

X14 – EXchanging Worldviews, 14: EXploring Prospects for Peace & Prosperity, 6: EXTending, EXhorting, and EXporting EXorbitant, EXpansionist Delusions

Dear: In previous chapters I provided evidence to support my assessment that a whole lot of political, judicial, and religious leaders are bonkers, including Iran’s President Ahmadinejad, [former] Attorney General John Ashcroft, Gary Bauer, Saudi Arabia’s “Supreme Religious Leader” Bin Baz, Bin Laden, Pat Buchanan, George W. Bush, Charles Colson, Tom Delay, James Dobson, Jerry Falwell, Al Qaeda spokesman Abu Gheith, Newt Gingrich, Judge James Holmes, and so on through the rest of the alphabet, certainly including Ralph Reed, Pat Robertson, Supreme Court Justice Scalia, and Randall Terry. None is grounded in reality.

They differ primarily only in culturally specific religious delusions. They all “believe” that they’re “doing God’s work” and that, after this life, they’ll proceed to another. None is overly concerned about destroying the world. In turn, all are oblivious to data, need psychiatric help, and should be incarcerated until they’re no longer threats to humanity. Under other circumstances, if they were just “private citizens”, it wouldn’t bother me to know that they are living in their fantasy worlds of exorbitant ideas (using ‘exorbitant’ in its literal sense: “out of orbit”). But as I’ll try to show you in this chapter, most of them are hell-bent on exporting their delusions to the rest of the world, thereby seriously diminishing the prospects for worldwide peace and prosperity.

A recent illustration is the following news report from the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA).¹

President: Rule of Islam only way for salvation of mankind

Kabul, Aug 14 [2007] IRNA
Iran-Afghanistan-Ahmadinejad

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said here Tuesday that rule of Islam on mankind is the only way for salvation of human beings.

¹ Copied from <http://www2.irna.ir/en/news/view/menu-234/0708142013173859.htm>.

“There is no truth on earth but monotheism and following tenets of Islam and there is no way for salvation of mankind but rule of Islam over mankind,” said Ahmadinejad in a meeting with Afghan Sunni and Shiite ulama at Iranian Embassy in Kabul.

President Ahmadinejad said nations are today distancing themselves from culture of materialism and selfishness and look for a new way for their prosperity, that is the path of Islam.

He said that the world is on verge of a great upheaval and ulama at this juncture shoulder a heavy responsibility that is introducing genuine Islam as it is.

“Nations today have no haven but religion,” the Iranian president announced, cautioning Muslim nations against enemies’ divisive plots.

He said, “All of us have the duty to resist the enemy by closing our ranks...”

The president said Islam belongs to all generations and Muslims should get ready for global mission of Islam.

And actually, the exorbitant ideas of such people aren’t restricted to religion; if they were, such people probably wouldn’t be so dangerous to the rest of us; instead, their fantasies fly wherever way the political winds blow.

As an illustration, consider the following 5 August 2007 news report from *Agence France-Presse*:

ALGIERS – Iran’s outspoken President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called on Israel to “go find somewhere else” for its state and leave its territory for the creation of a Palestinian state, according to an interview published on Saturday.

“Our support [for the Palestinian people] is unconditional. As for the Israelis, let them go find somewhere else,” Ahmadinejad told several Algerian newspapers ahead of a visit to Algiers that starts Monday.

Iran consistently refuses to recognize Israel’s right to exist in the Middle East, and Ahmadinejad sparked outrage abroad by stating after coming to power in 2005 that Israel should be “wiped from the map.”

He also provoked a storm in June by saying a “countdown had begun that would end with Lebanese and Palestinian militants destroying Israel, and his government last year hosted a conference on the Holocaust questioning the German Nazis genocide of the Jews during World War II.

Would that someone could get through to this nut with a few simple facts of life: 1) There is no evidence supporting your delusion that some giant

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Jabberwock in the sky is in control; therefore, a significant fraction of all people will never either buy into your fantasy or permit you to cram it down their throats, 2) the Holocaust happened, and 3) if Iran tries to wipe Israel “from the map”, a whole lot of Iran will become a radioactive wasteland. In sum, humanists and Israel exist – get over it and get real!

Further, these crazies don’t restrict themselves to just religion and politics. As an illustration of a case in which you would otherwise probably think “Nobody could be that stupid”, consider the following from Saudi Cleric Muhammad Al-Munajid, which aired on Iqra TV on 26 July 2007.²

Sheik Muhammad Al-Munajid: This is a nation of monotheism, and this is the Islam that Allah wants to spread throughout the world, and to rule the land its entirety. Allah wants this. He sent down the Koran and the *hadith* for that purpose...

