The Eclipse of Transcendence in Dickens' Hard Times

"If a vulgarly ambitious person achieves social success, a poor novelist would have the material for a melodramatic success story; a better one might find the material for a social satire; and a really good one might even discern the tragic fall of a society in which such success has become possible. You see, the farther one goes, the richer the implications unfold."

Eric Voegelin in a letter to Robert Heilman, August 20, 1959i [1]

In Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life, Martha Nussbaum presents a compelling reading of Charles Dickens' Hard Times (1854). Bringing together a philosopher's concern for conceptual clarity and a novel reader's love of character, language, and plot, Nussbaum details Dickens' method of satirizing utilitarian political and economic views--views, she argues, that still deeply influence contemporary political science and public policy today.ii [2] Reading Dickens, according to Nussbaum, illuminates the limitations of utilitarian economic science, and leads to the insight "that economic science should seek a more complicated and philosophically adequate set of foundations."iii [3] Nussbaum convincingly shows that Dickens' novel is a "deep attack" on utilitarianism, going to the heart of its assumptions about the human good. In my remarks today, I'll review Nussbaum's reading of the novel, and then return to the novel to read it through a lens shaped by the work of Eric Voegelin. Voegelin's thought leads us to see another dimension to Dickens' critique of utilitarianism, reflected in Dickens' awareness of the spiritual and cultural struggle underlying the movement toward utilitarian thought. The insights into the novel that I offer today give rise to further questions concerning the relationship of Nussbaum's own thought to the Christian traditions that are so prominent in Dickens' critique of utilitarianism.

Hard Times announces its central theme immediately, in the opening speech by Thomas Gradgrind to the students of the Gradgrind School in Coketown:

> "Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children; and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!"iv [4]

The novel shows how Gradgrind's political vision dovetails with the interests of the two other central antagonists of the novel, Josiah Bounderby and James Harthouse. Bounderby, wealthy and boorish owner of the local bank and cotton mill, delights in boasting of his impoverished childhood ("I passed the day in a ditch, and the night in a pigsty﷒Not that a ditch was new to me, for I was born in a ditch."v [5]) and keeps his true middle class origins a secret. Bounderby enters into a loveless and unhappy marriage with Gradgrind's young daughter, Louisa. Harthouse, bored son of an upper class family, serves Gradgrind's political party out of a lack of any other convictions, and entertains himself by attempting to seduce Louisa.vi [6]

Gradgrind's educational vision, which is long on the study of what Mrs. Gradgrind calls "ologies," and short on the education of the emotions and the imagination, leaves his two eldest children, Tom and Louisa, miserably unequipped for the choices they face as adults. Young Tom Gradgrind grows up to be an undisciplined wastrel, incurring gambling debts that lead him to embezzle money from Bounderby's bank and frame an innocent factory worker, Stephen Blackpool, for the crime. Louisa Gradgrind endures a miserable marriage to Bounderby and returns home to her family in disgrace after narrowly avoiding the seductions of Harthouse.

At the moral center of the novel is a girl who proves impervious to the Gradgrind educational system, Sissy Jupe. The daughter of a horse trainer with Sleary's Circus, Sissy is abandoned by her father and taken into the Gradgrind home. Her affectionate and faithful nature, nurtured by the Fairy stories she read to her father as a child, goes largely unappreciated by the Gradgrinds until after Louisa's return home late in the novel. Sharing the moral center with Sissy is Stephen Blackpool, a weaver whose honesty and conviction cause him to run afoul of both his employer Bounderby and the demagogic Slackbridge, organizer for the trade union.vii [7] Through the three parts of the novel, "Sowing," "Reaping," and "Garnering," Dickens follows Thomas Gradgrind from his early utopian confidence to his disillusionment with his system and his transformation into a man seeking a "heart" to complement the "head" on which he has depended so exclusively.

