



The Seven Deadly Virtues: 18 Conservative Writers on Why the Virtuous Life is Funny as Hell

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An all-star team of eighteen conservative writers offers a hilarious, insightful, sanctimony-free remix of William Bennett's *The Book of Virtues*—without parental controls. *The Seven Deadly Virtues* sits down next to readers at the bar, buys them a drink, and an hour or three later, ushers them into the revival tent without them even realizing it.

The book's contributors include Sonny Bunch, Christopher Buckley, David "Iowahawk" Burge, Christopher Caldwell, Andrew Ferguson, Jonah Goldberg, Michael Graham, Mollie Hemingway, Rita Koganzon, Matt Labash, James Lileks, Rob Long, Larry Miller, P. J. O'Rourke, Joe Queenan, Christine Rosen, and Andrew Stiles. Jonathan V. Last, senior writer at the *Weekly Standard*, editor of the collection, is also a contributor. All eighteen essays in this book are appearing for the first time anywhere.

In the book's opening essay, P. J. O'Rourke observes: "Virtue has by no means disappeared. It's as much in public view as ever. But it's been strung up by the heels. Virtue is upside down. Virtue is uncomfortable. Virtue looks ridiculous. All the change and the house keys are falling out of Virtue's pants pockets."

Here are the virtues everyone (including the book's contributors) was taught in Sunday school but have totally forgotten about until this very moment. In this sanctimony-free zone:

- Joe Queenan observes: "In essence, thrift is a virtue that resembles being very good at Mahjong. You've heard about people who can do it, but you've never actually met any of them."
- P. J. O'Rourke notes: "Fortitude is quaint. We praise the greatest generation for having it, but they had aluminum siding, church on Sunday, and jobs that required them to wear neckties or nylons (but never at the same time). We don't want those either."
- Christine Rosen writes: "A fellowship grounded in sociality means enjoying the company of those with whom you actually share physical space rather than those with whom you regularly and enthusiastically exchange cat videos."
- Rob Long offers his version of modern day justice: if you sleep late on the weekend, you are forced to wait thirty minutes in line at Costco.
- Jonah Goldberg offers: "There was a time when this desire-to-do-good-in-all-things was considered the *only* kind of integrity: 'Angels are better than mortals. They're always certain about what is right because, by definition, they're doing God's will.' Gabriel knew when it was okay to remove a mattress tag and Sandalphon always tipped the correct amount."
- Sonny Bunch dissects forbearance, observing that the fictional Two Minutes Hate of George Orwell's *1984* is now actually a reality directed at living, breathing people. Thanks, in part, to the Internet, "Its targets are designated by a spontaneously created mob—one that, due to its hive-mind nature—is virtually impossible to call off."

By the time readers have completed *The Seven Deadly Virtues*, they won't even realize that they've just been catechized into an entirely different—and better—moral universe.

The Seven Deadly Virtues: 18 Conservative Writers on Why the Virtuous Life is Funny as Hell Details

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From Reader Review The Seven Deadly Virtues: 18 Conservative Writers on Why the Virtuous Life is Funny as Hell for online ebook

Ruth Ann says

"While tolerating (nay, embracing!) diversity of race is one of the few remaining secular virtues--one not to be questioned, at any time, by anyone--tolerating diversity of opinion has become a rare beast indeed." p. 151 Sonny Bunch

Carly says

Puts rest to the idea that conservatives are unfunny. Rob Long's and Mollie Hemingway's are particular standouts.

Rex Libris says

A great book on a great topic by some great authors.

The Seven Deadly virtues is a collection of essays by leading conservative authors on the traditional virtues, such as thrift, chastity, etc, and some moder virtues such as curiosuty, integrity, and perseverance.

the authors include such classics as P.J. O'Rourke and Christopher Buckley, and new guy on the block David Burge, aka Iowahawk.

Douglas says

Except for one serious editing mistake, this is a super collection of interesting reflections on behavior. We don't talk much about individual virtues much anymore, but these essays do a great job of combining classic virtues with modern life, while keeping it very entertaining.

George P. says

Jonathan V. Last, ed., *The Seven Deadly Virtues: 18 Conservative Writers on Why the Virtuous Life Is Funny as Hell* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2014). Hardcover / Kindle

It is a vice to judge a book by its cover, but one that I'll indulge in this instance. The book's title and subtitle mislead. Its authors essay sixteen virtues, not seven (and none deadly), and while they do so hilariously, the funniness of the virtuous life is not the point of their essays. That said, *The Seven Deadly Virtues* is an insightful book, humorously written, and well worth reading.

The book divides into two sections. The first examines the traditional virtues, seven in number and divisible by two: prudence, justice, courage, and temperance are the *cardinal virtues*; faith, hope, and charity are the *Christian virtues*. The second looks into everyday virtues: chastity, simplicity, thrift, honesty, fellowship, forbearance, integrity, curiosity, and perseverance.

In the Introduction, Jonathan V. Last defines *virtues* as “the internal qualities that allow us to be our best selves and enable us to lead complete and fulfilling lives.” He warns against “extremism in the pursuit of virtue,” saying instead that virtue is “additive.” “No single virtue is sufficient in and of itself, and each one, taken on its own is corruptible. Yet each virtue becomes more valuable with the addition of others. And for any single virtue to be brought to its full bloom, it must be surrounded by its sisters.”

Picking favorites among the individual essays is difficult. How do you choose between P. J. O’Rourke and Christopher Buckley? Rob Long and Matt Labash? Andrew Ferguson and Jonah Goldberg? You don’t. You read, laugh, and learn.

