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From Useful Idiot to Useful Infidel: Meditations on the Folly of 21st-Century “Intellectuals”

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Lenin allegedly referred to the thinkers and activists ready to cover up for his crimes against his own people as “useful idiots.” Today, some intellectuals sacrifice their integrity as intellectuals not for a professedly progressive egalitarian movement, but in order to protect radical Islam, one of the most regressive and authoritarian movements imaginable. This article refers to such people as “useful infidels,” showing how their excessive self-criticism is exploited by Islamists to incriminate the West in the evils of modernity. The result is a perversion of human rights discourse and a marriage of pre-modern sadism and post-modern masochism.

Keywords cognitive warfare, demopaths, human rights complex, Masochistic Omnipotence Syndrome, memes, moral inversion, *Schadenfreude*, self-degrading Jews, useful idiot, useful infidel

Lenin allegedly referred to Western intellectuals who so supported the Communist experiment that they disguised its horrors from the West, as “useful idiots.” For him, these people’s idiotic attachment to Communist ideals made them highly useful allies in deceiving the West and preventing it from opposing the Soviet Union at a time when the new Soviet State was still particularly vulnerable.

Observers today speak of “useful idiots,” using the same term to describe liberal intellectuals who enjoy freedom and prosperity, yet undermine both, by giving moral and material support to revolutionary movements hostile to “bourgeois” values. That’s actually a mild accusation against useful idiocy. By covering up for the engineered famines in Ukraine and in China, by dismissing evidence of the Gulag Archipelago or the Cambodian killing fields, all of which killed tens, even hundreds of millions of people, useful idiots have been responsible for aiding and abetting Communism’s terrifying death machines.

History itself has proven them staggering dupes, protesting their nonsense blindly and sincerely. Even brilliant ones such as George Bernard Shaw and Jean-Paul Sartre got caught in the scam. One would think, therefore, that with the lessons of the last century still fresh in our minds, these memories would immunize us to the appeal of useful idiocy in the late 20th century and the early 21st.

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A fortiori, one would expect wisdom so painfully gained in the course of the 20th century—the blood-dimmed tide killed over a hundred million—to insulate the West from the urge to serve as useful idiots to a revolutionary movement with none of the idealistic appeal even of Communism. Rather, this revolutionary movement bears a record of regressive, gynophobic, authoritarian, and nihilistic acts that virtually guarantee that its success would be catastrophic for those unfortunate enough to have Muslims liberate them. Taliban Afghanistan and Khomeini’s Iran, the two most recent state-scale millennial experiments by Jihadi Muslims would, one would think, suffice to alienate any serious observer.

So why would a late 20th-century progressive, such as Noam Chomsky, or his acolyte, Norman Finkelstein, sympathize with, support, run interference for, even lie and deceive for a movement that manifested all the worst traits of the totalitarian megadeath machines of the 20th century—a nihilistic cult of death, paranoia, and genocidal hate-mongering? At least the fellow travelers of the early and mid-20th century had a noble ideal for which they carried out their campaigns of misinformation. But today, we have intellectuals from a wide range of fields running interference for Islamism in its most regressive and violent forms.¹

And, of course, at this asymmetrical stage in the war that global Jihad wages against the West, nothing is more critical to the capacity of the Jihad movement to mobilize its forces—to recruit, indoctrinate, train, and deploy—than a cognitive victory in which its targets in the West are kept in the dark about its real intentions. And given the yeoman job that apologists and advocates perform in this connection, I think it helpful to use the expression “useful infidel” for this new breed of fellow travelers.² They are still idiotic (and very smart), but they carry water not for some progressive cause (no matter how mistakenly), but for Islamists, preachers of a triumphal and totalitarian Islam that brooks no criticism.

Therefore, the “infidel” is a most significant term to couple with “useful” (“idiotic” being assumed). Nothing is more useful to Jihadi ambitions of subjecting the entire world to the Sharia than non-Muslim intellectuals who insist that Islam is a religion of peace; that it is perfectly consonant with democracy; that the terrorists represent a tiny, marginal deviation from true Islam. Indeed, the argument runs, we should not even speak of the terrorists as Muslim—the notion of “radical” Islam, meaning “extremist, violent” Islam, is an insult to true Muslims because it implies that Islam has a violent dimension to it, while it is really a “religion of peace.”³ Historically, no more inane claim can be put forth than that a belligerent (if not the most belligerent) creed in the 4000-year-long recorded history of identifiable religions could be called “a religion of peace.”

Progressive intellectuals’ support for Islamic Jihad forms an astonishing paradox. I want to argue that it strips away the pretense of naïve good intentions that the older “useful idiot” would have been able to plead, and to which many sympathizers resort to tone down criticism. Once we confront the irrationality of “useful infidelity,” and realize the urgency of trying to understand a phenomenon that pushes us in the direction of cultural, even civilizational suicide, we must confront the underlying self-destructive emotions.

Demopaths and Their Dupes

It seems to me that the phenomenon of useful idiocy revolves around a particularly dysfunctional relationship, that between *demopath* and dupe.⁴ Demopaths arise in response to democratic cultures, which they target in a cognitive assault against

the principle of human beings' right to freedom. The demopaths themselves embrace authoritarian principles of dominion by force, what Lee Smith has chronicled so chillingly in his latest book, *The Strong Horse*.⁵ Their line of attack is: "you [democratic target] do not live up to *your* commitments; in particular, you violate *our* [demopathic belligerent] rights in preventing us from taking control aggressively of *your* democracy."

