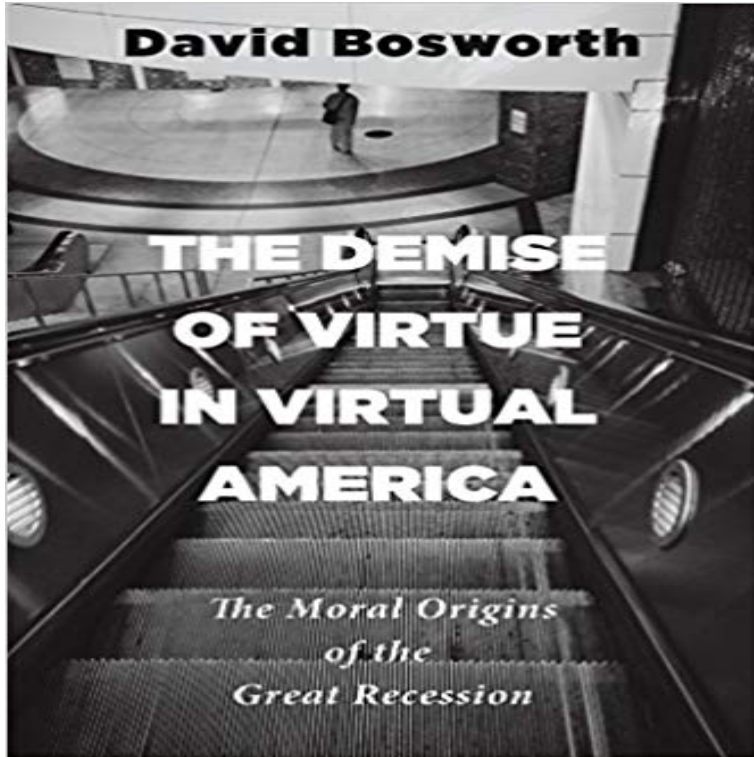


The Demise of Virtue in Virtual America: The Moral Origins of the Great Recession



Although the financial disaster of 2008 proved devastatingly quick, the evolution of the bad faith that drove the collapse is a more gradual story, and one that David Bosworth powerfully narrates in *The Demise of Virtue in Virtual America: The Moral Origins of the Great Recession*, his sweeping history of the forces driving ethical, political, and economic change over the last sixty years. Here, Bosworth traces how the commercialization of public spaces and electronic information has created a new and enclosed American place. Chapter by chapter, he then shows how the materialist values of this Virtual America have suffused our everyday lives, co-opting the themes of our narratives, the planks of our parties, the practices of our professions, and the most intimate aspects of our personal lives, including our beliefs about God, marriage, and childcare. From Ronald Reagan and Disneyland to modern pharmacology and prosperity theology, from the phony conservatism of Wall Street to the faux rebellion of transgressive art, Bosworth's alternative story of American life since 1950 relentlessly challenges today's dominant narratives--narratives that, as he reveals, made both the calamitous invasion of Iraq and the economic collapse of 2008 all too likely. David Bosworth is a first-rate cultural critic who brings to vivid life the full range of issues confronting us at the present moment. To read him on what has lately happened in American society is to become suddenly alert to the interpenetration of political, economic and cultural forces and to the fact that the most important questions we face are not primarily political in nature, however they may seem in a media-saturated age. Though Bosworth operates comfortably within the discourse of the academic left, he is by no means the prisoner of an ideological constituency. In fact he writes with extraordinary grace and lucidity and

calls to mind the work of earlier practitioners like Christopher Lasch, Jacques Ellul and David Riesman, each of them notable for their cogency and for combining a devotion to understanding the past with a passion for confronting the present. --Robert Boyers, editor of Salmagundi

I've been reading David Bosworth's insightful work for many years, and always find my dearly held positions on poetry and the culture we inhabit altered and deepened in important ways. He is a brilliant contrarian, the kind of thinker who identifies and cuts through what passes for true, and provides us with the language for what we only half-knew prior to reading him. His new book does this, and more. Like all great moral thinking, it's a warning and a beacon. It's Bosworth at his best. --Stephen Dunn, author of Local Time

As a reader, editor, and publisher of David Bosworth's essays for more than two decades of my tenure with The Georgia Review, I have been ever more impressed by his commitment to providing qualities that are vital yet increasingly missing, from writings about crucial political and cultural matters: a long sense of history; a respect for facts; an evenhanded approach to analyzing those facts; a readiness to speculate intelligently (and often entertainingly); and a lucid--I am tempted to say poetic--writing style. Bosworth is, to my mind, a secular Emerson for our time. --Stephen Corey, editor of The Georgia Review

A recipient of the Drue Heinz Literature Prize and the Editors Book Award, David Bosworth is the author of two books of fiction and numerous essays on cultural and ethical change in America. He teaches in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Washington in Seattle.

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