

Why Bell Matters

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You ask me if I'm a neoconservative. What I find amusing is that people who decry a one-dimensional view of society, a one-dimensional view of politics, apply a one-dimensional label to things.

I think I've been consistent all the way through. It's not that my politics haven't changed. Politics is basically a response to particular situations. I think my fundamental values have remained.

I believe there are different realms in the society and there are different principles which underlie these realms. That's why I've called myself a socialist in economics, a liberal in politics, and a conservative in culture. I'm a socialist in economics because I believe that every society has an obligation to give people that degree of decency to allow them to feel that they are citizens in this society. In the realm of economics, the first lien on resources should be that of the community in a redistributive way.

I'm a conservative in culture because I believe in continuity, and I believe in judgment. I don't believe that all opinions in culture are the same as everybody else's opinion. I don't believe that all art is the same. Some things are better than others, and you have to justify why it's better than others, and you have to understand the grounds of justification.

I'm a liberal in politics but liberalism has no fixed dogmas. It has no fixed points, that you can say, "This is the liberal position." It changes because it's an attitude. It's a skepticism. It's a pluralism, it's agnostic.

Daniel Bell, *Arguing the World*, 2000

"So," he wondered aloud, "why are you studying *Partisan Review*?"

I had the good fortune of meeting the late Daniel Bell. We met in mid-November, 2010, in his Cambridge home, spending an afternoon in discussion on a wide array of topics, from *Partisan Review* to Hannah Arendt's theory of totalitarianism to religion, secularism, the sacred, and to the importance of tradition, and, ultimately, history. The entire discussion seemed to flow of its own accord. The only problem—I soon realized—we had quickly veered far away from my immediate agenda, i.e., questions regarding the social and political thought of *Partisan Review*, the subject of my doctoral dissertation. But no matter, because I realized we were engaged in a larger, more important meditation on the life of the mind and, specifically, of the mind's place in life. And there was certainly no way I was going to script the man who was perhaps the "greatest mind in the group" of New York intellectuals,¹ listed among the 25 leading social theorists of the modern era, in the same vicinity as the acknowledged giants of the field—Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Simmel, Mead, Du Bois, Parsons, Goffman, Garfinkel, and Foucault.² Michael Walzer's description of the New York Intellectuals is apt: they are writers who feel that "you can't begin to analyze the most recent strike in Detroit without starting from the division of labor in ancient Babylonia. The context is world history and the questions you bring to your analysis are the largest questions: Where are we going? Where have we been?"³ It

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¹ Jacob Weisberg, "Remembering Daniel Bell, 1919–2011: He wrote about everything and was deep about all of it," *Slate*, updated Jan. 28, 2011, <http://www.slate.com/id/2283003/>.

² George Ritzer, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Major Social Theorists* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

³ Joseph Dorman, *Arguing the World: The New York Intellectuals in Their Own Words* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), 208.

was indeed that very philosophical inclination that steered our discussion, ultimately, to questions of religion, and then from the universal to the particular—namely, Judaism—and back again, virtually without end.

But let us begin in the beginning. I rang the door bell to Bell's house on Francis Avenue in Cambridge, Mass., at approximately 2 p.m. His home-nurse was polite enough to invite me in even though Prof. Bell had not gotten out of bed all day. She asked if he was expecting me, and indeed he was. We had first made contact only about a week earlier. Three short days after sending him a letter with my contact information, he called me, enthusiastically welcoming me to come to his home to meet and discuss my dissertation. When she told him I had arrived—I overheard them upstairs—he said he'd be down shortly. I awaited him eagerly in the living room. When he turned the corner of the stairwell to enter the living room, I was struck by his appearance. It was him, to be sure. But he had grown frail in his elder age and wore a white beard attuned to his bald head. To my untrained eye it appeared he had made a strenuous effort to get down the stairs, and for all I knew he was in great physical pain, perhaps his hips even burning at his every step and move. Setting aside his walker, he gracefully settled into his couch, telling me he had been having trouble walking of late. He took a moment to collect himself, and then asked me, directly, "So, why are you studying *Partisan Review*?"