The key to understanding demopaths is their hypocrisy: they have no commitment to democratic values or human rights. On the contrary: they despise these values, and have no intention, once in power, of respecting the rights of others. Their motto is: "Use democracy to destroy democracy." Even before they get into power, they embrace the principle that "those who can, do what they will, and those who cannot, suffer what they must."

Normally, one might expect that such a set of standards would get challenged and driven from the public sphere, especially by intelligent, perspicacious observers committed to building a more peaceful and more just society. One would also think that after the abject intellectual failure of geniuses on both the "Right" (Carl Jung, Martin Heidegger, Carl Schmitt) and the Left (George Bernard Shaw, André Malraux, Jean-Paul Sartre, Ernest Hemingway), intellectuals in subsequent generations might hesitate before plunging down the same path of giving demopaths their support. But, for reasons we must still learn to understand better, the demopathic ruse has returned in an even cruder and more transparent form than before. Even so, many Western progressives seem hell-bent on becoming dupes. When I first developed the notion of demopathy (around 2001), I remember describing it to an acquaintance who had worked in the UN for 20 years. Her response was: the UN is filled with demopaths—authoritarian elites using the dominant human rights discourse for their own ends.

Self-Criticism and the Human Rights Complex

One aspect of the problem appears in an early case of useful idiocy, that of the "pacifist" Roger Nash Baldwin, the founder of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), in 1920. Here we find the bizarre dynamic of someone who, alert to every impingement upon the high human rights standards he applied to his own culture, could not see (or acknowledge) the grotesque violation of human rights he saw in others. So, even as he spearheaded an organization severely critical of civil liberties violations in the U.S. (ACLU), he could, a decade later, write a book of fulsome praise entitled *Liberty Under the Soviets*.⁶ Here we find featured a characteristic tendency of useful idiots: ferocious *self*-criticism of the culture that allows them their freedoms, and a refusal to apply the same standards elsewhere.

To understand this "hyper self-criticism" better, consider what Charles Jacobs terms "the Human Rights Complex" (HRC).⁷ Western human rights organizations—groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch—operate according to a consistent, if unconscious, formula: moral indignation on the part of observers is a function not of the victim's identity, nor even of how badly the victim suffers, but of the identity of the alleged perpetrator.⁸ If the perpetrators are "White" (i.e., part of the culture that has developed the principles of "human rights"), then indignation waxes; if they are of color, an embarrassed silence descends. To take a particularly salient example: the UN Conference against Racism, held at Durban, and itself attaining the summit of demopathy, condemned Western

countries, especially the United States, for slavery, even though these countries are the only ones to have apologized for slavery after having outlawed it *over a century ago*. The same UN conference fell silent when it came to the *current* practice of slavery in the Arab world.⁹

At one level, this pattern derives from an unofficial, sliding scale of expectations: progressives committed to the highest standards of civil liberties and human rights naturally demand more from those progressive polities prepared to make the requisite sacrifices.¹⁰ And on some level, such an attitude makes sense. Self-criticism doesn't come easily, so let those with more practice in this painful—yet fruitful—art, get the ball rolling.

The problem emerges when self-criticism begins to substitute for reciprocity: being the first to criticize oneself takes courage and commitment, but it's only meaningful if moving away from a hard-line "My Side, Right or Wrong" approach to morality brings about a similar move among one's opponents. Yet all too often, reciprocity does not come.

The Arab countries, on the other hand, do not feel in any way contrite or grateful that their misdeeds are not being displayed before the world at an international forum. At Durban as elsewhere, while continuing to provide the setting where the most blatant (genocidal) racism (and misogyny) go on unabated, these countries led the pack in assaulting an appropriately penitent Western world. Far from reciprocity, the West has headed in a radically different direction, towards a kind of "Masochistic Omnipotence Syndrome," in which the Western world seems to believe that everything is the West's fault, and if the West could only perfect itself, everything would be fixed.

Of course, as Jacobs (mentioned above) points out, the consequence of this move is to absolve the "Other" of all responsibility. If the Other strikes at us, it must be our fault. 9/11? What have we done to make them hate us so? Thus Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount *provoked* the Intifada, just as the Pope's citing a passage about an inherently violent Islam *provoked* a wave of rioting that killed over a dozen people. In so thinking, we treat "them," the Muslims, as having no agency, as if they only *react* to our deeds. In behaving in this way, those suffering from HRC infantilize the "Other," depriving "them" (people of color, Third-World nations, post-colonial subalterns, non-Western "minorities") of moral responsibility: just as we don't scold our cat for killing mice, so those suffering from HRC do not scold Muslims for engaging in terror. Somehow, anyhow, the terror must be *our* fault.

This "puts a sword in the hands of our enemies with which to slay us."¹¹ Why on earth, if we're willing to take responsibility for every act of violence that Jihadis commit against us, would they not press the advantage, and both attack us and blame us for the attack? If the Pope says Islam is violent, radicals foment riots; when the Pope apologizes, the radicals win. This is paradise for the demopaths.

This phenomenon cries out for analysis. It is clearly suicidal—it empowers the enemies of human freedom. In addition, it's racist. One would imagine that in the anti-racist, progressive circles of the late 20th century and the early 21st, such an approach would find few takers. And yet, the opposite has proven true.