Humanity can have no happiness without Islam. Humanity can enjoy no goodness, unless the sun of monotheism, the Koran, and the Sunna shines upon it. The world without the sun of the divine revelation is a place of eternal darkness, as we can see today – a world of frustration, collapse, injustice, arbitrariness, and wrongdoing. The world today is a jungle – a world of barbarism of all kinds. People in many parts of the world are not happy, because they do not walk in the path of Allah.

There are rules of *shari'a* in everything. We have counted almost 70 rules about how to urinate and defecate. In contrast, how do those beasts in the West answer the call of nature? They stand in front of other people, in toilets at airports and other public places. They do not care about covering their private parts. Even their underwear is colored and not white, so it can conceal all that filth. We are a nation that has long known the meaning of cleanliness, what to do when nature calls, and what the rules of hygiene are. The others, to this day, live like beasts.

What’s the matter, Dear? Don’t you want to have all “70 rules about how to urinate and defecate” crammed down your throat by your rulers? Well, not to worry. I’m sure that they’ll give you the option of having your throat cut.

And, actually, Dear, you can see from such examples the fundamental problem with all religious fundamentalists: they “know” they have all the “answers” (not only about how to urinate and defecate, but how to have sex, what women are permitted to do, what men must do, how to pray, and so on – of course including how to pay the clerics for being such a pain in the butt). Compared with such fundamentalists, scientific humanists have huge

² Available at <http://www.memrity.org/clip/en/1520.htm>.

disadvantages: every which way we look, we find unanswered questions needing solution – such as how to rid the world of religious kooks!

And I'm sorry to suggest, Dear, that during your lifetime, once such idiots as Sheik Al-Munajid, Presidents Ahmadinejad and Bush, the terrorist Bin Laden, and the rest of the crazies are (thankfully) gone, you'll probably continue to find crazy people confronting each other on either side of the humanists/anti-humanist abyss: I doubt that subsequent leaders of the two major religious groups (Christians vs. Muslims) will be saner than Bush and Bin Laden; therefore, you'll still probably need to struggle through the defeat of the stupid (immoral) ideologies of both groups. As with all Christians and Muslims, the fundamentalists accept the data-less worldview that some giant Jabberwock in the sky rules the universe, but the real pain-in-the-butt is not the worldview but the ideology of both groups of "fundies", namely, to force everyone to accept their stupid worldview – of course with them in control. As Salman Rushdie (under an Islamic death fatwa) said: "Fundamentalism isn't about religion; it's about power."

During my lifetime, it was bad – but not so bad as what appears to be ahead. During roughly the 40-year period from about 1946 to 1986, the USA and the USSR had enough intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), aimed at one another and armed with nuclear bombs, to kill everyone in the world many times over –if not directly, then from the associated "nuclear winter" (a conference on which was the stimulation for my "paper" that I included as an addendum to the C-chapter). But in the Cold War (in a way, fittingly capped with fear of "nuclear winter"), the in-a-way crazy policy of "mutually assured destruction" (MAD) was nevertheless maintained by in-the-main rational people (on both sides of the abyss), i.e., people who didn't want to die and who wanted humanity to continue. To their everlasting credit, without whom humanity might not have survived, the Soviet atheists Nikita Khrushchev and Michel Gorbachev proved to be saner than their American counterparts, the theists Jack Kennedy and Ronald Reagan.

And my purpose in going through that, Dear, was to emphasize the point that I tried to make in the previous chapter, namely, that two moral questions need to be addressed. The first is to question the morality of attempting to influence people; then, if it seems moral to try to influence people, the second question is: how much of what type of violence can morally be applied? In my view, fascists, communists, Islamists, and Christianists are all immoral, because their ideologies permit unconstrained physical

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violence: the fascists and communists had their gas chambers and slave gangs, the Islamists have their suicide bombers and their terrorist organizations, and the Christianists bomb abortion clinics, brutalize homosexuals – and now, courtesy G.W. Bush et al., they invade other countries to “liberate” them.

