



# THE MIDWAY REVIEW

A JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND CULTURE

SEBASTIAN WAISMAN *on* **DEMOCRATIC THEORY**

TERESA BEJAN *on* **LIBERAL EDUCATION**

GARRETT ROSE *on* **AGNOSTICISM**

MORDECHAI LEVY-EICHEL *on* **BEING JEWISH**

AARON MIDLER *on* **EVOLVING POETRY**

*and*

**AN INTERVIEW WITH FRENCH AUTHOR**

**MICHEL HOUELLEBECQ**

# THE MIDWAY REVIEW

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# DEFINING TERRORISM DOWN

J. Thomas Bennett

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We are trying to put out a fire in Iraq, but we are the fuel. This, in essence, is the theory of blowback—only add that the fire exists in the first place because of U.S. involvement. I posit this view of blowback because I once seriously considered the theory while deployed to Iraq as an Army officer. Indeed, the notion of blowback has emerged as a major framework for criticisms of the War on Terror and certainly of the Iraq war. For instance, Ambassador Alfred H. Moses states confidently that “our actions in Iraq have materially swelled the ranks of those willing to die for jihad.” Another form of the blowback thesis was expounded in these pages last winter (“Rethinking the Causes of Global Terror”) by Lee Solomon, who wrote that we need “to engage the terrorists on the terms of their own criticism.” Part of the theory is that insurgents in Iraq—and terrorists in general—are simply responding in the same manner that nationalists anywhere would if their nation were occupied by a foreign power. If the occupier withdraws, the root of the problem is gone. Viscerally, this seemed to make sense to me and other soldiers in Iraq early in our deployment.

However, over the course of my unit’s tour in Iraq, blowback did not occur; the theory failed to account for insurgent activity in our sector, and for the overall hospitality that almost all Iraqis showed us, even when they had ample opportunities not to. At a very personal level, blowback lost its explanatory power for me during the constitutional referendum and, later, the national assembly elections. During these periods, the Iraqis democratically chosen to lead and build their nation—poll workers, policemen, and soldiers—were attacked at and

around polling stations. I realized that the Iraqis whom I worked with on a daily basis were more likely to be killed by insurgents than I was. This was not the logical, understandable reaction to foreign occupation upon which blowback is premised. I began to see that the consequences of withdrawing from Iraq under the assumptions of blowback would be grave. In short, I was mugged by reality.

The theory of blowback is accepted uncritically. Experience convinced me that blowback deserves closer scrutiny than it has received. First, the theory is supported by no empirical evidence, not even an anecdote. Moses and other critics can offer no proof that terrorism has increased due to U.S. involvement, because none exists. It is a *post hoc* fallacy to point out that suicide attacks happened after U.S. involvement and then conclude that U.S. involvement caused those attacks. Even if our involvement did in some way cause suicide attacks or resistance, this still does not justify the acts themselves. Besides, the unpopularity of the U.S. presence in Iraq can be greatly overstated. There are opinion polls showing that majorities of Iraqis favor a U.S. withdrawal. However, opinion polls also show that over three quarters of the Iraqi public feel that the overthrow of Saddam Hussein was worth the hardships of occupation. Indeed, one of the most interesting things about being in Iraq was knowing that some Iraqis were more open-minded about our involvement than were critics of the war.

Within Iraq itself, there has been amazing patience with the U.S. presence, in the fight against insurgents, and in resisting provocation. When one looks at the revealed preferences of the Iraqi people, it is clear that they are not rising *en masse* to oppose the U.S. presence. Rather, they are the

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primary victims of suicide attacks—a point which undermines the logic of blowback, as I will explain. It would be unreasonable to fault critics for questioning our nation's policies around the world, considering our bitter record of supporting corrupt or brutal dictatorships, and complicity in human rights abuses. Yet, it is also unreasonable to expect dogma to provide guidelines for each and every national policy. In some quarters, U.S. involvement is criticized out of ideological instinct, not based on the merits of the involvement within the specific historical circumstances that we face today. The beliefs about western institutions underlying critics' views of terrorism may often be correct, but the threat against Iraq is a unique, reactionary threat.

Yet, for committed critics, there is no act so outrageous that it can't be attributed to an unjust social structure, or unjust U.S. foreign policy. This tendency is what Daniel Patrick Moynihan described as "defining deviancy down" in the context of domestic policy. Once again, tolerance and criticism has degenerated into license, only now the stakes are international. Just as we once blamed society for crime and pathology, we now blame our foreign policy for terrorism. Personal and group responsibility is abdicated abroad, when we redefine terrorism as a rational and largely justified response to foreign occupation. It is a sign of ideological impoverishment when only one rigid framework is offered through which to view the entire world, and all of the diverse, sordid, and conflicting relationships that humanity has created. We must face the simple truth that some acts of violence in any society should be attributed to malice, criminal intent, and extreme ideology. This is the case in Iraq. To be sure, there are reasonable arguments for the theory of blowback which demand more attention because they seem to provide evidence that withdrawal would decrease terrorism.

Such an argument is offered by Chicago Professor Robert Pape. Pape writes that terrorist groups are "seeking to establish or maintain political self-determination," and that "suicide terrorism is mainly a response to foreign occupation rather than a product of Islamic fundamentalism." For this reason,

there is a certain logic to suicide attacks, and policy needs to take a stance that will not galvanize extremists. In short, we should act as if there is a justification for what terrorists are doing and saying. Moreover, the responsibility is on us to change our policies to comport with their worldview. Pape's is an insight gained through rigorous research, but—for moral and practical reasons—the principle he infers from his data doesn't apply to Iraq.

The key to blowback is the legitimacy of attackers' demands. Suicide attacks are supposed to be directed against occupiers. The assumption is that suicide attacks are a reasonable, if awful, means of supporting the cause of national self-determination. Blowback puts a burden on occupying powers to change their policy. Yet, the theory fails and attacks are delegitimized when they are directed against the citizens of Iraq. Ambitions to restore a fascist caliphate do not constitute legitimate resistance. Therefore, no burden is on the U.S. as an occupying power. As a simple matter of fact, systematically targeting the government of a nation whose citizens strongly participate in democracy is not consistent with advancing those citizens' "political self-determination." The Iraqi people are democratically deciding how they will shape their governmental institutions despite vicious attacks directed against a legitimate and popular government. When elected officials and innocent citizens are slaughtered by suicide bombings, those bombings can't possibly be justified as "a response to foreign occupation."

The easy retort to that is that the government and police are targeted for working with the U.S. That is true in part, but the legitimacy of Iraq's governmental institutions makes it impossible to justify suicide attacks within the framework of blowback. For the sake of argument, let's say that the insurgents in Iraq actually do have "a specific secular and strategic goal" of compelling the coalition assembled in Iraq "to withdraw military forces from territory that the terrorists consider to be their homeland," as Pape writes. The citizens who rightly claim Iraq as a homeland are victims of the suicide attacks, not beneficiaries. Even if this

were not the case, why should we accede to their tactics or their demands? Accepting terrorists' terms would simply betray our allies. The theory of blowback is at its best when it can avoid facts.

Unfortunately for blowback, there are facts that cannot be avoided by any rational observer seeking to understand Iraqi society today. Blowback spawns countless intellectual corruptions; chief among these the notion that the U.S. is "imposing" democracy on Iraq. This is easily disproved by the huge participation in Iraqi elections, which have seen increased turnout, with no U.S. involvement beyond that of providing security from a distance. We are securing an opportunity for Iraqis to exercise rights that have been denied them in the past, and that they clearly cherish. In fact, many Iraqis believe it is their religious duty to vote. Nonetheless, blowback is taken seriously by all manner of Iraq war critics. It is then instructive for us to ask the questions of this framework that all thinking people should ask, regardless of political prejudices. Critics raise several emotionally potent concerns. It is possible to respond to those concerns and pose several questions that equally deserve answers. Consider, as an example, the following statement made by one critic: "Terrorists are people too, people like us driven by their own hopes and fears."

Obviously, terrorists are people too, in the biological sense. However, not every person is right, and not every group of people deserves to be excused when they commit injustices. Some hopes and fears are not rational. In fact, some hopes and fears result in error, bigotry, despicable cruelty, and murder—an injustice that must be stopped. We absolutely must bear in mind the nature of our enemy; sometimes human nature results in irrational behavior.

Lee Solomon sensibly criticizes those who say terrorists "hate our freedoms" because "this presumes that the terrorists' behavior can be explained with reason." Terrorists' "motives cannot be simply reduced to a rational hatred and jealousy for a way of life that they envy." He quotes Chicago Professor Jonathan Lear that terrorism "is sup-

ported—indeed, made possible—by unconscious fantasies that are themselves irrational." Yet, at the same time, Solomon and other critics would have us "engage the terrorists on the terms of their own criticism." So terrorists are irrational, but when they kill people we should treat them as if they were not only rational, but justified. Utter inconsistency is hardly the greatest problem with this argument. We are also evidently morally obligated to hold ourselves hostage to the fantasies of extremists, even though their entire worldview is totalitarian, sexist, and theocratic. Suicide bombings in Iraq do not represent an "exasperated culture" seeking a "discursive space," as Solomon describes the ailment ostensibly affecting terrorists. This attitude neglects peace-loving Arabs who aren't represented in any way by the supposedly authentic terrorists. There is no reasonable logic to the suicide terrorism in Iraq; it is the product of extremism and it should be deterred.

What troubles me most is that there is a group of Arabs left out of the critics' circle of sympathy: the innocent Iraqi civilians who have been killed in larger numbers than anyone else. Iraqis are not as quick as critics to excuse the acts of terrorists. The targets of suicide attacks in Iraq are usually citizens who did not actively or passively support western imperialism. What did they do to get themselves killed, and be swept away by blowback? Critics can't absolve their murderers of guilt. Yet, critics don't focus on the victims. Rather, it is the United States that must always be the focal point of criticism. It is fair to ask what we did, if anything, to bring terrorism upon ourselves. We should ask that question and not be afraid of the answer, because the answer ultimately isn't convincing. There are other equally valid questions, such as "How could a rational human being commit an act of terrorism? Do any critics honestly think that there are terrorists calculating their acts so as not to incur backlash? We are clearly extremely sensitive to the backlash which we might cause, but what about the blowback that terrorists cause? Aren't we allowed to be angry when westerners are beheaded for no reason, aside from extremism? Doesn't some justified backlash result from

9/11? Why are we burdening ourselves with the presumption of guilt? If we can rationalize suicide attacks against westerners and Iraqis as an appropriate response to our actions, then can't we also rationalize our own aggressive response in the exact same manner?" Unfortunately, we can't, because—for the devout critic—backlash doesn't work both ways. It is a selective critical framework—selectively applied to us but not our enemies, who commit atrocities out of policy, not as mistakes.

The true question should be: Are terrorists justified in their actions? They may have excuses; they may offer rhetoric and a litany of faults and injustices at the hands of the west. However, our fundamental inquiry must be into the soundness of their views, not the mere presence of reasons. We need to face the possibility—even the likelihood—that some terrorist behavior is irrational and is caused by cruelty, ignorance, and genuine malice on the part of people who cannot be appealed to in an enlightened manner. Blowback does not exist in Iraq as war critics describe it, and the conclusions drawn by its adherents are unsound. One way to undoubtedly embolden terrorists is to show weakness in the face of their extremism. Withdrawal would not lead to the end of suicide attacks; it would only make our allies easier to kill, and prove that we aren't serious about fighting terrorism. For this reason, we need to persevere in Iraq.

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# LIBERAL EDUCATION AND ME

Teresa Mia Bejan

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*“The Fundamentals program enables students to concentrate on fundamental questions by reading classic texts that articulate and speak to these questions... This program emphasizes the firsthand experience and knowledge of major texts, read and reread and reread again. Because they are difficult and complex, only a small number of such works can be studied. Yet the program assumes that intensively studying a profound work and incorporating it into one’s thought and imagination prepares one for reading any important book or reflecting on any important issue. Read rapidly, such books are merely assimilated into preexisting experience and opinions; read intensively, they can transform and deepen experience and thought.”*  
—The University of Chicago Course Catalog

What exactly constitutes a “liberal” education is a perennial hot topic among academics—or “those who know”—and undergraduates—or “those who pretend to”—alike. For some, the idea is yet another vestige of the antiquated and chauvinistic Western tradition. For others, it is a real and important intellectual journey towards a Truth that only coincidentally resembles the principles of the American founding.

