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THEY SAID IT

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian nations into civilization. The cheap prices of commodities are the heavy artillery with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.

The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilized ones, nations of peasants on nations of bourgeois, the East on the West.

Manifesto of the Communist Party, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 1848.

IRAQ: NO EXIT.

We haven't paid a great deal of attention to the debate between the Democrats in Congress and the White House over funding for the Iraq war for the same reason that we didn't go see the movie "Titanic." Need we say it? The outcome was never in doubt. The boat sinks. The war will be funded. The Democrats' apparent enjoyment of this useless exercise is reminiscent of Sir Thomas Beecham's famous observation that what the British like most about music is the noise it makes.

The bottom line is that Democrats in Congress are dishonest. They have never had any intention of withholding funds for the war. That would be gutsy and Democrats are not gutsy. They are cautious. They follow public opinion. They don't lead it. They are the kind of people that Churchill had in mind when he said that it is difficult to look up to a leader who has his ear to the ground. All that is going on here is that when President Bush said he would veto their efforts to cut funding for Iraq or to set a timetable for withdrawal, he gave them a chance to put on a little show for the benefit of the antiwar wackjobs at moveon.org, the folks upon whom the Democrats are depending to provide the money and the votes for the upcoming election.

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But when push comes to shove, the congressional Democrats will pay for the war until the antiwar movement is big enough to make defunding it a sure thing politically, or close to it. And that isn't the case right now. The moveon.org crowd knows this and is resentful, which makes the Democratic Party an example of a Tolstoyan family, unhappy in its own way.

The fact of the matter is that the United States military is likely to be in Iraq for a long time yet, regardless of who wins the election in November '08. Indeed, it is improbable that even Barack Obama, as president, would be able to effect a speedy withdrawal from that beleaguered nation. Our guess is that after having the requisite visits with the leaders of America's allies in the Middle East and having been fully briefed by his own military on the dire impact that the collapse of a friendly government in Iraq would have on the security of the region, he would decide upon a "flexible timetable of withdrawal." This timetable would acknowledge his pledge to "get out" but would have the practical effect of guaranteeing a U.S. military presence in Iraq for a very long time.

A Democrat would handle things in Iraq differently, of course. There would be negotiations. Peace talks. Shuttle diplomacy. Obsequious visits to the lairs of tyrants and killers. Admissions of Western guilt dating back to the Crusades, accompanied by apologies and concessions, probably in the form of forcing Israel to further weaken its defenses.

But a Democratic president would quickly learn, among other things, that it is one thing to give speeches about pulling out of Iraq to friendly crowds during an election campaign, and it is quite another to take on the full responsibility for the consequences of abandoning a friendly Iraqi government in face of considerable strategic danger and little or no strategic advantage. He or she would also learn that despite being the "the most powerful leader in the world," the president of the United States does not call all the shots in the "war on terror," that this task is shared by the nation's enemies.

In short, he or she would have to deal with the cold, hard reality that this war is like Sartre's delightful little play, *No Exit*. In Sartre's case, hell was being in a small room with "other people" forever, with no way out. In this case, hell is being stuck in an increasingly small world with Islamic fanatics. And no way out.

For the Islamists are to "the West" today what the "barbarians" were to ancient Rome, vast tribes of aggressive and primitive people who hate and disdain the powerful, advanced civilization that is constantly encroaching on their ancient prerogatives and religious beliefs. The Romans sparked the ire of the barbarians with military imperialism, constantly expanding the borders of the Empire into barbarian lands. "The West" today sparks the ire of the Islamic barbarians with cultural imperialism, introducing into their societies not only a socially disturbing array of appealing goods and services but a combination of ideas that are foreign to their medieval culture, ideas such as democracy, freedom, individual rights, sexual equality, the rule of law, religious tolerance, and the importance of the individual in the eyes of God.

Theoretically, either the Romans or the barbarians could have stopped their clash of civilizations at any time. But the world doesn't work that way. In the real world, people fight for their way of life, for their religious beliefs, their institutions, their customs, their mores, and their land. The Romans won numerous great military victories against the barbarian hordes, but they eventually lost the war, in part because their reproduction rate slowed dramatically, while that of the barbarians increased. Moreover, the Romans began relying on "friendly" barbarians to both defend them and do their work for them. Europe is likely to lose to the barbarian Islamists for the same reasons. And the United States may well abandon the Europeans to their fate, as Rome did the Britons in 410 A.D., when, as Churchill put it in *The Birth of Britain*, Honorius sent his "valedictory message" that "the cantons should take steps to defend themselves."

But the United States isn't ready to surrender to the Islamic barbarians just yet, in Iraq or anywhere else. We don't say this in the spirit of macho jingoism.