Thus, in this country it’s not just “the militant Christian Right” (those who bomb abortion clinics, brutalize homosexuals, and in some cases, attack atheists) whose defeat you’ll need to “struggle through” during your lifetime. At present, the “Christian Reich” are just the fringe element of a large group of intolerant fools, totaling somewhere between one tenth and one third of all Americans, who probably could easily become this century’s “new (or neo-) Nazis” or “brown shirts”, and who (as I tried to show you in the previous chapter) have gained substantial power in the Republican party. You can find much more about them on the internet; you can detect them by paying attention to activities such as “book burnings” (e.g., of Harry Potter books), demands for school prayer and displays of the Ten Commandments, attempts (with some success) to control school boards and then to modify the teaching of evolution by including descriptions of the nonscientific concept of “intelligent design”, and so on.

The ideology of such groups is to infiltrate and gain control, well described by their spokesmen, such as Pat Robertson (quoted in the previous chapter):

The strategy against the American Radical Left [i.e., secular humanists] should be the same as General Douglas MacArthur employed against the Japanese in the Pacific... Bypass their strongholds, then surround them, isolate them, bombard them, then blast the individuals out of their power bunkers with hand-to-hand combat. The battle for Iwo Jima was not pleasant, but our troops won it. The battle to regain the soul of America won’t be pleasant either, but we will win it... Our aim... is to gain dominion over society... to take working control of the Republican Party...

As I showed you in the previous chapter, similar garbage was spewed by Ralph Reed (chair of the southeastern region of the Bush-Cheney 2004 re-election campaign):

I honestly believe that in my lifetime we will see a country once again governed by Christians... and Christian values. What Christians have got to do is take back this country, one precinct at a time, one neighborhood at a time, and one state at a time... I want to be invisible. I do guerrilla warfare. I paint my face and travel at night. You don’t know it’s over until you’re in a body bag...

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Such people, Dear, aren't open to dialogue – and yet the foundation of “civilized behavior” is commitment to the concept that a morally acceptable method of attempting to influence other citizens is through dialogue. Stated more completely, between and among citizens the maximum violence that's morally acceptable is a “heated argument”; an acceptable level of “violence” is to try to convince others of the correctness of your worldview; the desirable level (practiced by people such as Thoreau, Gandhi, and King) is to show the wisdom of your worldview simply by demonstrating how you live your own life.

Meanwhile, as I write this and probably while you read it, the biggest threat to world peace, the biggest threat (via nuclear or biological war) to humanity's survival, is from Christian and Muslim “fundamentalists”, currently led by the schizophrenics Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, George W. Bush, and Osama Bin Laden. I don't know how many people are similarly crazy, i.e., who have adopted the crazy premiss that their “holy books” contain “the truth”. I suspect that somewhere between 10 to 100 million Americans “believe” such stupidity – and close to a billion Muslims. And although I would have no qualms about holding the coats of these two groups of fanatics while they murder each other, there is very real danger to all humans – when a fool such as Bush has his finger so close to the nuclear-nightmare button. I similarly shudder at the prospects of Iran getting nuclear or biological weapons and of some Muslim fanatic succeeding Pakistan's President Musharraf, since Pakistan already has nuclear weapons.

If you think that things couldn't possibly be so bad as I've been sketching, Dear, then I'm sorry to suggest that the situation is actually even worse. On both the Islamic and Christian sides are missionary zealots (including Mormons) hell-bent on “saving the world”: people committed to telling other people how to live their lives, rather than minding their own damn business. As I'll show you in a later chapter, Saudi Arabia is spending more money exporting their fanatical version of Islam than the USSR spent exporting communism during the height of the Cold War, Iran's mad Ahmadinejad is probably spending at least a billion dollars per year funding terrorists, and courtesy the idiot G.W. Bush, American is spending even more money, exporting “freedom and democracy” (even if it has to be forced down other people's throats, e.g., as in Iraq).

And if you think that your old grandfather is exaggerating (even “ranting and raving”), then please read the following more somber assessments by

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more knowledgeable people. The first is an article about Bin Laden that first appeared in the August/September 2002 issue of *Policy Review* and was subsequently printed in the online version of the *Wall Street Journal*.³ It was written by Lee Harris, about whom little seems to be published, except that he is “an Atlanta writer”, that he entered Emory University at age fourteen and graduated summa cum laude, and that he recently wrote a book entitled *Civilization and Its Enemies: The Next Stage of History*. To his essay, I’ve added a few notes in “square brackets” and some italics.

AT WAR

Al Qaeda’s Fantasy Ideology

To understand Sept. 11, think of it as theater, not politics.