Although the continuing debate over liberal education attests to its importance, it also suggests that, whatever such an education might be, we are not getting one. As the soon-to-be graduate of both a university and a major famed for a belief in liberal education, I feel that I should know something about it, or at least be able to wax sufficiently poetical so as to disguise my cluelessness—not ignorance, you see, which would be vaguely Socratic and therefore somewhat respectable—but rather the customary cluelessness of a young adult about to embark on a new stage of life unsure as

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to whether she’s satisfactorily concluded the last.

My journey through Fundamentals: Issues and Texts has hardly been easy. I remember being told by a University of Chicago administrator during my second year that Fundamentals would serve as a handicap in my attempts to gain academic and professional recognition. Proving him wrong became a project of mine—and, happily, I have done so—but not before I broke down in tears of mortification at my stupidity in choosing a program so derided, as it seemed to me at the time, by everyone.

Only after my abortive flight to the Philosophy department, where in the first five minutes I was actively discouraged from writing a BA, did I realize the absurdity of what I had been told. For all its lack of a set curriculum, Fundamentals respects undergraduates and requires original work from them again and again. It is only in the repeated setting of one’s ideas to paper—in the endless revision of the question statement, the junior paper, and the final exit exams—apart from any class requirement, that one comes to know how to have them, what they are, and, crucially, how to communicate them.

Over the years, Fundamentals has led me to rank education above all else and alternately to question its goodness altogether. Still, according to Mark Lilla, a Fundamentals professor, in a November piece in *Slate*, Fundamentals-style programs provide the best approximation and hope for liberal education in America today. In the same article, Prof. Lilla describes liberal education as a process of alienation.

Assuming for a moment, then, that Fundamentals is a fair approximation of a liberal education, its emphasis on original work might also provide a clue to the character of such an education. How

might this reconciliation of the individual to himself and his own ideas through original work combine with alienation to produce the desired result?

The traditional pictures we have of a liberal education—great books, close reading—expose the student to the thoughts of mankind throughout history. The idea is to somehow allow him, either by a slow process or a sudden flash of understanding, to participate in those thoughts and, ultimately, have some of his own. Alienation occurs when we encounter radically different alternatives to the life we know, a true diversity of different worldviews beyond the superficial diversity of skin tones. When the student encounters another thinker who gives voice to a pre-existing question in his own heart, hitherto unexpressed original thought becomes possible. Through such a point of contact with the intellectual life of mankind, we hold out the hope of participating in that ongoing tradition.

Ultimately, such an education influences our approach to the fundamental question, asked and answered in the face of an inevitable death—“How should I live?” In providing us alternatives, liberal education aims at enabling us to make choices, the sum of which represent our final answer to that question. There is a lot at stake in the educational endeavor. Alienation provides us with critical distance, a vantage point outside our selves and our circumstances from which we can judge different answers to the question.

The willingness to pass judgment is crucial, and the pejorative sense in which “judging” others is now regarded provides a clue as to how alien liberal education has become. Even so, it is in the development of a capacity for judgment that education can best be understood as “liberal,” a term that is not merely coincidental. Education can effectively emancipate man from his circumstances, resulting in real freedom in his ability to choose rationally for himself rather than reacting dumbly to stimuli, such as the opinions of his peers or the prejudices of his parents. Of course, this is not the aim of education espoused by most American institutions of learn-

ing, higher and lower, which encourage students to substitute feeling for argument and to regard the strongest convictions as “only opinions.” Liberal education has no time for such prevarication; once one has seen clearly and chosen his course, he can and must act on those decisions. Liberal education produces men of action.

This education requires that we step outside of our laws, customs, and biology and boldly confront alternatives to what is familiar. Of course, this requires our insistence with no hint of cynicism or insincerity that, really and truly, such a break is possible. Perhaps the belief in this possibility is folly. The bulk of academic wisdom argues that such transcendence of circumstance is fundamentally impossible—as it would have to be if we are all unconsciously and thoroughly conditioned and determined by our genes, our history, and our “cultural identity.” Liberal education cannot help but fly in the face of popular theories of man that challenge his ability, and ultimately his right, to make distinctions. It will not appeal to those educated to think that choice itself is a pernicious fiction.

So why cling to a notion so anachronistic and hostile to modern “truth”? I would maintain that an education that frees and empowers men is more necessary today than ever before. The world in which we find ourselves, made small via modern communication, does not draw our focus outward and call us to action; instead, it makes us painfully aware that we are but single individuals in a pool of billions. Afraid of the odds and solaced by ever-increasing array of mindless diversions, we plunge into the minutiae of our own lives with unapologetic abandon. We no longer see the universal and the political world as realms wherein we might distinguish ourselves. We cling to our only “identity” in belonging to groups—with “victims” being a popular choice—not as unique moral agents capable of action and meaningful decisions.

As it happens, liberal education is harder to come by the more necessary it becomes. Prof. Lilla puts his faith in programs like *Fundamentals: Issues and Texts* that leave students “free to con-

nect the themes of great books to some deep question that is meaningful to them individually.” Students in Fundamentals are certainly free to do so, but is the result a liberal education?

Such an education is more than an encounter with a tradition or a body of knowledge; it is also an encounter with the self. Through education, we encounter—and hopefully transcend—our own limits. More importantly, we learn that in the unending internal dialogue, the vexing life questions, and the paralytic doubts that dominate our inner life, we are not alone. Countless men before us have dealt with the same problems. The sign of a successful liberal education is in our ultimate reaction to this discovery—we must avoid both intimidation and arrogance, and confront it instead with humility and hope.

At the end of my tenure in Fundamentals, I can see that the program, done correctly, can provide such hopeful humility. Devoting time to close and multiple readings of books is profoundly humbling, not least in the way it forces one to realize that, on the first read, one missed the point entirely. Still, it does not follow that Fundamentals is the only method by which this can be accomplished.

Indeed, the program is also fraught with its own particular perils. Occasionally, Fundamentals majors can exhibit a lack of self-awareness to an almost comical degree. Some live in awe of the program and its traditions, reveling in its mystical foundation at the hands of giants, Allan Bloom and Leon Kass. They see it as an incubator for Nietzschean super-men and themselves as the standard-bearers of a Truth too terrible for the average Anthro major.

Fundamentals done incorrectly is not a pleasant thing. If the student already has a superior sense of knowing—that Fundamentals is the right program for them, for example, and the better path towards truth—liberal education is not taking place. Such certainty cannot help but impede an education predicated on alienation and humility.

Certainty and conviction must be earned, the ideal

rewards of a successful education. Although, the idea of education getting one anything is perhaps at odds with the idea of a liberal education. This education ideally transforms one—as Andrew Abbott, a professor in the Social Sciences says, education “is not something you have. It is something you are.”

The crises of faith and routine disillusionments that we experience in Fundamentals—the emotional roller coaster, if you will—are as much a necessary part of education as the issues and texts themselves. In the end, Fundamentals has provided no single answer to my question, but rather countless answers and what I hope is an effective way of sorting through them.

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# ‘A DISCRIMINATING JUDGE’

Mark Meador

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Why is discrimination so bemoaned as an undeniable evil? Because the term ‘discrimination’ has been hijacked. While authors in more plebian publications decry the evils of internet-speak, real linguistic decay with real socio-political implications confronts us every day in real life. When the warriors against racial discrimination began their fight, it was meant to force people to acknowledge that all humans are just that: human. The color of one’s skin has absolutely nothing to do with the possibility of intelligence, strength, etc. But it didn’t take long for the clear common sense underlying this proposition to be bastardized into the largely empty rhetoric used to support various other, less straightforward causes.

Now before one goes throwing around accusations of bigotry, allow us to define the terms of discussion. Definitively speaking, ‘discrimination’ may mean a few things. There is the conventional – and pejorative – sense of making a distinction “without regard to individual merit,” but there is also the less contextualized definition of, “To make a clear distinction, distinguish.” And yet in addition to these two, there is also the less common, though more appropriate, idea of discrimination as being the ability “to make sensible decisions” or “judge wisely.” All of these uses are found in modern language, though each with less frequency, respectively. It is the first definition which is now in want of attention. It is this definition which opponents of racial discrimination alone seem to combat, for only in this instance is the act of distinguishing being done without regard to any merit. And because of the both philosophical and practical success of the

argument against racial discrimination, general accusations of ‘discrimination’ quickly became the weapon of choice in the battle of rhetoric for minorities across the world. Yet even the opposition to racial discrimination only hits at part of the issue. Racial discrimination is not wrong because every race is the same; rather, it is wrong because none of the differences between them have any effect on the merit of any person in any race. This, then, brings us to the later two meanings of discrimination. To discriminate, ultimately, is to distinguish; in its classical sense, to distinguish well. Socrates alluded to this in *The Republic* when he asked, “By what must things that are going to be finely judged be judged? Isn’t it by experience, prudence, and argument? Or could anyone have better criteria than these?” Thus, such are the criteria used in demonstrating that one race is not inferior to another. However, this definition also creates a reluctance to dismiss all forms of discrimination. To say that one should never discriminate is, in essence, to say that one should never distinguish. Even before contextualizing such a claim, the ramifications are obvious and dastardly. In fact, it is the very contextualization of the issue of discrimination which leads to the tyranny of sentimentality and the suppression of reason. Accordingly, the act of discriminating – of judging finely – deserves an abstracted evaluation.

All of life revolves around decisions. Yet anyone possessing an understanding of their being knows that the decisions we face are not limited with respect to our ends, but to the contrary, our weightiest decisions come in reference to the means to our ends. Thus, the greatest quandaries of life arise when we are conflicted as to how to most justly, or appropriately, determine the best course of action. For this, God gave us the ability to *compare*.

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Hence oftentimes we call them wise who simply have the best knack at evaluating differences. The importance of this skill arises in those aforementioned moments of decision: we are faced with a problem and (often) two or more solutions. The key to the just and happy life lies in determining which choice is best suited for the task of solving the problem. Accordingly, we endeavor to first determine how our available options differ. This step, however, is not the hard part. One’s acuity is revealed in the act of determining which characteristics relate to the intended task and then which option’s relative characteristics are better suited to the excellent completion of the task. When people use discrimination in the pejorative sense, when they argue that one shouldn’t discriminate, they are saying that A and B should not be viewed as different. What they likely really mean is not that A and B have no differences, but that their differences don’t matter. Thus, if one is actually making the case that two things should not be discriminated between because they are the same, it will usually be an uncontroversial claim as its facticity will be obvious. But to argue that the differences between two things or two people are inconsequential (to the task at hand) requires much more support. And when such a claim is made with respect to a varying characteristic which is clearly and intrinsically related to the task or goal at hand, we finally come to realize the final facet of discrimination: it reflects our values. What people are really against in ‘discrimination’ is not so much the distinguishing between two things, but the uncomfortable fact that two things that are different are rarely, for all intensive purposes, equal. They oppose distinguishing because they fear the results of hierarchy. But a society which focuses on being comfortable is going to be just that: comfortable, which is a nice way of saying, “stagnant.” And a lack of differentiation removes the color and variation which make the world – and society – beautiful and magnanimous.

And what is the response of those afraid of discrimination? They discriminate against it, completely naïve of the hypocrisy and foolishness involved. The result of their goal to make every-

one as happy as possible, by refusing to point out obvious differences, is pure and simple relativism. In such a paradigm, one can forget about magnanimity or excellence; there is no right answer. Yet discrimination is not the problem; the problem lies in the sentimentality, personal ideologies, and vague rhetoric which obscure one’s ability to understand what makes one thing or person better for a certain role than another. Thus, it is not discrimination which we should be combating, it is poor discrimination. We should oppose failures to distinguish well or incorrect distinguishments. Some may say that the latter of these is just what contemporaries are doing, but to really make such an argument requires more than simply stifling opposing views, it requires *extensive* consideration of uncomfortable topics that many already feel are settled. For instance, is it really sound to flatly claim that having two fathers or two mothers will make no difference in the development and character of a growing child? Does it comport with common sense to argue that men are equally adept homemakers as women? Is it at all prudent to claim that an 18-year old makes as sound a judgment in voting as a 45-year old? The answers to all of these questions are only to be found after thorough and enlightened discrimination. And so we come to realize that the modern view of the human ability to discern appears to be under a grave threat. It is not threatened by any sort of evolutionary weakening; it is not disappearing. Rather, it is slowly being corrupted by the feel-good, politically correct mantra of post-industrial liberalism. Hard though it may be, cumbersome though it may be, inconvenient as it inevitably is – we must refuse to acquiesce in our understanding of primary human capabilities of prudence. To judge, to discern, to *discriminate*, is not bad – it is to be encouraged. Let us pull away from the rhetorical shortcuts of demonizing prudence and focus once more on the valuable traits of consideration, level-headedness, and reason.