In her reading of Hard Times, Martha Nussbaum identifies four elements of utilitarianism, all of which are both dramatized in the novel and critiqued by it, and all of which are still present in some form in contemporary rational choice theories. These are: commensurability, aggregation, maximizing, and exogenous preferences.viii [8] Commensurability means that "all the valuable things under consideration [are regarded as] valuable because they contain some one thing that itself varies only in quantity."ix [9] Characters that Dickens presents as memorable individuals are seen by Gradgrind's system as "parcels of human nature." Students in Gradgrind's School are called by number instead of name, and the workers of Coketown are seen as "hands and stomachs," and are likened to "ants and beetles." Individuality is erased by what Nussbaum terms Gradgrind's "abstracting mathematical mind."x [10]

Aggregation, the second utilitarian element, means that data about individual lives is pooled, "without regarding the boundaries between lives as especially salient for the purposes of choice."xi [11] Louisa Gradgrind is taught, for example, to view the working classes as "Something to be worked so

much and paid so much, and there ended; something to be infallibly settled by laws of supply and demand; something that blundered against those laws, and floundered into difficulty; something that was a little pinched when wheat was dear, and overate itself when wheat was cheap﷯But, she had scarcely thought more of separating [the people of Coketown] into units, than of separating the sea itself into its component drops."xii [12] When Louisa tries to tell her father that she fears marriage to Bounderby, and remarks that life is short, he reminds her that "the average duration of human life is proved to have increased of late years."xiii [13] And in what Nussbaum calls "one of the novel's most chilling and brilliant moments," the dying Mrs. Gradgrind is asked by her daughter if she is in pain. "I think there's a pain somewhere in the room," she replies, "but I couldn't positively say that I have got it."xiv [14]

As Nussbaum points out, "political economy sees only pains and satisfactions and their general location: it does not see persons as bounded centers of satisfaction, far less as agents whose active planning is essential to the humanness of whatever satisfaction they will achieve."xv [15] In the Gradgrind School, Sissy Jupe resists the lessons of aggregation. Sissy's teacher describes to her a nation in which "there are fifty millions of money," and asks her, "Isn't this a prosperous nation? Girl number twenty, isn't this a prosperous nation, and a'n't you in a thriving state?" Sissy replies that she "couldn't know whether it was a prosperous nation or not, and whether I was in a thriving state or not, unless I knew who had got the Money and whether any of it was mine."xvi [16] On another occasion, her teacher describes a town of a million inhabitants in which "only" twenty-five starve to death. Sissy replies that "it must be just as hard upon those who were starved, whether the others were a million, or a million million."xvii [17] In both cases, Sissy's answers are deemed unsatisfactory by her teacher.

The third element identified by Nussbaum is "maximizing," which sees rationality as "aimed at getting as large an amount of something as possible."xviii [18] Nussbaum notes in this connection

Gradgrind's appeal to "simple arithmetic" as the means to solve any problem, his erasure of the complex mysteries of human motivation. She quotes Dickens, "not all the calculators of the National Debt can tell me the capacity for good or evil, for love or hatred, for patriotism or discontent, for the decomposition of virtue into vice, or the reverse, at any single moment in the soul of one of these [the Mill's] quiet servants There is no mystery in it; there is an unfathomable mystery in the meanest of them, for ever."xix [19] Because Gradgrind views people as "counters in a mathematical game," he teaches that human motivation all comes down to self-interest. His pupil Bitzer parrots this lesson back to him at the end of the novel, when Gradgrind appeals to Bitzer's (by now nonexistent) sense of gratitude. Bounderby, too, interprets the actions of those around him as reducible to self-interest, as when he tells Sissy that her father has abandoned her to please himself.xx [20]

Finally, Nussbaum notes in Gradgrind's system the view that individuals' desires and preferences are exogenous, or "simply given," rather than being "shaped by social arrangements."xxi [21] Bounderby, in his repeated comment that the workers of Coketown want to be fed on turtle soup and venison with a gold spoon, shows no sensitivity to the way the workers' desires are shaped by their deprived circumstances. He assumes that he knows what they want and that their desires are no different from his own, which have been shaped by his privileged life.

