

### 1: The Closing of the Western Mind : Charles Freeman :

*The Closing of the Western Mind: The Rise of Faith and the Fall of Reason [Charles Freeman] on [www.enganchecubano.com](http://www.enganchecubano.com) \*FREE\* shipping on qualifying offers. A radical and powerful reappraisal of the impact of Constantine's adoption of Christianity on the later Roman world.*

Feb 22, , Cartoons rarely create a demand for reflection on the craft. One is basically laughing the problem away. Cartoons thrive on stereotypes. One laughs exaggeratedly at a caricature of the self convinced it is an exaggeration. But cartoons in a cross-cultural sense become more problematic. Instead of laughter, we can face riots. The cartoons published in a Danish weekly generated controversies and protests that were deeply disturbing. The spate of editorials about it was equally inane. It was as if stereotype wrestled stereotype in happy predictability. The questions we have to ask are: Is there something wrong in our mode of thinking about these issues? Why do we reinforce stereotypes at the end of every such controversy? He was interested in understanding violence and how modes of thinking escalate violence. Each action by one side escalates the opposite reaction and we proceed to an escalating spiral of violence. There is no third term, no translation or alternative signal which can bring down the urge to excess. In such a situation all A seems to say is that you have hurt me, insulted me, denied me my basic being. Myth, symbol and history reinforce the escalation. The cartoon controversy reminds one of a schizmogetic situation. At this moment, humour is the last thing one wants. Humour now lacks real seriousness and laughter ironically becomes the worst medicine. The debate has been deluged with editorials. Analysis of this kind operates within fixed frames. Firstly, it is read consciously as a clash of religions particularly of Islam and Christianity. Secondly, it is seen as irrational faith confronting liberal secularism. There is also an invidiousness that is left unstated. There is an implication that Islam is Third World and ethnic and suffering from a touch of inferiority or defeat. Alternatively, the liberal West is projected as mature, superior and content within the rule of law. The opposition becomes one of identity politics vs citizenship, law vs vigilantism and reason vs obscurantism. It brings out the worst of both sides. But it takes wisdom to see that freedom and hypocrisy go together. The cartoons reflect Orientalism at its worst. But freedom of press is part of a large vision of democracy and the current situation will benefit neither side. If France, England and Germany want to survive as democracies, they must rework their liberalism to understand that they are not homogeneous societies but multiethnic, multi-religious and multicultural societies which have to go beyond tolerance as disengagement to plurality as engagement. Islamic groups must also realise that freedom and faith will feed on each other and Europe might produce a new and creative variant of Islam like India and Indonesia did. September 11 has created a Pearl Harbour of the mind, a closure that pre-empts alternative pasts and alternative futures. If democracy is central, we have to ask is free speech within licence or law? Does insulting Islam come under laws of blasphemy? Is free speech free of hate speech? When is the West going to confront its illiteracy about Islam? The Muslim is no longer the invisible terrorist but a fellow citizen and neighbour probably reading the same newspaper. Both Islam and the West need an alternative myth. We need a connection between European and Middle Eastern mythologies, which shows that modern western civilisation arose out of a conversation with Islam. The world before has to be translated into democratic theory. It demands that democracy cannot be constructed on singular identities and homogeneous histories. It emphasises that heterogeneity does not deny violence but has spaces of interaction beyond it. Abandoning this world led Europe to genocidal nationalism and Nazism. We need pluralism to rework pasts and futures. The imagination both of democracy and Islam calls for a democracy beyond current notions of liberalism and fundamentalism. Anything less is no longer feasible. The writer is a social scientist.

### 2: The Closing of the Western Mind by Charles Freeman | [www.enganchecubano.com](http://www.enganchecubano.com)

*The Closing of the Western Mind: The Rise of Faith and the Fall of Reason () is a book by the classical historian Charles Freeman, in which he discusses the relationship between the Greek philosophical tradition and Christianity, primarily in the fourth to sixth century AD.*