Just like that, Daniel Bell began my interview. I explained what I thought was the great relevance of their story—i.e. the compelling story of their (mis) adventures in politics during the 1930s to the 50s. For those that don't know, the intellectual history of the first 20 years of *Partisan Review*—from 1934 to 1953—is a dense period that runs the gamut of twentieth-century political thought. From Communism to Trotskyism to demo-liberalism, and culminating in (for many among them) a new breed of conservatism come the early fifties, its history is the history of thinking and re-thinking "totalitarianism." It is also a familiar tale of illusion and subsequent disillusionment with communism, yet another to add to the mix of *The God That Failed*.⁴ So I went on to add that the editors and its contributing writers blazed a trail in social and political thought, offering novel theories of totalitarianism and sounding post-modern and pragmatic calls for an end to ideological fanaticism. But he stopped me, before I could mention that *PR* intellectuals also offer us a model for what it means to be a responsible intellectual. He stopped me

then—and probably would have stopped me earlier had he been less polite—challenging me on my use of the word "relevance." He didn't like that word—*relevance*—while I couldn't have been more proud for finding something relevant in my dissertation topic. (After all, I thought to myself, I'm a political theorist not a historian.) Bell insisted, however, that it was not a question of relevance. As he saw it, it was simply a matter of history, and on the grounds that it is paramount that we know history and the history of our ideas, it had to be studied. Wow. I then recognized that despite his ailing body, Professor Bell's mind—at 91 years of age—was still remarkably sharp.

I reminded him of his first contribution to *Partisan Review* back in the Fall 1944 edition of the journal. An essay titled "Word Surrealism,"⁵ Bell argued for the curious emergence of word surrealism in politics during the Second World War. He began with a question, "Is it not characteristic of the ideological confusion of our time that the terms best describing social forms not fully understood are surrealistic combinations in which a negative adjective cancels out the formal meaning?" As he saw it, such terms as *secular religion*, *totalitarian liberal*, *monopolistic competition*, and *democratic corporativism*—the four terms scrutinized by Bell in the essay—were "sheer jabberwocky." "Yet," he wryly added, "only Alice in the Political Wonderland makes sense today." The essay is a pleasure to read. Bell concludes: "The last war brought surrealism in art and rationalism in politics; we now have a neo-classical revival in art and the emergence of word surrealism in politics. The secret is locked in the dialectic and Marx lies on his head in the grave." Little wonder that Bell would become a regular contributor to *PR* throughout the years that would come to span decades, ending publication less than a decade ago, only in 2003 after the death of William Phillips, its last surviving founding co-editor. Indeed, "one of his greatest and most personal essays,"⁶ as his son, David Avrom Bell, regards it, "First Love and Early Sorrows,"⁷ appears in a 1981 issue of *Partisan Review*. It is an account of his "first love"—*Marxism*—joining the Yipsels, the Young People's Socialist League, in 1932 at the age of 13, and of his "early sorrows" after learning *The Truth About the Boylsheviki* (sic), of *The*

⁴ David C. Engerman, "Foreword to the 2001 Edition," in Richard H. Crossman, ed., *The God That Failed* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), vii–xxxiv.

⁵ Daniel Bell, "Word Surrealism," *Partisan Review*, Vol. XI, No. 4 (Fall 1944), 486–488. I refer here to Bell's first essay contribution; just over a year prior he had reviewed Robert Brady's *Business As a System of Power* in the July–August 1943 issue of *Partisan Review*, Vol. X, No. 4, 377–380.

⁶ David Avrom Bell, "Daniel Bell's Relevant Distinctions," in *For Daniel Bell* (privately published *festschrift* edited by Mark Lilla and Leon Wieseltier in 2005), 12.

⁷ Daniel Bell, "First Love and Early Sorrows," *Partisan Review*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 4 (1981), 532–551.

Russian Tragedy and *The Kronstadt Rebellion*.⁸ “My early sorrows,” wrote Bell, “fortuitous as these were, had come with the awareness of ‘Kronstadt.’ That knowledge, combined with my temperament, made me a lifelong Menshevik—the chooser, almost always, of the lesser evil.”⁹ It also led to three maxims that came to rule his intellectual life: the ethic of responsibility, the politics of civility, and the fear of the zealot and the fanatic.

