

**Liberty University**

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**From the Selected Works of Steven Alan Samson**

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2010

# 201002 OBITER DICTA: WINTER BREAK 2010

Steven Alan Samson, *Liberty University*



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**201002 OBITER DICTA: WINTER BREAK 2010**  
**Steven Alan Samson**

**Sunday, January 3, 2010**

[http://townhall.com/columnists/GeorgeWill/2010/01/03/a\\_blight\\_grows\\_in\\_brooklyn](http://townhall.com/columnists/GeorgeWill/2010/01/03/a_blight_grows_in_brooklyn)

It is Naboth's Vineyard redux, New London "déjà vu all over again." The Takings Clause is once again on the rampage, devouring everything in its path. A Prospect Heights neighborhood has been declared blighted so that a developer, Bruce Ratner, can move the New Jersey Nets to Brooklyn. Subsequently, a Russian billionaire has been brought into the deal. The residents are up in arms and so is much of the press. The *Huffington Post* carried a piece on the controversy in October, but now the New York Supreme Court has ruled that the taking is constitutional. A municipal bond has been floated to cinch the deal. The question is whether a tree will still be growing in Brooklyn once the sawdust settles.

<http://www.thestar.com/news/world/article/744199--the-israelification-of-air>

Israeli airport security is unhampered by our political correctness regime.

**Monday 4**

[http://www.americanthinker.com/2009/12/engineers\\_scientific\\_and\\_socia.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/2009/12/engineers_scientific_and_socia.html)

We have never lacked for warnings. The past is neither a "dead hand" that holds us back from progress nor a museum that encases its relics in amber. Our God is the God of the living, not the dead (Matt. 22:32). The voices of experience offer us a multitude of counselors. The living hand of their example may restrain us from harm when the cupidity of our desires would entangle us in the fowler's snare (Ps. 124:7).

<http://pajamasmedia.com/blog/forty-years-of-misdirected-aid-to-africa/?print=1>

One of my Kenyan students wishes to direct her career path toward fighting corruption. She has taken the examples of Hernando de Soto and George Ayittey to heart.

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,668750,00.html>

Christopher Caldwell is somewhat more optimistic about America's capacity to assimilate its immigrants than Victor Davis Hanson is. Years ago I used Hanson's *Mexifornia* in my State and Local Government course -- along with, among others, *An Empire Wilderness*, *Democracy in California*, and *What Makes You Think We Read the Bills?* *Mexifornia* describes what could be the American future if we do not reinvigorate civics education and encourage assimilation. Francis Lieber, a German immigrant, was an early critic of "hyphenated-Americanism." Although multiculturalism does not reign here to the degree it does in Canada or Europe, public education is no longer the engine of Americanization it once was. John

Dewey's "common faith" was sufficient to marginalize Christianity from our public discourse, but the secular humanism he promoted is every bit as weak as the "insecure, malleable, relativistic culture" that Caldwell describes.

## Tuesday 5

[http://townhall.com/columnists/KenBlackwell/2010/01/05/president\\_obama\\_how\\_about\\_bowing\\_to\\_reality?page=full&comments=true](http://townhall.com/columnists/KenBlackwell/2010/01/05/president_obama_how_about_bowing_to_reality?page=full&comments=true)

Over the years I have been an occasional subscriber to the *New Yorker*. Its covers are usually worth collecting (and, of course, have been collected for that reason). Likewise the cartoons. One of my old acquaintances, a novelist and memoirist, used to be a regular contributor in the days when the legendary William Maxwell was the fiction editor. In this piece, Ken Blackwell is being exact when he described the urbane sophistication of the *New Yorker* as "a liberalism characterized by point-of-view than by policy point papers."

Perhaps point-of-view is what is missing from the conservative movement -- or at least has been missing since the passing of William F. Buckley, Jr., Russell Kirk, and a few others. Today's conservative movement has joined with the liberals in producing an abundance of policy analyses. Armies of policy wonks are massed on either side of the aisle. The gridlock of Washington politics that was so lamented in the 1980s seems almost to have become a permanent fixture. Wrangling over disbursements from public purse has settled into the moral equivalent of trench warfare. Raw recruits, often fresh out of college, are thrown onto the lines and often reduced to cannon fodder. And for what? Our political squabbles lack coherent definition. They are over little else than pride of place and how to divide the spoils. "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18).