I found myself lamenting the passing of two literary institutions during the same week in late May. The first was Philip Roth, arguably the last representative of that great cohort of American writers steeped in the European literary tradition and untainted by the culture of political correctness, a man whose literary accomplishments made him an institution all unto himself. The writer was eighty-five. The bookstore was twenty-two, and its owner had been in business for some forty years. A few months ago, I had an enriching conversation with an East European writer concerning the general drop in academic standards and the loss of interest in reading as juxtaposed against the rise of ultraliberalism and its incessant propaganda. There was some disagreement about whether this dumbing down is a sinister project carried out by a cabal, or whether, as Tolstoy thought, there are overriding laws at work that govern history and human affairs, and that have remained beyond the realm of human discovery. The question was not settled, but we were at one with each other on the main conclusion: It has always been trendy in some circles to glorify the past at the expense of the present. Did our conclusion amount to much the same thing? Were we two revenants stumbling about the shores of modernity, bemoaning a lost paradise that has probably never even existed? We expect our leaders to be our spitting images; and increasingly, looking at the present crop of those in power, it appears that the stewards of statehood are more than happy to oblige. How is this happening? To an extent, it is already happening. As a tool to help us maximize our potential, technology is supposed to work for humanity; instead, humanity appears to be working for technology. In fact, one often gets the feeling that modern existence is not so much about experiencing things as it is about anticipating or reporting experiences. The immediacy of life “that cogent sense of the present that gives our existence its texture” is attenuated in favour of its virtuality. It is saying something when companies such as Apple roll out tools to help users limit the amount of time they spend with their gadgets in a quest to fight phone addiction “the drug cartels promoting moderate use of narcotics. Good luck with that. Our lives are being shunted from reality to virtuality, from real life to the virtual one. Twitter epitomizes this shift. The media canvass the Twittersphere in order to echo the vox populi. More to the point, an observation can be made that life is now viewed, channeled, and beamed through a place like Twitter. What ought to have been a great platform for updates and announcements has become a measure of our existence, a watermark of modern life. Following the death of Anthony Bourdain earlier this month, the BBC inserted a number of eulogistic tweets into the article that reported his passing. Mourning, however, is also an intensely personal experience, which makes it less than ideal for social media. The doyennes of Twitter have other ideas. Rose McGowan, for instance, sobbed directly into the camera, imploring those who want to commit suicide to seek help. She had to turn her camera on, make sure she had everything right, and then upload the recording “all of it through a vale of tears. Was there no more dignified way to send her message across? Reality is now contingent on being virtual. Now there is something sensational! Three days later, Lawson was already posting photos of a culinary delight. Perhaps one ought not to be too harsh. In Twitter terms, three days is an eternity. On social media, the deepest feelings are but fleeting, like the fading contrails left behind by an airplane. Social media is the new battleground “with Twitter as the site of its Austerlitzes and Solferinos, it seems, only on a rather pathetic level. A university in a Canadian province congratulates a centre-right party on winning a provincial election on Twitter, and there is an uproar also on Twitter by dyspeptic ultraliberal militants allergic to anyone or anything an inch to the right of Justin Trudeau. The CEO of Twitter itself “the irony of all ironies” has a meal at a fast food chain that has been blacklisted by ultralibs, and there is a backlash “on Twitter, naturally. The modern man takes to Twitter to fight his wars and mete out justice. Social media platforms are becoming the global equivalent of a town square where crowds gather to pillory those who have offended the town folk. While everyone across the political spectrum is making good use of the opportunities provided by online prosecution and shaming, the

ultraliberal movement has proved to be especially adept at setting up its inquisition to try those who have run afoul of the ultraliberal dogma. To be fair, this is certainly an improvement on hurtling grenades at your opponents. Trivialization promotes the unimportant and scales down the important. Nothing sticks, nothing holds, nothing lingers. The landscape of today: Subsequent fact-checking performed by me, however, failed to reveal any statements made by Ford to that effect. The most disturbing aspect of the proliferation of social media is the impoverishment of language. The use of text messages forces the user to submit to a mode of communication that, by definition, depends on packing as much information as possible into a very small space. It might make communication more efficient, but it also restricts language. Using text messages does not encourage eloquence or loquaciousness. The user is confined to the dictates of his gadget – the tyranny of the screen. The use of language is driven by the gadget and not by the user. The tool dominates the user, and not vice versa. In the appendix at the end of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, George Orwell describes how Big Brother obliterates language in order to maintain its oppression of society. The atrophy of language makes society more pliable: The big question is whether this dumbing down of society is a function of natural i. Yet the process of the closing of the Western mind is clearly benefiting someone. The gnomes of Davos, naturally – the people who get together for the annual winter confab in Davos with the understanding that not everyone who goes to Davos is a gnome of Davos and that many a gnome of Davos need not go to Davos at all – this is more of a symbol than anything else. The gnomes of Davos – those who preach diversity, but in fact aim at uniformity; those who profess to celebrate humanity, but reduce the human being to a mindless consumer; those who promise lifestyle enrichment, but in fact deliver a destructive hedonism. The gnomes of Davos want us to believe that the apogee of the Enlightenment is a group of freaks eager to dangle their private parts in front of spectators and brandish their pathology in full view of the world – that for them is the crowning achievement of freedom and liberty. As long as the subjects spend money, nothing else matters. That is the new hegemony – the hegemony of the ultraliberal, the hegemony of the mediocre, the hegemony of the average. The hegemony of the gnomes of Davos. By now the answer should be clear. The latter-day hegemonies are not particularly interested in promoting reading as an activity – certainly not reading books. Reading books helps escape all the noise. Reading books insulates us against crowd thinking and propaganda. Reading books encourages us to think. Reading books is conducive to reflection. Reading books hones our ability to ask questions. Reading books is not good for hegemonies, since these might be questioned. Reading books broadens language and its boundaries, enhances our potential, and ultimately promotes freedom. It should not astonish us, therefore, that at a time when ultraliberal doctrinaires seek to curtail our freedoms in the name of imposing their own notions of liberty, serious reading is in retreat. A closed mind is not very likely to ask these questions, and so a closed mind is preferred to an open one.