As Nussbaum notes, Dickens critiques the Gradgrind claim to possess reliable "facts" and to rest on "reason."xxii [22] Gradgrind's system, she says, is blind, "blind to the qualitative richness of the perceptible world, to the separateness of its people, to their inner depths, their hopes and loves and fears; blind to what it is like to live a human life and to try to endow it with a human meaning. Blind, above, all, to the fact that human life is something mysterious and extremely complicated, something that demands to be approached with faculties of mind and resources of language that are suited to the expression of that complexity."xxiii [23]

By its very form, Nussbaum argues, the novel celebrates a countervailing view of the complexity and mystery of human motivation, the individuality of persons, and the malleability of their preferences. In the novel's content, as well, Dickens explicitly proposes a remedy for the blindness of Gradgrind, in the cultivation of "Fancy," or what Nussbaum terms the metaphorical imagination.xxiv [24] Hard Times, she argues, shows that the ability to imagine one thing as another is "morally crucial," linking the ability to imagine charitably the inner lives of others to the desire to behave compassionately toward them. Fancy, construed as wonder, play, delight, eroticism, and awe, underpins for Dickens a beneficent, as opposed to a harsh and cruel, form of reason.xxv [25]

In her own work in capabilities ethics, Nussbaum takes seriously the criticisms of utilitarianism raised here. Capabilities ethics, while it sometimes makes use of mathematical modeling, keeps in view the capacities of individuals (not aggregates) to function in a complex array of spheres of life (thus preserving qualitative distinctions between different human functions). Moreover, capabilities ethics attends to the ways that social arrangements shape individuals' aspirations and preferences.xxvi [26] Dickens' imaginative attention to the mysteries and complexities of human motivation serve as a continuing touchstone for Nussbaum's own work in political philosophy.

Stepping back now from Nussbaum's reading of Hard Times, we may ask, how might Nussbaum's reading of the novel be complemented by a reading informed by Voegelin's concerns? First, I'd note that Voegelin and Nussbaum share a deep concern for human dignity, a respect for mystery, a rejection of scientism, and a sense of the importance of play and wonder. Nussbaum's appreciation for Dickens' satire on Gradgrind's system, focusing on its eclipse of those complexities of human life that fail to fit the Gradgrind philosophy, has deep affinities with Voegelin's passionate critique of political ideologies.

A Voegelinian reading of the novel, however, would also see it in the context of a historical unfolding of symbols of order and disorder. Voegelin's own writings concerning utilitarianism place it in the context of a cultural struggle over symbolizations of human existence and political order.xxvii [27] What Voegelin termed the noetic and pneumatic differentiations of consciousness, in classical philosophy and Judeo-Christianity respectively, articulated the structure of human existence in ways that were open toward transcendent mystery and that preserved the tensions in human experience between divine and human, mortality and immortality, the temporal and the eternal.xxviii [28] Common to the noetic and pneumatic differentiations was the experience of the human psyche existing in what Voegelin, following Plato, calls the metaxy or In-Between. In both classical philosophy and in the gospels,

> "there is the same field of pull and counter-pull, the same sense of gaining life through following the pull of the golden cord, the same consciousness of existence in an In-Between of human-divine participation, and the same experience of divine reality as the center of action in the movement from question to answer. Moreover, there is the same consciousness of newly differentiated insights into the meaning of existence; and in both cases this consciousness constitutes a new field of human types in history"xxix [29]

Christianity developed an account of human perfection as beatific vision, or "supernatural perfection through grace in death," distinguished as sanctification of life and an ultimate state of perfection.xxx [30] In modern Europe these classical expressions of order were gradually displaced by symbolizations that Voegelin characterizes as gnostic, in that they sought human perfection in a world-immanent utopia rather than in a transcendent end and proposed various recipes for achieving utopian endsxxxi [31] These symbolizations, which include utilitarianism, lost the sense of the tensions inherent in human existence and of the human participation in the divine ground. As Voegelin remarks, "In the progressive, Positivist movement since the middle of the eighteenth century, as well as with the

followers of the movement, the term *man* no longer designates the mature man of the humanist and Christian tradition, but only the crippled, utilitarian fragment."xxxii [32]

Utilitarian philosophy represents a stage in what Voegelin sees as the modern loss of understanding of human existence, as immanent human reason is substituted for "divine order," and philosophers search for the norms of that reason in a descending scale of new sources:

> "But the conception of order through the greatest good for the greatest number, or through a balance of enlightened self-interest, or through the more specific balance achieved by the pursuit of economic profit, proved at variance with the disorder and human suffering created concretely in the societies that experienced the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution. The substance of order moved down in the ontological scale from God, through reason, pragmatic intellect, usefulness, production forces, and racial determinants, to biological drives."xxxiii [33]