Arguably, this masochistic self-criticism, what Pascal Bruckner calls the "tyranny of guilt," has become the predominant feature of today's *Zeitgeist*, a kind of default approach to culture clashes.¹² We embrace a whole series of rhetorical tropes as if they were real, especially moral relativity (Gitmo is like the Gulag), or even moral inversion (the U.S. is the worst terrorist state in the world, as per

Chomsky; Blair is worse than Ahmadinejad, as the *Guardian* would have it; and Bush is worse than Bin Laden, according to the *Nation*).

I wish to argue that at origin, such claims are prophetic tropes, intended as moral exhortations, not as descriptions of reality. When Isaiah compared Israel to Sodom and Gomorrah, when Jesus challenged those who complain about the mote in another's eye while ignoring the beam in their own, they spoke to highly sophisticated and self-critical audiences, using prophetic rhetoric to castigate and to whip these already sensitive souls into shape. It wasn't because the Israelites were really as bad as Sodom, or that those attending the Sermon on the Mount were really focused on their neighbor's speck of sawdust and oblivious to their own heavy lumber (except for, well, some, maybe). It's because these prophetic figures wanted to provoke their listeners into making still greater efforts, into making messianic efforts. Our problem today is that, not recognizing this kind of rhetoric for what it is, many tend to treat it as an honest, even as a searing comment on "reality." Contrary to common sense and the interests of self-preservation, such figures of speech are now taken literally to refer to real life. This interpretive approach leads to disastrous consequences.

The Perversion of the "Justice Meme"

This dynamic can be summarized in the following history of humankind in terms of social memes:

Identity Meme: Invidious Formation (Pre-Modern): "My/Our Side, Right or Wrong"

This meme involves sharp boundaries between the good "us" and the bad "them." The latter deserve no empathy. As Mel Brooks' two-thousand-year-old man put it humorously: "Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when you walk into an open sewer and die."¹³ The Arab term for this solidarity is *asabiyya*, and the 14th-century historian-sociologist Ibn Khaldun made it the center of his cyclical analysis of history: only people who stay loyal to clan and identity can prosper.¹⁴ This meme dates back hundreds of thousands of years; it lies behind the ability of any tribal grouping (extended family, clan, or tribe) to survive over time.

All self-help justice is based on these high levels of solidarity. One might even call it the "strong force" that bonds human communities together. On a basic level, every human being participates in these emotional configurations in connection with various identities (even if it's the purely egotistical version of "Me, Right or Wrong"), and only by dint of serious effort can one even temporarily transcend it, in order to reach a realm that grants ontological importance to the "Other." On both an individual and a group level, this constitutes, perhaps, the most fundamental meme in human evolution, the solidarity meme: my side, right or wrong. Family is family.

Justice Meme (Modern, Civil Politics): "Whoever Is Right, My Side or Not"

Here we step into the complex and fertile world of self-criticism, admission or confession, acknowledgment or forgiveness. Without at least minimal willingness to

allow that an outsider can be right, one cannot have urban society or “civilization.” In its highest forms, this justice meme has produced modern democracies in which the principle of “equality before the law” can operate. This is only possible where there is a profound commitment to justice, however the chips may fall.

Such an attitude towards the “Other” has proven extremely difficult to develop, demanding as it does very high levels of empathy, good will, trust, and, above all, readiness to engage in self-abnegation and self-criticism.¹⁵ Although difficult to cultivate, such attitudes are the *sine qua non* of “human rights” as we understand this principle. Demopaths, who have not even begun this process of self-abnegation, find it particularly easy to demand it of their interlocutors in the West as a way of forcing the West to refrain from criticism of the demopaths’ side, even as that side advances an agenda profoundly hostile to the justice meme.

Self-Denial Meme (Post-Modern): “Their Side, Right or Wrong”

The most advanced of the cultures that prize the values listed above have a tendency to push self-criticism and self-abnegation to extreme levels. This tendency is particularly strong in the West today. The call for respecting the dignity and autonomy of the “Other” has become the arrow indicating one of the main lines of intellectual exploration in the Western world, an approach that, in literary exegesis, philosophy, psychology, social relations, and even international relations, has taken on a crucial importance. The “Other” in the post-colonial discourse inspired by Levinasian-Derridian post-modernism has come to occupy such a central position that some thinkers actually argue the epistemological priority of the ethnic or national “Other.” This turns collective societal self-abnegation from a technique into a principle: what others say about me (or my culture) has more truth to it than what I, or we, say about myself (or ourselves).¹⁶

Such a nearly mystical position may work in various kinds of therapies used to treat individuals; but when applied to international affairs, it is hazardous. For we (i.e., Western nations) are dealing with political cultures in which none of the emotions that produce mutual self-respect have been nourished. Instead, blaming others, whether right or wrong, for one’s own problems is for them an art of government. In such a situation, self-abnegation rapidly becomes counter-indicated. And yet this is precisely the moment of a stunning wrong turn taken by post-colonial thinking. The thinking now becomes: *To atone for our colonial past, we must embrace the rage of the wretched of the earth.*¹⁷

The moral catastrophe here is an outcome of the suicidal marriage of pre-modern sadism (*asabiyya* in weaponized form; systematic projection of the worst traits onto the targeted Other; paranoid, scapegoating narratives) with post-modern masochism (“We deserve the hostility of the Other; what we did to them makes them hate us so”). Nothing empowers the most regressive behavior and the scapegoating narratives more than to have the targeted victim proclaim his guilt. The suicidal behavior of the post-modern masochists mocks the very claim they make to be fighting for human rights.