### 3: The Closing Of The Western Mind by Charles Freeman - Penguin Books Australia

*The Closing of the Western Mind looks at the history through this missing political dimension and provides a fuller explanation as to the "whys" in Church history. While the title is somewhat cynical, the body of the text is less so. Many books dealing with Catholic Church history present the lineage of the Church and the internal conflicts.*

Sep 27, Erik Graff rated it really liked it Recommends it for: Raised a Catholic in St. Louis and having gone to school at Holy Cross and Loyola as a student, first, of astronomy and then of the classics, he was--and is--not very sympathetic to Christianity. Indeed, he is downright hostile. My own background was pretty much areligious. Mom was a nominal member of the Church of Norway, but except for some months in a Lutheran Sunday school with my best friend Larry Nolden around fourth grade, I was pretty ignorant of the whole religion business. Dad, however, announced himself an unapologetic atheist when I finally got around to asking him about his own beliefs. Nobody in the family was religious so far as I could discern and when church was attended it was more for the sake of Norwegian tradition than an expression of any ideology. Basically, no one cared much one way or the other. My brother and I were free to attend any services we liked without criticism. The world around us, however, seemed quite religious, quite Christian in fact, and when we moved from a rural housing development to upscale Park Ridge, Illinois, it seemed almost entirely Protestant and often evangelical--and Republican--at that. Having had friends of all faiths--and races--while living in the country, the move to Park Ridge in fifth grade was quite upsetting. There I was introduced not only to Protestant enthusiasm, but also to anti-Catholicism, class prejudice and racism. There were Catholics in town, but they had their own schools and virtually their own neighborhoods. By high school, a disproportionate number of my friends were of Catholic backgrounds, though those who still "believed" were quite selective in their beliefs. By the end of the sixties the New Left had penetrated even Park Ridge, many of my older friends being socialists of one sort or another. With the left also came the appeal of the broader counterculture, many peers and younger friends being freaks of one sort or another. Between the two groups, the political and the apolitical, there was much interaction, much openness. It was from among their number and from a freshman History of Civilization course taught by Kelly Fox that I became exposed to and increasingly interested in non-Western religions. The first two years of college were devoted to study and politics, the politics often pushing the academics aside. Then, having to drop out for a year while facing draft evasion charges, I found myself with the time to read what I wanted. Thinking my character could use a lot of improvement and having had some rather challenging experiences with psychotropics led me towards the serious study of continental depth psychology and the works of C. Jung--a psychiatrist who seemed to know a lot about altered states of consciousness and to care a lot about religion. Returning to college to find the politics now more subdued and inspired by my independent studies, I started taking psychology courses and even a two semester sequence on the bible taught by the Grinnell College chaplain. Dennis Haas, the bible professor, managed to get me enthusiastic about the new Religious Studies Department and to switch to that from the History Department, a change that led me to go straight to Union Theological Seminary in New York upon graduation. Although the Religious Studies major in college and the subsequent M. The ideology of Christianity need not be seen as inherently authoritarian, though its alliance with such a state in the fourth century has had that consequence. Now my stepbrother has walked in for a planned dinner to be eaten together, so this will have to stop

### 4: Armarium Magnum: The Closing of the Western Mind by Charles Freeman

*Allan Bloom's diagnosis in "The Closing of the American Mind" can explain far more about the sorry state of American higher education and the Western condition than popular stories that blame the Enlightenment, or democracy, or medieval nominalism.*

It is a respectable 16 pages of excellent scholarly works on topics as wide-ranging as the origins of Christianity to ancient Greek astronomy and from Neo-platonism to the conversion of the Empire. But the books that were remarkable by their absence were precisely the ones I was looking for. Here was a weighty, closely-argued tome that was trying to explain the death of reason and its consequent absence in the early Middle Ages at least, apparently, until the age of Aquinas in the Thirteenth Century and yet nowhere in his bibliography could I find anything on early Medieval philosophy, Medieval science or Medieval thought generally. Given the excellent recent work done on the continuity between Classical, Hellenistic, Roman, Late Antique and Medieval thinking by giants in the field like David C. His writing is fluid and his argument is smooth, so it is hardly surprising that most of his readers are blissfully unaware of these odd lacunae. Indeed, Freeman carries even readers who are aware of what he is not telling us along so fluently that it required me to stop several times and say to myself "But hang on a minute, what about So it is hardly surprising that non-specialist reviewers accept his thesis without so much as blinking and that most general readers have been even more readily convinced. The argument of this book is that the Greek intellectual tradition did not simply lose vigor and disappear. Its survival and continued progress in the Arab world is testimony to that. Rather in the fourth and fifth centuries AD, it was destroyed by the political and religious forces which made up the highly authoritarian government of the late Roman empire. On the whole this summary of history is judicious enough and covers a broad range of topics and centuries in enough detail to avoid being glib and rapidly enough to avoid getting bogged down. The points where his narrative jars for anyone with more than a passing familiarity with the subject matter is where Freeman skips around something that might not suit his picture of Classical and Roman thinking as generally free, untrammelled and superbly rational and later thinking as restricted, oppressed, constrained and finally strangled. Freeman makes ancient medicine sound as though it bordered on the rigour of its modern equivalent, for example. Yet it was as riddled with silliness, superstition, astrology, mysticism, false assumptions and quack cures as anything in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. It was a highly irrational ancient taboo about corpses that prevented any genuine examination of human anatomy - with the exception of one short window in which human dissection was allowed in Ptolemaic Egypt, anatomical knowledge came from guesswork, observations of screaming patients during surgery and the dissection of apes, dogs and pigs. Not surprisingly, this rather irrational way of working did not exactly yield much useful information. And ironically, this taboo was overcome and true dissections were carried out again in the Middle Ages. Similarly, Freeman makes much of the supposed religious tolerance of earlier Roman imperial authorities and contrasts this with the increasingly intolerant attitudes of Constantine and his successors to the purple: There clearly existed a wide range of spiritual possibilities, any one of which could be followed without any sense of impropriety and, even though there existed some degree of competition between the different movements for adherents, none excluded other beliefs. And, as a marked rhetorical contrast to the later Imperial campaigns for religious orthodoxy that Freeman describes in detail, it works very neatly. Despite what Freeman would like to pretend or have his readers believe, the intolerance of the post-Constantinian emperors of the Fourth and Fifth Centuries had deep Roman and Classical roots. The Romans were tolerant enough of various cults, but only so long as they met certain criteria. Obviously the worship of their version of the Olympian gods was fine and this cult formed the centre of their regime for centuries. And the gods of their conquered peoples were also acceptable so long as they conformed more or less to the Roman model of religion. So the worship of the Celtic god Grannos or Grannus as an equivalent of Apollo was acceptable and tolerated, but the Celtic practice of human sacrifice was not. Contrary to his claim that any cult could be "followed without any sense of impropriety", various mystery religions, especially those of Isis and Cybele, were sneered at as sects for foreigners, the nouveau riche and freed slaves and,