I then pushed on the issue of *Partisan Review*: I wanted to know what it meant for him as a young budding intellectual to publish in *PR*; when had he first read the little magazine; how it was perceived among his friends and colleagues; if it had any role in shaping his socio-political worldview; and, of its role in the fight against Stalinism. In a way, though, I had already known the answers to these questions. Watching Joseph Dorman’s documentary of the New York intellectuals, “Arguing the World,” you see very clearly how “The Second Generation” spoke of *PR* and with what great reverence they held up “The Elders.”¹⁰ In William Phillips’s words, “We dreamed of having a magazine that would create a new community of writers and intellectuals, that would pull together whatever independent, gifted people there were. We saw this magazine as the vehicle of Modernism and radicalism via a community. We thought of it partly as a personal organ, but partly as the organ of a new community. So when one talks of the New York intellectuals, one is talking about a community.”¹¹ Bell himself had mentioned elsewhere that in New York during the 1940s the New York intellectuals had come together as a “self-conscious group,” ala Budapest just before World War I, Bloomsbury in the 1910s, Paris and Vienna in the

1920s, and Oxford in the 1930s.¹² *Partisan Review*, to be sure, was the hub around which it all revolved. So I knew that publishing in *PR* was for them an event, recognition that you had finally arrived. Bell then calmly looked at me, responding in turn, “Yes, it’s true, *Partisan Review* was a big deal. But I always thought *The New Leader* the more influential magazine in terms of the anti-Stalinist struggle.”

There was a lull in the conversation as I began to wonder if perhaps I had chosen the wrong dissertation topic. After all, here was Daniel Bell telling me that what I had long considered to be quite “possibly the most influential little magazine ever,”¹³ had in fact paled in comparison with the *The New Leader*. Then, reminded of its recent demise in August 2010 in its 87th year of publication (*PR* had folded just shy of its 70th birthday), and of its entire archival collection of manuscripts and correspondence now housed as part of Columbia University’s Rare Book & Manuscript Library, I became intrigued. Bell’s role in the history of the *The New Leader* is no secret, though is perhaps less known than his (arguably) lesser involvement with *PR*. As Bell puts it, in 1941 at the “tender age” of 21 years he became *The New Leader*’s managing editor, having first contributed to the magazine in 1938 and becoming a staff writer in 1940. He occupied that position for 4 years until 1945 to return as a staff writer 3 years following—from 1948 to 1958—before beginning what would ultimately make for a prolific career in academia starting as associate professor at Columbia University (1958–1969), then moving on to Harvard in 1969 until his retirement in 1990.

Finding his home in academia may have had something to do with his passion for truth, his feeling of ethical responsibility, and his overarching sense of proportionate justice. Daniel Bell, to be very sure, was a man of reason and measure. This might explain his break with the *New Leader* in the late 1940s on the grounds of what some have referred to as the magazine’s overly strident Cold War rhetoric.¹⁴ It might also, however, explain his return, ultimately celebrating the

⁸ Bell mentions these three works in the essay: the first, a pamphlet written by Emma Goldman just prior to her imprisonment of 2 years; and the latter two, pamphlets by the anarchist Alexander Berkman. Needless to say, Bell mentions a number of other works given to him by Rudolf Rocker, “the venerable Anarchist leader,” including works by Malatesta, Kropotkin, and still more by Goldman and Berkman—foremost being Berkman’s diary of his years in Russia, 1920–1922, *The Bolshevik Myth*.

⁹ Bell, “First Love and Early Sorrows,” 550.

¹⁰ In “The ‘Intelligentsia’ in American Society,” in *The Winding Passage*, Bell provides a genealogy of those that have come to be known as the New York intellectuals. First generation members—or “The Elders,” coming of age in the late 20s and early 30s—included Philip Rahv and William Phillips, Sidney Hook, Lionel Trilling, Meyer Schapiro, Dwight Macdonald, and Edmund Wilson, among others. The Second Generation, coming of age in the late 30s and early 40s, perhaps the more familiar of the bunch, included Daniel Bell, Irving Howe, Irving Kristol, and Nathan Glazer, among others. See Daniel Bell, *The Winding Passage: Essays and Sociological Journeys 1960–1980* (Cambridge: Abt Books, 1980), 119–137. The essay was originally given as a Frank L. Weill lecture at the Hebrew Union College, in Cincinnati, as part of its contribution to the U.S. bicentennial celebration in 1976.

¹¹ Dorman, *Arguing the World*, 73.

¹² Bell, “The ‘Intelligentsia’ in American Society,” *The Winding Passage*, 130.