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# PARLIAMENT AND PARTIES IN IRAQ

Brian Hinkle

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In April 2006, the Iraqi National Assembly finally reached an end to a long constitutional impasse. Jawad al-Maliki, a member of the Shi'ite Dawa party, was nominated as the Prime Minister of the Iraqi government. Coming as it did on the heels of four months of partisan strife and violence, this development put an end to deadlock that had left many Americans openly wondering whether the Iraqis could ever form a coalition government. (Indeed, al-Maliki still faces the struggle to form a unity government, albeit with considerably better prospects than before). But what took so long? With the need for a functioning central authority obvious to all but the most deluded acolytes of Moqtada al-Sadr and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, how could the Iraqi members of the National Assembly drag their heels and delay? The answer can be revealed by analyzing the Iraqi election and subsequent political maneuvering with the tools of modern party theory. By doing so, we can advance two ideas—first, that the new National Assembly was faced with illegitimate opposition parties, and second, that the extremist nature of the Iraqi voter meant there was no incentive for Iraqi candidates to move to centrist positions.

One serious problem that plagued reconciliation efforts in the Iraqi National Assembly is a lack of what political scientist Richard Hofstadter called “constitutional” parties:

“When we speak of an opposition as being constitutional, we mean that both government and opposition are bound by the rules of some kind of constitutional consensus...Opposition rises above naked contestation; it forswears sedition, treason, conspiracy, coup d'état,

riot and assassination, and makes an open public appeal for the support of a more or less free electorate.”

Herein lies the problem. After the December 2005 election, a group of secular Shi'ite and moderate Sunni parties threatened widespread protests and walkouts if unspecified allegations of “fraud” in the elections were not investigated. The threats were made by the Iraq National List, a centrist bloc led by former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi. One should not find it surprising that, having had a taste of being Prime Minister, Allawi wanted to keep his power beyond the meager eight percent of National Assembly seats his party had attained. The walkouts were conducted days later, and tens of thousands of Iraqis publicly demonstrated against the success of the Shi'ites in the elections. Partisan fervor reached such a peak that a Sunni Arab student was even strangled and riddled with bullets after leading an election protest in Mosul.

If your opponent is convinced that your success was achieved through fraud or lies, it becomes nearly impossible to negotiate by virtue of your position. Thus, even though the United Iraqi Alliance (a Shi'ite party bloc) achieved a plurality of National Assembly seats, it was left unable to negotiate for several months with minority Sunni and Kurdish parties. Rather than accepting their own positions in the electoral results and beginning collaboration on government, the minority parties embraced everything Hofstadter's constitutional parties abhor: calling for riots, organizing militias, denouncing the current government as a fraud and (in the most extreme cases) even resorting to terrorist violence.

Hofstadter gives the “constitutional” parties such weight because consensus cannot be achieved when one side still believes it can per-

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form an end run around the democratic process through intimidation or violence. It thus should not come as a surprise that serious progress in inter-party talks only restarted once the minor opposition parties ceased their protests of the election's legitimacy. As soon as they chose to enter the democratic process as an actual opposition (rather than an enemy of the state), these parties could participate in real dialogue.

As another explanation for the entrenched opposition, we turn to the "median voter theorem"—which presumes that if voters tend to vote for the candidate who is ideologically closest to them, and this candidate desires to be elected, he will position himself at the mean of their ideological beliefs. This seems to hold true purely as a theory, and even serves as a valuable tool for describing American politics. But we must remember that the candidate moves to the median only because most of the voters have centrist positions—by occupying the center, he will be ideologically closest to a majority vote. In Iraq, however, this distribution simply does not hold true. Voters are motivated by intense religious and ethnic ideologies—whether they desire to subsume government under the rule of shari'a Islamic law, or whether they desire an independent Kurdish state, they are quite firm in their beliefs and look dimly on compromise. The elections reveal an approximate 40-20-20 ratio of beliefs in the Iraqi voting public between Shi'ite Islam, Sunni Islam and Kurdish ethnic affiliation respectively (the remainder being taken up by centrists, small unaffiliated parties or less numerous ethnicities).

This shows us that a) an Iraqi candidate can obtain a large number of votes simply by placing himself at a strong religious or ethnic belief, and b) if he places himself in a centrist position, he will have very few voters willing to place him into office. Furthermore, because Shi'ites do not have a majority of the voting populace's support (only a plurality), a prospective Iraqi candidate cannot simply side with the Shi'ites and ride to victory. The end result of this consideration and self-identification is that candidates have no in-

centive to move to the center in Iraq, so naturally their campaigns and positions end up at ideological extremes. This sort of government might run as smoothly as a U.S. Government composed of 40 percent hardline Republicans, 20 percent hardline Democrats and 20 percent hardline libertarians—it is possible to create compromise, but not without a great deal of negotiation and work.

It is far from impossible for Prime Minister al-Maliki's bloc to form a coalition government with Sunnis, Kurds and centrists. But it is far from easy as well. With the tools of party theory from political science, we can see that coalition-building in Iraq is hobbled by the rewards from choosing to vote, the continual trouble with finding legitimate opposition parties, and the lack of serious incentives for electoral candidates to align themselves with the center. Wise students of politics ought to keep their eyes on Baghdad in the coming months, as the United Iraqi Alliance strives to prove that partisan rancor can be overcome with hard work, negotiation and dialogue.

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# ADDRESSING GLOBAL WARMING

Arpit Gupta

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“Global Warming is a moral issue, not an environmental one,” claims Al Gore, one of the most outspoken supporters of a growing campaign to decrease emissions of greenhouse gases. Amid such political rhetoric surrounding global warming, it may be useful to analyze the global warming thesis for reducing greenhouse gas emissions into its core premises:

First, that recent climate change is largely attributable to human emissions of greenhouse gasses such as carbon dioxide. Second, that reducing emissions of such greenhouse gasses is feasible and will have a meaningful impact on climate change. Third, that the benefits of a more moderate climate change outweigh the costs of greenhouse gas emissions cuts.

The first premise is a scientific claim. In general, skepticism is warranted against alarmist claims by experts with vested interests (the same scientific consensus arrayed in support this claim once argued during the 1970s that the Earth was in danger of general cooling). It is difficult to separate the human-caused portion of global warming from natural trends of cyclical warming and cooling; it is even more difficult to create models that accurately forecast the future. Despite the uncertainty, there is a vocal majority view that global temperature has increased around 0.6° Celsius since the late 19th century and human activity is largely to blame. Various climate models predict rising temperatures between 1.4 and 5.8 Celsius through the next century.

Establishing that climate change exists, however, is insufficient grounds for justifying the

vast policy changes espoused by supporters of the global warming thesis. It is important to address the second premise and determine how feasible are attempts to combat global warming. The impact of any one country will probably be minimal, but even international efforts to combat global warming do not have the impact environmentalists may hope for—the Kyoto Protocol, for instance, is projected to cost the United States \$150 billion per year, while delaying to 2106 the warming that would otherwise be experienced in 2100. Supporters of the treaty claim that Kyoto is just a first step; but if the costs of such a moderate decrease in emissions are on the order of magnitude of trillions, a sharper reduction in emissions would presumably cost far more.

While an overall policy of combating global warming through political mandate might be excessive, there are a number of reasons to think that more moderate attempts of environmentalism are justified. One strategy is developing sources of renewable or clean sources of energy (such as nuclear, wind, solar, hydropower, ethanol, etc.) that do not depend on the burning of dirty fossil. Money for such a project could come from the vast subsidies currently doled out to the coal and oil industries. There exist, however, independent reasons to favor these approaches, such as the volatile nature of petroleum imports and the inevitable exhaustion of nonrenewable sources of energy. While the threat of global warming may be used as an additional incentive to pursue such policies, it is not the sole justification. Levying carbon taxes on emitters of greenhouse gasses is an approach that has the benefits of raising government revenue and encouraging companies to cut first the emissions that are most wasteful and are the least expensive to curb. Technologies that

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limit all forms of pollution produced by fossil fuel plants—including greenhouse gasses—have the potential not only to reduce emissions, but also to lower particulate air pollution. Such action should be done moderately; a study by a group of researchers from Stanford and the Electric Power Research Institute concluded that improvements in technology over time mean that for the same cost, three times as much emissions of carbon dioxide could be cut by waiting two decades.

Possessing the ability to limit climate change does not imply that action is obligatory; supporters of global warming must also prove the third premise. There exist clear dangers associated with drastic climate change, but after implementing the reasonable policies outlined above, the benefits of additional cuts in emissions dwindle while implementation costs rise. Also, climate change is a process that produces both winners and losers. The fisherman on a small, isolated Pacific island loses, while a Canadian farmer might see expanding yields. Calculating the net loss associated with inaction and comparing it with the net loss due to policies done solely to combat global warming is anything but straightforward, especially since the effects of increases in the average temperature of the globe remain unclear.

Against such economic uncertainties, promoters of global warming thesis have made a number of economic arguments. First, they have claimed that a changing climate will affect crop yields. A recent study suggests otherwise, claiming that the U.S. will benefit to the tune of 1.1 billion a year by profiting from longer growth seasons and increased precipitation. Even if the net impact was negative in the U.S. or elsewhere, mitigating the harms is possible by bringing in more land under cultivation or improving agricultural technology. Second, supporters claim that increased temperatures will lead to a rise in average sea levels. Any meaningful sea level rise has not been observed in the past 100 years as temperature has risen—but even if some change were to materialize in the next 100 years, the US has the ability to institute policies that would mitigate the effect, such as relocation

or coastal defenses. In fact, rich countries overall are not significantly impacted by global warming, because of the various benefits of warming trends and their ability to use wealth to adapt to changing conditions. It is often poorer, coastal countries that will bear the brunt of global warming.

If altruistic motives of helping developing nations are our real concern, however, then other strategies of aid are probably more beneficial than preventing global warming. Poorer countries deal with any number of serious problems—endemic poverty, diseases such as AIDS and malaria, malnutrition, and so forth. The Copenhagen Consensus recently ranked such concerns and found that actions such as putting money towards preventing AIDS, combating hunger, and liberalizing trade markets had the greatest benefit for the poor while pursuing Kyoto was the least effective. Such a ranking reflects the priority of many such countries, which often pursue economic growth at the expense of environmental concerns. There are a number of intelligent ways of reducing emissions while at the same time achieving a number of other socially desirable goals. But if helping developing nations is the prime motive, then there exist many better ways of doing so. In fact, measures that help alleviate poverty and enhance opportunity ought to be part of the solution since they will enable developing countries to better bear the costs of mitigating or adapting to global warming.

Similarly, climate change will alter many ecosystems and drive threatened species towards extinction. But species are being driven to extinction for any number of reasons—deforestation, pollution, and population growth—and it is easier and cheaper to control and combat these man-made crises rather than the more difficult to manage threat of global warming.

Global warming may well be a moral question, but not in the way that Al Gore proposes. Inaction is dangerous; not only from the threat of global warming, but from more simple threats of energy insecurity. However, drastic changes in policy bring problems of their own, and may dis-

tract us from various man-made crises that are the real causes of human suffering around the world. A solution somewhere in between would have the moral benefit of helping as many people as possible.

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# AGNOSTICISM, BRIEFLY CONSIDERED

Garett Rose

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The charge that I have most often heard leveled against agnosticism is that it is 'lukewarm.' This essentially means that agnostics are people who cannot make up their mind, or do not want to. Rather than committing to one side or the other they choose the mediocre middle ground of not choosing and go along their merry way. The key part of this criticism is the mediocrity aspect. Agnostics are essentially people who lack enough conviction to choose any stand, implying that taking any stand whatsoever would be better than not choosing at all. While this implication is suspect, I take more issue with the overall charge of mediocrity.

It is true that agnostics do not take a stand on the answer to the question of the existence of God. As Bertrand Russell put it "An agnostic thinks it impossible to know the truth in matters such as God and the future life with which Christianity and other religions are concerned. Or, if not impossible, at least impossible at the present time." In other words, agnosticism claims that human beings are incapable of finding answers to these questions. There are various stances supporting this view. One argument is based on the notion that the answers to questions about the divine are unverifiable through some sort of test and therefore unimportant. Another argument is that while an answer to the question may be attainable at some point, given our current condition, we are incapable of reaching them. Whichever stance one takes does not particularly matter.