occasionally, restricted or expelled from Rome and other cities. Other cults were actively destroyed in hysterical fear campaigns that were clear precursors of the heresy scares and witch hunts of later periods. Bacchanalian sects were actively and brutally persecuted and eliminated by the Roman Senate in the Second Century BC in savage persecutions that prefigured the later persecution of Christians. And while Judaism officially enjoyed the status of *religio licita* by merit of its antiquity, the virulent anti-Semitism in the Roman Empire had a religious rather than a purely ethnic edge. He handles this by downplaying the persecutions as much as possible, emphasising that many of the later traditions about the persecutions were fanciful and framing them as reasonable responses to fairly legitimate concerns about a dissident element. Interestingly, he does not take a similar tack in his far longer, far more detailed and far more condemnatory account of later Christian oppression of pagans. If it is a crime to raze a temple, it must surely be a greater crime to throw the congregation to the lions, and of the half-dozen philosophers who triumphed over the ashes of the martyrs in the first three Christian centuries, Porphyry was the only one to be punished by the burning of his books. Mark Edwards, *History Today*, Vol. This is a consistent failing throughout his book, particularly at the very points on which his broader thesis rests. Lindberg moves from the significant contribution of the Classical Greek natural philosophers and mathematicians to a much briefer chapter entitled "Roman and Early Medieval Science". Over 26 pages Lindberg gives a reasonable summary of science and reason in the period from the early First Century BC to the age of the Venerable Bede d. And he is able to make the summary of eight centuries in such a short space because, to be blunt, not much happened in this period. With the notable exceptions of Ptolemy and Galen, this was a period of commentators and encyclopaedists and was certainly not a period of reason being fruitfully applied to the world in an unfettered and tolerant intellectual idyll, with remarkable and innovative results. If anything, the Roman era saw science increasingly become a slightly eccentric hobby and saw the thinkers of the previous age solidify into largely unquestioned or even unexamined "authorities". This is not exactly remarkable and there are many periods of history where similar things have happened in certain areas of intellectual inquiry. He needs the slow down and stagnation of the application of reason to the world to come much later - during and after the reigns of the villains of his story: So he puts a brave front on this period and has his story glide on in smooth prose as though there is no problem at all: This period has often been derided for its lack of intellectual energy. A cloud of critics, of compilers, of commentators darkened the face of learning and the decline of genius was soon followed by the corruption of taste. If he wants his argument that "the Greek intellectual tradition did not simply lose vigour and disappear And Freeman is more than capable of supporting points in his argument; often for whole chapters at a time with many quotes, examples and citations of modern authorities. He makes the point that recent scholars have "have shown increasing respect for the achievements of the Greeks under the Roman Empire", but that is the last we hear of these recent scholars. We never hear what this "increasing respect" is based on either. After meandering for a few pages describing the reigns and gardens of Hellenophile emperors like Nero and Hadrian, Freeman finally returns to the "achievements" he mentioned. But instead of a long list of overlooked advances and significant contributions that have not been appreciated, what we get is, well, Galen and Ptolemy. And the algebraist, Diophantus. But that is pretty much it. And this tradition led directly into early Medieval successors like Cassiodorus, Isidore and Bede. Wicked Emperors and Fundamentalist Bishops The next part of the work is a section which Freeman serves up with some relish. The central or so pages of his book is a lengthy and generally accurate summary of the origins and rise of Christianity, the conversion first of the emperors and then of their Empire and the complex and literally Byzantine theological disputes that led the Emperors of the Eastern Empire to become increasingly dogmatic, hard-line and intolerant of dissent. Freeman argues that intolerance of contrary or even alternative ideas became built into the institution of Empire and, as such, was passed on to the post-Roman west, killing the tolerance and rationally-based inquiry of the former ages in the process. If Freeman had never bothered with that argument and instead written a book about the intersection of Fourth to Sixth Century Christian theology with Imperial politics this central section would have stood alone nicely. One of the more peculiar elements in it is his constant emphasis on the idea that Arian Christology was somehow more widely accepted and more reasonable than its rival position and his depiction of what was to become orthodox Nicean Christology as

