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2-28-2019

February 28, 2019: The Communitarian Collapse in America

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Repository Citation

Ledewitz, B. (2019). February 28, 2019: The Communitarian Collapse in America. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism/1228>

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Title: The Communitarian Collapse in America

Date: 2019-02-28T05:55:00.001-05:00

2/28/2019—Ross Douthat wrote a column yesterday in which he discussed the changing view of the State on the Right. Conservatives traditionally defended limited government in order to allow civil society to flourish, including corporate life. But now with all civil life in decline and corporations unmasked as bad citizens, some on the Right want to turn to government, to some extent at least. A good column, but, as I wrote in a letter to the New York Times you won't see, basically beside the point. You can't adopt policies to address social decline when you have no idea why they happened in the first place. The renewal, when it does come, will come by way of a secular acknowledgment of the crisis of meaning. With the death of God, the story of human life that was told in the West ended. Nietzsche knew what a momentous event that was. Secularists today are blasé. The neo-pagans, like Anthony Kronman (*Confessions of a Born Again Pagan*) and John Gray (*Seven Types of Atheism*) tell us to cultivate our own gardens and to seek equanimity. No thanks. This is not good advice for this culture. More helpful, maybe, is a work from 1981 by the German social observer Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*. Sloterdijk also says that "the critical addiction to making things better has to be given up" but, he adds, "for the sake of the good, from which one so easily distances oneself on long marches." The long march is Communism. That may also stand for any other project of making things better. They threaten "the good." But because Sloterdijk can still write of the good, he is still one of us wanting a better world. He is just saying with the doctors, first, do no harm. Americans are stuck right now not daring to believe in a good that has power, in a truth that will be accepted. It is not all on us. There is a hidden order that all humans are bound to follow—are meant to follow. If you follow it, you have lived a good life and can die with the equanimity that the neo-pagans promise. But it is not just about you. It is about loving your neighbor. There is a lot here. And not much has to do directly with politics.