For want of a point-of-view everything else is beside the point. Thomas Sowell has just today published a new book entitled *Intellectuals and Society*. One of the reviewers on Amazon raised much the same point:

"Sowell does a good job of illustrating the pernicious influence of leftist intellectuals. What is less clear is why opposing intellectuals, like Sowell himself, have not been more successful. Is there a simple lack of data among certain people? Does ideology cause a lack of cognitive dissonance? Are there self-serving reasons for spreading faulty theories, visions, or data? These are an important question, the answers to which will tell us if we need better education or a better vision (or maybe both). The fact of the matter is that this book does help to discredit certain intellectuals, and this is an important next step. Unfortunately, it will be read least by those who need to most urgently: those who are routinely swayed by defective ideas need to read this book, but how many of them will?"

Answering such questions is our collective challenge. Yes, we need better education, but even more we must return to something of the vision upon which this country was founded. Thomas Jefferson echoed the Old Testament prophets when he wrote in the Declaration: "He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people, and eat out their

substance." But would he speak any differently of the kings we ourselves have chosen today?

Decadence has been defined as a loss of object. It is what happens when people lose the point, when the point has been blunted, when mere lifestyle choices are given pride of place over the substance. At the cusp of a decade, is anything more clear than that we the people have lost our way? That we are perishing from a famine of "hearing the words of the LORD?"

[http://townhall.com/columnists/ThomasSowell/2010/01/05/intellectuals\\_and\\_society?page=full&comments=true](http://townhall.com/columnists/ThomasSowell/2010/01/05/intellectuals_and_society?page=full&comments=true)

Thomas Sowell joins Julien Benda, Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, Raymond Aron, Thomas Molnar, Paul Hollander, Herbert Schlossberg, Paul Johnson, and many others before and since, in confronting the idolatries and idol-worshippers of our times. In fact, this theme of political idolatry lies at the heart of my political theory courses.

Sowell concludes this column by noting that "intellectuals of unquestionable brilliance have advocated similarly childish and dangerous notions. How and why such patterns have existed among intellectuals is a challenging question, whose answer can determine the fate of millions of other people." Vance Packard wrote several books that likewise displayed a realistic understanding of the dynamics of our status-saturated society. But we are long past the time when we need such diagnoses. What we need is intelligent leadership: true statesmanship at all levels of society.

<http://www.investopedia.com/articles/retirement/06/DemiseofDBPlan.asp?partner=answers>

The attached article addresses current realities with regard to retirement. Unless we can change direction rather dramatically, various sorts of defaults and repudiations will define our future. Several states already face grim choices. One poll indicates that most Californians believe that their state, which is bankrupt in all but name, should not be bailed out. Nevada and Michigan (where I once lived) are in similar straits. What happens when all these dominoes start cascading? People in those states are already voting with their feet and heading for the exits.

Once upon a time we worried about a "domino effect" in Southeast Asia. Now the wolf is at our doorstep.

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article6977152.ece>

"Britain Threatens to Freeze Iceland Out of EU as Loan Payback Vetoed." As I was saying this morning about defaults and repudiations: Behold the future! As Friedrich Nietzsche put it: "If you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you."

**Wednesday 6**

[http://www.americanthinker.com/2010/01/what\\_the\\_dems\\_know\\_universal\\_v.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/2010/01/what_the_dems_know_universal_v.html)

Here is another battle conservatives had better be prepared to fight: universal voter registration. Whenever politicians hate the election results, they try to redefine the electorate. "We the People" are becoming victims of identity theft.

[http://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2010/01/war\\_correspondent\\_michael\\_yon.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2010/01/war_correspondent_michael_yon.html)

Welcome to the future. As Gerald Ford told Congress shortly after being made president: "Government big enough to supply everything you need is big enough to take everything you have.... The course of history shows that as a government grows, liberty decreases." The Supreme Court in 1973 gave us *Roe v. Wade* in the name of a hitherto non-existent "right to privacy." But if such a right existed in fact, it would surely protect against such highly intrusive searches and seizures, as happened recently with a journalist's laptop at the Detroit airport. I am less inclined than ever to fly the unfriendly skies.

<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/3ef8f012-f969-11de-8085-00144feab49a.html>

Note from a former student: "This is scary... it should be America losing the free world... the free world is being lost entirely. sad.. sad... sad."