imposed against broad resistance. This seems to fit with a general theme regarding Constantine as a bully and a machiavel which is not, in itself, unreasonable, but to the point where it becomes highly strained. Similarly, all indications that Constantine may have been motivated by any genuine religious zeal - however unsophisticated - is downplayed or ignored. It is highly odd that Freeman makes a great deal of the fact that Constantine did not get baptised when he converted and only received that sacrament on his deathbed. So the fact that Freeman completely fails to make this simple observation is not just odd, but slightly suspicious. I find it hard to believe someone who has researched the period as carefully as Freeman clearly has could be unaware that this was common practice, so it seems he did not bother to mention it because doing so casts Constantine in a light that suits his thesis. Once again, Freeman fails to prove himself an objective historian and veers off, despite his pretensions and protests to the contrary, into the territory of the polemicist. Similarly we get strange omissions in his brief account of the murder of Hypatia of Alexandria. He does not say that this vignette illustrates his thesis, but by only telling part of the story he does not actually have to - his careful editing of the details does the job for him. God and Reason in the Middle Ages These smaller omissions and skewing of the picture aside, the major flaw in this part of the book is related to the problems and gaps in the earlier section. Just as Freeman skims over the fact that the Greek intellectual tradition did lose its vigour long before the increasingly Christian and rigidly intolerant emperors of the Fourth to Sixth Centuries, he also ignores the fact that for every Church father, patriarch and bishop who denigrated reason, philosophy and learning in this period, there were others who defended them. It certainly is not hard to find early Christian authorities who disparage natural philosophy, discourage the contemplation of science and scold the faithful for trusting reason over revelation and faith. Of Tertullian he writes: Like many Latin Christians, he taunted the Greek philosophers: Here Tertullian is decrying not so much "dialectic", but its use by heretics. Of course, Tertullian was certainly no great fan of unfettered speculation and rational analysis over revelation and faith, but he was not quite the close-minded, anti-intellectual philistine Freeman depicts here either. More importantly, Freeman gives a great deal of attention to sentiments like that of Tertullian while almost completely ignoring another, far greater and far more significant development that was emerging around the same time. Because while some Christians certainly were steadfastly turning their backs on reason and rejecting the legacy of the Classical Greek scientific tradition, others were doing precisely the opposite. And the key point here is that those who opposed the rejection of reason and Greek learning won the debate over those like Tertullian and John Chrysostom who would have preferred to abandon the Greek rational heritage completely. The fact that Freeman utterly fails to acknowledge this is telling, but it seems he has done so because it undermines his whole thesis. Justin Martyr argued that reason and the learning of the Greek philosophers were not incompatible with the theology of a revealed religion as early as the Second Century AD and this idea, adapted from the Jewish scholar Philo, was taken up and amplified by Clement of Alexandria: We shall not err in alleging that all things necessary and profitable for life came to us from God, and that philosophy more especially was given to the Greeks, as a covenant peculiar to them, being, as it were, a stepping stone to the philosophy which is according to Christ. Clement, Miscellanies, VI, 8 This idea that reason and philosophy were stepping stones to the same truths revealed in Christianity became a consistent theme amongst a continuous strand of Patristic tradition - one which was diametrically opposed to that which advocated the rejection of "pagan learning". Even Origen called philosophy "the ancillary of Christianity", but the idea that the universe was the rational product of a rational God and so could be apprehended by the reason of the Greeks was argued most influentially by John of Damascus: Nothing is more estimable than knowledge, for knowledge is the light of the rational soul. The opposite, which is ignorance, is darkness. Just as the absence of light is darkness, so is the absence of knowledge a darkness of the reason. Now, ignorance is proper to irrational beings, while knowledge is proper to those who are rational. John of Damascus, Writings, trans. Bizarrely, Freeman depicts Augustine as an integral part of "a defensive tradition inherited from Paul, largely in terms of its enemies With the decline of literacy in Greek which began in the Third Century, Boethius realised that he needed to translate key works into Latin to preserve them for western scholars. As Edward Grant notes: By his monumental achievement, Boethius guaranteed that logic, the most visible symbol of reason and rationality, remained alive at the lowest ebb of European civilisation between the fifth and tenth

centuries. Incredibly, Boethius does not even appear in his extensive 26 page index. Of course the real reason for the centuries-long hiatus in intellectual development between the Fifth Century and the Tenth was the collapse of the Western Roman Empire and the subsequent centuries of chaos, fragmentation, invasion and then slow recovery. By carefully avoiding key elements in the story, Freeman creates an illusion by which this hiatus was substantially caused by a rejection of reason by Christendom, where in fact reason was preserved so that as soon as the west emerged from that period of social, political and economic turmoil one of the first things its scholars did was go in search of the books of reason and inquiry that had been lost in the wreck. There was no "closing of the Western mind" at all. It is just that for several long centuries western minds had other things to think about, like surviving the next Avar or Viking incursion or getting through the next winter. Polemics and Defensiveness Freeman bills himself as "a freelance academic", which seems to be a slightly cute way of saying he is an amateur historian. He is certainly a lot more defensive than most professional academics. His introduction to the Pimlico edition of his book is a long apologia and defence against the idea he was attacking Christianity. He has posted not one but two lengthy comments along the same lines on Amazon.