We're simply reflecting our belief that the social, economic, military, and cultural colossus that is the United States today is unlikely to fold its tent and disappear into history without a whimper. Driven by a variety of factors, not the least of which is commercial success, it will continue to spread its influence across the globe, pushing further and further into the territory of the barbarians, presenting challenges to their belief system and offering them new opportunities to participate in a different way of life. And the barbarians will fight back to protect their old way of life. That's the way the world works and has worked since the beginning of time. William H. McNeill in his classic book *The Rise of the West* described this process as follows:

Centers of high skill (i.e., civilizations) tend to upset their neighbors by exposing them to attractive novelties. Less-skilled peoples round about are then impelled to try to make those novelties their own so as to gain for themselves the wealth, power, truth, and beauty that civilized skills confer on their possessors. Yet such efforts provoke a painful ambivalence between the drive to imitate and an equally fervent desire to preserve the customs and institutions that distinguish the would-be borrowers from the corruptions and injustices that also inhere in civilized life.

In the meantime, as we said earlier, Democrats will fund the war in Iraq, even while working to undermine it. It's a low and dishonest approach to politics in a time of war. But, as Walter Cronkite used to say, "that's the way it is," at least that's the way it is in the opening days of the 21st century. This won't last forever, however. The barbarians will eventually introduce a new note of seriousness to the American political debate. They did it to Rome and they'll do it to the United States. Barbarians have a habit of doing that to fat, comfortable, self-satisfied civilizations. That's the way the world works.

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL.

Back in the good old days, when we were big shot analysts for a big shot brokerage firm, we'd occasionally get complaints that our attempts at political philosophy were pedestrian and had little application to modern American politics, much less to the financial services industry. As one correspondent in particular remarked, "So Melcher and Soukup read Nietzsche in high school. Who didn't? And who cares?"

Then, as now, we understood such complaints, though we disagreed with them profoundly. Yes, everyone read Nietzsche in high school or college. Having done so ourselves hardly makes us unique. But in a strange way, that's sort of the point. Nietzsche – and the various nihilists and postmodernists who followed in his wake – affected Western civilization deeply and, sadly, irrevocably. The very fact that every school boy now reads Nietzsche is testimony to the pervasiveness of his philosophy and thus of the ideas he advanced. In a very short period of time, his rejection of traditional Western morality and his intimation of a post-Christian morality became core principles in Western thought, which, in turn, meant that they quickly came to affect nearly every aspect of Western life, most especially politics, our correspondent's protestations to the contrary notwithstanding.

The fact of the matter is that Nietzsche provided many in the West with an excuse simply to abandon morality, or at least traditional Judeo-Christian morality. His condemnation of the blind acceptance of "objective truth" and of the Christian moral scheme struck a chord among Western intellectuals, who had been searching for a philosophy that would justify their rejection of what they saw as little more than ancient taboos and superstitions. Nietzsche killed God, and Western intellectuals rejoiced. By couching the destruction of societal norms in terms of the "will to power" and "self-overcoming," Nietzsche simply provided the intellectual framework necessary to validate what many in the West sought anyway.

The problem, of course, is that Nietzsche's fabled "Übermensch" didn't exist in his day (as Nietzsche himself repeatedly noted), doesn't exist today, and indeed will never exist. All of which is to say that the philosophers tore down the old moral order, as Nietzsche envisioned it, but never overcame the nihilism that replaced it, nor erected a new, sustainable moral order to take its place. In the West, we have gone "Beyond Good and Evil," yet in so doing have merely created a culture in which the concepts of right and wrong, good and evil, truth and falsehood are defined capriciously and frivolously, often in contravention of traditional norms, but in accordance with little that can be called coherent or consistent.

Now, we will readily admit that we are not the only ones ever to note these things about Nietzsche or those who followed him. Far from it. In fact, we are not the only ones to have written on this or a similar topic this week. Over the weekend, Julian Baggini, a philosopher and the editor of *The Philosopher's Magazine*, discussed parallel subject matter, writing in London's *Guardian* newspaper. Baggini noted that both the British Ministry of Defense and the Vatican have correctly identified the hollowness of modern moral relativism as a threat to Western civilization, a threat that is driving those disillusioned by meaninglessness to "rigid" and "doctrinaire" belief systems. He wrote:

How did we get to this dismal Hobson's choice? The finger of blame has to be pointed largely at academics and intellectuals who have been so keen to debunk popular notions of truth that they have created a culture in which the middle ground between shoulder-shrugging relativism and dogmatic fundamentalism has been vacated.