Instead of picking a favorite, let me highlight Sonny Bunch, a younger, not-as-well-known author whose chapter, “Forbearance: Opting Out of the Politicized Life,” seems particularly apt for the politicized times in which we live.

The politicized life is “the growing, pernicious trend in American society where politics are injected into every moment of one’s existence.” For example, if you eat (or don’t) at Chick-Fil-A because you love (or hate) Truett Cathy’s support of traditional marriage rather than because of its delicious chicken sandwiches (not to mention peach shakes!), then you’re leading a politicized life.

Unfortunately, the Internet exacerbates the viciousness—in both senses—of politicization. “In real life,” Bunch points out, “you forbear those around you because you never know who thinks what, and forbearance makes it easier for the whole neighborhood to get along. There is diversity of thought, in part because no one really cares what the guy who lives next door thinks about marginal tax rates. But in virtual life, everyone in the self-selected group pretty much thinks the same way thing, about everything. And the occasional deviations become opportunities to enforce the communal norms, to show how super [serious] we all are about the righteousness of whichever cause binds the community together.” This politicized viciousness makes appearances on the social media of both the left and the right of the political spectrum, as both my Right and Left friends will quickly attest. (It’s easier to spot the lack of forbearance in those who differ from you online than in those who agree with you.)

Forbearance doesn’t mean avoiding politics, of course. (Avoidance isn’t possible, even apart from the ubiquity of social media, for the simple reason that politics is how we organize our common life, and you cannot avoid your neighbors.) Bunch writes: “there’s nothing wrong with standing up for your beliefs and attempting to persuade those with whom you disagree. But,” he goes on, “there’s a difference between having polite, rational discussions and declaring those with opposing views to be the enemy and, therefore, worthy of destruction, infamy, and impoverishment.” So, “the next time a Two Minutes Hate ramps up,” Bunch advises, “step away from your computer and get a cup of coffee. You’ll be a better person. And you’ll feel better too.” Yes, and amen!

If what Bunch has written resonates with the better angels of your nature, my guess is that you’ll both profit from and enjoy reading *The Seven Deadly Virtues*. Though written by conservatives (but not only for conservatives), the book contains insights that are widely applicable because appropriately wise.

P.S. If you found this review helpful, please vote “Yes” on my Amazon.com review page.

Paul says

Thought provoking commentary on properly understanding values and how our society often gets them upside down. The essays each hold their own worth and can be read independently.

JP says

Decent read. thought provoking. best consumed one essay at a time followed by some time reflecting on the message. Enjoyed the experience

Alex O'Connor says

Very funny and insightful

E says

What a great collection of writers: Jonathan V. Last, P. J. O'Rourke, Andrew Ferguson, Rob Long, James Lileks, Joe Queenan, Jonah Goldberg, Christopher Caldwell, Christopher Buckley, and several more. Lileks on simplicity is superb, as is Matt Labash on Chastity, Andrew Stiles on Temperance, and Last on virtue in general. Some of the chapters (articles, really) seem to be tongue in cheek--is the writer really extolling his assigned virtue? And some only address their topic somewhat obliquely. But I would nevertheless heartily recommend this book as a look at virtues/traits/ruits sorely missing in today's society.

Dave Mevis says

"Despair and hope are both contagious, perhaps equally so. If we are going to face a global attitudinal epidemic, better one of hopeful expectation than the alternative." -David Burge (p. 71)

Great essays on chastity and simplicity. The editor has assembled some really good thinkers and writers for this collection.

Please go read this book. Thank me later. :)

Matthew Trevithick says

Enjoyed this collection of essays. A few are excellent and a few are less than interesting. But on the whole enjoyable with a few good thoughts and perspectives.

It's a look at a few key values and their place (or absence) in American society, all with a fair amount of humor mixed in.

Renee says

Meh. Curmudgeon humor. "Funny as Hell" might be over-selling it a bit.

Checked it out because it had a Jonah Goldberg piece in it. I find him agreeable reading even when I don't agree with him.

Reza Amiri Praramadhan says

The first half of the book is quite coherent, yet the the second half is more difficult to understand, especially the essay about hoarding. The best part of the book would be the essay about perseverance, which is very inspiring for me.

Steve Penner says

This was a funny read. Sometimes a mildly humorous, chuckle-to-yourself read, sometimes a belly laugh from-the-bottom-of-your-feet laugh, but delightful all the way around. But besides funny, it was insightful as a piece of cultural analysis. The most striking thing about its humor was its clean, self-deprecating, non-vicious poking of our cultural foibles. Unlike much left-leaning humor, it was not mocking, self-indulgent or vulgar. I appreciated the realistic and funny portrayals of Washington, its media elite as well as the Hollywood crowd. Highly recommended.

Kenneth says

As a long time proponent of Virtue Ethics, I found this an entertaining and refreshing take on the classical virtues in our modern society. Each virtue gets its own chapter. The first eight chapters cover an overview and then the seven Cardinal Virtues. The remainder of the chapters are on virtues that are often included in other lists referred to as The Everyday Virtues.

I guess if you wanted the thesis for the book, perhaps the best would be from page 11 of the introduction, by Jonathan V. Last:

"If you take anything from this book (other than the yucks), it should be that virtue is additive. No single virtue is sufficient in and of itself, and each one, taken on its own, is corruptible. Yet each virtue becomes more valuable with the addition of others. And for any single virtue to be brought to its full bloom, it must be surrounded by its sisters. Courage and prudence: Together they give people the spine to do great things. Integrity and forbearance: Without them, no society can function. Chastity and temperance: All right, let's

not get carried away here. The point is, when a man cultivated the virtues as a class, then, and only then, does he become a man in full."
