discontents*, 116.

⁴¹ Quoted in Robert Chazan, *Medieval Jewry in Northern France: A Political and Social History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 103.

⁴² Kevin MacDonald, “What Makes Western Culture Unique?,” *The Occidental Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 9–38.