Of course, the works of truth-deniers such as Michel Foucault and Richard Rorty are hardly bestsellers. Yet their ideas do filter through to society as a whole. Consider, for instance, how what passes for common sense about morality has been turned on its head. For millennia, most people believed that right was right and wrong was wrong, and that was

all there was to it. Now, university lecturers report that their fresh-faced new students take it as obvious that there is no such thing as "the truth" and that morality is relative. In educated circles at least, only the naive believe in objectivity. What was shocking when Nietzsche first proclaimed it at the end of the 19th century became platitudinous by the start of the 21st . . .

Ironically, like many left-leaning intellectuals, Rorty thinks that denying objectivity and truth is politically important, as a way of liberating people from the ways of seeing the world promoted as the Truth by the powerful. However, it turns out that Rorty and his ilk seriously misjudged what happens if intellectuals deny truth stridently and frequently enough. Far from making liberal openness more attractive, such denials actually make it appear empty, repugnant and weak compared to the crystalline clarity and certainty of dogma.

Baggini didn't say as much specifically, but we suspect that what set him thinking about the subject of moral relativism and its effect on Western Civilization this week is similar to that which set us thinking about the same subject, namely the rise of "rigid, doctrinaire" Islamism and the West's tepid, feckless response to it. But while his principal concern is the threat that relativism poses in terms of pushing people toward dangerous and intolerant belief systems, ours stems more from the current confusion produced by the inability to distinguish good from evil. Baggini (and, according to his piece, Pope Benedict XVI) is justifiably worried about the future consequences of the post-modern, post-Nietzschean world, and we're worried about the current repercussions, about the failure of leaders to identify that which is truly evil and therefore dangerous and to distinguish it from that with which they simply disagree.

The most striking examples of such moral ineptitude of late have come from Great Britain, where 15 sailors and Royal Marines recently returned home after being

kidnapped and held for two weeks, but where no one can think of a harsh thing to say about the kidnappers who both took and held them in contravention of international law. But if Mahmoud and the Mad Mullahs cannot be condemned and are indeed praised by some for their actions in the hostage affair, who can be blamed? Who is the real evildoer here?

As it turns out, for some the real culprit in this case is the same offender responsible for all the world's ills, George W. Bush. *The Independent* (of London) reported during the midst of the hostages' captivity that they had the Americans to blame for their predicament. According to the paper, "A failed American attempt to abduct two senior Iranian security officers on an official visit to northern Iraq was the starting pistol for a crisis that 10 weeks later led to Iranians seizing 15 British sailors and Marines." You see, the "innocent" Iranians were simply in Iraq "to develop co-operation in the area of bilateral security," in the words of Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki. Perfectly innocent. Yet the nasty, brutish Americans couldn't resist themselves and had to start something, something that ended with 15 Brits being taken in response.

Never mind that Iranian "security officers" have been murdering Americans and Brits in Iraq since the start of the war. Never mind that other "security officers" had been detained for training and arming Iraqi terrorists. And certainly never mind that there is no corroboration for the theory that the British hostage crisis was related to American efforts to rein in Iranian action in Iraq other than that provided by the Iranian regime itself. One wouldn't want to "judge" the Iranians too harshly or to address the fact that even if all of *The Independent's* reporting were accurate, that would in no way justify the evil perpetrated by the Islamic Republic. After all, such a determination of culpability might involve the imposition of unacceptable Western standards on non-Western people.

Of course, the United States was not the only bad guy in this drama. Other offenders included the dastardly Joe Camel. As *National Review's* Jonah Goldberg noted,

the British government approached the entire hostage crisis with a delicate enough nature until the Iranians did something truly awful. To wit:

But looking to the British government itself, pride seems to be sorely lacking. The most outrage I could find from a government official came from Patricia Hewitt, the British health secretary, who called the spectacle "deplorable." Alas, she was referring to something else. She was infuriated "that the woman hostage should be shown smoking. This sends completely the wrong message to our young people." Imagine the outrage if those captured marines had been fed trans fats.

Sadly, it didn't take the hostage crisis to force the Brits to abandon all sense of perspective and all moral sagacity. Like their European cousins, the British have been slowly drifting away from traditional conceptions of moral and immoral behavior, replacing those with arbitrary and often inconsistent "multicultural," politically correct formulations of proper conduct. Again, as Jonah Goldberg noted:

The Daily Mail reported this week that police tracked down and nearly arrested an 11-year-old boy for calling a 10-year-old boy "gay" in an e-mail. This was considered a "very serious homophobic crime" requiring the full attention of police. The article explained that this sort of thing happens quite a bit. Last October, the coppers fingerprinted and threw a 14-year-old girl into jail for the crime of racism. Her underlying offense stemmed from the fact that she refused to join a class discussion with some fellow students because they were Asian and didn't speak English.