¹³ Melvin Maddocks, “Review: Field Trips among the Intellectuals,” *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 90, No. 4 (Fall, 1982), 569–557.

¹⁴ In *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America*, Neil Jumonville cites the following from a letter written by Dwight Macdonald to Daniel Bell, dated 8 April 1947: “Good for you to break with the New Leader . . . (especially as it was such a personal wrench) over their war-drums beating. . . . the neurotic intensity with which those circles pursue a hate-Russia policy is making it easier for the black-rightists to push this country still faster toward something damned unpleasant—as in the red purge now projected in govt offices.” See Neil Jumonville, *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 213–214.

magazine for having taken throughout its many years a principled stand against both fascism and communism and for charting a “moral vision” for humanity.¹⁵ Daniel Bell was an anti-ideological thinker. Again, this explains both his founding of *The Public Interest* with Irving Kristol in 1965 and his break with it in the 1970s over what he considered to be Kristol’s increasingly neo-conservative disposition.

As Irving Kristol explains, “I and Dan Bell and Nat Glazer, we got together and started *The Public Interest*. The only thing I could think to do. I didn’t run for office. We started a magazine—on a shoestring. . . . *The Public Interest* was, in its origins, still a liberal magazine but without a liberal ideology.”¹⁶ As Bell put it, it was a magazine determined “to transcend ideology through reasoned public debate and the inquiry into knowledge.”¹⁷ In other words, *The Public Interest* sought to apply the methods of the social sciences to the concrete analysis of public policy. Theirs was a recipe that made for great success. And by the spring of 2005, upon closing after “Forty Good Years,”¹⁸ columnist David Brooks could realistically credit the magazine in *The New York Times* for having had “more influence on domestic policy than any other journal in the country—by far.”¹⁹

I continued with the interview: “So, it seems that the point of theory is to somehow guide or direct reality, or perhaps better yet to discover reality. What about Hannah Arendt’s theory of totalitarianism?” On this topic Bell was curt: “I never liked the theory. Or, I guess you could say I changed my mind very quickly in regard to it.” He added, “Society is never that flattened out. It’s a theory very much in search of reality—grasping for reality—but it comes up far too short.” The problem, then, for the pragmatic Bell was that the theory of totalitarianism left little for the “weary foot-traveler” in search of a guide to civic action and engagement. As a “working tool,” as he put it elsewhere in essay form, it is “too sweeping” and so of little guide to solving the concrete problems of its society—not to mention neglecting the inherent tendency

towards “normalization” in all states, even and especially crisis-states.²⁰

Looking over my notes, I surveyed my next batch of questions: I had intended to ask about Trotsky; of Trotsky’s intellectual presence in 1930s New York; of *The Revolution Betrayed* and The American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky; of *PR*’s break and re-birth on independent auspices in 1937; of the role and function of intellectuals; etc. But feeling somewhat lost in the headiness of the conversation I was curiously reminded of a parable noted in the preface to Bell’s collection of essays and sociological journeys, *The Winding Passage*. “It is a Zen story,” that Bell recounts: “Two monks have been circling in the desert for a long time. Finally they sit down. Neither says a word. Sometime later, one speaks: ‘My brother is lost.’ The other is silent. After a long meditation, he says: ‘No. I am not lost. I am here. The Way is lost.’”²¹ Something had seemingly been pushing me in this direction of discussion, and in Zen-like submission, who was I to resist? I asked if he still agreed with this parable. “Have we lost our Way?”

Bell replied to my question—in signature Jewish fashion—with another question: “If I were to ask you—‘Who are you?’—how would you answer?” This classic question of identity Bell had used to introduce his 1961 essay for *Commentary* magazine, titled, “Reflections on Jewish Identity.”²² Sensing the professor was asking a rhetorical question I allowed him to continue in explanation: “If you were to answer ‘I am the son of my father’ you’d be giving a traditional, pre-modern answer; the modern response, however, is ‘I am I’—meaning, I stand alone, I have come out of myself, self-propelled and so on.” I now replied: “You do know that my name, Benli, in Hebrew means ‘my son.’ So that literally I would answer you with my name: I am Benli, son of Oded . . . son of Isaac, son of Eliezer, son of Jacob . . . all the way back to our first forefathers, Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham.” “Well,” Bell came back, “that’s certainly a rare answer; and I assumed you were Jewish, otherwise you wouldn’t be interested in these questions and probably wouldn’t be here discussing them with me today.” I then wondered: What was that unique Jewish quality that led

¹⁵ Daniel Bell, “The Moral Vision of ‘The New Leader,’” *The New Leader*, Vol. LVI, No. 25 (Dec. 24, 1973), 9–12.

