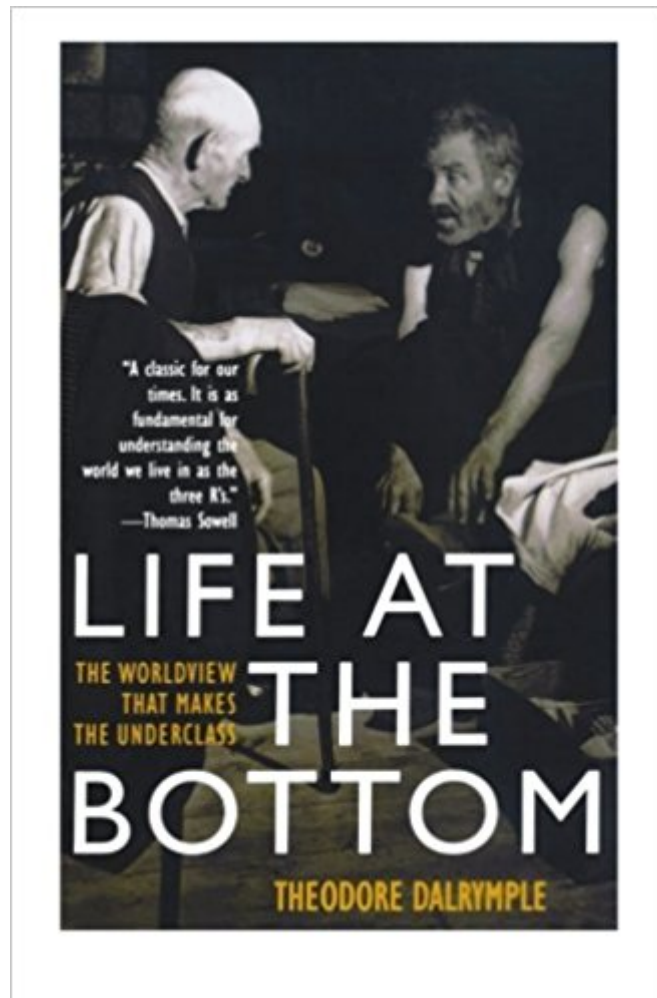




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Life At The Bottom: The Worldview That Makes The Underclass



Synopsis

Here is a searing account-probably the best yet published-of life in the underclass and why it persists as it does. Theodore Dalrymple, a British psychiatrist who treats the poor in a slum hospital and a prison in England, has seemingly seen it all. Yet in listening to and observing his patients, he is continually astonished by the latest twist of depravity that exceeds even his own considerable experience. Dalrymple's key insight in *Life at the Bottom* is that long-term poverty is caused not by economics but by a dysfunctional set of values, one that is continually reinforced by an elite culture searching for victims. This culture persuades those at the bottom that they have no responsibility for their actions and are not the molders of their own lives. Drawn from the pages of the cutting-edge political and cultural quarterly *City Journal*, Dalrymple's book draws upon scores of eye-opening, true-life vignettes that are by turns hilariously funny, chillingly horrifying, and all too revealing-sometimes all at once. And Dalrymple writes in prose that transcends journalism and achieves the quality of literature.

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Customer Reviews

Filled with poignant stories of women and men trapped in destructive behaviors and environments, this volume puts forth a vision of the modern world and of intellectualized modernism as hell but offers few concrete or theoretical solutions. Dalrymple, a noted conservative columnist in London's *the Spectator*, collects pieces he wrote for the conservative *City Journal*, using his own work as a physician in British slums and prisons as fodder for an analysis of the underclass: "not poor... by the

standards of human history" but trapped in "a special wretchedness" from which it cannot emerge. Most of his patients put their violence in the passive: the murderer who says "the knife went in" as though he had no control; the man who beat his girlfriend and then exclaimed, "I totally regret everything that happen' [sic] as if... [it] were a typhoon in the East Indies." The fault, Dalrymple asserts, is not bad environments, but a pervasive liberal view and agenda that creates "passive, helpless victims," encourages the idea that the acceptance of "unconscious motivations for one's acts" obviates personal responsibility, and the "widespread acceptance of social determinism." Dalrymple makes many astute observations on British social attitudes about wealth, the tattooing of white youths and urban redevelopment, and his writing is graceful and often witty. But his main points get hammered home too quickly and too often. His critique of liberalism and the welfare state, while sometimes provocative, is spelled out in the introduction and repeated again and again. While Dalrymple is preaching to the converted, his vivid writing and often heartbreaking stories rise above his deeply felt but repetitive social analysis. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