Perhaps the most eloquent expression of this last meme and its devastating consequences for the human rights of victims was voiced by a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)-appointed Goldstone Commission. Asked about the reliability of Palestinian testimony accusing Israel of war crimes,

Hina Jilani, Pakistani Supreme Court Judge “internationally known for her expertise in human rights investigations,” commented: “I think it’d be very cruel to not give credence to their voices.”¹⁸ The fact that it is cruel to believe vicious slander apparently does not occur to her (Palestinians engage in slander and libel? Perish the thought!); nor that, in believing such accusations and ignoring evidence of the Hamas’ systematic use of civilian shields, she was empowering the very thugs who victimize the people of Gaza most.¹⁹

Now, Jilani may be a demopath (coming from Pakistan, she may take the voice of Palestinian subalterns to be speaking up for what we have discussed as the “My Side, Right or Wrong” meme), but she operates in the high-minded international circles (UNHRC) where dupes and demopaths find their common ground. Whatever her identity formation (Pakistani Muslim, citizen of the world), she is certainly empowering demopaths. By contrast, her warm friend, Richard Goldstone, who claims to be a Zionist and whose “fact-finding” mission actually provided a venue for the accusations leveled against Israel in this case, instantiates the epitome of “Their Side, Right Or Wrong” meme. He is, consequently, a first-order dupe. Moreover, his style (“I am a Jew, so it is incumbent upon me to bend over backwards to be self-critical”²⁰) illustrates the psychology of dupes: “I must embrace the demopaths’ principles of attack to prove my good faith.”

Here we touch upon the role of hyper-self-critical *Jews* in this dynamic. The “Masochistic Omnipotence Syndrome” is a messianic affliction that strikes particularly those attracted to the notion of “*Tikkun ‘olam*,” or “improving the universe.” These are people like Michael Lerner, whose organization, *Tikkun*, just presented their annual Ethics Award to Judge Goldstone for his stellar work at the head of the UNHRC investigation into the Gaza war of 2008–2009.²¹ And there’s Richard Silverstein’s blog “*Tikkun Olam*,” which obsessively reports any accusation against Israel as true, and dismisses any defense as part of the “Israel, Right or Wrong” crowd.²² We should be giving out the annual “*Ein ani li*” (“I am not for myself”) award to the Jews who push self-abnegation to the extremes of masochism. They are the demopaths’ most prominent duped followers and advocates.

The more extreme examples of this kind of syndrome have often been called “self-hating Jews,” an accusation usually met with scorn by people who either practice or sympathize with epistemological prioritizing of the Palestinian narrative. Given how much hatred informs that narrative (which people who are its target adopt as their own), such a term is not inaccurate, although there is some reason to view it as mistaken (since the people it refers to tend to love themselves while despising their fellow Jews or Israelis). Shmuel Trigano has suggested “alter-Juifs,” meaning those Jews who, until they decided they had to denounce Israel, had never publicly expressed their Jewish identity. But that, of course, while it gets at the Harold Pinters and Edgar Morins, does not adequately explain someone like Michael Lerner or Rabbis for Human Rights.²³ Anthony Julius has suggested “Scourges,” to identify the source of the rhetoric: using prophetic exaggeration, scourges take the public position of moralists, whipping Israel into shape with their rebukes.²⁴ Of course, the ancient prophets addressed their own people, while today’s scourges specifically address a global audience, as in J-Street’s strategy of lobbying the U.S. government to pressure Israel into concessions. The less responsive Israel is to their moral disapproval, the more virulent the disapproval becomes.

I would like to suggest instead using the term “self-degrading Jews.” This yields a double advantage: First, it identifies these people’s most salient act. We are

concerned here with Jews publicly proclaiming that Israel is like the Nazis. But the only things that *both* Israel and Nazi Germany have done have also been done by every nation state in the recorded history of humanity! For a Jew, especially for someone who publicly identifies as a Jew, to compare Israel to the Nazis is to engage in an act of public self-abasement. “Proud to be ashamed to be a Jew” is how Julius characterizes it.²⁵

Second, “self-degrading” identifies the discourse in which these scourges participate: accusations that the Israelis are like Nazis or apartheid racists are part not of a reasoned discourse based on serious historical analogies, but of one of insult and contempt. The Palestinians’ (and Arabs’ and Muslims’) human rights record in treating *their own* people is worse than Israel’s in dealing with *their enemies*. Besides, the Palestinians’ extensive adopting of Nazi anti-Semitism is depressingly obvious. When the scourges accuse Israel of being like the Nazis, they are not engaging in anything resembling a reasonable, empirical, or moral discourse. Instead, they are involved in a typical honor-shame exchange: for them, insulting and degrading the “Other” in public is a sign of manhood and “honor,” especially when the “Other” has to swallow it without retaliating. For Jews to adopt such grotesque language is to self-degrade. *It is to be proud to be ashamed to be a Jew.*

Such self-abasement is an old survival technique from the pre-modern days of exile. In those times, refusing to perform self-degrading gestures—to kiss a pig’s ass on Easter—could result in pogroms. It makes sense to “turn the other cheek” after your people have been crushed by an imperial enemy, or when you think the Last Judgment is “at hand.” But are things the same today? In a world where human rights are supposed to be the norm? Where we are supposed to be free and love freedom for all . . . why on earth would anyone self-abase to appease the most sadistic violence and triumphant *Schadenfreude*?