Utilitarianism, according to Voegelin, has at its core the desire to dominate nature through science. While utilitarian thinking has a legitimate place, it came in the nineteenth century to dominate western thought. "In the nineteenth century this idea of utilitarian exclusiveness crystallized in the belief that the domination of man over man would ultimately be replaced by the dominion of man over nature, and that the government of men will be replaced by the administration of things."xxxiv [34] Since the nineteenth century the dominance of utilitarian thinking has only increased:

> "The tendency to narrow the field of human experience to the area of reason, science, and pragmatic action, the tendency to overvalue this area in relation to the bios theoretikos and the life of the spirit, the tendency to make it the exclusive preoccupation of man, the tendency to make it socially preponderant through economic pressure in the so-called free societies and through violence in totalitarian communities--all these tendencies are part of a cultural process that is dominated by a flight of magic imagination, that is, by the idea of operating on the substance of man through the instrument of a pragmatically planning will."

At the root of this "power orgy," which culminated eventually in National Socialism, "the historian will find a gigantic outburst of magic imagination after the breakdown of the intellectual and spiritual form of medieval high civilization."xxxv [35]

It's clear that Voegelin's critique of utilitarian thinking has much in common with Nussbaum's. Nussbaum's identification of the tendencies of utilitarian thought to aggregate human beings, to overlook individual differences, to take human motivations as ahistorical or exogenous, and to reduce the mysteries and complexities of human motivation to mathematically predictable elements of self-interest, all resonate with Voegelin's characterization of the movement.

Where Voegelin's account of utilitarian thought differs from Nussbaum's is in his emphasis on specific historical experiences and symbolizations that provide resistance to utilitarian reductionism. If we were to approach Hard Times again with this difference in mind, we'd find that Dickens shows an awareness that the strongest resistance to utilitarianism is found in traditional, and especially in Christian, articulations of the nature of the human psyche.

Several of Dickens' characters, in their dissatisfaction with the limited vision of Reason of Gradgrind's system, reflect a sense that there are deeper questions to be asked, and that they are missing the direction their lives ought to take. Louisa, dissatisfied early on by her education, spends an evening staring into the fire, and remarks to her mother, "I have such unmaneageable thoughts, [illegible] that they *will* wonder," a claim that her mother says is "morally and physically impossible," unless someone has encouraged her, given that her father has forbidden the children to "wonder" about anything. "I was encouraged by nothing, mother, but by looking at the red sparks dropping out of the fire, and whitening and dying. It made me think, after all, how short my life would be, and how little I could hope to do in it."xxxvi [36] Later in the book, Louisa stares out at the smoking chimneys of Coketown and engages in similar reflections on the brevity of life and her lack of love for Bounderby, who has asked to

marry her. Her father instructs her to answer the question of marriage as simply a question of "tangible Fact," having nothing to do, by implication, with whether she and Bounderby love each other or whether she would be truer to herself by refusing him.xxxvii [37]

Mrs. Gradgrind, on her deathbed, pathetically attempts to write down "something--not an Ology at all--that your father has missed, or forgotten, Louisa. I don't know what it is. I have often sat with Sissy near me, and thought about it. I shall never get its name now. But your father may. It makes me restless. I want to write to him, to find out for God's sake, what it is. Give me a pen, give me a pen."xxxviii [38] Thus both she and her daughter feel the absence of something crucial in their lives that has been left aside in Gradgrind's version of Reason.

The sense on the part of Louisa and Mrs. Gradgrind that "something" is missing in Gradgrind's account of reason, recalls Voegelin's account of the origins of the differentiations of consciousness in human experience:

> "Well, existence is not a fact. If anything, existence is the nonfact of a disturbing movement in the In-Between of ignorance and knowledge, of time and timelessness, of imperfection and perfection, of hope and fulfillment, and ultimately of life and death. From the experience of this movement, from the anxiety of losing the right direction in this In-Between of darkness and light, arises the inquiry concerning the meaning of life. But it does arise only because life is experienced as man's participation in a movement with a direction to be found or missed; if man's existence were not a movement but a fact, it not only would have no meaning but the question of meaning could not even arise."xxxix [39]

Nussbaum, as we've seen, argues that the missing "something," for Dickens, is Fancy, or what Nussbaum has termed the metaphorical imagination, the ability to see one thing as another. In this, she is clearly correct. However, the novel gives strong indications that Fancy has a deep source of support in the tradition of Christian symbols that arose out of what Voegelin called the pneumatic differentiation of consciousness.