<http://www.melaniephillips.com/articles-new/?p=706>

My reply: "I ran across another article a couple of days ago which claims that the terrorist's father has been supporting a revolutionary movement in Kenya. Everything is getting so interconnected, much like the network of *Avatar's* Pandora."

"Yes, I regret that America is losing its way, but it will take more than a visionary leader to enable us to break the gravitational pull of our spiritual lassitude."

## Thursday 7

[http://townhall.com/columnists/LarryElder/2010/01/07/sarah\\_palin\\_wrong\\_prescription\\_for\\_america?page=full&comments=true](http://townhall.com/columnists/LarryElder/2010/01/07/sarah_palin_wrong_prescription_for_america?page=full&comments=true)

It is not just Sarah Palin. Conservatives in general have been too long dismissed as what John Stuart Mill called "the stupid party." Larry Elder here answers the stupidity hypothesis rather effectively.

[http://townhall.com/columnists/MattTowery/2010/01/07/conservative\\_bloggers\\_will\\_play\\_huge\\_role\\_in\\_coming\\_gop\\_contests?page=full&comments=true](http://townhall.com/columnists/MattTowery/2010/01/07/conservative_bloggers_will_play_huge_role_in_coming_gop_contests?page=full&comments=true)

Here is a good brief introduction to the power of the conservative blogosphere. As of this past weekend, I have been given a go-ahead to post my collected ramblings at the Digital Commons. Some of the articles I have posted on the Commons have gotten attention, although not nearly so much as when some of them were originally posted. Still, one can hope for a widening circulation.

After going through several potential titles, I finally settled on *Obiter Dicta*. My purpose in starting this blog is to combine a community service with an investment in the future. If my pen can help slay some monsters, all the better.

Once upon a time a bowman shot an arrow into the air and where it fell he knew not where (1 K. 22:34). Undertaking this project reminds me of Albert Jay Nock's classic essay, "Isaiah's Job." <http://www.lewrockwell.com/orig3/nock3b.html> Nock left a good description of my "job" (and that of so many other conservatives) both inside and outside the classroom. Similarly, that bowman's job at Ahab's last battle was simply to launch the payload.

[http://townhall.com/columnists/MaggieGallagher/2010/01/06/california\\_voters\\_face\\_show\\_trial\\_in\\_kangaroo\\_court?page=full&comments=true](http://townhall.com/columnists/MaggieGallagher/2010/01/06/california_voters_face_show_trial_in_kangaroo_court?page=full&comments=true)

Tim Burton's version of *Alice in Wonderland* is hitting the theaters in March. But the U.S. District Court plans to give us a preview when it challenges California's recent Prop. 8. It may be a breach of propriety to use the word "challenges," but can we any longer say, with full confidence and a straight face, that our system does not sanction show trials and that "judges do not make the law?" It has been about four decades since Raoul Berger wrote *Government by Judiciary*. Is judicial activism any less a fact now than it was then?

<http://newsmax.com/deBorchgrave/Borchgrave-Yemen-Terror-Afghanistan/2010/01/06/id/345567>

Over many years of reading his work, I have developed a lot of respect for Arnaud de Borchgrave's analytical abilities.

What is most striking in this piece is the continuing ability of terrorists to travel with impunity throughout the region even as a new "Silk Road" takes shape from the Baltic to Central Asia. "The new 2,400-mile Northern Distribution Network, from Riga on the Baltic through Russia and the 'Stans to northern Afghanistan, moves 20 to 30 supply trains per week. The 1,250-mile Pakistan route – through border tribal areas and frequently attacked by Taliban insurgents – had become too hazardous."

Borchgrave argues that the terror war's center of gravity shifted away from Afghanistan and Pakistan years ago. Certainly the geostrategic advantages offered by Yemen rival those of the tribal areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Its youth bulge is a larger percentage of the population than those of either Afghanistan or Saudi Arabia. The population of the three countries is now roughly equal. Nearly half the population of Yemen is under the age of 15. The size of the territory is nearly as large as Afghanistan's. Yemen is a country of mountains and deserts with most of its arable land located in the west and along the southern coast. If de Borchgrave is correct that Iran and al-Qaeda are collaborating in Yemen, this would only further strengthen the significance of the Indian Ocean as a strategic waterway, as Robert D. Kaplan contends.