Obviously, I could go on forever charting and exposing the insanity of our principled dupedness in the face of a grotesquely hypocritical and lethal demopathic assault, and many books about the tyranny of politically correct principles have done just that.²⁶ In closing, I would like to address the question: what makes intellectuals behave in such astonishingly idiotic and self-destructive ways? Here I would like to invoke three basic issues helpful in further understanding “progressive” idiots, those “useful infidels” in general of today.

Issue 1: Cognitive Dissonance and the Year 1989

The psychological mechanism of cognitive dissonance, first identified by Leon Festinger in a study of an apocalyptic UFO cult’s response to the failure of prophecy, clearly plays a central role in the fellow traveler’s response to what Arthur Koestler called “the God that failed.”²⁷ And yet, despite a series of incidents that could have led to a final break with the monstrosity of the Soviet Union, many intellectuals continued to maintain a low-key loyalty, an idiocy no longer even useful to a failed totalitarian state.²⁸ But, as Hillel Stavis points out, as late as 1989 (!), the inertial mass of useful idiots the world over took a heavy blow. When the Soviets’ (shameful) Wall came down, shortly followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union itself, the mother ship vanished, leaving dependent space modules floating free.

1989 also happens to be a key year in the ascent of global Jihad. It was the year the Russians left Afghanistan, giving Bin Laden his first and most spectacular victory over the Infidel; and it was the year Khomeini issued a fatwa calling for the

murder of Salman Rushdie, who had blasphemed against Islam with his novel *The Satanic Verses*.²⁹ In both cases, Islamic Jihadis (both Sunni and Shiite) had scored a strike against the West. For all those radical, revolution-at-all-costs modules floating in the distressing outer space of cognitive dissonance, a new ally had just appeared on the horizon.

Issue 2: Envy and European Progressive Anti-Americanism and Anti-Zionism

In my opinion, one of the great and most disturbing revelations of what pervades the “progressive” Left’s responses to the outbreak of the Intifada and to the attack of 9/11 was the role of envy in these responses: these are the politics of envy, as Paul Hollander appropriately calls it.³⁰ The palpable resentment felt towards the U.S. in Europe in the early “aughts” (00’s), was nearly suffocating for anyone not thriving on such an atmosphere of self-indulgence. This takes on particularly ugly coloring when one considers the enormous debt that Europe owes to the U.S. for its freedom and prosperity right up to 1989. But, as the expression goes, “no good deed goes unpunished,” and, more specifically, as a different saying has it, “France may forgive the Germans for conquering them, but will never forgive the U.S. for saving them, twice.” Perhaps nothing illustrates so strikingly the Europeans’ desperate need to vilify the U.S. than the widespread European belief that Noam Chomsky is one of the great intellectuals of this age. How the mighty have fallen.

But even the Europeans’ hatred of the U.S. pales beside the resentment they evince toward Israel. Why? Unlike the U.S., Israel is not a great power, not a crushing cultural entity whose movies, television shows, and fast-food and coffee chains displace the once great European entertainment and restaurant industry. Why the animus towards Israel?

To those who would argue “Esau hates Jacob,” I would like to comment: “Do not read ‘Esau,’ but rather ‘envy.’” Why the envy? In the case of the radical Left, the envy stems from the deeply uncomfortable awareness of the fact that Zionism—i.e., the only openly Jewish revolutionary Leftist endeavor of the 20th century—constitutes the only case of a modern egalitarian revolution that, even though attacked from without and criticized from within, did not turn totalitarian. Unlike the French with their terror, the Soviets, the Maoists, the Khmer Rouge, and the rest, all with their auto-genocidal totalitarian episodes, the Israelis did not respond to the extremely serious threats they faced with the paranoia about dissent as treachery that had led the other Leftist revolutionaries down the path to terror.

As a result, Israel’s 60+ years of democracy, under conditions that no other egalitarian revolution has sustained for even a few years, constitutes the most exceptional record of commitment to democratic values in the history of mankind. And the Leftist Zionists abroad who stood by Israel during these fights, did not have to engage in the kind of systematic lying and denial of reality that the regimes’ fellow travelers did in the other cases. Ironically, instead of covering for Israel’s crimes (as they had for so many moral monsters), would-be fellow travelers assaulted Israel with invented crimes (apartheid, genocide). For Europeans and other Leftists, whose past weighs heavily on their claim to greatness, the example of Israel shines a harsh light on their failures.³¹

But the need to preen before the whole world as the leader poised on the cutting edge of global morality is apparently so powerful an addiction for Europe, that it cannot “just say No” to the urge, even when such posturing becomes

life-threatening. Thus, despite all their moral protestations, the Europeans' driving passion is anti-Zionism. They can say they despise the U.S. for its barbaric use of the death penalty (not something you can find in progressive European countries!), but when they turn their eyes to the much more violent Middle East, they despise Israel, the only country without a death penalty in the region, and lionize the Palestinians, for whom executions without trial for the misdemeanors of "collaboration" or "shaming the family" are a way of life. Apparently, the *Schadenfreude* of being able to accuse the Jews is just too sweet to get in the way of moral consistency.

All of this unacknowledged envy makes Europeans particularly susceptible to Muslim hate-mongering about both the little Satan and the great Satan. Fused into a collective individual of sorts, overweight and with a cholesterol count of over 300, they continue to scarf down the cheeseburgers of anti-Americanism and wash them down with the chocolate truffles of anti-Zionism. Who would have thought that a civilization can commit suicide because of an addiction to moral *Schadenfreude*?