Rather, it is important to recognize that a good agnostic holds a) that man is incapable of finding answers to certain questions and that b) the

question of the existence of God is of supreme importance. This is contrasted with both the atheists and the theists who hold the answer to the question to be of supreme importance. In order to be an agnostic one must continually hold the question as more important than the answer. Rather than being a paragon of mediocrity, agnosticism demands a passionate engagement with this extremely difficult question. It is from this demand that agnosticism derives any intellectual and spiritual force to which it can lay claim. The two tenets of agnosticism also bring to the fore several other important aspects involved in agnosticism. I shall deal with the features I find the most compelling: the epistemic view that agnosticism implies and the framework of thinking it endorses.

As an epistemic view, agnosticism claims that human beings are unable to know answers to certain theological and philosophical questions. In its strongest form, this implies that human beings are inherently incapable of answering these questions. In a weaker form it could imply that we cannot know the answer at this moment in time. Whether one accepts the stronger or weaker view is not of particular interest here. Rather, what matters is that in positing the inability to know answers, agnosticism sets itself up to take two paths. In taking one path, agnosticism rejects the questions as at best worthless, or at worst misleading. Yet, this point of view ultimately implies leaving the question behind, which runs counter to a central tenet of agnosticism. In other words, an agnosticism that rejects the question on the basis of it being unanswerable is no longer agnosticism at all.

The other path it can take from the original epistemic claim is to come to recognize that the value of the question is not necessarily predicated on it

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being answerable. Answers are a specific subset of a larger category that deals with questions. I call this larger category ‘replies.’ That is, answers are a type of reply that specifically seeks to end debate on a question and provide a light from which the question can be fully seen and understood.

However, answers are not the only possible reply to a question. Another type of reply is a response. A response lacks the definiteness of an answer; it does not claim to be the end-all and be-all of a question. Rather, a response is a reply that is intended to be transitory and to encourage more thinking about the question one is being faced with. An agnosticism that wishes to continue to give the question itself a primary place is concerned with seeking after responses to the question. By understanding the various types of responses (and the arguments and methods used to formulate them), we come to greater knowledge of the question in its amazing multiplicity. In keeping questions primary agnosticism shifts the epistemic emphasis of questions. Rather than asking a question with an eye towards coming to knowledge of an answer, agnosticism asks a question in order to come towards knowledge of the question itself. Thus, the question of God’s existence is not to be rejected because it can’t be answered. Quite the contrary, it is found to be of extraordinary value because of the multitude of responses that can be brought to bear on it.

This is not to say that agnosticism rejects the knowableness of answers totally. Questions such as “What does  $2+2$  equal?” or “What is the speed of the earth’s rotation?” or “How many pseudonyms did Søren Kierkegaard have?” all clearly have answers and those answers are knowable. Instead, agnosticism claims that there is a limitation to human knowledge, whether faith-based or reason-based. As a result, when we decide to ask questions that reach beyond those limits, it is the question itself, rather than any particular reply, that becomes important.

So, what’s the point of being agnostic? What do its basic tenets teach us? As seen above, the chief

teaching of agnosticism is to value questions as questions. When previously discussed, this was with an eye towards the theological question of God’s existence. However, I think agnosticism teaches that it should be extended to all questions. That is, rather than seeing questions as means to an end, they should be seen as partners in the dialogue of thought. Thinking is a process of engaging the questions we ask ourselves in a continuous discussion. Some of these discussions can be easily brought to an end, such as with the questions of simple arithmetic. Others can never be brought to an end, such as the question of God’s existence. This view allows for answers to be attained, but it changes the way in which we attain them. This method of thought calls upon us to engage each question on its own terms and as a partner in our cogitations. The purpose of thinking is not to figure out the questions we ask, but to delve into them as they delve into us. In essence, thinking is only valuable when it engages questions for their own sake. When thinking becomes concerned solely with figuring out answers it becomes dull, rote and empty.

On this understanding of thinking, questions are valuable because they continue to challenge us. When they cease to challenge us, the questions lose their value. To an agnostic, human beings are not simply valuable because we can believe and worship a God whose existence we do not doubt nor because we can understand the natural world around us rationally (although agnosticism would not deny that these do lend value to a human life). Instead, what is great and valuable in a human being is the ability to ask and delve into questions to which we cannot know answers. Agnosticism celebrates these questions and the dance of thought that they call upon us to participate in.

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# AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHEL HOUELLEBECQ

Translated from the French by James Rumsey-Merlan

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*Michel Houellebecq is probably the most polarizing man in contemporary European literature. His works are frequently decried as tawdry pornographies and his celebrity is often held up as evidence of the parlous state of French literary culture.*

*In his 2001 novel Platform (to which he refers in the interview), the protagonist (a sex tourist in Thailand) meets a French woman with whom he starts an affair and a campaign to make sex-tourism packages available to French men at low cost. Along with 116 prostitutes and their customers, his paramour is killed by Islamic terrorists in an attack on a Thai resort. This bleak outlook has resonated with a large enough swath of the French bourgeois to propel Houellebecq to the top of the best-seller lists four times in the last decade.*

*In this interview Houellebecq discusses his most recent novel, The Possibility of an Island. The novel was published at the end of last year in France and will be released at the end of May in the States. I translated this interview for Australian journalist Ben Naparstek and he used it as source material for articles published in various Australian newspapers, including The Canberra Times and The Australian.*  
—James Rumsey-Merlan

## **1. How have you responded to the French reception of The Possibility of an Island?**

The problem in France is that many of my critics have a preconceived opinion of my books. These critics content themselves with thumbing through my books looking for quotes to illustrate pre-written articles. Few critics, for example, noticed the degree to which the third part of the book was

different from anything that I had ever been able to do before. To this specifically French problem, I have not discovered any solution.

## **2. To what degree, if at all, do you regard yourself as a moral writer?**

To the degree that good and evil are always clearly delineated. There is no ambiguity there. Also, the author—again without ambiguity—offers sympathy and admiration for good, distaste and contempt for evil.

## **3. What are your feelings about Ireland?**

The most striking point is that Ireland, which was the most catholic country in Europe, gripped by an absolute fervour, stopped being it very abruptly in the space of a few years, as soon as prosperity arrived. A stay in Spain, a country that was almost as catholic as Ireland revealed the same phenomenon. That was incredibly striking for me; all the more so as these countries are from all other points of view very different (Catholicism was allied with a hated regime in Spain, while in Ireland it was a common element of the resistance to the English oppressor). My friends have told me of a similar ultra-rapid collapse of Catholicism in Poland, another country which is in a very different situation. No doubt all of this played a significant role in the genesis of *The Possibility of An Island*. It was stupefying to me that a religion could collapse with such rapidity, everything would have led me to believe that religious belief was part of the 'heavy trends'. This contradicted all of my previously held sociological opinions.

## **4. Why do you believe that, as you recently said: "democracy is out of control"?**

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It's not exactly that: I said that representative democracy was in crisis, as, on questions as fundamental as the European Constitution—and I have the sense that this would be the case of many other questions—all of the political parties said to be 'of government' share an opinion, and the majority of the population has a contrary opinion. This isn't healthy, and it appears crucial to me that direct democracy should be accorded greater importance in the system.

**5. Why is it that, after writing Platform, you came to believe: "Thailand was not a good example of sexual tourism"?**

The archetypal sexual tourist is the fortunate and generally aged westerner who comes to enlist the sexual services of poor girls: it is so in Central America, in the Caribbean and in Africa. The case of Thailand is more complex: a large portion of the clientele is itself Asian; Thailand is not really a poor country; marriage often results (matrimonial tourism).

**6. Do you set out deliberately to shock and provoke, on and off the page?**

No, in fact the controversies are provoked and maintained by the media—especially the audiovisual media—which hopes to increase its audience in this way.

**7. To what extent do you regard your outlook as pessimistic?**

I don't think of myself as particularly pessimistic or particularly optimistic; I think of myself as something close to a realist, as did the majority of novelists of the past centuries. People are certainly looking for more reassurance today, because the world is more disturbing and unstable; as such they have a tendency to demand an elevated level of optimism.

**8. Why do you choose to make things up in interviews – for instance, your claim that your mother converted to Islam, which you later**

**denied was true?**

The journalist gave too much importance to this statement—he took it very seriously. The spirit in which I made the statement made it clear that the conversion of my mother was not to be taken seriously: it was just an eccentricity, a pose.

**9. One critic has observed that your novels "tend to focus on the most middling of the middle classes: IT technicians, bureaucrats, accountants." Why do you choose to focus on these characters?**

No doubt because in France at least, and certainly in Europe in general, almost everyone has a tendency to situate themselves of their own accord in the middle class (even those whose social status is slightly lower, or higher and sometimes markedly higher). For example, I consider myself born of the middle class (even if the people who raised me would probably qualify as proletarians) and I still consider myself part of it (even though I am fully conscious that my status as an artist is theoretically superior).

**10. To what extent do your protagonists embody your own opinions and world view?**

When my characters express their artistic tastes, these tastes are mine—I benefit from the very open form of the novel to offer literary criticism, and more rarely musical and cinematographic criticisms.

Apart from that, the opinions of my characters are pretty varied: in fact I feel capable of giving almost any opinion to a character, as long as it is presented in a sufficiently convincing manner.

**11. What's your response to those who tag you as reactionary?**

That's a particularly stupid mistake. A reactionary is someone who wants to go back—to return to a former state of society. My books are all suffused with the idea that all evolution is irreversible

(whether it concerns an individual, a relation of humans, or a society in its entirety). For someone so completely steeped in this sense of irreversibility even the question of a return to a past state can't even be posed.

One could more accurately describe me as a conservative, in a very general sense: a conservative being someone who prefers to conserve a functioning system rather than embark on risky transformations with unforeseeable consequences.

**12. How did you find your time in asylums?**

I don't particularly like returning to those places. During the first hours, I am conscious that these are unliveable places, where one is a prisoner, where one walks past terrible suffering. And then, insidiously—and this is what frightens me—I start to feel good, as though these places had been made for me, as if this were my real home, and my probable destiny at the end. It is very displeasing.

**13. Why do you say: "I am not a French writer?"**

I said that because it's true that I have read at least as many Anglo-Saxon, German and Russian books as I have French books and that the former have influenced me at least as much as the latter.

Having said that, I was wrong. I write in French, I love this language, I feel at ease in it and it is that, fundamentally, which is the determining criterion when deciding on the nationality of a writer.

**14. How, if at all, has fame or renown altered your life or outlook?**

This started very recently: the idea, otherwise a source of anguish, that I would be little by little cut off from all human contact, lustful with those similar to me; because no-one would dare, everyone would be afraid of disturbing me; because people would also be afraid of feeling themselves inferior. The excessive giving of interviews, also,

leads people little by little to consider me as a sort of virtual creature—of pure spirit.

**15. Were you surprised by the response of the Muslim community to Platform?**

I was not particularly surprised by the reaction of the Muslim authorities. What was particularly shocking is that they claim to speak in the name of their 'community' of 'five million French Muslims', though everyone knows that the majority of French people of North African origin are agnostic or indifferent. There was made a particularly dishonest attempt to try and claim something as a sort of racism, which was nothing but an insult to a religion, perfectly admissible in a secular country—which explains, incidentally, why I won my trial.

**16. Do you feel any less despondent about love in light of your marriage to Marie-Pierre?**

In these matters I am capable of attaining an almost limitless level of contradiction. For example, I can be deeply in love without so much as believing in love in general. I think most humans are this way.

**17. Why do you believe your books are so popular?**

Because they are moving.

**18. The New Zealand Herald runs a break-out box alongside every literary profile, containing five reading recommendations from the author. Could you please list five titles?**

§ *The Anthology of French Poetry* by Georges Pompidou.

§ *The Bible*.

§ Schopenhauer—*The World as Will and Representation*.

§ Balzac—impossible to choose.

§ Dostoevsky—*The Possessed*, being without question his best book.

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# REEXAMINING LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

Sebastian Waisman

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Norberto Bobbio. *Liberalism and Democracy*. Verso Press, 2006. 104 pp. \$9.84.

Pierre Rosanvallon. *Democracy: Past and Future*. Columbia, 2006. 312 pp. \$40.00

Liberal democracy is once again a topic of serious political reflection in Europe, and has been for almost a generation. For over two decades now, many European political theorists have been departing from their structuralist and post-structuralist roots in order to revisit fundamental problems in the history of political thought. Appealing to a rich tradition of political argument, these Continental scholars have consistently found novel and interesting ways of approaching the elementary questions of political philosophy.