### 5: The closing of the Western mind – THE AXIS OF REACTION

*In the fourth and fifth centuries a.d., however, faith in this last sense achieved prominence over reason. The principles of empirical observation or logic were overruled in the conviction that.*

The central thesis of the book is that Christianity by the fifth century, served to impede the advancement of science and reason and only began to break out of its lethargy during the time of Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. Simply put, Christianity was a major contributor to the dark ages, more so than Christian historians would like to admit and most Christians understand. After reading the book I can see that the author had some valid points. His basic argument goes like this chronologically. By BC the Greeks began to develop the idea of reason as a primary tool in understanding the world. These ideas were coalesced by Aristotle and his philosophy on how to live a balanced life. Plato took a slightly different direction through his ideas on Forms had the effect of discouraging observation of the natural world and the use of reason as the means to knowledge. It also denigrated the natural realm in favor of the perfect heavenly realm. The ideas of both Aristotle and Plato were incorporated into the Roman empire beginning around BC. Because Rome was essentially a federation of conquered nations the empire allowed a plurality of religious systems to exist although after Julius Caesar also included the cult of the emperor which demanded nominal allegiance. Christianity was founded by the Apostle Paul who wove elements of Platonism and Greek thought into his teachings. Jesus was a historical figure, a wise teacher, but was not divine nor did he preach salvation, damnation, or anything supernatural. This idea coupled with the belief that incorrect beliefs lead to eternal punishment, was later decisive in persuading Christians to abandon Greek thought and promoted the idea of knowledge being the purview of first those in apostolic succession and much later the bishop the Pope in Rome. Christianity was also unique to the Roman empire for its exclusivity by not encouraging the practice of multiple religions. However, local practices became incorporated into the church leading to the creation of saints martyrs with powers similar to those of local deities and worship of the virgin Mary. By AD Constantine saw that the exclusive and hierarchical structure of the church could be used to keep "good order" in society and so allowed it to flourish freely. He wrongly thought that doctrinal differences could be ironed out through councils like Nicea in AD. However, he and his successors were wrong and the arguments between bishops became rancorous and personal. This was the case because the doctrinal points in question e. This led to scores of heresies and heretics being found on all sides. Augustine lists 83 such heresies in the early fifth century. With the official stance of Christianity secured came imperial funding and perks that institutionalized the church and served to drive the debate on various doctrinal questions. As the church became more rigid in its structure it incorporated certain teaching including Plato in philosophy, Galen in medicine, and Ptolemy in cosmology. These became entwined in Christian doctrine particularly through Augustine to the exclusion of Aristotelean logic and other Greek learning. In short, Christianity became narrow by not allowing the free flow of ideas inherent in the Greek and Roman pagan cultures. Christianity suppressed reason by stressing authority over debate. The split between the western and eastern churches further served to isolate the west from Greek thought and certain Greek texts were left to be preserved by the Arabs as the west became exclusively Latin. The end result was that reason, observation, and speculation were inhibited by the church in favor of orthodoxy. Thomas Aquinas with his incorporation of Aristotle into Christianity signalled the turning of the tide. He also only develops his argument overtly in the second to last chapter and the epilogue. Much of the rest of the book is straight history although with a little interpretation that serves his purposes to be sure. I found especially interesting his discussion of the development of patron saints of various illnesses from pagan forerunners. As a protestant this always confused me and so to see an historical explanation was welcome. I also tend to accept his view that Constantine and other emperors were first politicians, only nominally Christian, who used Christianity for means other than personal salvation. Posted by Dan Agonistes at

### 6: The Closing Of The Western Mind (ebook) by Charles Freeman |

*The Closing of the Western Mind by Charles Freeman. Charles Freeman and I have corresponded about this review. You can read our emails in full here.. Charles Freeman is a freelance writer of popular history.*