Issue 3: Fear and Intimidation

Behind much of this suicidal advocacy lies fear. The duped victims of the demopaths love to accuse the demopaths' critics of Islamophobia. Actually, this is a transparent case of projection. The dupes are the ones who are afraid of Islam; they are the ones who dare not challenge or criticize their Muslim allies. On the contrary, they do everything to help Muslims save face.

That is why, rather than demand reciprocity, the Left turns to masochistic self-reproach. Not only do Leftists not want to test the limits of their own moral paradigm, but they know that, should they try it, they will provoke the other side to violence, a violence they are not prepared to contain. In this sense, the parallels with Neville Chamberlain's "Peace in our time" are particularly salient. It's much easier to declare peace than to pay heed to the old Roman saying "*si vis pacem para bellum* [if you want peace, prepare for war]." It's so much easier to blame the Pope, or Sharon, or Bush for having provoked the Muslims, than to demand some signs—even faint signs—of moral responsibility from the same Muslims themselves!³²

Much of the mainstream news media (MSNM)'s treatment of the Arab-Israeli conflict can be explained by the following observation: if you criticize Israel, even dishonestly, there's no price to pay; but if you criticize the Arabs, even honestly, there's a high price to pay. The result, visible daily in the news reporting from the Middle East, conforms to the following epistemological imperative: *what Palestinians claim is credible until proven false; what Israelis claim is dubious until proven true; and when the Israelis' claim proves to be true, fall silent.*

In this sense, much of the moral dysfunction of the Left, as well as much of the Left's predilection for useful idiocy, maps closely on what one might expect had the Left been motivated purely by fear of Islamist violence. But the Left's self-awareness and self-criticism, so readily available when there is a need for appeasing angry Muslims, vanish as soon as it comes to acknowledging cowardice of this kind. Having taken the coward's way out, journalists, many of whom self-identify as progressive, indignantly deny that any intimidation whatsoever is involved. Should they publicly admit the role of intimidation in their work, the reliability of their reporting would be called into question (as it should be); should they make this admission to themselves, it would tarnish the narcissistic self-image of the "good guy reporter" that so many of them cherish.

Faced with such a dilemma, most of them chose to adopt the moral view in which the Palestinians are right.³³ So if one is going to appease those who threaten to use force and criticize those who restrain themselves, why not admire those who do not hesitate to use force. In the final expression of the moral inversion involved in “Their Side, Right or Wrong,” a self-castrated, atheist Left embraces the meme that “War Is Not the Answer” and denigrates its own culture’s would be religious fundamentalism. All this even as it ends up siding with the most alien of “Others”: with men and women for whom war *is* the best answer and for whom the most ferociously destructive death cults are willed by God.³⁴ In this case, the formula reverses itself (as it did in the 1930s): *Si vis bellum, para pacem*.

Moral Narcissism, Jewish Messianic Complexes, and the Unholy Marriage of Pre-Modern Sadism and Post-Modern Masochism

For Jews, the issue takes on a special meaning since they are literally the first sacrificial victim of the dysfunctional marriage between pre-modern sadism (“‘You,’ the West, the USA, Israel, Are Evil”) and post-modern masochism (“You Are Right!”). In addition to the other factors involved, we need something more to explain not just the Jews’ participation in the process that this union sets in motion, but also their role as leaders in it. Indeed, invoking their own sense of playing a “prophetic” role, the Jews give this poisonous union their “rabbinical blessing.”³⁵ In this sense, besides the exceptionally acute capacity for self-criticism and self-abnegation, which is characteristic of Jews, I think we also have to give credit to a somewhat less exalted trait: an inordinate need for attention. This, too, is a Jewish specialty.

Here we find a peculiar dynamic at work. Jews who criticize Israel sharply get an almost rapturous reception from fellow progressives. They are admired warmly for their “courage” in criticizing their own side. They are lionized for their remarkable ability to rise above the crass partisanship—the *communautarisme*, as the French call it—of their tribe.³⁶ They set the gold standard for rejecting the “My Side, Right or Wrong” mentality that is the mark of the “right-wing” Zionist camp. A soldier speaking up for the IDF in the U.S. will address a small group of older Jews at a synagogue; a soldier refusing to serve in the territories because of the terrible crimes of the occupation will speak to large audiences on campuses and in churches. People like John Mearsheimer compile lists of “good Jews” who stand up for justice for Palestinians vs. “Afrikaaner” Jews who, in supporting Israel, support apartheid.³⁷

This admiration that the scourges get for their self-degradation gives them an inebriating moral “high.” In uttering their morally deranged accusations against their own people, they get a frisson of both transgression and purity. This hearty approval and the size and enthusiasm of the audiences for whom they perform have an undeniable appeal. At the same time, Jews who have the courage to stand up against the demonization onslaught get shut out of the public sphere as part of the “Israel, Right or Wrong” crowd.

Apparently, few people want to hear Jews defend themselves, and many want to hear Jews defame and degrade themselves. This, of course, raises the question of why there’s such an exceptional appetite these days for “dirt” on Jews. What is the thrill, the moral *Schadenfreude* of saying, “You Jews! For 2000 years you were oppressed and now that you have power, you do to the Palestinians what your oppressors did to you?” Apparently, the urge is strong enough to drive normally sane people into

the morally delirious world where the picture of a boy (allegedly) killed in a crossfire (actually staged footage), erases the significance of six million Jews murdered.³⁸

Can a civilization self-destruct from stupidity? Stay tuned to find out. Or start fighting back.

If not now, when?