## Friday 8

[http://townhall.com/columnists/JonahGoldberg/2010/01/08/what\\_the\\_gop\\_can\\_learn\\_from\\_a\\_pizza\\_chain?page=full&comments=true](http://townhall.com/columnists/JonahGoldberg/2010/01/08/what_the_gop_can_learn_from_a_pizza_chain?page=full&comments=true)

My response to "Yes we can!" in recent months has been: "Just say no!" Digging in our heels against the sort of "change" the socialists can "believe in" has never been more necessary than in the last few months. The loss of key Senate seats has forced Republicans to unite in resistance.

But digging in is not a strategy. Whether or not the health care package goes down in flames, conservatives inside and outside the Beltway must find their voice again and articulate policies that address the issues of the day: tort reform, transferability of health insurance, deficit spending, the national debt, and the deterioration of the infrastructure. In the face of the Democrats' strong and hostile bid to establish a servile state, the only good defense for conservatives is to burn their avenues of retreat while rallying the friends of liberty and preparing to launch a sharp and adamant offense. Steps that would lead to the devolution of power to the states and counties, as well as the sunset of self-serving agencies, would be good for starters.

If the Republicans wish to lead, they should apologize for their flirtation with so-called big government conservatism during the Bush Administration. They should acknowledge their failure to keep the Contract with America. They should also redeem some of Reagan's unkept promises from the campaign of 1980. Not only did he fail to dismantle two cabinet-level departments, but his successors have subsequently added others.

More than three decades after the creation of the Department of Energy, we are more dependent than ever upon foreign energy sources. More than three decades after the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare devolved into the Department of Health and Human Services and a separate Department of Education, our medical expenses have continued to soar while Johnny's scores in reading, writing, and arithmetic have fallen off the charts. But these two departments are not simply white elephants. They have always been Trojan horses designed for the socialization of America.

So how does one reduce the size and scope of government and get its hands out of everybody's pockets? This is the great challenge for those who wish to protect liberty. The welfare state of the New Deal era begat the regulatory state, which in turn begat the ever more intrusive security state. This is no accident, as Garett Garrett knew at the time. American-style "liberalism" is the ideology of collectivism and the foundation of the New Class. This "liberalism" will consume everything in its path as long as it is able to redistribute the wealth.

What's in a name? In this country, socialism has always marched under false colors. It is time to call it by its proper name: statism. With czars popping out all over the place during the past twelve months, Amaury de Riencourt's *The Coming Caesars* has been proven very prescient. Let's acknowledge that Caesar and his *clementia* have made a comeback. While the Roman Republic was still in the bloom of youth, its leaders called Cincinnatus out of retirement to perform one last public service: to thwart a demagogue who sought to buy his way into office. Yet such corruption has become the norm today.

The title of one particular social science classic is worth pondering. Forty years ago Albert O. Hirschman published *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to*

*Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States.* Let conservatives take heed and find their voice before they are forced to exit. What Sidney Milkis called the Third New Deal of the late 1930s has given us the permanent administrative state as well as a permanent liberal establishment entrenched in the bureaucracy, the universities, and the mass media.

Having permitted our central government to create a new ruling class to ride herd over us, we the citizens and taxpayers of the United States of America must again turn to our Founding ideals. Less than two weeks before his death, Thomas Jefferson wrote on June 24, 1826: "The general spread of the light of science has already laid open to every view the palpable truth, that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God."

For the last seventy years, what James Burnham called "the managerial revolution" has kept private initiative, entrepreneurship, and our civil liberties on the defensive. Let us put freedom back on the march where it belongs.

[http://www.americanthinker.com/2010/01/empowering\\_iranians\\_to\\_dislodg.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/2010/01/empowering_iranians_to_dislodg.html)

I have read several of Amil Imani's columns in recent years and agree that the Iranian regime is being destabilized by the protests. But that does not mean that its demise is quite so imminent as the arrival of a deliverable Iranian atomic bomb. It has long been evident that Israel cannot count on meaningful pressure on Iran from the international "community." So, what is it supposed to do? The chief obstacles to meaningful sanctions right now are China and Russia. But the Obama Administration is also too heavily wedded to the "peace process" to be any real assistance. If the United States fails to act, Israel will. If Israel is told it must give up the West Bank and that Jerusalem must be divided, can it ever again count on its friends?

<http://pajamasmedia.com/blog/the-u-s-bullied-castro-not-even-close/?print=1>

When it comes to reporting on Cuba, Humberto Fontova continues to fight the good fight. Here, with the tip of the hat to Paul Harvey, is "the rest of the story."