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Truthful and therefore morally courageous and intellectually rigorous. (Norman Podhoretz) Dalrymple's vivid writing and often heartbreaking stories rise above his deeply felt social analysis. (Publishers Weekly) Brilliant social analysis...a master chronicle of life at the bottom. (Hilton Kramer) Lucid, unsentimental, and profoundly honest...Dalrymple is one of the great essayists of our age. (Denis Dutton, Editor, Arts & Letters Daily) This devastating account and analysis of underclass life and the elite ideas which support it is a classic for our times. (Thomas Sowell, Rose and Milton Friedman Senior Fellow on Public Policy at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University) It is a truism that ideas have consequences, but a truism is rarely illustrated as implacably as in this book. (George F. Will, syndicated columnist for The Washington Post) Theodore Dalrymple is the best doctor-writer since William Carlos Williams. (Peggy Noonan) Mr. Daniels's best essays cast a spell almost from the opening line. (New York Sun) A landmark experience is reading *Life at the Bottom*. (Detroit Free Press) Once in a long while a writer comes along with a vision so powerful that it shakes you. Theodore Dalrymple is that kind of writer. (Bruce Ramsey Liberty Press)

Amazing book told from an honest perspective. Dalrymple's book should serve as a warning to those that think society is to blame for any individual's bad behavior. Far too often, a person's bad behavior is excused from judgement or consequences because of the offender's tough upbringing

or low social status. This book documents what happens to a society that prefers how policies make them feel rather than the negative effects of the policy.

An excellent and eye opening look into the personal mentalities, choices and patterns of behavior that serve to perpetuate the misery of the underclass. Unfortunately, the kinds of people who would be best served by reading this book (awareness and acknowledgement of a habitual/behavioral problem is, after all, the first step), will never read it. The other group that would be well served to read this are the bleeding hearts who support overly liberal policies. This book provides some disturbingly thought provoking insights into the UK's uber 'Politically Correct' policies and the effects they've had on mentalities and education over there. Many of the articles written by the author and compiled in this book were written in the 90's and early 2000's and yet, some folks are still pushing the US in that direction, despite contraindications from other countries who've already been there. A reader might be inclined to ask, "Why is that?"

Excellent documentation "at the street level" of the effects of the suffusion of the bad ideas of intellectuals on the reality of day-to-day life of the British underclass. And, by extension, the underclass of every western society. Nothing like hearing things directly (as reported by the author) from the horse's mouth (although you would think the material erupted from the anatomical antipode). Dalrymple's material is highly valuable as it is personal, real, dramatic and presented along with brief but crystal-clear commentary on the underlying philosophical principles that undergird the thought patterns and behaviors he reports. This book should be given to those prone to abstract non-data-driven pronouncements about "the poor", "the downtrodden", "the (insert favorite victim group here)". Like the work of Thomas Sowell, Dalrymple draws on both cross-temporal and cross-cultural facts to obliterate arguments based on abstract single-point arguments regarding the "root causes" of crime and other destructive behaviors. The root cause of the misery had already been identified by Shakespeare: "The fault lies not in our stars but in ourselves". Dalrymple provides us the proof and the documentation of the amplifying effects of British social policy and law.

Masterful style and wit combined with a genuine level of compassion and uncompromising evaluation of life's choices and their consequences. As a practicing physician in a small town emergency department I see the same problems and outcomes of our "post modern" culture. The study of "worldview" aka, philosophy and its current results might offer some direction. The greatest man to ever live said, "come to me all who are heavy laden (really tired) and I will give you rest". We

have been brainwashed to ignore the importance of spiritual things and have swallowed the drugs of "enlightenment" which in the end only leave us desolate.

This story of dystopian Britain is too depressingly familiar to anyone who pays heed to the changes the welfare state has brought to the US.

Theodore Dalrymple is a medical doctor and psychiatrist in the National Health Service in the United Kingdom who writes about his tens of thousands of encounters with the British underclass. A collection of articles written over the past three decades or so, each is a description of what happens when the welfare state takes away personal initiative and personal accountability. Dalrymple paints a convincing picture of the decline the welfare state makes inevitable by removing personal initiative and providing incentives for uncivilized behavior. Anyone truly interested in helping the worst off among us should read this book.

Dalrymple makes some cutting and excellent points about the anti-intellectualism, violence and culture of the bottom quartile in British society. As a former doctor in prisons and hospital emergency rooms, he speaks with authority. He also writes extremely well. By the end of the book, however, the author's tone - a bit too much Tory condescension - began to grate a bit. It is a solid book but it lacks the compassion and insight that George Orwell exhibited in *Wigan Pier*. Mr. Dalrymple must surely recognize that the seemingly boorish and violent behavior of those at the bottom reflects decades of disdain and disinvestment by people much further up the economic spine. Still at four stars, it is a worthwhile read. Dalrymple is a good enough writer that I will read more of his work.

It's a great book, and I won't repeat ad nauseam what those in other reviews have already stated. But add this to your reading list if you're concerned about the leftist path America is taking, and let it serve as a cautionary moral tale as to how good intentions can have disastrous results. There should indeed be a safety net in society, but there should also exist a line between government involvement and personal responsibility.

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