Not surprisingly, in parts of Europe where there exists little or no consensus on the present and future course of liberal democracy, these political theorists have adopted a sharply critical perspective: theirs is primarily an exploration of the major themes rather than an endorsement of any particular solutions. Appropriately, several such theorists have set about to reexamine the often-overlooked conflict between liberalism and democracy, or between individual rights and popular sovereignty.

Two books published this year make an important contribution to that endeavor. Norberto Bobbio's *Liberalism and Democracy*—reprinted in an elegant paperback edition from Verso Press—and Pierre Rosanvallon's *Democracy: Past and Future* offer penetrating analyses of the underlying tension between liberal and democratic

theory and produce a subtle and compelling argument for a continued, albeit qualified, alliance between liberal and democratic institutions.

In *Liberalism and Democracy*, Bobbio attempts to sketch the theoretical foundations of the 'rights-based' state and the 'popular' state, in order to identify their points of intersection and potential agreement. Bobbio's short treatise appeared in English for the first time in 1990, and it appears again now almost exactly two years after the author's death in January of 2004. The most important Italian political theorist of the second half of the 20th century, Bobbio has a gift for elucidating obscure and complicated arguments, and his work stands out among that of his contemporaries for its sober and incisive reasoning.

Bobbio begins his argument by distinguishing sharply between liberalism and democracy: the first implies limits on the exercise of political power, while the second implies merely the distribution of political power. For Bobbio, this distinction corresponds to the well-known distinction between modern and ancient liberty, or between negative and positive liberty. Thus, the phrase 'liberal democracy' is at best a misleading one—democracy is not necessarily or always liberal, and liberalism is not necessarily or always democratic.

Bobbio goes on to examine the conceptual basis for liberalism, which he takes to be a complex one. Unlike democracy, which he depicts as a fairly straightforward conception of political power, Bobbio's liberalism is composed of a variety of different concepts and principles that combine to produce a theory of the 'rights-based' state. He identifies the theory of natural rights as the primary basis for liberalism; the individual is endowed

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with certain natural, pre-political rights, which he carries with him into political society, and which the sovereign is bound to respect. In addition to the theory of natural rights, Bobbio also identifies the theory of the social contract as a foundational element of liberalism; because the individual possesses rights, and because the sole purpose of government is to protect those rights, governments must derive their legitimacy from the consent of the governed. Bobbio suggests that these two central liberal theories are closely connected in their respect for the intrinsic dignity of the individual and in their rejection of the pre-modern, or 'organicist,' perspective that respects the individual only insofar as he forms a part of a larger political whole.

Yet according to Bobbio, liberalism consists in more than merely limits on state power – liberalism demands also a reduction in the functions of the state, as distinguished from the power of the state. Remarkably, Bobbio suggests that economic liberalism, or the theory of the free market, is "consistent with the best liberal tradition." The relevant distinction here is between the maximal and minimal state, between state responsibilities broadly and narrowly conceived. According to Bobbio, liberal theory demands that state responsibilities be strictly limited to affairs that are directly conducive to the preservation of individual rights.

Bobbio presents traditional liberalism as a kind of natural rights utilitarianism (as opposed to John Stuart Mill's liberalism, which explicitly rejects natural rights in favor of utilitarianism); the state may take any action that is conducive to the end of preservation of individual rights, and it may take no action that is not similarly conducive. Bobbio departs from the contemporary opinion that praises moral and political liberalism and disparages the defense of the free market. Bobbio's account makes the defense of the free market a reputable endeavor.

In addition, Bobbio identifies liberalism with social pluralism; he finds in liberal thought the unique proposition that "conflict is fruitful." According to him, liberal theory makes a strong case for social conflict and variety; it charges the

absolute state (as well as the maximal state) with attempting to enforce an unnatural and debilitating social unity. On this view, liberalism rejects the pre-modern, or 'organicist,' emphasis on social harmony, and insists rather on social conflict as the "necessary condition of humanity's technical and moral progress." Instead of bringing about the dissolution of the political order, competing interests and opinions help to strengthen the regime and promote the common good.

Advancing the book's central argument, Bobbio makes the case for a complementary relationship between liberalism and democracy. According to Bobbio, democracy and liberalism are practically complementary insofar as democratic procedures are necessary to the defense of individual rights, and theoretically complementary insofar as democracy constitutes a modern, individualistic resolution to the liberal antagonism between individual and society. Bobbio provides two very different justifications for the alliance between liberalism and democracy.

The first is straightforward and convincing; without democratic procedures, the only recourse that citizens have against the violation of individual liberties is the right of violent resistance. Popular government thus provides an increased protection of individual rights, and Bobbio correctly observes that "democracy has over time become the principal tool for the defense of rights to liberty."

The second is less straightforward and possibly less convincing. Here, Bobbio seems to appeal not to the defense of natural, individual rights, but rather to a conception of the social contract as the legitimate basis of government: "democracy reconciles individual and society by making society the product of common agreement between individuals." Bobbio suggests a parallel between democratic theory and contract theory when he observes that the purpose of democracy is to "reconstitute [public power], but to reconstitute it as the sum of particular powers – as is plain in contract theory, which regards the state as founded upon a juridical institution..." He makes a powerful argument

for the relevance of democratic institutions, but does not address the principal liberal objection to such institutions; by interpreting suffrage as the unification of the social and the political, democracy places liberal social pluralism at risk.

As Pierre Rosanvallon makes plain, this was precisely the historical dilemma of French politics. In *Democracy: Past and Future*, he takes up Bobbio's analysis and applies it to a distinctively French setting—the conflict between liberalism and democracy as it manifested itself in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century French politics.

Rosanvallon's point of departure is, not surprisingly, the French Revolution. Rosanvallon identifies French revolutionary politics as a radically illiberal form of democracy, which attempted to erase the distinction between the political and the social, and in doing so preferred social unity to social conflict. Rosanvallon argues that this 'voluntarism' was characteristic of the Revolution of 1789, and constituted an attempt to transfer a unified vision of sovereignty from the monarch to the 'people.' Similarly, Rosanvallon criticizes the drive for universal suffrage during the Revolution of 1848. According to Rosanvallon, the revolutionaries envisioned universal suffrage not as a method for managing the diversity and plurality of social interests, but as an expression of social unity and harmony. Rosanvallon makes a powerful case in favor of social pluralism as an essential feature of liberal theory and practice — modern politics becomes "schizophrenic" if institutions that are designed to represent a unified society are instead confronted with a diverse one.

Rosanvallon locates the French alternative to voluntarist democracy in the rational liberalism of François Guizot. According to Rosanvallon, Guizot developed a unique theory of the 'sovereignty of reason,' which was intended as a corrective to the excesses of revolutionary democracy. Guizot derived his liberalism not from an appeal to 'rights' but rather from an appeal to transcendent reason; Guizot sought for an independent power that would place limits on both royal and

popular sovereignty, and he found it in a rational administrative apparatus that would function according to the principles of political science and without reference to the "wayward human will."

According to Rosanvallon's account, French liberalism, as exemplified by Guizot, developed along wholly different lines from Anglo-American liberalism. Because of its sharply rationalist bent, French liberalism failed to address the crucial questions of representative government and constitutional law that Rosanvallon takes to be essential to a healthy political order. To use Rosanvallon's terminology, French liberalism sidestepped the question of the "self-institution of the social."

Rosanvallon suggests that the natural plurality and diversity of social interests require an effective mechanism of representation combined with a constitutional balance of powers. These intermediate institutions, more common in the United States than in France, provide the resolution of the conflict between liberalism and democracy; they are democratic insofar as they give political expression to social realities through universal suffrage or freedom of expression, and liberal insofar as they allow civil society to develop freely without interference from the state. As an independent sphere of human interaction, civil society must express itself politically through representative institutions without being pressured into a false unity and cohesion.

Rosanvallon is exceptionally lucid and profound in his examination of the theory of civil society, and he offers a perceptive reappraisal of that theory from both liberal and socialist perspectives. Following Bobbio, Rosanvallon traces the theory of civil society, understood as commercial or market society, back to its origins in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century political thought. According to Rosanvallon, market society is by no means an aberration of genuine political liberalism — on the contrary, it is an essential component of liberalism and derives from the early-modern attempt to theorize a sphere of human organization that would be free from "all forms of authority." Rosanvallon traces this attempt back to Montesquieu, who

opposed “the sweetness of commerce (*le doux commerce*) to the harshness of power relations.” On this view, market society fulfills the liberal ideal in which autonomous individuals interact with each other free from political intervention.

Rosanvallon goes on to compare Marx’s understanding of civil society with that of his liberal predecessors and, perhaps not surprisingly, finds a number of similarities between the two. According to Rosanvallon’s account, Marx shared the liberal faith in the “withering away of politics” and the actualization of individual autonomy, although he conceived of this development in radically different terms; for Marx, autonomy required the “reabsorption of the political into the social, and the realization of a society immediate to itself.”

Ultimately, Rosanvallon rejects the theory of the withering away of politics. He suggests, rather, that liberalism return to the political through a “reinstitution of individuals:” not a socialist or communitarian vision, but rather a method of representing civil society that recognizes the inevitability of social conflict and division. This “complex sovereignty,” or “pluralist democracy,” would bring together the best that liberalism and democracy have to offer. Rosanvallon echoes Bobbio’s suggestion that democracy be conceived of as the reconciliation of the liberal individual to society. (He does not, however, make the strictly liberal case for democracy on the grounds of enhanced protection for individual rights.) Yet Rosanvallon’s analysis suggests that he is acutely aware of the threat that ‘voluntarist’ democracy poses to liberal pluralism. Thus, Rosanvallon wisely advises modern citizens to “love democracy moderately.”

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# HERE COMES YOUR MAN

David Kaye

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Harvey C. Mansfield. *Manliness*.  
Yale University Press, 2006. 289 pp. \$27.50.

In some of today's most civilized countries, human nature is struggling to breathe. Around mid-April Reuters reported an unusual Tokyo trend: manicures, lessons in poise, and girdles – for men. One firm has even created an expensive (\$4,500) workshop called Total Men's Revolution. "It's a new era, and Japanese men are pursuing a new kind of manliness," says Yumi Komura, a firm representative. American men are also pursuing a new kind of manliness, although instead of indulging in feminine accoutrements it resembles nothing so much as the bastard half-brother of manliness, masculinity. One example familiar to us is that of popped collars. As with Japanese mangirdles, they "make a statement," a condition we all recognize in manliness. But what are the implications of that statement? Upon reflection, one might wonder what is wrong with the *old* kind of manliness. Those among us born too late might also wonder, what *is* the old kind of manliness?

Harvey Mansfield, a professor of government at Harvard University, has addressed that question in his new book, *Manliness*. The succinct, unqualified title suggests an aim for definitiveness; indeed, Mansfield says in the preface that it is "the only ready-to-hand treatment of manliness...as a whole that you will find." The work is an account of manliness from scientific, sociological, literary, and philosophical perspectives. Specifically, it is an argument explicitly directed to reasonable women to endorse a moderate amount of manliness in our society, which is gender-neutral and by definition hostile to manliness.

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Mansfield's first two chapters cast a grim overview of our gender-neutral society and of the scientific studies corroborating that society's base view of manliness. Our shift to remove male bias in language is indicative of our shift to lessen the actual differences between men and women. This is intended to give women greater freedom, obviously a good in itself; however, it comes at the price of forgetting those differences. For example: liberated women want men to have a greater share in the housework. Yet men will not do what had always been women's work; in fact, *they look down on it*. This is italicized in the book as well, the first sentiment, preceding several, given that honor. Mansfield builds from this to imply that there is a natural division of labor between the sexes, to the extent that one sex naturally defends the other. He writes, with a none-too-favorable look to feminist efforts, "But suppose you have to maintain your independence? Suppose it is not enough to agitate the community, shame the males, and raise everyone's consciousness?" I need only refer to September 11 to indicate the extent to which our greatest national concerns have changed. Throughout his work Mansfield suggests that man's greater physical strength and his greater ability to assert, both natural, should be desirable, not detestable, to society as a whole. This argument will resurface, with a vengeance, in the conclusion.