To see how Hard Times invokes Judeo-Christian symbols in support of its resistance to utilitarianism, let us first note that Hard Times stands out among Dickens' novels for its many references

to Biblical texts and to well known prayers. The titles of the three parts of the book, "Sowing," "Reaping," and "Gleaning," recall New Testament parables that emphasize the choices that lead to one's being saved or damned.xl [40] The title of the first chapter, "One Thing Needful," is an ironic comment on the contrast between Gradgrind's reliance on "facts" alone and Jesus' rebuke to Martha (Luke 10: 38-42). Jesus tells her that her sister Mary has chosen the "better part," and the "one thing needful," when she stays and listens to him rather than helping Martha with the work of the household. In Book 3, Dickens titles his first chapter "Another Thing Needful;" in this chapter, Gradgrind has understood that Louisa's education was a disaster for her, and begins to look for an alternative to his system, in a "wisdom of the Heart."xli [41]

Dickens' use of biblical language and images throughout the book moves between these two patterns, i.e., between passages in which the Gradgrind system and its allies are represented ironically as a substitute for Christianity, and passages in which Christianity is pitted against the Gradgrind system as its antithesis. The ironic substitution of utilitarianism for Christianity is seen in the early description of Coketown: "Fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town: fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the immaterial—and what you couldn't state in figures, or show to be purchaseable in the cheapest market and saleable in the dearest, was not, and never should be, world without end, Amen."xlii [42] The Coketown property owners' tender care for their property, which increases at the expense of the quality of the air of Coketown, is also ironically couched in Biblical language: "So there it was, in the haze [of black smoke] yonder, and it increased and multiplied."xliii [43] And Slackbridge, the labor organizer, who for Dickens represents no genuine alternative to the complex of interests allied with Gradgrind, corrupts Biblical rhetoric for his own ends, when he compares Stephen Blackpool to the serpent in the Garden of Eden.xliv [44]

The churches of Coketown might be thought to represent an alternative to the Gradgrind faith in facts, but Dickens portrays the churches as reinforcing the system that presses upon the working people, supporting the landowners and strengthening, for example, the marriage laws that apply so unequally to the rich and poor.xlv [45] But although the churches are of no help to the working people of Coketown, the Christian teachings that some of them still live by are a crucial counterpoint to the self-centered motivations of Bounderby and his like. Stephen and Rachael explicitly invoke Christian principles of forgiveness and of comfort in the face of death,xlvi [46] and both are metaphorically associated with Jesus, Stephen in the manner of his death (buried alive for several days, sacrificed for a crime he didn't commit, outcast by all, and bearing his affliction with heroic patience) and Rachael by association with a touch that "could calm the wild waters of his soul, as the uplifted hand of the sublimest love and patience could abate the raging of the sea."xlvii [47]

At important points in the novel, Dickens explicitly sets up an opposition between Gradgrind and his allies on the one hand and Biblical exemplars on the other. Book I, Chapter 2 refers to Gradgrind's system of education as "Murdering the Innocents," invoking Herod's killing of young children in an attempt to murder the infant Jesus.xlviii [48] Sissy, asked in class for the first principle of Political Economy, answers, "To do unto others as I would that they should do unto me," an answer that her teachers acknowledge is absurd.xlix [49] And Gradgrind is described in one scene as busy "proving something no doubt--probably, in the main, that the Good Samaritan was a Bad Economist."l [50]

Dickens hints at the power of divinity to overcome the utilitarians and industrialists, when he mentions the time when "the last trumpet ever to be sounded shall blow even algebra to wreck."li [51] Yet in other passages, Dickens is more ambiguous regarding the ultimate success or failure of the utilitarian vision. Dickens sets out the opposition between the works of modernity and the works of God in a passage we looked at previously:

Stephen bent over his loom, quiet, watchful, and steady. A special contrast, as every man was in the forest of looms where Stephen worked, to the crashing, smashing, tearing piece of mechanism at which he laboured. Never fear, good people of an anxious turn of mind, that Art will consign Nature to oblivion. Set anywhere, side by side, the work of God and the work of man; and the former, even though it be a troop of Hands of very small account, will gain in dignity from the comparison.

