

# Pico Della Mirandola's *Oration On the Dignity Of Man*

Once read that Abdala the Muslim, when asked what was most worthy of awe and wonder in this theater of the world, answered, "There is nothing to see more wonderful than man!" Hermes Trismegistus concurs with this opinion: "A great miracle, Asclepius, is man!" However, when I began to consider the reasons for these opinions, all these reasons given for the magnificence of human nature failed to convince me: that man is the intermediary between creatures, close to the gods, master of all the lower creatures, with the sharpness of his senses, the acuity of his reason, and the brilliance of his intelligence the interpreter of nature, the nodal point between eternity and time, and, as the Persians say, the intimate bond or marriage song of the world, just a little lower than angels as David tells us. . . . After thinking a long time, I have figured out why man is the most fortunate of all creatures and as a result worthy of the highest admiration and earning his rank on the chain of being, a rank to be envied not merely by the beasts but by the stars themselves and by the spiritual natures beyond and above this world. This miracle goes past faith and wonder. And why not? It is for this reason that man is rightfully named a magnificent miracle and a wondrous creation.

What is this rank on the chain of being? God the Father, Supreme Architect of the Universe, built this home, this universe we see all around us, a venerable temple of his godhead, through the sublime laws of his ineffable Mind. The expanse above the heavens he decorated with Intelligences, the spheres of heaven with living, eternal souls. The scabrous and dirty lower worlds he filled with animals of every kind. However, when the work was finished, the Great Artisan desired that there be some creature to think on the plan of his great work, and love its infinite beauty, and stand in awe at its immenseness. Therefore, when all was finished, as Moses and Timaeus tell us, He began to think about the creation of man. But he had no Archetype from which to fashion some new child, nor could he find in his vast treasure-houses anything which He might give to His new son, nor did the universe contain a single place from which the whole of creation might be surveyed. All was perfected, all created things stood in their proper place, the highest things in the highest places, the midmost things in the midmost places, and the lowest things in the lowest places. But God the Father would not fail, exhausted and defeated, in this last creative act. God's wisdom would not falter for lack of counsel in this need. God's love would not permit that he whose duty it was to praise God's creation should be forced to condemn himself as a creation of God.

Finally, the Great Artisan mandated that this creature who would receive nothing proper to himself shall have joint possession of whatever nature had been given to any other creature. He made man a creature of indeterminate and indifferent nature, and, placing him in the middle of the world, said to him "Adam, we give you no fixed place to live, no form that is peculiar to you, nor any function that is yours alone. According to your desires and judgment, you will have and possess whatever place to live, whatever form, and whatever functions you yourself choose. All other things have a limited and fixed nature pre-

scribed and bounded by our laws. You, with no limit or no bound, may choose for yourself the limits and bounds of your nature. We have placed you at the world's center so that you may survey everything else in the world. We have made you neither of heavenly nor of earthly stuff, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with free choice and dignity, you may fashion yourself into whatever form you choose. To you is granted the power of degrading yourself into the lower forms of life, the beasts, and to you is granted the power, contained in your intellect and judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms, the divine."

Imagine! The great generosity of God! The happiness of man! To man it is allowed to be whatever he chooses to be! . . . Man, when he entered life, the Father gave the seeds of every kind and every way of life possible. Whatever seeds each man sows and cultivates will grow and bear him their proper fruit. If these seeds are vegetative, he will be like a plant. If these seeds are sensitive, he will be like an animal. If these seeds are intellectual, he will be an angel and the son of God. And if, satisfied with no created thing, he removes himself to the center of his own unity, his spiritual soul, united with God, alone in the darkness of God, who is above all things, he will surpass every created thing. Who could not help but admire this great shape-shifter? In fact, how could one admire anything else? . . .

[T]he mystic philosophy of the Hebrews transforms Enoch into an angel called "Mal'akh Adonay Shebath," and sometimes transforms other humans into different sorts of divine beings. The Pythagoreans abuse villainous men by having them reborn as animals and, according to Empedocles, even plants. Muhammad also said frequently, "Those who deviate from the heavenly law become animals." Bark does not make a plant a plant, rather its senseless and mindless nature does. The hide does not make an animal an animal, but rather its irrational but sensitive soul. . . . It is not a lack of body that makes an angel an angel, rather it is his spiritual intelligence. If you see a person totally subject to his appetites, crawling miserably on the ground, you are looking at a plant, not a man. If you see a person blinded by empty illusions and images, and made soft by their tender beguilements, completely subject to his senses, you are looking at an animal, not a man. If you see a philosopher judging things through his reason, admire and follow him: He is from heaven, not the earth. If you see a person living in deep contemplation, unaware of his body and dwelling in the inmost reaches of his mind, he is neither from heaven nor earth, he is divinity clothed in flesh. . . .

