

that thoroughly unambiguous instance of cause and effect is the angry refrain of his book: “The punishment didn’t fit the crime!”

In other words, two plus two does not equal four. It equals 7 or 12 or 31 — whatever sum convenience or desire dictates. Rose wants what he wants because he wants it. He wants what he wants because politicians get away with corruption and celebrities get away with lies; because athletes in other sports get away with drug addiction and spousal abuse (behavior that, Rose implies, makes compulsive gambling by comparison a positively healthy form of recreation), and because ordinary citizens get away with things that famous people cannot. He wants what he wants because he is Pete Rose, and despite the fact that he is Pete Rose. He wants what he wants because there *has* to be a way to get it, and, if there is not a way, there should be.

If Rose’s perspective sounds familiar, that is because, while extreme in him, it is not unique to him. The fact is, we live more and more in a Roseian world, a place where two plus two does not always equal four because — well, who the hell says it has to? We see around us the creeping application of a new syllogism: Being stigmatized is wrong; rules are stigmatizing; therefore, rules, by their nature, are unjust. Furthermore, no matter what you have done, it is not *that* bad because there is someone somewhere who has done something worse.

America is now divided pretty much between the Roseians and the non-Roseians, and, in such an atmosphere, it is not surprising that the Rose case stimulates heated debate, even outside the sports world. It is bigger than baseball because it offers uncomplicated, even streamlined, consideration of personal responsibility. It is a metaphor for our times, one of the cleanest possible encapsulations of the question *Do the rules matter?* (For those keeping score: The non-Roseians are being steadily inched toward defeat.)

Pete Rose’s second problem is that he is constitutionally incapable of engaging in what has become the required public ritual for celebrity rehabilitation.

There was a time when public figures who found themselves in trouble went into lockdown mode: Don’t be seen; don’t be heard; hide out and hope it all blows over. Sadly, those wonderful days are gone. The contemporary method for handling a public-relations crisis requires a sequential series of specific maneuvers.

The drill has become universal and applies equally to politicians, film stars, sports figures, and corporate honchos. The drill’s all-important final move demands, as we know all too well, the public — *i.e.*, televised — spilling of guts and tears, along with great showy displays of both remorse and wounded innocence. And the more humiliating and self-debasing, the better. This spectacle is now the unavoidable price a cornered celebrity must pay for the chance to be allowed back into the public’s good graces.

Of course, nothing in the ritual requires the celebrity actually to *be* remorseful. The consideration of real remorse — felt contrition — simply is not part of the drill. What the ritual requires is that the display be *sufficient* — sufficient to give us, the public, a sense of power. Examples are ubiquitous. On one side, you have, say, some huge ex-NBA star, ginning up tears and self-regret for Barbara Walters, finally putting the cherry on the sundae by turning and blubbing into his wife’s bosom. On the other side, you have the public (and the media), its most cynical instincts aroused, smugly scoring the performance: *Not enough, Mr. Bigshot, not enough. A little more . . . a little more . . . still more. There! Yes! You are now blubbing into your wife’s bosom. I declare you sufficiently demeaned and your performance a success. Go forth and blubber no more.*

Pete Rose’s strategy for getting back into Major League Baseball has blown up in his face not because he lacks contrition but because he will not fake contrition. He is the Gary Condit of sports. Both sportswriters and fans are in a state of agitation with Rose because he is either too stupid or too stubborn to debase himself. Says Rose, in a much-quoted passage from his book, “I’m sure that I’m supposed to act all sorry or sad or guilty now that I’ve accepted that I’ve done something wrong. But you see, I’m just not built that way.” Personally, I doubt Rose truly has accepted that he has done something wrong (he is not built *that* way, either), but that is not his problem. His problem is that he has denied those on the other side their rightful role in dispensing absolution. Say what you will (and I have said plenty over the years), Pete Rose is not a guy who is going to go publicly blubbing into his wife’s bosom. And for that — not for the betting on baseball — he will not soon be forgiven.

And therein lies the irony of Rose’s dilemma. When he finally accepts (on

whatever level) the traditional concept of cause and effect, he is undone by its modern counterpart. He waits 14 years to offer a confession, only to be blindsided by the fact that what is required of him is a performance. In his book, Rose talks repeatedly of his lifelong desire to “give the fans their money’s worth.” What he cannot or will not grasp is that his confession is being judged by showbiz standards, and emotionalism is the currency of our times. In this system, everyone counts as a fan, and no fan will have gotten his money’s worth until Rose has been sufficiently humbled.

Pete Rose wants what he wants, and he wants it bad. He wants to be in the Baseball Hall of Fame, and he wants (horrors) another shot at managing a Major League team. What he does not want is to have to “act [*act*] all sorry or sad or guilty.” So the guy is in a bind, and we will just have to wait and see whether a man so self-absorbed and lacking sentiment that he cannot remember his mother’s birthday can bring himself to pull out the stops and do the full-blown contrition dance.

I am not banking on it. The thing about boneheads is that they are nothing if not predictable. And with that, let us thank the big Umpire in the sky for small favors.

Janet Scott Barlow is the author of *The Nonpatriotic President: A Survey of the Clinton Years* (Chronicles Press).