The couple had a daughter, Lucille, two years earlier. As a thirteen-year-old, Bloom read a Readers Digest article about the University of Chicago and told his parents he wanted to attend; his parents thought it was unreasonable and did not encourage his hopes. Essays, "he stated that his education "began with Freud and ended with Plato ". The theme of this education was self-knowledge, or self-discovery—an idea that Bloom would later write, seemed impossible to conceive of for a Midwestern American boy. He credits Leo Strauss as the teacher who made this endeavor possible for him. Bloom went on to write his thesis on Isocrates. Grene recalled Bloom as an energetic and humorous student completely dedicated to studying classics, but with no definite career ambitions. Among the American expatriate community in Paris his friends included writer Susan Sontag. Conservatism is a respectable outlook I just do not happen to be that animal. Upon returning to the United States in , he taught adult education students at the University of Chicago with his friend Werner J. Bloom went on to teach at Yale from to , at Cornell until , and at the University of Toronto until , when he returned to the University of Chicago. In , as a professor at Cornell, Allan Bloom served as a faculty member of the Cornell Branch of the Telluride Association , an organization focused on intellectual development and self-governance. The students received free room and board in the Telluride House on the Cornell University campus and assumed the management of the house themselves. While living at the house, Bloom befriended former U. Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins. Bloom strove to achieve "translation The preface opens on page xi with the statement, "this is intended to be a literal translation. After returning to Chicago, he befriended and taught courses with Saul Bellow. He was concerned with preserving a philosophical way of life for future generations. He strove to do this through both scholarly and popular writing. His writings may be placed into two categories: Allan Bloom says a philosopher is immune to irony because he can see the tragic as comic and comic as tragic. Bloom refers to Socrates, the philosopher par excellence, in his Interpretative Essay stating, "Socrates can go naked where others go clothed; he is not afraid of ridicule. He can also contemplate sexual intercourse where others are stricken with terror; he is not afraid of moral indignation. In other words he treats the comic seriously and the tragic lightly". Bloom follows Strauss in suggesting that the "Just City in Speech" is not natural ; it is man-made. The Closing of the American Mind[ edit ] Students now arrive at the university ignorant and cynical about our political heritage, lacking the wherewithal to be either inspired by it or seriously critical of it. Yet on the momentum of strong initial reviews, including one by Christopher Lehmann-Haupt in The New York Times and an op-ed piece by syndicated conservative commentator George Will titled, "A How-To Book for the Independent" [22] it became an unexpected best seller, eventually selling close to half a million copies in hardback and remaining at number one on The New York Times Bestseller List for nonfiction for four months. In it, Bloom criticizes the modern movements in philosophy and the humanities. Philosophy professors involved in ordinary language analysis or logical positivism disregard important "humanizing" ethical and political issues and fail to pique the interest of students. The modern liberal philosophy, he says, enshrined in the Enlightenment thought of John Locke "that a just society could be based upon self-interest alone, coupled by the emergence of relativism in American thought" had led to this crisis. For Bloom, this created a void in the souls of Americans, into which demagogic radicals as exemplified by s student leaders could leap. In the same fashion, Bloom suggests, that the Nazi brownshirts once filled the gap created in German society by the Weimar Republic. In the second instance, he argued, the higher calling of philosophy and reason understood as freedom of thought , had been eclipsed by a pseudo-philosophy, or an ideology of thought. Relativism was one feature of modern liberal philosophy that had subverted the Platonic "Socratic teaching. For Bloom, the failure of contemporary liberal education leads to the sterile social and sexual habits of modern students, and to their inability to fashion a life for themselves beyond the mundane offerings touted as success. Bloom argues that commercial pursuits had become more highly valued than love, the philosophic quest for truth, or the civilized pursuits of honor and

glory. Treating it for the first time with genuine philosophical interest, he gave fresh attention to the industry, its target-marketing to children and teenagers, its top performers, its place in our late-capitalist bourgeois economy, and its pretensions to liberation and freedom. He cites the soldier who throws himself into battle at the urging of the drum corps , the pious believer who prays under the spell of a religious hymn , the lover seduced by the romantic guitar , and points towards the tradition of philosophy that treated musical education as paramount. He names the pop-star Mick Jagger as a cardinal representative of the hypocrisy and erotic sterility of pop-rock music. Pop music employs sexual images and language to enthrall the young and to persuade them that their petty rebelliousness is authentic politics, when, in fact, they are being controlled by the money-managers whom successful performers like Jagger quietly serve. Bloom claims that Jagger is a hero to many university students who envy his fame and wealth but are really just bored by the lack of options before them. A second round of reviews was generally more critical. Jaffa , a conservative, both argued that Bloom was deeply influenced by 19th-century European philosophers, especially Friedrich Nietzsche. Nussbaum wrote that, for Bloom, Nietzsche had been disastrously influential in modern American thought. The answer is, we cannot say, and we are given no reason to think him one at all. The book, he said, was one that "decent people would be ashamed of having written. Norman Podhoretz noted that the closed-mindedness in the title refers to the paradoxical consequence of the academic "open mind" found in liberal political thoughtâ€”namely "the narrow and intolerant dogmatism" that dismisses any attempt, by Plato or the Hebrew Bible for example, to provide a rational basis for moral judgments. Podhoretz continued, "Bloom goes on to charge liberalism with vulgarizing the noble ideals of freedom and equality, and he offers brilliantly acerbic descriptions of the sexual revolution and the feminist movement, which he sees as products of this process of vulgarization. But this awareness of the abyss moved Bloom, unlike Nietzsche, toward love and political conservatism. Love, whether for the truth or for another, because it can raise us out of the abyss. Political conservatism because it best restrains the chaos that modernity threatens". Bloom was writing vigorous polemic at a time when America sought to ensure that the intellect could not and would not be allowed to rise above gender and race; the mind was to be defined by its melanin and genetic content, and by what lay between our legs; or, in the academe, the canon was to be re-read and re-defined so that it fitted the latest theorem of gender or race. Bloom would have none of it. He loved people who were first-rate with real love. Describing its creation, Bellow wrote: I mention this because it was a remarkable thing for a sick man and a convalescent to do and because it was equally remarkable that a political philosopher should choose at such a moment in his life to write about literature Bloom had a gift for reading realityâ€”the impulse to put your loving face to it and press your hands against it". People only want the factual truth. Well, the truth is that Allan was a very superior person, great-souled. When critics proclaim the death of the novel, I sometimes think they are really saying that there are no significant people to write about. The Republic of Plato. Cornell University Press; Agora ed. Bloom, Allan, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Emile translator with introduction. Introduction to the reading of Hegel. The Closing of the American Mind. Bloom, Allan, and Steven J. University of Chicago Press. Plato, Seth Benardete , and Allan Bloom. Bibliography on Allan Bloom[ edit ] Atlas, James. Harvard Law Review , no. The New York Times May 28, National Review 57, no. New York, New York: Perspectives on Political Science; 19, no. An Intellectual Best Seller Revisited". American Scholar 58, no. Academic Questions 17, no. A Critique of Closing of the American Mind. Platonische Kulturkritik in Amerika. Palmer, Michael, and Thomas Pangle ed. Political Philosophy and the Human Soul: Essays in Memory of Allan Bloom. Thoemmes Press, archived from the original PDF on