<http://article.nationalreview.com/?q=MjBiMjMzNGUwMDI3OTMxMDM5NzM0M2M3NzExNGMyOTI=>

I wish I could say that Victor David Hanson is belaboring the obvious. But the obvious has still not penetrated many of the thick skulls inside the Beltway. Humberto Fontova has reminded us that Castro's rise in 1959 was aided and abetted by the State Department and the CIA. Now Hanson reminds us of two other awful years: 1939 and 1979. But at least in the case of 1979, the 1980 election brought some needed relief from the failed policies of the 1970s. Will we once again see the lights going out all over Europe (as they did in 1914) before American responds? Sleepers, awake! *Carthago delenda est!*

Let's now tend to some reclamation projects closer to home.

**Saturday 9**

<http://townhall.com/columnists/OliverNorth/2010/01/08/shocked?page=full&comments=true>

The president reduces what his predecessor called "the War on Terror" to a single organization, al-Qaeda, and misses the magnitude of the forces that threaten the world. Radical Islam is fed by some of the same phenomena I encountered in three years of teaching at the state penitentiary.

Prison life encourages countercultural alternatives to the prevailing social norms. By isolating or quarantining its inmates from the larger society the so-called penitentiary becomes an incubator for all manner of social pathologies. Far from being a place where sins may be repented, its hothouse environment favors surging crosscurrents that make prison an ideal mixing bowl and proving ground for more dangerous infections.

Once released from such "Devil's Punchbowls," our ex-cons often become countercultural leaders. I find that so much of our popular culture is a *déjà vu* experience. Both the heroes and the villains of our action films mirror and even idealize the same personal attributes and social characteristics I saw on display at the penitentiary during my frequent visits more than thirty years ago.

Too often the Islamists hail from failed states and floundering autocracies that are the flotsam of a declining civilization: one that has for centuries has lagged far behind West -- but a West which today is riddled with nihilism and increasingly hollowed out. In a book on, *Taliban*, Ahmad Rashid described the psychological damage inflicted upon a generation of young Afghans who grew up in the hothouse environment of refugee camps in Pakistan populated by the victims of war. So many of its adherents, radical Islam is the ultimate survival mechanism, providing both a reason to live and an inducement to die. In recent decades the toxic conditions of the refugee camps have been replicated in the suburbs of so many European cities where the displaced persons of the Middle East, North Africa, and the former Soviet bloc have been congregating: suburbs where violent crime is now endemic.

As these social pathologies spread, Western universities play a vital role as the great incubators of the "culture of repudiation," as Roger Scruton calls it, that infests the intellectual classes. What we are witnessing is a pulsing intensification of radical ideologies that were set in motion two centuries ago when revolutionary fevers burst out of Paris in 1789. Such "fire in the minds of men" has been fanned to greater levels of intensity through the convergence of subsequent ideologies and movements: Hegelianism, Marxism, Russian nihilism, the Pan- movements, the Black Hand, Bolshevism, Fascism, National Socialism, racial eugenics, the Khmer Rouge, and radical Islam. Each "avatar" of what James Billington has called "the revolutionary faith" represents new "genetic" information programmed into existing strains of the disease. The writings of men like Adolf Hitler, Antonio Gramsci, and Sayyid Qutb burst through prison walls with a propulsive force continue to shake the world to this day.

Ideas have consequences. One of the consequences of our idolatry of the beneficent state is that our social and political institutions are being reprogrammed into instruments with which disdainful social engineers contrive to reorder the world. The Fabian stained-glass window of a century ago depicted

Sidney Webb and George Bernard Shaw as two blacksmiths who had placed the world on an anvil and "work their good will" upon it underneath a banner that says "Remould It Nearer to the Heart's Desire." The caption on a nearby shield reads "Pray Devoutly Hammer Stoutly." On the wall behind the scene is another shield with the initials of the Fabian Society (F. S.) and a wolf in sheep's clothing as its heraldic beast.