¹⁶ Dorman, *Arguing the World*, 157–158.

¹⁷ Cited in Matt Schudel, “Daniel Bell, 91; sociologist foresaw the rise of the Internet,” *Washington Post*, Jan. 27, 2011, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/26/AR2011012608911.html>.

¹⁸ Irving Kristol, “Forty Good Years,” *The Public Interest*, May 25, 2005, <http://www.aei.org/article/22580>.

¹⁹ Cited in Michael T. Kaufman, “Daniel Bell, Ardent Appraiser of Politics, Economics and Culture, Dies at 91,” *The New York Times*, Jan. 25, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/26/arts/26bell.html>.

²⁰ Daniel Bell, “Ten Theories in Search of Reality: The Prediction of Soviet Behavior,” in *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), 324–325. The essay was originally presented as a paper at the conference on “Changes in Soviet Society,” held at Oxford, England, June, 1957, under the auspices of St. Anthony’s College, Oxford, and the Congress for Cultural Freedom. It subsequently appeared in *World Politics*, April, 1958.

²¹ Daniel Bell, “Preface,” *The Winding Passage*, xxiii.

²² Daniel Bell, “Reflections on Jewish Identity,” in Peter I. Rose, ed., *The Ghetto and Beyond: Essays in Jewish Life in America* (New York: Random House, 1969), 465–476. The essay was originally published in *Commentary*, June 1961. It is also available in *The Winding Passage*, 314–323.

me from my earliest days to question man's place in the world, to questions of the perennial role and function of intellectuals, questions of the relation of art and culture to our preeminently social and political world, questions of radicalism, responsibility, history, truth and justice—all questions that similarly occupied the minds of the New York intellectuals? Was there really such a thing as a Jewish mind?

For Bell and the New York intellectuals, this went without saying. As Irving Howe put it, “Historical consciousness was part of immigrant Jewish life. The immigrant Jews brought with them memories of the old country, legends and stories about things that had happened there, so you absorbed this kind of historical consciousness at the kitchen table. And so history came to one unbidden. It wasn't that I'd made the decision to have historical consciousness, it was that historical consciousness was part of my elemental life, part of my natural being”²³ This notion of a distinct historical consciousness Bell also credits to his having grown up in the Jewish world of 1920s and 30s New York. In his words, “It was a kind of double consciousness. We'd go to school and we'd sing ‘My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, land where my fathers died,’ and people would say, *Russia*. ‘Land of the pilgrim's pride’—*Jerusalem*. ‘From every mountainside’—*the Alps*.”²⁴ It was in this historical sense that Bell defined his Judaism. There was simply no escaping one's *Jewishness* (not that he would have wanted to). Indeed, Bell's “whole life,” as he has described it, has “always been lived in that sense of the tension between the particular and the universal, at times, moving towards one or another pole.”²⁵

No man stands alone, we could say in his voice. Bell told me he considered it a major deficiency of *Partisan Review* that they never had any proper identification with Judaism. No coincidence then that his favorite group biography of the New York intellectuals was Alexander Bloom's *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and Their World* (1986). Bloom's book is the only one of a fair amount of books on the subject that places their relationship with their Jewish roots at front and center. From its opening chapter, “Young Men from the Provinces”²⁶—the title referencing an essay in Lionel Trilling's collection of essays, *The Liberal Imagination*—it becomes clear that Bloom plans to write about the New York—JEWISH—Intellectuals. There is much focus on ghetto life, life in Brooklyn and the Bronx, the weight of Jewish parental pressures—of fathers and sons—the Talmudic tradition and

double-consciousness. Bloom also emphasizes the place of school and education in Jewish life: that Jews inherit a sense of intellectuality from the Biblical and Talmudic tradition; that school became for them the path to success, the road to social class and social prestige, but also the site where the inevitable process of assimilation began. Ultimately, then, Bloom, very much like Bell throughout his life, grapples with the benefits and burdens of the ghetto life and with the benefits and burdens of, what was for many, its abandonment.