BY LEE HARRIS

Tuesday, August 13, 2002 12:01 a.m. EDT

“Know your enemy” is a well-known maxim, but one that is difficult to observe in practice. Nor is the reason for this hard to fathom: If you are my enemy, it is unlikely that I will go very much out of my way to learn to see things from your point of view. And if this is true even in those cases in which the conflict is between groups that share a common culture, how much more true will it be when there is a profound cultural and psychological chasm between the antagonists?

Yet, paradoxically, this failure to understand the enemy can arise not only from a lack of sympathy with his position, but also from a kind of misplaced sympathy: When confronted by a culturally exotic enemy, our first instinct is to understand such conduct in terms that are familiar to us – terms that make sense to us in light of our own fund of experience. We assume that if our enemy is doing X, it must be for reasons that are comprehensible in terms of our universe.

Just how unfortunate – indeed, fatal – this approach can be was demonstrated during the Spanish conquest of Mexico. When Montezuma learned of Cortés’s arrival, he was at a loss to know what to make of the event. Who were these white-skinned alien beings? What had they come for? What were their intentions?

These were clearly not questions that Montezuma was in a position to answer. Nothing in his world could possibly provide him with a key to deciphering correctly the motives of a man as cunning, resourceful and determined as Cortés. And this meant that Montezuma, who, after all, had to do something, was forced to deploy categories drawn from the fund of experience that was ready-to-hand in the Aztec world.

³ Available online at, e.g., <http://www.policyreview.org/aug02/harris.html>.

By a fatal coincidence, this fund of experience chanced to contain a remarkable prefiguring of Cortés – the myth of the white-skinned god, Quetzalcoatl. And indeed, the parallels were uncanny. But of course, as Montezuma eventually learned, Cortés was not Quetzalcoatl, and he had not appeared on the coast of Mexico in order to bring blessings.

We should not be too harsh on Montezuma. He was, after all, acting exactly as we all act under similar circumstances. We all want to make sense of our world, and at no time more urgently than when our world is suddenly behaving strangely. But in order to make sense of such strangeness, we must be able to reduce it to something that is not strange – something that is already known to us, something we know our way around.

Yet this entirely human response, as Montezuma learned to his regret, can sometimes be very dangerous.

On Sept. 11, 2001, Americans were confronted by an enigma similar to that presented to the Aztecs – an enigma so baffling that even elementary questions of nomenclature posed a problem: What words or phrase should we use merely to refer to the events of that day? Was it a disaster? Or perhaps a tragedy? Was it a criminal act, or was it an act of war? Indeed, one awkward TV anchorman, in groping for the proper handle, fecklessly called it an accident. But eventually the collective and unconscious wisdom that governs such matters prevailed. Words failed, then fell away completely, and all that was left behind was the bleak but monumentally poignant set of numbers, 9-11.

But this did not answer the great question: What did it all mean? In the early days, there were many who were convinced that they knew the answer to this question. A few held that we had got what we had coming: It was just deserts for President Bush's refusal to sign the Kyoto treaty or the predictable product of the U.S. decision to snub the Durban conference on racism. Others held, with perhaps a greater semblance of plausibility, that the explanation of 9-11 was to be sought in what was called, through an invariable horticultural metaphor, the "root cause" of terrorism. Eliminate poverty, or economic imperialism, or global warming, and such acts of terrorism would cease.

Opposed to this kind of analysis were those who saw 9-11 as an unprovoked act of war, and the standard comparison here was with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. To this school of thought – ably represented by, among others, the distinguished classicist Victor Davis Hanson – it is irrelevant what grievances our enemy may believe it has against us; what matters is that we have been viciously attacked and that, for the sake of our survival, we must fight back.

Those who hold this view are in the overwhelming majority among Americans. And yet there is one point on which this position does not differ from the position adopted

by those, such as Noam Chomsky, who place the blame for the attack on American policy: Both points of view agree in interpreting 9-11 as an act of war, disagreeing only on the question of whether or not it was justifiable.

This common identification of 9-11 as an act of war arises from a deeper unquestioned assumption – an assumption made both by Mr. Chomsky and his followers on one hand and Mr. Hanson and National Review on the other – and, indeed, by almost everyone in between. The assumption is this: An act of violence on the magnitude of 9-11 can have been intended only to further some kind of political objective. What this political objective might be, or whether it is worthwhile – these are all secondary considerations; but surely people do not commit such acts unless they are trying to achieve some kind of recognizably political purpose.