During the Second World War Friedrich Hayek, an émigré scholar from Austria, witnessed an earlier phase of the revolutionary social dynamic at close hand. At the time he published *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), Hayek taught at the Fabian-inspired London School of Economics. Near the end of a chapter entitled "Who, Whom?" (a phrase attributed to Lenin), Hayek observed:

"The old socialist leaders, who had always regarded their parties as the natural spearhead of the future general movement toward socialism, found it difficult to understand that with every extension in the use of socialist methods the resentment of large poor classes should turn against them." Today, what Hayek then observed and Edward Banfield later described as a lower-class culture type (which resembles that of the refugee camps) has spread to what Marx might have called a *Lumpenintelligentsia* composed of the estranged and resentful scions of privilege who have adopted a revolutionary mindset.

"The resentment of the lower middle class, from which fascism and National Socialism recruited so large a proportion of their supporters, was intensified by the fact that their education and training had in many instances made them aspire to directing positions and that they regarded themselves as entitled to be members of the directing class." Thomas Hobbes had noted much the same among the leaders of popular movements during the English Civil War.

"While the younger generation, out of that contempt for profit-making fostered by socialist teaching, spurned independent positions which involved risk and flocked in ever increasing numbers into salaried positions which promised security, they demanded a place yielding them the income and power to which in their opinion their training entitled them." What could be a more precise description of our New Class of college-educated *apparatchiks*? Like Milton's Lucifer, they seek to reign if not rule. Such are the pipe dreams of the revolutionary manqué.

"The movement was able to attract all those who, while they agreed on the desirability of the state controlling all economic activity, disagreed with the ends for which the aristocracy of the industrial workers used their political strength." Here we can detect one of the oldest stories in the world: what René Girard has called mimetic rivalry. We see it in the stories of Cain murdering Abel, Jacob supplanting Esau, Romulus slaying a defiant Remus, the scapegoating of designated "enemies of the people."

"They [the fascists and National Socialists] knew that the strongest group which rallied enough supporters in favor of a new hierarchical order of society, and which frankly promised privileges to the classes to which it appealed, was likely to obtain the support of those who were disappointed because they had been promised equality but found that they had merely furthered the interest of a particular class. Above all, they were successful because they offered a theory,

a Weltanschauung, which seemed to justify the privileges they promised to their supporters."

The phenomenon that Hayek so ably summarizes is yet another collective manifestation of what Augustine called the *libido dominandi*, the lust to rule. Whether the initiators or adherents of such movements are promised an earthly or a heavenly paradise, their founders, leaders, and true believers are enabled to draw strength and sustenance from the visions they conjure and the passions they loose. But in the end, as always, such revolutions devour their children.

As Edmund Burke understood, civilization must be renewed and strengthened in each generation. Too often we elect leaders who kill us with their kindness because they fail to protect and defend their flocks from ravening wolves. Our malady today seems to be that the sins of lust and sloth are tangled together. Our leaders have permitted murderous threats to fester in our midst, unchallenged.

Perhaps it is most appropriate to conclude here by citing Solomon's wisdom concerning the fires of burning lust. His words are equally applicable to our own sloth in the face of ravaging firebrands. Paraphrasing Prov. 6:27: Can a man press fire to his bosom and not be burnt?

[http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Global\\_Economy/LA05Dj07.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Global_Economy/LA05Dj07.html)

Spengler/Goldman is in his usual good form. In a discussion of the besetting sin of our times, sloth, he starts with a striking story about a wave of suicides at France's Telecom. Why is it that today we are driven more by our fears than by our lusts? Is our problem that we love too little rather than too much? Toward the end Spengler quotes the hard-won wisdom of Goethe's Faust: "'I am wholly dedicate to this purpose/Which is the final conclusion of wisdom:/Only he deserves freedom as well as life/Who must conquer them every day!'"

But he continues: "Not so the little people who inhabit the barrows of the state monopolies. Oswald Spengler, who characterized Western culture as 'Faustian', would have been astonished to see today's Europeans nod in assent with Mephistopheles' refutation of life." What a rebuke to the present generation! The desire to get something-for-nothing degrades slowly toward an extinction of all desire. The secular West's humanism is becoming a culture of death and decay that connives at the death of humanity. This is at the heart of great temptation that is driving the national health care juggernaut: the fear of life's uncertainties.

Once again we are asked to surrender to the servile state and placate our enemies -- both on the installment plan. Already mortgaged to the hilt, we are asked to mortgage a future that we try to postpone indefinitely. What could be more comical or futile?