For Bell, Judaism could never be abandoned—this was moral imperative. While he told me he did not believe in “the religious,” per se, he did strongly believe in “the sacred.” He mentioned Gershom Scholem as a major influence, and especially his 1941 work, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. He mentioned Isaac Rosenfeld's only novel, the 1946 *Passage from Home*, and how it deeply affected the Jewish intellectuals of his generation. He explained his idiosyncratic understanding of Judaism that began with Ezra and Nehemiah; and how Abraham Joshua Heschel's understanding of the meaning of Jewish existence perhaps had the most profound effect on his practice. As Heschel understood it, “Judaism is our genesis, not our wisdom Being a Jew is a part of our continued existence. . . . We carry the past in our will. . . . We have immortality in the past.”²⁷ Ultimately, then, for Heschel—we might ascribe the same to Bell—the task of Jewish philosophy and of Jewish thought is “to set forth the universal relevance of Judaism.”²⁸

Coming to see his self as an alien Jew during his adolescence,²⁹ Bell found his way out of the abyss, found his way home³⁰ and reached maturity through the power of the *yizkor*—the remembrance—the sacred link to his Jewish past.³¹ Reflecting on his Jewish identity, he wrote, “I write as . . . one who has not faith but memory, and who has run some of its risks. I have found no ‘final’ place, for I have no final answers. I was born in *galut* [exile] and I accept—now gladly, though once in pain—the double burden and the double pleasure of my self-consciousness, the outward life of an American and the inward secret of the Jew. I walk

²³ Dorman, *Arguing the World*, 25.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁶ Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and Their World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 11–27.

²⁷ Abraham Joshua Heschel, “The Meaning of Jewish Existence,” in *Mid-Century: An Anthology of Jewish Life and Culture in Our Times* (New York: The Beechhurst Press, 1955), 89, 93, 94. The essay was originally published in *The Zionist Quarterly*.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

²⁹ See Bell's essay, “A Parable of Alienation,” in *Mid-Century*, 133–151. The essay was originally published in *The Jewish Frontier* in 1946.

³⁰ See Bell's essay, “The Mood of Three Generations,” in *The End of Ideology*, 299–314.

³¹ See Bell's essay, “Reflections on Jewish Identity,” *The Ghetto and Beyond*, 465–476.

with this sign as a frontlet between my eyes, and it is as visible to some secret others as their sign is to me.”³² In this sense, seeing his self as bound to his past, and emerging from a larger tradition, there arises a notion of continuity, a sense of belonging, and a feeling of respect and responsibility for both the past and the future. This type of resolution is rare for a man with a modern sensibility. For the modern world has uprooted us all, broken ties to our past, and left us with the feeling of utter and absolute loneliness and despair. And “if The Way is lost, all is lost.”³³

Without a sense of history we become blind wanderers, subject to the blowing winds of our lost pasts, re-creating the past in all its misery and woe. Bell saw this in the New Left. As he explained it, “these were people who had lost a sense of historical memory. The thirties were sort of lost in the fog, the fifties were confused for them, and they thought they were coming out of themselves. They had no feeling for Stalinism, they had no feelings for things we’d gone through in this way and there was a hubris of being new.”³⁴ Consequently, in their outright rejection of the wisdom of past historical memory—of the “Wisdom of the Fathers”³⁵—the New Left’s politics descended into violence, bloodshed, doctrinarism and utopian yearnings of a caricatured past. Marx’s warning that history repeats itself is appropriate: “first as tragedy, then as farce.”

What Bell provides us with, therefore, as John Patrick Diggins considered the thinker’s “balancing act” of contradictory political ideologies, is an eclectic and post-modern “political wisdom born of the woe of historical experience.”³⁶ His was critical thought announcing—or rather calling for—the advent of a post-ideological and post-utopian era. It is precisely why, in his sociological “disjuncture of realms,” Bell considered himself a socialist in economics, a liberal in politics, and a conservative in culture. In this regard, as Vladimir Tismaneanu put it in a symposium on “Conservative-Liberal-Socialism,”³⁷ Bell’s vision is actually none too different from that of the late Polish philosopher’s, Lezek Kolakowski (1927–2009), in providing us with