Behind this shared assumption stands the figure of Clausewitz and his famous definition of war as politics carried out by other means. The whole point of war, on this reading, is to get other people to do what we want them to do: It is an effort to make others adopt our policies or to further our interests. Clausewitzian war, in short, is rational and instrumental. It is the attempt to bring about a new state of affairs through the artful combination of violence and the promise to cease violence if certain political objectives are met.

Of course, this does not mean that wars may not backfire on those who undertake them, or that a particular application of military force may not prove to be counterproductive to one's particular political purpose. But this does not change the fact that the final criterion of military success is always pragmatic: Does it work? Does it in fact bring us closer to realizing our political objectives?

But is this the right model for understanding 9-11? Or have we, like Montezuma, imposed our own inadequate categories on an event that simply does not fit them? Yet, if 9-11 was not an act of war, then what was it? In what follows, I would like to pursue a line suggested by a remark by the composer Karlheinz Stockhausen in reference to 9-11: his much-quoted comment that it was “the greatest work of art of all time.”

Despite the repellent nihilism that is at the base of Mr. Stockhausen's ghoulish aesthetic judgment, it contains an important insight and comes closer to a genuine assessment of 9-11 than the competing interpretation of it in terms of Clausewitzian war. For Mr. Stockhausen did grasp one big truth: 9-11 was the enactment of a fantasy – not an artistic fantasy, to be sure, but a fantasy nonetheless.

My first encounter with this particular kind of fantasy occurred when I was in college in the late 1960s. A friend of mine and I got into a heated argument. Although we were both opposed to the Vietnam War, we discovered that we differed considerably on what counted as permissible forms of antiwar protest. To me the point of such protest was simple – to turn people against the war. Hence anything that was counterproductive to this purpose was politically irresponsible and should be severely

censured. My friend thought otherwise; in fact, he was planning to join what by all accounts was to be a massively disruptive demonstration in Washington, which in fact became one.

My friend did not disagree with me as to the likely counterproductive effects of such a demonstration. Instead, he argued that this simply did not matter. His answer was that even if it was counterproductive, even if it turned people against war protesters, indeed even if it made them more likely to support the continuation of the war, he would still participate in the demonstration and he would do so for one simple reason – because it was, in his words, good for his soul.

What I saw as a political act was not, for my friend, any such thing. It was not aimed at altering the minds of other people or persuading them to act differently. Its whole point was what it did for him.

And what it did for him was to provide him with a fantasy – a fantasy, namely, of taking part in the revolutionary struggle of the oppressed against their oppressors. By participating in a violent antiwar demonstration, he was in no sense aiming at coercing conformity with his view – for that would still have been a political objective. Instead, he took his part in order to confirm his ideological fantasy of marching on the right side of history, of feeling himself among the elect few who stood with the angels of historical inevitability. Thus, when he lay down in front of hapless commuters on the bridges over the Potomac, he had no interest in changing the minds of these commuters, no concern over whether they became angry at the protesters or not. They were there merely as props, as so many supernumeraries in his private psychodrama. The protest for him was not politics but theater; and the significance of his role lay not in the political ends his actions might achieve, but rather in their symbolic value as ritual. In short, he was acting out a fantasy.

It was not your garden-variety fantasy of life as a sexual athlete or a racecar driver, but in it, he nonetheless made himself out as a hero – a hero of the revolutionary struggle. The components of his fantasy – and that of many young intellectuals at that time – were compounded purely of ideological ingredients, smatterings of Marx and Mao, a little Fanon and perhaps a dash of Herbert Marcuse.

For want of a better term, call the phenomenon in question a fantasy ideology – by which I mean political and ideological symbols and tropes used not for political purposes, but entirely for the benefit of furthering a specific personal or collective fantasy. It is, to be frank, something like the role-playing game *Dungeons & Dragons* carried out not with the trappings of medieval romances – old castles and maidens in distress – but entirely in terms of ideological symbols and emblems. The difference between them is that one is an innocent pastime while the other has proved to be one of the most terrible scourges to afflict the human race.

But before tackling this subject outright, let us approach it through a few observations about the normal role of fantasy in human conduct.

It is a common human weakness to wish to make more of our contribution to the world than the world is prepared to acknowledge, and it is our fantasy world that allows us to fill this gap. But normally, for most of us at least, this fantasy world stays relatively hidden. *Indeed, a common criterion of our mental health is the extent to which we are able to keep our fantasies firmly under our watchful control.* [Italics added.]