The argument in *Manliness* is a continual ascent: having first approached his topic empirically through the lenses of society and science, Mansfield moves to a reflection from higher ground. It appears from Mansfield's analysis of present-day scientists (i.e. social psychologists and evolutionary biologists) and society that neither can get beyond associating manliness with aggression; however manliness is also assertive. For examples of assertive manliness Mansfield turns

away from science and turns to its primary ancient and modern literary figures, which, according to him, are Achilles and Hemingway's old man (from *The Old Man and the Sea*), respectively. Both assert themselves: the old man against nature (only to appreciate it in the end), Achilles against his fellow man – namely Agamemnon, the ruler. Each, then, asserts himself against an authority.

While manliness does assert itself against an authority, and is hence inherently political, the ultimate assertion manliness can take (Mansfield is always looking for the highest ground from which to look down in this book) is when it asserts all meaning, a condition otherwise known as nihilism. This brings him to Friedrich Nietzsche. According to Mansfield, Nietzsche is “the philosopher of manliness of modern times.” He shows how Nietzsche diagnosed nihilism and posited manliness based in truthfulness to treat it. This aim for truth adds a new dimension to manliness; in fact, it is “manliness carried to its greatest heights.” (See?) Mansfield's emphasis on Nietzsche, however, lacks adequate treatment. One crucial aspect of Nietzsche's philosophical teaching, which Mansfield discusses all too briefly, is the distinction between the slave and the master moralities. According to Nietzsche, religion imposes a slave morality on its followers and makes them weak, i.e. unmanly. However, deeply pious men have an inner strength that leads to a kind of manliness: they may not welcome conflict, but they are courageous. By not properly responding to this paradox, Mansfield neglects scores of individuals, including the very manly Christian volunteer workers building houses in Appalachia with whom I spent this past spring break.

Perhaps nihilism is too exhaustive a subject to adequately cover in one book, but Mansfield's account of feminists and “womanly nihilism” is even more insufficient than that of Nietzsche and “manly nihilism.” Mansfield argues that modern feminism has destroyed not only femininity, the female equivalent to manliness, but also the very ability for a woman of the feminist stripe to have an identity. To free themselves from men the

feminists had to borrow from them: Mansfield shows how the seminal work of the modern feminist movement, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, takes its idea of “transcendence” from the Nietzschean will to power. While he acknowledges the moderate feminists, whose leader was Betty Friedan, Mansfield takes too broad a survey of modern feminism, thus weakening his argument against feminism. While Mansfield shows how female censoriousness led to the feminists' “raising consciousness” project, he does not offer reasons why men so readily yielded the patriarchy. Furthermore, his second point, that women lose control of their ability to define themselves when they seek to have more, is unconvincing precisely because it itself is too transcendent. What is feminism but the pursuit of autonomy and the assertion of rights, which lends a definition of oneself at least to oneself, if not to society?

A professor of political philosophy by trade, Mansfield is at his best in the chapters surveying Western thought. (He is broad here as well, but triumphantly so.) In a chapter outlining the responses of modern philosophers—specifically Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Burke, Kant, Hegel, and Mill—to liberalism's problematic tension between liberty and security, Mansfield shows that it is actually Mill whose arguments should be most appealing to women. “Yet what did the feminists do? [They] went mad for crazy, manly Friedrich Nietzsche.” As women, they were naturally attracted to Nietzsche's forcefulness, even though Mill's sensitivity was closer to the model for men that they hoped to create. This suggests not only that there are natural sex roles into which men and women invariably fall, but also that the feminists approached transcendence in the wrong way. These suggestions are addressed in Mansfield's last chapter, on manliness as understood by the ancients—with reference to Rousseau, Stephen Crane, and the movie *Fargo*. I leave its pleasantries and revelations for the interested reader to discover.

Bound by the demands of relevancy from ending his book with a look to Plato and Aristotle, Mansfield must treat manliness in the context

of the gender-neutral society. And he does. “Our gender-neutral society needs to readopt the distinction between public and private that is characteristic of liberalism,” he says. “In public it should be gender-neutral, in private not.” Manliness needs an outlet; in the author’s terms, it seeks employment. This does not mean keeping women at home; Mansfield strongly supports the protection of women’s careers. At the same time, he encourages the expression of men’s “protective and authoritative” elements. The extreme manliness of Islamic militants lends a sense of urgency to the argument. They show too much, we show too little; our very freedom hangs in the balance.

Pending an even more ambitious work on his part, *Manliness* is Mansfield’s *Closing of the American Mind*. It features the same basic structure: opening chapters bemoaning the direction of contemporary society, a central section attributing that direction to a misuse of Nietzsche and select others, and a conclusion on what to do but not on how to do it (although there is a hint: a restoration of manliness will be at the hands of women, who had taken it away in the first place). Certainly *Manliness* has attracted a similar level of controversy in its short existence; however, it should not be of the same shock value. Indeed, Mansfield states in his preface that he had intended to call the work “a modest defense of manliness.” He goes out of his way to charm us, with jokes, asides, and surprises of all kinds (did you know that Margaret Thatcher has been the manliest politician of our time?). One lingering problem, however, is the feasibility of a professor writing a book on manliness when his intentions are beyond that of an academic study. What does a professor know about manliness? Mansfield addresses this question at two points in his book, but on this issue he ultimately contradicts himself. Can Mansfield not see everything clearly from his elevated view?

Another problem: Mansfield’s answer to our opening question, that on the nature of manliness, is everywhere and nowhere in this book. Scattered throughout *Manliness* are statements contributing to a larger picture never to be completed, as

manliness “exists only in its instances.” Mansfield’s convenient definition of manliness for the busy or disinterested reader is “confidence in the face of risk;” in the course of his nearly three-hundred-page work, however, it emerges as much more than that. In abstract terms, manliness affirms nature and defies convention. Nevertheless it is applicable and beneficial to politics. As with the other virtues, manliness in moderation is essential for society, yet it has been driven out because it is by nature problematic, with a tendency towards insensitivity, brutality, and even tyranny. Some, particularly those on the Left, have criticized the solution *Manliness* presents—a rededication to the public/private distinction—as out-of-date. They are right. It is as old as political philosophy itself.

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# A MODEST PROPOSAL FOR RESOLVING AMERICA'S IMMIGRATION CRISIS

Matt Mutino

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As you are reading this essay, a ferocious debate is raging in the Senate. After granting years of unfettered access through our nation's porous borders, our government has decided that illegal immigration has to stop, and that the illegal immigrants who are here already must be dealt with in some way or another. Some insist that by allowing anyone to run willy-nilly through our borders, we will inevitably let in people who will compromise our national security, such as terrorists, drug dealers, activist judges, feminists, and maybe even Mexicans. Others insist that our nation requires a steady flow of immigrants, because our economy needs workers who are willing to lose limbs on the job, be paid in bottle caps, and who do not know enough English to understand the word "union."

The controversy thickens when one takes into account the more than eleven million immigrants already in America, who seem logistically impossible to remove (without developing giant immigrant-removing hovercrafts) and who present a strain on our resources and a source of unemployment for natural-born citizens.

To make matters worse, if one looks abroad, he/she (probably he because womyn do not understand these things) will recognize that America faces some problems even more daunting than immigration. Iraq still seems to be making no progress toward peace and democracy after three years of occupation. Iran and North Korea are aggressively pursuing nuclear weapons, both posing a major threat to our national and global security. China is rapidly developing into the world's greatest superpower and is challenging our global preponderance.

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Ordinarily, we could rely on our robust military to deal with each and every one of these concerns. Unfortunately, many of our troops are tied down in Iraq, and we have lost the support of many of our allies.

It would seem that our nation is in great peril, and that we all might as well take a cue from the Mexicans and sneak through the Canadian border. But do not worry, gentle reader, I have a solution.

First, to sum up the immigration problem: there are more than eleven million illegal immigrants in this country, and millions more potential illegal immigrants who are honing their fence climbing and swimming skills in order to come here in the future. Most of these people are probably really nice, but they are taking our jobs and planning terrorist attacks against us.

To sum up the foreign policy problem: we do not have enough soldiers to be greeted as liberators when they bring democracy to our enemies.

What to do? The solution is quite simple: send the immigrants to Iraq. After completing their tours of duty, they will be entitled to return to America and become citizens.

After all, politicians tell us that we need immigrants to do the dangerous, degrading, low-paying jobs that Americans are not willing to do. Military service happens to be a dangerous, degrading job that many Americans are not willing to do. Further, the monumental task of equipping this eleven-million person army is sure to create thousands of manufacturing jobs for all Americans. And because all of the immigrants will be halfway around the world, they will not be able to take them.

Also, the plan will resolve any domestic discontent about illegal immigration. If there is anything that Americans hate more than immigration, it's troop-bashing, ensuring that they will be more than happy to grant amnesty to the immigrants when they return.

Now, let us talk about the military advantages of said plan. First, because most of the immigrants are terrorists or mercenaries hired by drug lords, we will not need to give them very much training. Second, Iraq has a population of roughly twenty-six million. We have an immigrant force of roughly eleven million people, plus millions more potential immigrants. This means that we will have about one troop in Iraq per every two Iraqis. The streets will be clogged with American soldiers, and the chance of a civil war will vanish. Third, we will not need to worry about spending money to armor Humvees like we have in the past, simply because most Latin Americans have cousins who work in body shops and will do the job for free. The bottom line is that we will transform Iraq into a pristine and functional democracy within months.

But what will we do then? One skill that many immigrants have is sneaking across borders. So after resurrecting Iraq from the ashes, we will send the immigrant legion through the Iranian border. By morning, we can surround Tehran without them even knowing it. Regime change will be complete within a week. And reconstruction will be extraordinarily cheap if we can provide inexpensive immigrant labor. Think about it, the combined lawn maintenance skills of millions of Latin Americans will turn the arid desert of Iran into a lush, green savannah in days.

One might point out that the immigrant legion will suffer casualties during this campaign, even with their covert blitz of Tehran. But we can imagine that the most outlandish estimate for deaths will be around one million, more than American forces sustained in World War II and Vietnam combined. Even subtracting those million and another few thousand for reconstruction efforts, the force will still contain more than ten million people.

Which is why it will be only appropriate for them to move through Pakistan and India and on into China. India and Pakistan may claim that marching through their territory without permission is a violation of their sovereignty. But again, the immigrants will be good enough to sneak through without either of them knowing about it.

China has the largest standing army in the world, with approximately 2.3 million soldiers and another 1 million reservists. However, it is not at all impressive when one considers that it is about a third of our immigrant force. Further, after our astounding successes in Iran and Iraq, many other countries will jump on the immigrant-army bandwagon, and contribute their disenfranchised to our effort in China. France will send its sizable Arab contingent, Russia will send the Chechnyans, Israel will send the Palestinians, and Sudan will send everyone in Darfur still alive.

The war in China will be a lengthy campaign, but the Chinese will eventually be overwhelmed, and will surrender in less than a year. Of course the immigrants will suffer even heavier casualties than those sustained during the Iran campaign. Suppose, for argument's sake, we lose half of them. That will leave us with more than five million left to deal with North Korea.

Korea has developed a demilitarized zone that is 248 km long and 4 km wide. Because the DMZ is filled with some one million landmines, some have said that it is impenetrable, and thus a land invasion of North Korea is tricky. But with a five million person immigrant force, crossing the DMZ will be like a walk in the park. Imagining that every landmine in the DMZ was detonated, and killed one immigrant, the force would only sustain 20 percent casualties. There would still be four million left!

The combat in Korea will be relatively easy-going, considering that the immigrant force will more than quadruple their standing army. In fact, after seeing what we did to Iran and China, they might just voluntarily surrender and accept democracy. Eventually, the remaining immigrants will be

brought back home where they will easily find work in a booming post-war economy without displacing any natural-born citizens. After such resounding military successes, recruitment levels among non-immigrants will skyrocket, and we will have scores of white soldiers to build our long-term bases, and carry out our strategy of forward deployment.

Further, after becoming democracies, China, Iran and North Korea will become thriving bastions of egalitarianism. They would be more than happy to accept millions of immigrants every year, ensuring that we will never again have to worry about securing our borders.

More importantly, the valiant sacrifices of the immigrants will make them no longer take for granted the gift of American citizenship. They will wake up every morning and salute the flag, because Goddamn it, they destroyed half of Asia for that right. This will make them bitter toward any future immigrants, and thus make them pressure their congressmen to give millions to defense contractors to develop giant immigrant-removing hovercrafts.