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*A radical and powerful reappraisal of the impact of Constantine's adoption of Christianity on the later Roman world, and on the subsequent development both of Christianity and of Western civilization. When the Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in AD, he changed the course of.*

You can read our emails in full here. Charles Freeman is a freelance writer of popular history. I bought this when it came out there is now a second edition and thoroughly recommend it as the best introduction to the ancient world in print. Reading it makes two things clear – that Freeman is a writer of exceptional talent and that he loves the ancient world with a passion. To his credit, Freeman wrote a rejoinder to his critics on Amazon. *The Closing of the Western Mind* is also extremely well written and thoroughly enjoyable but its central thesis is completely wrong. Then, in the fourth century AD, the classical world was taken over by crazy Christians who rioted about stuff like whether Jesus was man or god, oppressed women and generally made life difficult for scientists. As a result, human development stopped and Christianity held back progress for a thousand years. To be fair to Freeman, a lot of people actually believe this and it passed as conventional wisdom among historians until about a century ago. But, we now know that it is wrong in general and in every detail. Freeman, if he had paid attention to a fraction of the books in his bibliography, should have realised this. Dodds gave a series of lectures at the University of Berkeley, California that have formed the basis of our understanding of Greek culture ever since. Essentially, Dodds marked the move away from an elitist reading of classical texts as somehow representative of what ordinary people thought to the realisation that hardly anyone would have come across the thought of Aristotle or Euclid. Dodds called the book that resulted from his lectures *The Greeks and the Irrational* and it totally demolished the idea that the ancient world was a hive of rational philosophers. Christianity could not have overturned the rule of reason in the Greek world because the Greek world was not reasonable. Sure, among a tiny literate elite the works of Lucretius and Aristotle were popular, but even most of their readers made their sacrifices to the household gods and hoped for healing in the Temple of Asclepius. When plague struck Rome in the reign of Antonius Pius the pagan faithful did exactly what medieval Christians would have done – went on processions to assuage the gods. Of course, very little of this pagan irrationality has been passed down to us. The fact is that early Christians were not very interested in the details of pagan religion and preserved hardly any of its literature. They thought that the Greek myths were picturesque stories and we inherited that belief. Thus, we have now completely lost the ability to see them as part of a living religious tradition. However, Christians were very interested in Greek philosophy, science and medicine. This is what they preserved by the laborious process of hand copying. Edward Grant calculated that an incredible 15, pages of Greek commentary on Aristotle dating from the 2nd to 6th centuries AD have come down to us. Every single one of those pages had to be copied and recopied by Christian scholars. The destruction of pagan religion, then, had nothing to do with the elite activity of pagan philosophy. The closest link is in the work of the neo-Platonists. This was the dominant philosophy among pagan thinkers from the mid-third-century onwards although it is quite hard to tell because again, we see things through a later Christian lens. Well, Christian theology certainly absorbed aspects of neo-Platonism because theology is a study of the supernatural. But Freeman mistakes the history of theology for the history of everything else. In one sense, this is forgivable because many of our sources for the period are histories of the Church. Modern scholars must pick through these to try to work out what was really going on. He believes this even though he has read Ammianus Marcellinus, a secular historian of the period, who finds Christian doctrinal disputes extremely boring and hardly mentions them. Gibbon deliberately made the whole thing even more obscure than it was, to emphasise his point that the whole dispute was trivial. Freeman instead carefully explains what was at issue and why it was at issue. Compare that with the favourable mention Pelagius gets in the recent film *King Arthur*. A minor quibble is that Freeman writes as a Protestant-raised humanist. This means that he can simultaneously attack the Trinitarians for not basing their theology on a clear reading of the Bible, while elsewhere complaining about biblical literalists. So when did the western mind close? Well, the downfall of classical civilisation in the West was due to wave after wave of barbarian invasions that shut down

intellectual life for four centuries or so. We have Christianity almost entirely to thank for its reappearance. In the East, minds remained open or closed depending on prevailing conditions. There was no intellectual stagnation in the fourth or fifth centuries about which Freeman bases his book. There was in the sixth and eighth centuries, due largely to the belligerent policies of Justinian and the Islamic invasion. Many Greek Christians found themselves ruled by the Caliphs and kick-started Arabic science and maths. A surprising number of early Arabic science writers were Christians not Moslems. So, *The Closing of the Western Mind* explains something that never happened and manages to get the explanation wrong. As mentioned at the start of this review, Freeman and I both share a passion for the classical world. I get the impression that Freeman sincerely regrets its passing and cast around for someone to blame. Like many other humanists, he settled on the Christians and set out to write the indictment. From there it all started to go wrong. Freeman put the hypothesis before the research and ended up with a brilliantly written piece of anti-Christian polemic.

### 8: Review of Closing of the Western Mind

*About The Closing of the Western Mind. A radical and powerful reappraisal of the impact of Constantine's adoption of Christianity on the later Roman world, and on the subsequent development both of Christianity and of Western civilization.*

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*The Closing of the Western Mind: The Rise of Faith and the Fall of Reason is a book by the well-known historian of the classical world Charles Freeman in which he discusses the relationship.*

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