Notes

1. Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba, 1928–1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

2. On John Esposito's ardent anticipation of a wave of Middle East democracies, see the remarks made in Martin Kramer, *Ivory Towers on Sand* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2001), 48–52, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/pubPDFs/IvoryTowers.pdf>; on Juan Cole's insistence that Iran is not seeking nuclear weapons, see Ryan Mauro, "Juan Cole Gives Iran the Benefit of the Doubt," *PJMedia*, September 29, 2009, <http://pajamasmedia.com/blog/giving-iran-the-benefit-of-the-doubt-denied-to-bush/>; on Noah Feldman's democratic airbrushing of Islamism in his *Fall and Rise of the Islamic State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), see the review by Shammai Fishman in *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 4, no. 1 (2010): 141–144. The list of apologists and their many deeds could go on for pages. Much of this rhetoric centers around the fear of what many call "Islamophobia." See *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, <http://crg.berkeley.edu/content/islamophobia/islamophobia-studies-journal>. Others, myself included, feel that this is a term largely used by people who are themselves afraid to criticize Islam, and assault anyone who does: Piers Benn, "On Islamophobia-phobia," *New Humanist*, 2002, <http://rationalist.org.uk/524>.

3. See the remarks of John Brennan, the President's National Security Advisor, and Eric Holder, the Attorney General, discussed in Richard Landes, "How PC Talk Paralyzes Us: Holder before the House on Islamic Radicalism and Home-Grown Terrorism," *The Augean Stables*, May 17, 2010, <http://www.theaugeanstable.com/2010/05/17/how-pc-talk-paralyzes-us-holder-before-the-house-on-islamic-radicalism-and-home-grown-terrorism/>.

4. Richard Landes, "Self-Criticism and Identifying Demopaths: A Pressing Agendum for the Humanities in the 21st Century," *The Augean Stables*, April 8, 2008, <http://www.theaugeanstable.com/2008/04/18/self-criticism-and-identifying-demopaths-a-pressing-agendum-for-the-humanities-in-the-21st-century/>.

5. Lee Smith, *The Strong Horse: Power, Politics, and the Clash of Arab Civilizations* (New York: Doubleday, 2010).

6. Roger Nash Baldwin, *Liberty Under the Soviets* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1928); for a brief version of the argument, see the same author's "Freedom in the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R.," *Soviet Russia Today* (1934), <http://www.law.ucla.edu/volokh/blog/baldwin.pdf>. Baldwin recognized the problem only after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact had been signed in 1939.

7. Charles Jacobs, "Why Israel, and Not Sudan, Is Singled Out," *Boston Globe*, October 5, 2002, <http://www.theaugeanstable.com/2008/08/08/from-the-archives-dr-jacobs-argument-on-msm-coverage-of-human-rights-abuses/>.

8. On the "Human Rights" NGO giants, see the critique of NGO Monitor, <http://www.ngo-monitor.org/>.

9. See the discussion in Bernard-Henri Lévy, *Left in Dark Times: A Stand Against the New Barbarism* (New York: Random House, 2009), 137–141.

10. After a talk at Yale on matters of international law, Goldstone surprised those he spoke with by ardently adopting the principle that he expects more of Western nations and Israel: "I think it's more heinous when a rabbi or a priest commits adultery." Aside from the left-handed compliment to Israel (as a "priestly" nation?), this obviously misses the point. Even if we agree that a priest's or a rabbi's misbehavior is more reprehensible, that hardly makes the action of the priest who commits adultery more heinous than that of the layman who commits mass murder. And none of this should have an influence on a "judge." The sloppiness of the thinking here—Goldstone's words were quite emotional—suggests that reason plays less of a role in moral judgment than some idealistic passion. Richard Landes, "The Coke-Lite of International Law: Goldstone Speaks at Yale," *The Augean Stables*, January

28, 2010, <http://www.theaugeanstables.com/2010/01/28/the-coke-lite-of-international-law-goldstone-speaks-at-yale/>.

11. Exodus 5:21.

12. Pascal Bruckner, *The Tyranny of Guilt: An Essay on Western Masochism*, trans. Steven Rendall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

13. Mel Brooks and Carl Reiner, *The Two Thousand Year Old Man*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQWDxrKS1Z4>, at 6:26.

14. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, trans. F. Rosenthal (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), III: 311–315, 271–274. For an analysis of current Arab political dynamics using a combination of Ibn Khaldun and sociological theory, see Syed Farid Alatas, “A Khaldunian Exemplar for a Historical Sociology for the South,” *Current Sociology* 54 (2006): 397–411.

15. Adam Seligman, *The Problem of Trust* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 135–137.

16. Richard Landes, “When Cain is the ‘Other’: On the ‘Other’ in the Arab-Israeli Conflict,” *The Augean Stables*, December 22, 2008, <http://www.theaugeanstables.com/2008/12/22/when-cain-is-the-other-on-the-other-in-the-arab-israeli-conflict/>.

17. For an excellent analysis of this phenomenon, see Bruckner, *The Tyranny of Guilt* (see note 12 above). The post-colonial field of Subaltern Studies gives epistemological priority to the voice of the oppressed. There is little to no investigation (that I am aware of) of the problem of what Nietzsche called “ressentiment” or, more generally, the problem of “envy” as a factor impacting the epistemological value of the voice of subalterns.

18. Haroon Siddiqi, “Looking for Accountability in the Gaza War,” *The Star*, October 15, 2009, <http://www.thestar.com/comment/article/710335>.