The same day the *Daily Mail* reported the tale of the homophobic 11-year-old, it also reported that schools across the country have been dropping discussion of the Holocaust in the classroom for fear of offending Muslim students.

You got that? It's a crime – a crime punishable by arrest, even of an 11 year-old – to call someone “gay.” And it is equally seditious, apparently, to teach the truth about the worst, vilest, evilest act ever perpetrated by man against man, because there is a possibility that those who share the murderers’ hatred of Jews might somehow be “offended.” This, sadly, is what Nietzsche foreshadowed.

Back home in the United States, the situation has not quite deteriorated to the same point, though one could be forgiven for thinking that that is only a matter of time. Consider Speaker of House Nancy Pelosi and her recent visit to Syria.

As you all know, two weeks ago the Speaker traveled to the Middle East, not on a fact-finding mission or as a representative of the President, mind you, but as an independent political leader intent on dialogue with Syrian President Bashar Assad. As countless commentators, on both the right and the left, have noted, Madame Speaker’s trip was not only foolish, shortsighted, and extra-constitutional, but also possibly illegal. There is a reason that the foreign policy function of the government is vested exclusively in the President. But that’s not the worst of it.

Mrs. Pelosi traveled to Syria to talk “peace” with Assad, because President Bush wouldn’t. Think about that for a second. In Pelosi’s mind, Bush is the bad guy here, the stubborn ideologue who fails to grasp the obvious fact that the “road to peace runs through Damascus,” as the Speaker herself put it.

Assad, for his part, is the son of one of the most brutal dictators of our time, a man who slaughtered 25,000 of his own subjects at Hama and who supported and helped fund the most prolific terrorist killers in the world prior to 9/11. And Boy Assad is no slouch himself, imposing Syrian domination over neighboring Lebanon, even going so far as to murder former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in order to suppress anti-Syrian political activity. Assad continues to this day to aid both the Iranian regime and the terrorists who kill Americans in Iraq. And he

continues to fund, train, and harbor those who wage a death struggle against Israel. But Bush is the bad guy.

Upon her return, Mrs. Pelosi received less than flattering reviews for her efforts, which, again, prompted her friends and supporters to spring into action against the real bad guys in this story. The man who would be President, Senator John Kerry, for one, was not afraid to look the real “evildoers” in the eye and call them out:

We Democrats should’ve been unapologetic last week defending Speaker Pelosi because the truth was on our side: She had a right to go. And she was right to go. The coordinated attack on her trip to Syria was as inappropriate as it was irresponsible. And when that happens to one of our leaders, we should all damn well stand up and be counted in our support, or else we hand partisan operatives on the other side a dangerous victory.

As *OpinionJournal’s* James Taranto noted the next day:

The telling phrase here is “the other side.” Which side is Kerry on? The Democrats’ against the Republicans’, it would seem, not America’s against its enemies.

It used to be said that politics ends at the water’s edge--that is, that both parties stood in solidarity against foreign foes. Many of today’s Democrats have precisely inverted the meaning of that adage. They stand against Republicans, even if that means standing in solidarity with America’s enemies.

And that has been the problem throughout the entirety of this war. From the very day those towers fell nearly six years ago, the intellectuals, academics, and “enlightened” political thinkers in this country and throughout the West have been “standing in solidarity with America’s enemies.” Why do they hate us, they ask. What did we do to cause this? How have we offended the “Arab Street” so grievously as to bring this upon ourselves?

Rarely if ever is the more appropriate question asked, namely “what the hell is wrong with them?” And on the rare occasion that it is asked, it is reflexively dismissed as jingoistic, naïve, or “anti-Muslim.” Heck, President Bush can’t even get away with calling the jihadists “Islamofascists” or calling the war a “war on terror” because such terminology is deemed hostile or inflammatory, as if our attempts to define our enemies and to defend ourselves from them are the real causes of evil in the world.

We have spilled a great deal of ink over the last four years knocking President Bush for failing in his single most important task as Commander-in-Chief, i.e. keeping domestic morale high and communicating the necessity of the effort to the public at large. And while we continue to believe that the President has indeed failed to make his case, we will concede that this is not entirely his fault.

How does one convince a country steeped in moral relativism of the moral imperative involved in this struggle? How does one convince a nation full of people who believe that right and wrong, good and evil, truth and falsehood are mere human constructs and expressions of power that there really is an “axis of evil?” How does one win over a culture in which everyone has read just enough Nietzsche in high school to know that traditional moral paradigms are merely tools of oppression and dominance?

We wish we had the answers to these questions. But we don’t. We do suspect, however, that the answers are important. We just hope somebody figures them out before too many more Americans have to die and Europe, the “cradle of Western civilization” disappears into the dustbin of history.

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