In the end, as Lee Harris urges in *The Suicide of Reason*, we must stand our ground and start to reclaim what we have surrendered. "The Dutch, in order to maintain their independent Republican tradition, had to create a nation out of the sea bed. They had to be prepared to flood their own country in case of attack, as they did when the armies of Louis XIV tried to occupy Holland in the Dutch War (1672-78). The Dutch thus were perfectly aware that their independence

[like their landscape] was an anomaly. . . . How long could the Dutch have survived if they, like us, had been convinced that we all want the same things, and taught their children to respect the culture of those who were trying to crush their freedom?" (pp. 263-64).

My father-in-law grew and harvested some of the grass seed used to rebuild the Dutch dikes after the Second World War. Today, we must tend to some reclamation projects closer to home.

[http://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2010/01/paul\\_kirk\\_threatens\\_constituti.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2010/01/paul_kirk_threatens_constituti.html)

Here is some more political chicanery from the Democratic leadership. Is it time to install trap doors and water slides under the desks of members of Congress?

<http://www.firstthings.com/article/2009/07/empathy--apathy>

At last I am finding time to read the August/September issue of *First Things*. In "Empathy & Apathy," Hadley Arkes, who wrote the book from which the journal apparently gets its name, deconstructs what political liberals mean -- and do not mean -- by the word "empathy." The nomination of Justice Sotomayor was framed by the president in terms of her alleged empathy, which, presumably, recent conservative jurists have lacked.

So Arkes tests the bona fides of liberal jurists according to the same principle of equity. As Jesus put it: "with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. 7:2). What Arkes, a constitutional scholar, concludes about the empathy of the liberal jurists that he cites should give us as much comfort as what, according to Thucydides, the Athenian representatives told the officials of Melos: "Right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must."

Let us pray to be spared from the tender empathy of what Isabel Paterson called "The Humanitarian with the Guillotine."

<http://www.firstthings.com/article/2009/07/apocalypse-now>

For years I have had my students join me in wrestling with René Girard's thought. I start them with the basics: mimetic desire, mimetic rivalry, and the scapegoat mechanism. Further than that, I have not yet been prepared to take them. In fact, the apocalyptic vision of this essay may not be a good place to start, and yet it raises profound questions that deserve consideration, as do the questions raised in the posthumous work of Philip Rieff.

Each time I visit Stanford for surgery or follow-up examinations I pick up some new work of Girard's. Yet I still have read only one in full and large parts of several others. Now, having finally gotten around to reading this piece only this afternoon, I am struck not only by implications that he has raised in other recent works but also by some more familiar themes from my reading during the early 1970s: in Simone Weil and Raymond Aron, to be sure, but also Henri Bergson and Jacques Ellul.

Girard's "escalation to extremes" reminds me of Henri Bergson's two laws in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*: the law of dichotomy (the dialectic) and the law of twofold frenzy (imagine a pendulum that swings with "a widening gyre"). But what I would like to note from Bergson here is an astute psychological observation (1935: 292):

"The uninterrupted enjoyment of an eagerly-sought advantage engenders weariness or indifference; it seldom fulfils completely its promise; it brings with it unforeseen drawbacks; it ends by making conspicuous the good side of what has been given up and arousing a desire to get it back." In one context, we might call this nostalgia, but in another phase it becomes the rage of the dispossessed, as in the case of the children of Muslim families that relocated to Europe. "The desire will be found principally in the rising generations, who have not experienced the ills of the past, and have not had to extricate themselves from them." Bergson characterizes the nature of parliamentary government in this manner while describing what may be a built-in tendency to exacerbate tendencies to "the very brink of disaster."

In *The Technological Society*, Ellul develops his idea of "technique" in terms reminiscent of what Paul Valery called a "fatal tendency." As Ellul contended: "Technique has become autonomous; it has fashioned an omnivorous world which obeys its own law and which has renounced all tradition" (1964:14).

Similarly, Girard writes: "The trend toward the apocalypse is humanity's greatest feat. The more probable this achievement becomes, the less we talk about it. . . . Inversely, the escalation to extreme reveals the power of this divine intervention. . . . Humanity is more than ever the author of its own fall because it has become able to destroy its world." The seemingly autonomous violence that Girard finds at the heart of civilization is, he believes, the eruption of a Satanic conception of the sacred that should be confronted by awakening "our sleeping consciences." In that sense, he echoes a point made by John Steinbeck in *East of Eden* about Gen. 4:7: *timshel* (Thou mayest).