Fire the Nanny

by Fr. Michael P. Orsi

FDR’s Folly: How Roosevelt and His New Deal Prolonged the Great Depression

by Jim Powell
New York: Random House;
274 pp., \$27.50



Even under a “conservative” President, government entitlements continue to grow. President George W. Bush’s expansion of Medicare to include prescription drugs will add billions to the already overinflated budget. And, despite warnings from Alan Greenspan that Social Security is on the verge of default, neither political party is willing to address the issue. Americans have grown

accustomed to the “nanny” state, which has had, according to Jim Powell, a deleterious effect on human freedom, economic well-being, and common sense that few dare to question.

Powell is an historian and a senior fellow at the Cato Institute. His revisionist examination of FDR’s New Deal is an assessment of the major players who formed policy during the Roosevelt era and refutes the lingering myth that government programs, public projects, and monetary regulations are good for society. He shows that America, then and now, would have been better off had the New Deal never been implemented. He argues that *laissez-faire* capitalism is cyclical in nature, with a natural ability to rebound, and that government intervention effectively stifles initiative and recovery. He convincingly argues that the New Deal prolonged the Great Depression. His impressive display of hard data supports his conclusion.

The current outsourcing of American jobs serves as a *prima facie* example of how New Deal legislation continues to hurt American businesses. Because of the high cost of American labor, employers are now moving jobs to foreign markets where labor is cheaper. Powell shows this to be the result of minimum-wage legislation and closed-shop union membership, both promoted by Roosevelt. Powell says that these policies deny Americans their fundamental right to freedom of contract and stifle fair-market competition. He demonstrates that, during the Depression, these policies actually increased unemployment, especially among black workers in Southern textile mills. He chronicles the strong-arm activities of unions, the United Auto Workers in particular, that negotiated above-market wages for their members, resulting in General Motors dismissing one quarter of its employees and overall U.S. car production dropping 50 percent between 1937 and 1938. This situation continues today. Recently, union-negotiated healthcare and retirement benefits have raised the cost of G.M. cars \$1,400 per vehicle, endangering sales and undermining the automaker’s competitiveness against foreign companies.

Powell argues that the 1935 Social Security Act, the centerpiece of New Deal legislation, was unfair and unsound: a pyramid scheme that takes workers’ money without the adequate compensation that private investment would garner. The actuarial charts tell the sad tale of

Uncle Sam’s Robin Hood effort. Social Security contributions are now America’s biggest tax, yet projected returns continue to decline. Even worse, Powell writes, according to the majority opinion of the U.S. Supreme Court in *Fleming v. Nestor* (1960), nobody has a contractual right to Social Security benefits. Furthermore, Powell argues, high Social Security taxes have caused many employers to cut their workforces, causing even greater unemployment.

Powell’s book provides much food for thought regarding how we arrived at our present indenturedness to big government, including how many New Deal-era U.S. Supreme Court decisions allowed the government to usurp our economic freedoms. He shows that the present caretaker state whittles away at our fundamental liberties and limits productivity. Powell’s book deserves the careful attention of all those involved in public policy and of Christians who support government programs in the belief that they foster social justice: If anything, these programs have hurt, more than helped, the poor and disenfranchised.

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Till Earth Was But a Name

by Patrick J. Walsh

John Clare: A Biography

by Jonathan Bate

New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux;
672 pp., \$40.00

**“I AM”: The Selected Poetry
of John Clare**

edited by Jonathan Bate

New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux;
344 pp., \$17.00



Poet John Clare (1793-1864) seems to have grown from the soil. His last name derives from the word *clayer*—someone who manures and enriches clay. As a farm laborer, he drew sustenance from the earth. Immersed in humus, he learned the humility so necessary to creativity. His poems, like furrow lines, break the

surface of things to expose the extraordinary aspect of the ordinary. Delighting in common things—birds, flowers, trees, blades of grass—Clare revels in their simple mystery. It is an art that captures the first day forever dawning.

John Clare was born in Helpston in Northamptonshire, a small village largely undisturbed since the Middle Ages. People kept the old ways and customs, shared the common land, and still observed the pre-Reformation calendar that celebrated all the seasonal festivals. Life was in rhythm with nature, in an era before the Enclosure Acts took their toll and radically reconstructed English rural life.

The Clare family subsisted as farm laborers, living on potatoes and water gruel. When only seven, Clare had a job looking after sheep and geese. At 12, he worked the fields. Never robust in health or temperament, he stood barely five feet five inches, a small, sensitive plant. One reviewer who visited him at Northborough sanitarium described his eyes as “light blue and flashing with genius.”

Clare was reared in an oral tradition of stories and songs. His parents were admired as local storytellers: Clare’s father once said he could sing over a hundred songs. When his workday was finished, Clare studied reading and writing in night classes. At 13, he came across Thompson’s poem “Seasons” and was immensely influenced by it. Thereafter, he read every book he could find, recited poetry to himself in the fields, and wrote verses of his own on discarded scraps of paper.

Jonathan Bate does a fine job in acquainting us with this sadly neglected Romantic poet. The noted Shakespeare scholar spent five years among Clare’s vast archive, determined to fill a void by giving “the one major English poet never to have received a biography worthy of his memory” his due. Bate has succeeded absolutely in his prescribed biographical task.

Published alongside this biography is a companion volume containing a wider selection of poems. *I AM* takes its title from one of Clare’s most anthologized poems:

I am—yet what I am, none cares or
knows;
My friends forsake me like a
memory lost:
I am the self-consumer of my woes;
They rise and vanish in oblivion’s
host