So many hundred Hands in this Mill; so many hundred horse Steam Power. It is known, to the force of a single pound weight, what the engine will do; but, not all the calculators of the National Debt can tell me the capacity for good or evil, for love or hatred, for patriotism or discontent, for the decomposition of virtue into vice, or the reverse, at any single moment in the soul of one of these its quiet servants, with the composed faces and the regulated actions. There is no mystery in it; there is an unfathomable mystery in the meanest of them, forever.--Supposing we were to reserve our arithmetic for material objects, and to govern these awful unknown quantities by other means!

> The day grew strong, and showed itself outside, even against the flaming lights within. The lights were turned out, and the work went on. The rain fell, and the Smoke-serpents, submissive to the curse of all that tribe, trailed themselves upon the earth. In the waste-yard outside, the steam from the escape-pipe, the litter of barrels and old iron, the shining heaps of coals, the ashes everywhere, were shrouded in a veil of mist and rain."[lii] [52]

In this passage, Dickens addresses the reader directly, drawing a contrast between the work of Man and the work of God, calling for a respect for the mysterious motivations of human beings, in contrast to the economic model of the utilitarians, and asserting the inherent dignity of human beings as works of God. The opposition between the work of God and that of Man is continued in the next paragraph, as the daylight is contrasted to the artificial lights of the factory, the rain and mist to the "submissive" and "cursed" Smoke serpents (identified here with the serpent of Genesis). A veil of mist and rain, creations of God, serve as a shroud to the iron, coal, and ashes created by human industry. We are left with an ambiguity, finally; the rain and mist shroud the ugly products of industry, but do they overcome them, or just provide a covering for their corpses?

In light of the opposition Dickens portrays between Christian faith and utilitarian economics, Sissy Jupe's patient and faithful waiting for the return of her father (which, as Nussbaum points out, illustrates the disagreement in the novel over whether human actions are ever motivated by altruism) takes on added meaning.[liii] [53] Sissy's father leaves her without an explanation, having sent her out on an errand and disappeared before her return. In the course of the novel, he never returns, and the reader, along with the characters in the novel, is left to wonder what Sissy's father's motives were for

leaving. Bounderby, as Nussbaum notes, imputes selfish motives to Sissy's father, as he does to everyone. Sissy, on the other hand, never wavers in her belief that her father will return to her. At first the only reason she does not run away from the Gradgrinds is through a self-restraint, "the result of no arithmetical process, [that] was self-imposed in defiance of all calculation, and went dead against any table of probabilities that any Actuary would have drawn up from the premises. The girl believed that her father had not deserted her; she lived in the hope that he would come back, and in the faith that he would be made the happier by her remaining where she was."liv [54] In the hope of his return, Sissy preserves for years a bottle of "nine oils" to massage her father's aching muscles.lv [55]

Sissy's faith in her father, despite his unexplained absence, resonates symbolically with the New Testament story of Mary, criticized by Jesus' disciples for using expensive ointment to wash Jesus' feetlvi [56] , and with parables such as that of the wise and foolish virgins, waiting for the bridegroom's arrival.lvii [57] Sissy is symbolically linked with those who preserve faith in what cannot be seen, despite criticism by those who claim to have rational explanations that would reduce their faith to a delusion. She symbolizes the novel's struggle to preserve what Sleary calls "a love in the world, not all Thelf-interetht after all, but thomething very different; [illegible] that it hath a way of ith own of calculating or not calculating, whith thomehow or another ith at leatht ath hard to give a name to, ath the wayth of the dogth ith!"lviii [58] Here too, we are left with ambiguity regarding the ultimate success of Christian faith over the Gradgrind system, even after Gradgrind himself has abandoned it. The father for whom Sissy has waited is portrayed as a failure, who fails to "give satisfaction" to the circus-going public and who beats his faithful dog in frustration.

Sissy's faith in the unseen is explicitly opposed by Bounderby, when he denies her belief in her father's good intentions. Bounderby as a character embodies the opposite of Sissy's faith. While she maintains a love for her father, Bounderby insists at every opportunity that he is a "self-made" man,

abandoned by his mother to an abusive grandmother and beholding to no one for his great wealth. In the course of the novel these claims are publicly shown to be false, as Bounderby's adoring mother, whom he has forbidden to come to Coketown, is revealed to have provided him with all the advantages of a middle-class upbringing.