Let us disdain earthly things, and despise the things of heaven, and, judging little of what is in the world, fly to the court beyond the world and next to God. In that court, as the mystic writings tell us, are the Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones in the foremost places; let us not even yield place to them, the highest of the angelic orders, and not be content with a lower place, imitate them in all their glory and dignity. If we choose to, we will not be second to them in anything.

—Translated by Richard Hooker

# Dixie Dystopia

by Clyde Wilson

*How easy it is to make people believe a lie, and how hard it is to undo that work again.*

—Mark Twain

**The Last Confederate Flag**

by Lloyd E. Lenard  
Baltimore: AmEriCa House;  
432 pp., \$29.95

**Bedford: A World Vision**

by Ellen Williams  
Belleville, Ontario: Guardian Books;  
299 pp., \$15.95

**Death by Journalism?  
One Teacher's Fateful Encounter  
with Political Correctness**

by Jerry Bledsoe  
Asheboro, NC: Down Home Press;  
241 pp., \$24.95



H. Ward Street

Just in case you have not heard, we are in the midst of a Culture War. *Death by Journalism?* is a battle report from the front lines. *The Last Confederate Flag* and *Bedford: A World Vision* are fictional near-future projections, in the spirit of Orwell, of how the war is going to end. Coming all at the same time, these books provide a grim view of our prospects. The war is heating up, and culture is losing.

Fortuitously, these authors tend to support my understanding of what the war is all about: a totalitarian-minded drive to impose a uniform public nonculture on the American people. Despite optimistic statements to the contrary, America has never been culturally homogeneous. (By culture, I mean something like widespread folk attitudes and articulated and unarticulated assumptions about private

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and public things.) There is a Jamestown/Robert E. Lee/country-music America. Let's call it "Confederate America" for short. Conquered, impoverished, and despised, Confederate America remarkably maintains a continuing vigor, mostly below official radar and fashionable discussion.

Then there is Plymouth Rock/Abraham Lincoln/General Motors America. (I am talking here about "culture," not economics.) For short, let's say "Yankee America." Yankee America never really had much folk culture except a kind of leveling of distinctions and what John Lukacs has aptly described as a genuine but peculiarly materialistic idealism. Yankee America has had, and continues to have, lots of power, prestige, and wealth, but its chief strengths have been technology and productivity.

Next came Ellis Island/Catholic/Perry Como America, which we can call "Catholic America." It mostly acquiesced in such aspects of Yankee America as it

liked or was forced to accept, while adding a little spice to the Boston pot roast.

Now we have Frankfurt School/Martin Luther King, Jr./MTV America, invented by European totalitarians and imported into the United States in the 1930's. It is aggressive, mean-spirited, bent on conquest, and, based on the evidence in these books and all around us, controls much of the American arsenal of cultural power. Let's call this phenomenon, though the label is not really accurate, "Multicultural America." Multicultural America initiated the Culture War and is spearheading its offensives. Its leaders take no prisoners and do not spare the weak and innocent.

Yankee America is culturally and demographically moribund. The victories of the Multiculturalists are mostly a result of the Yankee elite's intellectual shallowness, moral cowardice, and continual appeasement. In fact, the Yankee elite and the Multicultural elite can barely be distinguished anymore. Though it has temporarily rallied its masses by an appeal to abstract "America," with the help of Rush Limbaugh radio demagoguery, the Yankee elite is really holding on to its wealth and some of its prestige by drawing taxes, votes, and fighting men from Confederate America and Catholic America. Two Connecticut Bushes have become president by pretending to be Texans and pretending to represent the concerns of traditional Americans, for whom they have never done and never will do anything. (Ford, Dole, Kemp, etc., could not pull off the trick.) It is Little George, the preferred candidate of sincere Christians, who has changed the American motto from "Protestant, Catholic, Jew" to "Protestant, Catholic, Jew, and Muslim." (Clinton took money from the Bud-