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# A NEW KIND OF POETRY

Aaron Midler

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The books of poetry on my shelf have many admirable and beautiful sentiments in them. Today however, I am struck that part of what makes them beautiful to me is simply their physical presence, regardless of their sentiment. I love that I can hold them in my hands, and take them with me wherever I go. I love that books, by virtue of print and paper, give a kind of body to words, making them palpable. And I want to amplify that sensation. I want to walk through a world of words, looking at them as I might look at an animal or a plant—that is, a living thing, rather than a frozen set of words on paper. In order to make this aesthetic move possible it is necessary to turn to computers and the Internet and to turn away from books and authorship (except in terms of web site design, and the creation of program code to produce, modify and present poems to visitors).

The internet is necessary because it is the only medium in which a poem could even metaphorically be said to have “life.” It lends physicality, much like books do, to immaterial things. Current estimates place the number of internet users in the world at about one sixth of the global population, or about 1 billion users, all exchanging information with one another. We think about this vast network in terms of space—I’m on the internet, surfing the web, in a chat room, visiting a site—imbuing it with a sense of physicality. The internet also never shuts off, but can be accessed at any time of the day or night, giving it the appearance of an autonomous and permanent space. Chat rooms, bulletin boards, video games, as well as other communities on the internet, also have various forms of ‘netiquette,’ or cultural rules for interact-

ing with other people and using services. In other words, the internet is a place to go, with things to do and see, despite the fact that its spaces exist only on various hard drives distributed around the world and despite the fact that its elements are text, image, and sound, rather than air, soil, or water. The internet also allows one to continually update the content of a website, making instantaneous revision to writing possible. I want to take advantage of that ability, as well as our general attitudes about the internet, to produce moving poetry.

Of course, poems are already on the internet, but they are static, and equivalent to the poetry put down in books—there is no movement, no change, no growth or death happening. However, given the use of a program whose function is to generate, rate, recombine, and discard, poetry can be given a life of its own. In fact, someone is already attempting to do this. In 2003 David Rea began to ‘evolve’ poetry. He compiled an eclectic database of words and used a generator to randomly produce “poems” from them. These poems were then posted on his website, “Darwinian Poetry,” where visitors rated those they liked and disliked, producing a set of “fit,” or popular, poems which were then chopped up and combined by computer to form the next generation of poetry—and so the cycle of life continues today. Here is an early poem, produced in July of 2003:

into the soullessness  
berry fire on toiling horses

It is incoherent, begins with a line that sounds as if it were stolen from an angsty middle schooler’s diary, and lacks interesting imagery. Why is it worthy of recognition? The poems on Rea’s site are constructed through a series of rule-based ma-

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nipulations which mimic certain aspects of evolutionary selection and transfer of genetic materials (words in the case of poems). The program runs all of the time, unless an unforeseen glitch occurs. We could compare the poems to animals at a zoo or plants at a botanical garden, but they are not alive in any real sense. They simply have an element of time and change, as applied by programmed rules, attached to them, and a stable place to exist (a website, an environment) in which we visit. The unpopular ones die out and some go on to produce other poems which will likely be dead as well; but every once in a while something truly great might emerge. Here is a poem written eight months after the previous example:

first snowfall  
beating beyond the head  
that  
with cold knowledge  
  
revealing  
one dream is and  
was again

This is not a work of genius. However, it is definitely better than the last poem we looked at. It is modestly coherent—one can connect “cold knowledge” to a “first snowfall,” and the second stanza would seem to follow from that, “revealing” something to us. The “one dream is and/was again” even suggests a kind of cyclic pattern of the kind we associate with the seasons—definitely more complex than “berry fire on toiling horses.” I constantly refer back to the earlier poem not simply as a convenient device for this essay, but also as a means of appreciation. It is not easy to love any single poem on Rea’s site, but we can appreciate lineages of poems, seeing how one is better than another in this way or that, applauding a particularly beautiful one if it should happen to arise, marveling that a line or a thought could emerge through processes other than that of our own minds’. We can admire, though some are entirely without merit, the whole project of poems, moving forward in time, in some semblance of an autonomous existence.

I am, in short, not opposed to the idea of treating a poem as an object, removed largely from any one person’s intent or meaning. I am interested in the idea of poems as undergoing “evolution” and change because those elements contribute to that sense of object-hood. I have said to treat Rea’s poems as creatures in an environment, though of course his site is not at all designed that way. You cannot see all the poems at once; you cannot see the program acting upon them. But why not do this? Why not design a site that represents them graphically in such a manner, giving a space to navigate and “cages” to view the poems? Why not change the code used to splice poems together in ways that are better suited to producing quality work? We could make it more akin to the editing process used by writers. Why not ask visitors to judge the poems along a number of pre-determined axes—language, clarity, inventiveness, etc—so that the “fit” poems are a more homogeneous and better set? Or do away with visitors’ input altogether, and find some other method of judging good and bad poetry? There are a number of possibilities for altering the way poems are created and displayed; a whole new set of methods for moving poetry forward in time—and for a new poetry. I feel that this could be an interesting aesthetic offshoot, which with enough work could produce beautiful and timely art.

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# TWO THOUGHTS ABOUT BEING JEWISH

Mordechai Levy-Eichel

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*“It is surprising, in view of the wide scope of the Varieties [of Religious Experience] that [William] James does not deal with the subject of Orthodox Judaism. All the more surprising on the part of a pragmatist, since here we have one of mankind’s most successful religions. The gods of Greece and Rome lorded it over this tiny and stubborn nation. Those gods, once beautiful and glittering presences, have vanished completely among the dead antiquities of mankind. Judaism survives. If pragmatism means anything, it is surely an attempt to call our attention to the element of practice that constitutes our experience far more than we commonly realize. And here is a religion whos maximum emphasis is put upon faithful, stubborn, unwavering practice. What would the world be like without that perseverance? I sometimes tease my Jewish friends that if Orthodox Judaism were to disappear, Jews all over the world would collapse. And the rest of us? Can we even begin to guess how much we too would be shaken?”*

—William Barrett,  
*The Illusion of Technique*, 1978

*“The world is too much with us; late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.”*

—William Wordsworth, 1807

1) Judaism is indefinable. One of its fundamental features, though, is the *Halacha*, also known as the Law. The *Halacha* is the Hebrew term for the Law...y’know that thing (among others) that St. Paul condemned us Jews for stubbornly keeping. Too many Jews today, like St. Paul long ago, see the Law as a burden. For Paul the coming of

Jesus rendered the Law superfluous: “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Galatians 3: 24-25). Today, a variation on this theme passes, I fear, as the dominant sentiment among most of the Jews I know. They see the Law as a burden, as a restriction, as an archaic system that if generally followed would prevent them from enjoying themselves, from living satisfactorily in the modern world.

One of the most obvious examples of these restrictions is the Sabbath, or *Shabbat*. On *Shabbat*, you are supposed to rest. You are supposed to rest by not using money, by not writing, by not using electricity, or in short, doing any sort of work. How to define work is, of course, an impossible task, hence the long debates in the *Talmud* about what constitutes work, and why the debate could still be said to be alive today, since *Halachic* debates cannot die, as by their very nature they are a continuing argument.

Keeping *Shabbat* is hard...and I don’t want to sound like I am criticizing anybody for not keeping it. (I don’t fully keep it myself.) *Nothing* I say in this essay should be construed as me asserting or implying that because somebody does not observe certain rules that they should ever be looked down upon. Nor should anything I say in this essay be construed as me asserting the inherent superiority of a more (or less) religious lifestyle. I find proselytizing obnoxious, although I find debate addictive. What I want to do here is criticize the distaste for ritual, for observance, for the rules and restrictions that a lot of Jews my age dislike, if not loath. Heck, I often enough share their disinclination to observe the *Halacha*, and I even occasionally indulge those desires,

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but I don't make my deviations a habit. I make my observance my habit, my policy—my aim.

Keeping *Shabbat* can be annoying. It means not using money. Not using money means not taking a trip downtown (never mind the prohibitions about traveling too far during *Shabbat*), or anywhere else. Not taking a trip downtown means staying here, on campus, another day when I could be out...visiting the Shedd Aquarium, walking around Old Town, and eating lunch in Devon. Observing the Sabbath means not beginning the essay due Monday on Saturday and finishing it on Sunday, but writing it all on Sunday, and then late into Monday morning. Observing the Sabbath means not checking my e-mail, or Facebook, or calling my friends (although half the time I just arrange something to do my friends before Saturday). It does mean being alone sometimes.

But so what? It also means being free from the busy world that we normally surround ourselves with. I consider this extremely valuable. It means silence and stillness. It means calmness and it means peace. I am talking spiritually for the moment, something I am usually wary of doing given how just about whenever I read somebody else trying to talk about spirituality, I find it nauseating. What I am trying to say is that observing the Sabbath—that not doing certain things—allows others things to happen that I consider valuable, other things that are precious given how little my hectic life as a student allows me to truly slow down and rest.

Is there meaning in the Sabbath? I find its meaning in that it is a day unlike my others. As it says in the *Havdalah*, the short blessing said at the end of the Sabbath that ushers in the new week: "Blessed are You Hashem...Who separates...between the seventh day and the six days of labor. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who separates between holy and secular." *Shabbat* is a day when I am forced to rest, to give up the demanding life of the student, when all I can do is read or spend time with my friends. It is a day for walking and thinking and sleeping.

During Sunday, I do my schoolwork. I catch up

on my reading (or vainly try to). I write as much of my essays as I can, (but somehow it is never enough, and the writing always bleeds into early Monday morning). Sunday is never a day of rest because it can't be (nor would it be even if I did half of my work on Saturday). It is not that I have to do my schoolwork on Sunday and therefore it is not a day of rest. If I *really* wanted to, I could probably do most of my schoolwork during the week. I mean something else. I mean that without the *Halacha* enjoining me from working, of course I will be working, or trying to. Without the *Halacha* forcing me not to use the phone, not to write, not to use money, I couldn't let the day truly be different. And a day when you can't do any of those things is singular. It is like fasting for a day. It is a cleaning out of your system. It restores one.

I find the *Halacha* essential. Thinking that *Shabbat* is a set of restrictions is immature. Yes, of course it is...but it is also more, so obviously so much more. Imagining that tradition is simply, or mostly, a set of prohibitions that stop one from doing what one wants to, that stop one from enjoying oneself or having fun, simply demonstrates one's ignorance of the deeper power and meaning of tradition, of law, and of religion. The *Halacha*, the Law, is *not* superfluous because without it Saturday is not truly different. Without being enjoined from using money or writing or checking my e-mail, I would do all of those things. The Law is necessary if we want the day to be holy. It is the Law that makes the Sabbath different, that makes *Shabbat* blessed, that sanctifies and consecrates it. How can anything else be as satisfying as partaking in that sort of peace?

2) Passover, or *Pesach* as the Hebrew has it, ended recently. On the first night or two of it (depending on your tradition) is the Seder. The story of the Jews leaving Egypt is told, and in the midst of the story sits a short tale, a parable really, about the modern day tradition of retelling the story of our leaving Egypt. (Judaism is a very self-conscious religion). The parable features four children: a wise one, a wicked one, a simply one, and one who is too young to ask. The *Haggadah* (from which

the story of Passover is read) says: “The wicked child asks: ‘What is the meaning of this service to you?’ Saying *you*, he excludes himself...” As my friends and I read the *Haggadah* at our Seder, and as we got up to the part about the four children, a few of them made the point that they did not like the idea of a wicked child. They didn’t like the idea of classifying somebody as wicked; they didn’t like the idea of classifying somebody as wicked who asks such questions about the holiday; they thought it was closed minded to put it that way, and so they used another word to describe the wicked child. (I forget the new choice.)

The funny thing is that by doing this they acted *just like* the wicked child. The first thing to notice about the wicked child—and let’s stick with traditional label for the moment, shall we—is how quick he is to judge what is presented to him, and to dismiss it. He asks what is the meaning of the service. There is an immaturity in the question. The wise child asks “What are these testimonies and statues and judgments which God had commanded you?” He asks a simpler question. He asks just what is going on. He doesn’t understand the situation either, but is curious, honestly interested, ready to learn, not to judge before knowing.

The wicked child asks “What is the meaning of this service to you?” The traditional condemnation of the wicked child stems from the “you.” The wicked child is condemned because he excludes himself from the Seder by saying “you and not us”. The funny thing is that in the Hebrew, the wise child also says “you,” even though it is usually translated as “us.” (My Jewish readers might want to check their *Haggadot* at this point to confirm this, but it’s true.) I therefore don’t consider the traditional censure of the wicked child as the best sort of indication of why he should be considered wicked. He is wicked because he doesn’t care about Judaism and what is happening but just blithely asks “What is this work to you” which is a literal translation of his words. The wicked child is wicked because there is a condescension in the way he addresses the whole matter, in the sneering way he puts his question, in the way he is ready

to seize up and judge the tradition before he really has experienced it. The tale of the four children comes right before the story of leaving Egypt. The wicked child does not want to hear the story, but he already wants to know why he should.