the elementary components of the “nascent hybrid and therefore truly dynamic ‘conservative-liberal-social-democratic-anti-fascist-anti-communist’ International” of critical intellectuals. In Tismaneanu’s words, “The new International of critical/democratic/post-ideological/cosmopolitan intellectuals will not advocate any arrogant solutions to humanity’s problems, but, at the same time, it will not shy away from recognizing that the roots of barbarism are located at the very core of modernity.”³⁸ To be sure, the larger import of Bell’s theoretical project aimed at taking us beyond the camps of Auschwitz, the gulags of Siberia, and the killing fields of Phnom Penh. To that end, Bell’s eclecticism ran far and wide; his liberal imagination deep. And indeed it is in this sense that my dissertation *is* relevant.

But in our afternoon’s conversation I never explicitly said that to the late Daniel Bell. Somehow I imagine he understood it—how could he not have? We continue to study *Partisan Review*, the New York intellectuals, and Daniel Bell precisely because of their sustained relevance. For they provide us with models of how to live our lives with integrity, balance, reason, civility, responsibility and critical judgment, engaging the world in all its imperfections for the sake of *tikkun olam*—the sake of repairing the world. As part of a larger tradition—as our educators—they further teach us of an enlightened way of life that prefers difficulty to doctrine, yearns for the open society rather than the eschaton, and raises the voices of moderation over the ever perennial voices of rage.³⁹

Before I left, Professor Bell had me go to his upstairs office and fish down a box that contained a number of purple bounded packets. They were copies of a *festschrift*

³² *Ibid.*, 475.

³³ Bell, “Preface,” *The Winding Passage*, xxiii.

³⁴ Dorman, *Arguing the World*, 133.

³⁵ Rabbi Eleazar ben Shamma, the 2nd Century Mishnaic teacher, is reported to have said: “Let the honor of thy pupil be as dear to thee as the honor of thy colleague; that of thy colleague as the fear and reverence of thy teacher, and the fear and reverence of thy teacher as that of the Most High.” *Wisdom of the Fathers*, 4:15.

³⁶ John Patrick Diggins, “Daniel Bell’s Balancing Act,” *The New Leader*, Vol. LXXIX, No. 8 (Nov. 4–18, 1996), 14.

³⁷ Martin Krygier, Sean Patrick Eudaily, Karol Edward Soltan, Vladimir Tismaneanu, “Symposium: Conservative-Liberal-Socialism,” *The Good Society* 11.1 (2002), 6–25.

³⁸ Vladimir Tismaneanu, “In Praise of Eclecticism,” *The Good Society* 11.1 (2002), 24.

³⁹ In the closing essay to *For Daniel Bell*, “A Passion for Waiting: Liberal Notes on Messianism and the Jews,” pgs. 131–155, Leon Wieseltier writes: “Destiny must be attacked indirectly. We are enjoined to live climactically. We are enjoined to live significantly. . . . A messiah who is not a revolutionary. Criticism without nihilism. A change that is not an end. Fulfillment without closure. A climax that preserves. A hope that neither lulls nor incites. These are not contradictions. They are, rather, the terms of messianism in Judaism, which is finally not founded on an appetite for crisis.” (152). He adds: “[This] passion for waiting has another name, not a religious one and not a Jewish one. Its name is liberalism. For liberalism is, among other things, a philosophy of patience. It is the great adversary of eschatology; and the great liberal thinkers must therefore be numbered among the great critics of the messianic hunger.” (154). Placed into this mix he puts those responsible for his liberal upbringing: Isaiah Berlin, Lionel Trilling, and Daniel Bell. He then adds, “mutating all the *mutanda* . . . the name of Daniel Bell alongside the names of Maimonides, Nahmanides, the Maharal, and the others in this beautiful Jewish tradition [of patience], for he is one of the sages to whom we are indebted for our ability, may it stand us in good stead, to keep our heads.” (155).

“For Daniel Bell,” edited by Mark Lilla and Leon Wieseltier in 2005, presumably for his 85th birthday. As a parting gift of sorts, he gave me a copy, jesting that there’s probably more information in there about him than I had even wanted to begin with. As he was visibly excited about my project (requesting that I send him the finished version), and seemed to take a liking to me, I had planned on further engaging him through mail, but it evidently was not to be. This essay is my gift to him,

another essay—that I write—for Daniel Bell, another essay articulating why Bell matters.

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