Bounderby's denial of dependence resonates with what Voegelin called "the pathos of autonomy and self-reliance that animates the advancement of science," which he called "one of the most important sources of the modern existential disorder." The scientistic claim to absolute self-reliance is taken up on a social scale, resulting in a widespread denial of human dependence on a transcendent ground.lix [59] In Bounderby, Dickens anticipates what Voegelin describes as "the contraction of humanity to a self imprisoned in its selfhood," the "shrunken self" for whom "God is dead, the past is dead, the present is the flight from the self's non-essential facticity toward being what is not"lx [60]

In contrast, the belief in "something" that isn't reducible to self-interest and can't be captured by the quantitative methods of Gradgrind or the self-interest of Bounderby is put, as is fitting for a Christian vision, into the mouths of the disadvantaged: the workers, the lisping Sleary, and the timid Mrs. Gradgrind. It is identified with children and with the childlike Sissy, recalling Jesus' saying "suffer the children to come to me," and "unless you become as little children you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven."lxi [61] Dickens shows a hidden power in these apparently helpless characters, when Sissy demonstrates the ability to persuade Harthouse, who is frequently identified symbolically with Lucifer, to leave Coketown.lxii [62] At the end, Dickens recalls the reader sharply to the connection between the literary work and our own existential situation. He addresses the reader directly, "Dear reader! It rests with you and me, whether, in our two fields of action, similar things [i.e., the "graces and delights"

that come to Sissy and Louisa] shall be or not. Let them be! We shall sit with lighter bosoms on the hearth, to see the ashes of our fires turn gray and cold."

In reviewing these passages, I've tried to show, first, that Dickens indicates through his characters certain existential sources of the dissatisfaction with the limits of utilitarian accounts of human reason (such as would be compatible with both Nussbaum's reading and with the Voegelinian account of the unrest of the human psyche). In addition, I've tried to show that for Dickens, the resistance to utilitarianism is articulated largely in Christian terms. While Nussbaum's analysis overlooks Dickens' use of Christian symbolism, a Voegelinian framework, which invites the reader to recover both the structure of his or her own psyche and the foundational historical articulations of that structure, makes perfect sense of its being there.

How significant is it that Nussbaum, in reading Dickens, overlooks the religious symbolism of the novel? Can the novel's critique of utilitarianism be supported just as well without the Christian symbols that Dickens used? What are the further implications of the difference between Nussbaum's approach, which follows Rawls in seeking an overlapping consensus with religious "comprehensive" viewpoints, and Voegelin's, for whom some kind of "comprehensive" view of human existence, incorporating an account of the human relationship to the divine, is a sine qua non? Such questions lead beyond the limits of my remarks today. These questions point to the apparently endless capacity of a great literary work, however familiar it may seem, to surprise us and draw our questions ever deeper.

Endnotes

i [1] Robert B. Heilman and Eric Voegelin: A Friendship in Letters, 1944-1984, ed. Charles R. Embry. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2004, p. 195.

ii [2] Martha C. Nussbaum, Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995, p. 13.

iii [3] Poetic Justice, p. 11.

iv [4] Charles Dickens, Hard Times, third edition, edited by Fred Kaplan and Sylv�re Monod. New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001, p. 5. References to the novel are taken from this edition, with the exception of two references to the edition edited by Graham Law.

v [5] Hard Times, p. 15.

vi [6] Graham Law calls Gradgrind, Bounderby, and Harthouse the "demonic trinity" of the novel, and sees them as modeled on Thomas Carlyle's "Mechanism, the Gospel of Mammonism, and the Gospel of Dilettantism." See Hard Times, edited by G. Law; Toronto: Broadview Press, 1996, p. 20.

vii [7] Several other important characters weave through the novel, illuminating the foibles of the central characters and touching off events that determine their fates. These include Rachael, the compassionate working woman who is never able to marry her beloved Stephen; Mrs. Sparsit, a resentful dependent of Bounderby's; Bitzer, a bank clerk who takes to Gradgrind's teaching all too well; and the loyal and lively members of Sleary's Circus, which serves near the end of the novel as a sylvan retreat from the polluted and corrupt Coketown.

viii [8] Poetic Justice, p. 14.