What the wicked child is condemned for is the dismissive attitude that he takes to the tradition. What is wicked is that he is putting himself above tradition with such an approach. He is not willing to listen. He wants to know now. He is already prepared to judge it. And if it doesn’t suit him, then out the door with it. He is impatient. He is prideful. He is dismissive. He is arrogant. He is wicked.

The problem is not about questioning tradition. *Tradition is about questioning.* The problem is with not seriously confronting tradition, and thereby easily dismissing it. The problem is with glancing at it, and *only* glancing at it. The problem is with seeing it as something narrow. Our religious traditions are older than we are. That to me, history major that I am, gives them some inherent wisdom. What is old that has survived to the modern day probably has power, probably has something to teach me. And I would prefer not to walk away from anything that can teach me.

*All citations to the Bible are to the King James Version.*

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# REALISM AND ‘THE ISRAEL LOBBY’

Lee Solomon

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“The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy,” written by Chicago professor John J. Mearsheimer and Harvard professor Stephen M. Walt and published in the March 23rd issue of the *London Review of Books*, set off a maelstrom of backlash across the op-ed pages of the nation’s most preeminent newspapers and magazines. While it is true that some critics have raised substantive objections to the paper’s theses on empirical grounds, so many others have tragically fallen into the pit-trap that Mearsheimer and Walt took meticulous care to avoid: charges of anti-Semitism.

Few critics have outwardly accused the two of anti-Semitism—Elliot Cohen’s piece in the *Washington Post* is a notable exception—but many have been quick to emphasize the great praise the paper has drawn from the Palestinian Liberation Organization and Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood as a rhetorical point. Alan Dershowitz likened the paper’s theme to older apocryphal tracts such as the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (which the authors explicitly rejected) and radical thinkers such as Charles Lindbergh and Louis Farrakhan, even going so far as to characterize the paper as “David Duke with footnotes.” Richard Baehr and Ed Lasky wrote in the *American Thinker*, “When something walks like a duck, talks like a duck, and looks like a duck, usually it is a duck. Walt and Mearsheimer have decided to navigate the waters of the Israel-hating, Jew-hating conspiracy theorists. There is a good reason for this. They seem comfortable in these waters.” To use a similar metaphor, these criticisms amount to nothing more than a red herring.

Suggestions that Mearsheimer and Walt are in col-

lusion with the anti-Zionist conspiracy are both ironic and amusing. It seems much to the folly of critics arguing this point, given that one of the paper’s central criticisms was its failure to differentiate groups as dissimilar as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the *Wall Street Journal*, and the American Enterprise Institute from an unholy alliance coordinating U.S. foreign policy antithetical to the national interest.

Simply because David Duke has hailed the paper as the “modern American Declaration of Independence” doesn’t mean that the authors are apart of a broad conspiratorial movement or even endorse Duke’s views on the subject. Guilt by association is a particularly egregious logical fallacy when spoken from the lips of some of America’s most distinguished academics and columnists. A recently published rejoinder by the authors responds, “We have no control over who likes or dislikes our article, but we regret that Duke used it to promote his racist agenda, which we utterly reject.”

The Mearsheimer-Walt paper is a scholarly paper betraying no hidden political motivations whatsoever; a call for academic debate and nothing more. Its principle claims may very well be unjustifiable if the supporting evidence is flawed, but I do not care to defend them; this is the authors’ responsibility. Instead, their objective is to account for America’s unwavering and unparalleled support for Israel.

Their thesis advances two claims: (1) Neither strategic nor moral arguments can account for America’s support for Israel; and (2) U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East is steered in a pro-Israeli direction by a loose coalition of individuals and organizations they identify as the “Israel Lobby.” The authors take care to note that the “Israel Lobby” is

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not just another name for American Jewry, as Israel is not a very salient issue for many American Jews while it is ironically for many prominent Christian evangelicals, whose inclusion the authors note.

One might argue that this paper, coming from two leading advocates of a particular understanding of international politics called Realism, is “unmistakably smelly,” in the fashion of Christopher Hitchens. Realists have long held that statesmen craft foreign policy in terms of interest defined as power and that a state’s perception of power is shaped by the amount it has relative to other great powers in the international system.

In other words, realists agree domestic politics rarely influence international politics. Critics such as Christopher Hitchens and Elliot Cohen claim that Mearsheimer and Walt’s sudden fascination with domestic interest group politics in their paper smells of hypocrisy that betrays their true anti-Semitic motivations, but to the contrary, I argue for a reading of the paper informed by the realist tradition that absolves the authors from hiding an implicit Jew-hating political agenda.

The case of America’s support for Israel is one of the few in which realists by and large cannot field an explanation in terms of interest defined as power, the basis of the authors’ claim that no strategic power calculation can account for this phenomenon. Consequently, the authors admit that the case in question is an anomaly to their theory of the everyday workings of international politics. Moreover, the authors reject the moral arguments usually served up by the neo-liberalists, the realists’ main adversaries.

It is for these reasons that the authors find U.S. policy in Israel so fascinating; the two dominant theories of international politics—at least in their opinion—are completely frustrated by the case of American foreign policy towards Israel in each one’s bid for predominance in the academic field of international relations theory. Thus, a third explanation must be available somewhere in the great big repository of literature comprising this field of research.

Indeed, the answer is provided by none other than Walt himself in *The Origins of Alliances*. In this book, Walt suggests that alliances between nations in any form because of what he refers to as transnational penetration. Though hardly the norm for international politics, even a realist like Walt admits the possibility of such an alliance occurring when one state’s domestic political system is manipulated by another. One form this takes, he argues, is when lobbyists attempt to alter public perceptions and policy decisions regarding a potential ally. He provides examples of several studies on penetration, including one regarding the China Lobby’s power to influence and manipulate US foreign policy in the Far East during the 1950s. Penetration is not a new area of study in international relations theory; the Mearsheimer-Walt paper is merely the latest contribution toward the study of an often-neglected political phenomenon.

Critics such as Bret Stephens of the Wall Street Journal Editorial Board have argued the paper’s portrayal of Israel as an aggressive, nationalist, war-mongering state is a completely unfair characterization of a democracy with a well-integrated Arab-Israeli population. Stephens would do well to read the first chapter of *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, which might be called Mearsheimer 101, to find out what Mearsheimer really advocates.

Mearsheimer is a strong proponent of the belief that one state can never be sure of another state’s intentions either now or in the future, and that therefore the most secure state is the one that anticipates worst case scenarios by amassing power that far exceeds all its rivals. Statesmen conduct statecraft along a trajectory heading toward hegemony. This is not uniquely true for the case of Israel as Stephens would like us to think Mearsheimer believes. All states, democracies and dictatorships alike, look for opportunities to revise the status quo to reflect a more advantageous position in the balance of power. Thus the type of government, being a domestic political factor, is inconsequential.

Far from denouncing its illegitimate, abusive use of power to influence policy deci-

sions, the Mearsheimer-Walt paper compliments the Israel Lobby's effectiveness. However, as realists, the two authors believe these findings to be a cause for growing concern.

Realists, by definition, fear that if statesmen continue to ignore the balance of power, the U.S. will eventually lose its status as the leading state in the international system. Thus, their paper concludes that open debate about the Israel Lobby could help "move the U.S. to a position more consistent with its own national interest," that is, interest defined as power in realist terms. Having taken classes with John Mearsheimer, I know that these anxieties about strategic power miscalculations, and not the power of the international Jewish conspiracy, are what keep him awake at night.

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# REFLECTIONS ON GENOCIDE

Kati Proctor

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“After all, who remembers today the extermination of the Armenians?” This quote, by a prominent historical leader in the twentieth century, was the starting point for a book I read as a child about the Armenian Genocide. When I was younger, I was fascinated in an odd way with the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide. As a nine year old, I couldn’t comprehend the grand numbers of people that died, or why somebody would want to kill all those people. It wasn’t until I was older that I realized this hadn’t just happened once or twice in human history, but countless times. And genocide continues to happen in our world today. Darfur, to name one prominent example.

So, with more current and arguably more relevant instances of this happening, what then, does the Armenian Genocide (or any past instance of genocide, for that matter) have to teach us, today, ninety one years after the fact? Does the killing of this (numerically) small people in Eastern Turkey on the brink of World War One really matter to anybody today, in our world? Will fighting for international recognition really change anything?

The government of Turkey doesn’t recognize the Armenian Genocide as a genocide. They say that the Armenians exaggerate the numbers dead, and that just as many Turks died as Armenians in what they call a civil war. The United States government doesn’t recognize the Armenian Genocide either. The Armenians in this country, here as a result of the Armenian Diaspora (which in turn was a result of the genocide), are fighting an uphill battle, year after year, to get people to remember and recognize this atrocity in their history. Is it even worthwhile for Armenians to continue to

fight for worldwide recognition of this atrocity as a genocide? What good would it do? Is there even any reason for recognizing the Genocide, or is it all just boil down to an “I told you so” argument?

One interesting thing to note is that currently, Turkey has a law against “insulting Turkishness”, which has come into play recently on a few separate occasions dealing with the Armenian Genocide. One example is the trial of the Turkish author Orhan Pamuk who made a comment in a interview about how “one million Ottoman Armenians were killed in Turkey and no one but me dares talk about it.” In light of Turkey’s recent push to join the European Union, this case carried much weight because of the implications it might have on freedom of speech in Turkey. While charges were later dropped, the incident still raises some questions. For one, is it seriously insulting “Turkishness” to discuss this issue? The government at the time of the genocide is not the current government of Turkey today. The Ottomans were a completely different group of people. Wouldn’t it be easier for the current government to admit that there may have been some mistakes in the past but they’ve moved past them now? To me, that seems like a better solution than coming up with laws and prosecuting people for even making mention of Armenians being killed, which might jeopardize Turkey’s dream of becoming a member of the European Union.

Besides, if Turkey recognized the Armenian Genocide as an official genocide, Armenians all over the world would sleep easier. Armenians and Turks as a whole might be able to move past this issue and on to better understanding of one another, instead of this never-ending hatred that seems to reign in today’s discussions.

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However, recognition is one issue, remembrance is another. So, recognition aside, should we be like this speaker of the earlier quote? Should we forget the Armenians? The argument for forgetting is an easy one, seemingly. Why does anything matter that happened so long ago? The people that were in charge aren't even around anymore, and therefore we can't even bring anybody to justice. Once we have recognition, is there any reason left to still discuss the Armenian Genocide? And branching away from the philosophical onto the logical, isn't it true that the Armenians are safe? Armenia is a country now, and there are many thriving communities of Armenians outside of Armenia as well. The Armenian people isn't in danger of being wiped off the planet anymore.

But on the other hand, is forgetting really the solution? What about the genocides that are happening now? Should we forget them as well? The Holocaust? Should we let that slip by the wayside of memory?

The argument for no, therefore, has to do with the principle that history repeats itself. What happens once will probably happen again, and again, and again. The Armenian Genocide was the first of its kind in the twentieth century. One and a half million people are said to have died, which, if true, would have been about half the Armenian population in the world at the time.

One thing that most people don't know about the Armenian Genocide was that there were German officials in Turkey at the time, officials who later became high-ranking in the Nazi party in Germany 20 years later. They learned how easy it was to make a group of people a scapegoat, to turn ethnicities against ethnicities. The quote at this beginning of this article was in fact spoken by Hitler in 1939 after giving orders to "exterminate without mercy or pity men, women and children belonging to the Polish-speaking race."

Genocide is a common occurrence in recent history. Among other places Rwanda, Darfur, and Bosnia are all examples that come to mind. The international community needs to start doing something

about this. After so many instances of genocide, we should be able to recognize the tell-tall warning signs of this occurring. When the world sees this happening, something should be done about it. Whether or not you believe in an "international law", preventing genocides should not be a debatable issue. Mass killings should not be allowed to happen in our civilized world. We are humans, after all, and should value other human life.

Therefore, what I'm arguing is that the world needs to wake up and pay attention. It would be a lot easier to prevent a genocide from happening before it starts than after it's already begun. The cost in human lives of our not being aware is too high. After all, we spend countless hours and dollars saving species from extinction, and yet we can't spend time and money saving human lives? We have a responsibility to humanity as a whole.

Because, after all, today we do remember the extermination of the Armenians

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