19. For the critique of the Goldstone Report, see the many articles gathered at *Understanding the Goldstone Report*, <http://www.goldstonereport.com>; for the way in which the Report’s obsession with Israeli misdeeds—and its systematic neglect of Hamas’ violations of its own civilians’ right to be spared from the ravages of war—combine to reward the victimizer and further victimize the victims, see Richard Landes, “The Goldstone Report Part I: A Failure of Intelligence,” and idem., “The Goldstone Report Part II: A Miscarriage of Human Rights,” *MERIA* 13, no. 4 (2009), <http://www.gloria-center.org/meria/2009/12/landes1.html>.

20. CNN’s “Fareed Zakaria interviews Goldstone” of October 4, 2009, http://www.seconddraft.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=619:cs-fareed-goldstone&catid=57:see-section-msm-what-they-say-a-how-they-say-it&Itemid=134, at 5:55.

21. <http://www.tikkun.org/index.php>.

22. <http://www.richardsilverstein.com/>.

23. There is a (perfectly believable) story about Sidney Morgenbesser remarking to Lionel Trilling that his motto (as a completely secular and unidentified Jew) was “*incognito, ergo sum*.” What has happened since 2000 is the emergence of such previously incognito Jews “as Jews” to denounce Israel; hence the term “alter-Juif.” See the volume of *Controverses* 4 (2000) devoted to the problem: <http://www.controverses.fr/Sommaires/sommaire4.htm>.

24. Anthony Julius, *Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 546–559.

25. For the best single discussion of the problem, see Alvin Rosenfeld, “*Progressive*” *Jewish Thought and the New Anti-Semitism* (New York: American Jewish Committee Publications, 2006), http://www.ajc.org/atf/cf/%7B42D75369-D582-4380-8395-D25925B85EAF%7D/PROGRESSIVE_JEWISH_THOUGHT.PDF. For an introduction to the controversy, see the Wikipedia entry: “Progressive Thought and the New Anti-Semitism,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Progressive_Jewish_Thought_and_the_New_Anti-Semitism; and Bruce Bawer, *Surrender: Appeasing Islam, Sacrificing Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 2010), 22–30.

26. One of the most recent contributions, Bawer (see note 22 above), is well worth reading. See also Lee Harris, *The Suicide of Reason: Radical Islam’s Threat to the West* (New York: Basic Books, 2007).

27. Leon Festinger, Henry Riecken, and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group that Predicted the Destruction of the World* (San Francisco: Harper-Torchbooks, 1956); see also Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957); and Richard Crossman, ed., *The God that Failed* (Harper & Brothers, 1949).

28. See Hollander, *Political Pilgrims* (see note 1 above); and the discussion of the millennial dimension of fellow traveling in Richard Landes, *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), chap. 11.

29. Daniel Pipes, *The Rushdie Affair* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 2003).

30. Paul Hollander, *The Only Super Power: Reflections on Strength, Weakness, and Anti-Americanism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), ch. 5.

31. On anti-Americanism and its “twin brother” anti-Zionism, see Andrei Markovits, *Uncouth Nation: Why Europe Dislikes America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), especially chap. 5. Ironically, the Israeli Left today acts as if it must atone for a useful idiocy it has not committed: supporting Israel when Israel was wrong. This has become requisite for them, in order to curry favor with those Leftists who actually are guilty of fellow-traveler-type well-intentioned lies.

32. On the Sharon and the Intifada, see the *Mitchell Report*, 2009, 7, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rpt/3060.htm>. On the Pope’s comments and the Muslim reaction, see R. Landes, “The Pope’s Remarks about Islam: The Joke Too Few Get,” *Augean Stables*, September 29, 2006, <http://www.theaugeanstables.com/2006/09/29/the-popes-remarks-about-islam-the-joke-too-few-get/>. On the issue of intimidation, see the most recent study, Paul Marshall and Nina Shea, *Silenced: How Apostasy and Blasphemy Codes Are Choking Freedom Worldwide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

33. For the latest analysis of this, see Michael Prell, *Underdogma* (Dallas, TX: BenBella Books, 2011).

34. On the Russian death cult of terror, see Anna Geifman, *Death Orders: The Vanguard of Modern Terrorism in Revolutionary Russia* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010); on the Jihadi death cult, see Laurent Murawiec, *The Mind of Jihad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

35. Seth Farber, *Radicals, Rabbis and Peacemakers: Conversations with Jewish Critics of Israel* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage, 2005).

36. For a good example of this dynamic at work, note the case of John Mearsheimer. Speaking to a Palestinian audience (!), Mearsheimer contrasted the bad Jews (the “new Afrikaners”) with the “righteous Jews” (who fit the profile of self-degrading Jews as we have delineated it), all in John Mearsheimer, “The Future of Palestine: Righteous Jews vs. the New Afrikaners,” speech of Thursday, April 29, 2010, to the *Jerusalem Fund*, <http://www.thejerusalemfund.org/ht/display/ContentDetails/i/10418>.

37. John Mearsheimer, *ibid*.

38. See the comment made by Europe1 news anchor, Catherine Ney, to the effect that the picture of Muhammad al Durah “erases, replaces the image of the boy in the Warsaw Ghetto.” See Richard Landes, “On the Hidden Costs of Media Error: Muhammad al Durah and the French Intifada of 2005,” *The Augean Stables*, November 15, 2005, <http://www.theaugeanstables.com/essays-on-france/paris-notes-fall-2005/>.