ix [9] Poetic Justice, p. 14. Nussbaum qualifies the definition of commensurability, which may mean either that one value is believed to underlie all others, or that having a single metric of value is simply used to predict choices.

x [10] Poetic Justice, p. 21.

xi [11] Poetic Justice, p. 14.

xii [12] Poetic Justice, p. 21.

xiii [13] Poetic Justice, p. 22.

xiv [14] Poetic Justice, p. 22.

xv [15] Poetic Justice, p. 23.

xvi [16] Poetic Justice, p. 49.

xvii [17] Poetic Justice, p. 68.

xviii [18] Poetic Justice, p. 14.

xix [19] Poetic Justice, p. 24.

xx [20] Poetic Justice, p. 25.

xxi [21] Poetic Justice, p. 25.

xxii [22] Poetic Justice, p. 26.

xxiii [23] Poetic Justice, p. 27.

xxiv [24] Poetic Justice, p. 36.

xxv [25] Poetic Justice, p. 43.

xxvi [26] Poetic Justice, p. 51.

xxvii [27] See, for example, Eric Voegelin, Collected Works, vol. 11, Published Essays 1953-1965, ed. Ellis Sandoz. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2000, pp. 56ff. See also Eric Voegelin, Collected Works, vol. 24, History of Political Ideas: vol. VI, Revolution and the New Science, ed. Barry Cooper. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1998, pp. 206 ff.

xxviii [28] For an overview of Voegelin's account of these differentiations, see the editor's introduction to the Collected Works, vol. 12, Published Essays 1966-1985, ed. Ellis Sandoz. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1990, pp. xx-xxi.

xxix [29] Voegelin, Collected Works, vol. 12, p. 192.

xxx [30] Eric Voegelin, "Ersatz Religion," in Science, Politics, and Gnosticism. Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1968, p. 88.

xxxi [31] Voegelin, Collected Works, vol. 11, p. 56.

xxxii [32] Eric Voegelin, Collected Works, vol. 26, History of Political Ideas: Volume VIII: Crisis and the Apocalypse of Man, ed. David Walsh. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1999, p. 114.

xxxiii [33] Voegelin, Collected Works, vol. 11, p. 57.

xxxiv [34] Voegelin, Collected Works, vol. 24, p. 207.

xxxv [35] Voegelin, Collected Works, vol. 24, p. 209.

xxxvi [36] Hard Times, p. 45.

xxxvii [37] Hard Times, p. 77.

xxxviii [38] Hard Times, p. 152.

xxxix [39] Voegelin, Collected Works, vol. 12, p. 176.

xl [40] See, for example, Matthew 3:11-12, Luke 3:16-17, Matthew 13: 24-30, Luke 8: 4-15, and Matthew 6:24-34. I am indebted for this point to Graham Law. See his introduction to Hard Times, edited by G. Law; Toronto: Broadview Press, 1996, p. 21. Law points out that Dickens' use of Biblical references and references to the Book of Common Prayer in this novel is unusually frequent and probably reflects the influence of Thomas Carlyle on the novel.

xli [41] Hard Times, p. 168.

xlii [42] Hard Times, p. 21.

xliii [43] Hard Times, p. 86; compare to Genesis 9:1.

xliv [44] Hard Times, p. 185.

xlv [45] See, for example, Hard Times, p. 21, p. 68, and p. 168.

xlvi [46] Hard Times, p. 204.

xlvii [47] Hard Times, p. 62.

xlviii [48] Hard Times, p. 6.

xlix [49] Hard Times, p. 46.

l [50] Hard Times, p. 162.

li [51] Hard Times, p. 78.

lii [52] Hard Times, p. 56.

liii [53] Poetic Justice, p. 25.

liv [54] Hard Times, p. 46.

lv [55] Hard Times, p. 218.

lvi [56] John 12:1-8

lvii [57] Matthew 25.

lviii [58] Hard Times, p. 218.

lix [59] Voegelin, Collected Works, vol. 24;, p. 210.

lx [60] Voegelin, Collected Works, vol. 28, p. 111.

lxi [61] Luke 16; Matthew 18. See Hard Times, p. 79, p. 149.

lxii [62] For passages identifying Harthouse with a devil, see Hard Times, pp. 104, 134, 136, 155, and 175.