Yet clearly there are individuals for whom this control is, at best, intermittent, resulting in behavior that ranges from the merely obnoxious to the clinically psychotic. The man who insists on being taken more seriously than his advantages warrant falls into the former category; the maniac who murders an utter stranger because God – or his neighbor's dog – commanded him to do so belongs to the latter.

What is common in such interactions is that the fantasist inevitably treats other people merely as props – there is no interest in, or even awareness of, others as having wills or minds of their own. The man who bores us with stories designed to impress us with his importance, or his intellect, or his bank account, cares nothing for us as individuals – for he has already cast us in the role that he wishes us to play: We are there to be impressed by him. Indeed, it is an error even to suggest that he is trying to impress us, for this would assume that he is willing to learn enough about us to discover how best we might be impressed. But nothing of the kind occurs. And why should it? After all, the fantasist has already projected onto us the role that we are to play in his fantasy; no matter what we may be thinking of his recital, it never crosses his mind that we may be utterly failing to play the part expected of us – indeed, it is sometimes astonishing to see how much exertion is required of us in order to bring our profound lack of interest to the fantasist's attention.

To an outside observer, the fantasist is clearly attempting to compensate by means of his fantasy for the shortcomings of his own present reality – and thus it is tempting to think of the fantasist as a kind of Don Quixote impotently tilting at windmills. But this is an illusion. Make no mistake about it: The fantasist often exercises great and terrible power precisely by virtue of his fantasy. The father who demands his son grow up and become a professional football player will clearly exercise much more control over his son's life than a father who is content to permit his child to pursue his own goals in life.

This power of the fantasist is entirely traceable to the fact that, for him, the other is always an object and never a subject. A subject, after all, has a will of his own, his own desires and his own agenda; he might rather play the flute instead of football. And anyone who is aware of this fact is automatically put at a disadvantage in comparison with the fantasist – the disadvantage of knowing that other people have minds of their own and are not merely props to be pushed around.

For the moment I stop thinking about you as a prop in my fantasy, you become problematic. If you aren't what I have cast you to be, then who are you, and what do

you want? And in order to answer these questions, I find that I must step out of the fantasy realm and enter the real world. If I am your father, I may still wish you to play football, but I can no longer blithely assume that this is obviously what you have always wanted; hence, I will need to start paying attention to you as a genuine other, and no longer merely as a ready-made prop. Your role will change from “born football player” to – X, the unknown. The very immensity of the required mental adjustment goes a long way toward explaining why it is so seldom made and why it is so often tragically impossible to wean a fantasist even from the most destructive fantasy.

Fortunately, the fantasizing individual is normally surrounded by other individuals who are not fantasizing or, at the very least, who are not fantasizing in the same way, and this fact puts some limit on how far most of us allow our fantasy world to intrude on the precinct of reality.

But what happens when it is not an individual who is caught up in his fantasy world, but an entire group – a sect, or a people, or even a nation? That such a thing can happen is obvious from a glance at history. The various chiliastic movements, such as those studied in Norman Cohn’s *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (Harper & Row, 1961), are splendid examples of collective fantasy; and *there is no doubt that for most of history such large-scale collective fantasies appear on the world stage under the guise of religion.* [Italics added.]

But this changed with the French Revolution. From this event onward, there would be eruptions of a new kind of collective fantasy, one in which political ideology replaced religious mythology as the source of fantasy’s symbols and rituals. In this way it provided a new, and quite dangerous, outlet for the fantasy needs of large groups of men and women – a full-fledged fantasy ideology. For such a fantasy makes no sense outside of the ideological corpus in terms of which the fantasy has been constructed. It is from the ideology that the roles, the setting, the props are drawn, just as for the earlier pursuers of millennium, the relevant roles, setting and props arose out of the biblical corpus of symbolism.

But the symbols by themselves do not create the fantasy. There must first be a pre-existing collective need for this fantasy; this need comes from a conflict between a set of collective aspirations and desires on one hand, and the stern dictates of brutal reality on the other – a conflict in which *a lack of realism is gradually transformed into a penchant for fantasy.* [Italics added.] History is replete with groups that seem to lack the capability of seeing themselves as others see them, differing in this respect much as individuals do.

A fantasy ideology is one that seizes the opportunity offered by such a lack of realism in a political group and makes the most of it. This it is able to do through symbols and rituals, all of which are designed to permit the members of the political group to indulge in a kind of fantasy role-playing. Classic examples of this are easy to find: the Jacobin fantasy of reviving the Roman Republic, Mussolini’s fantasy of reviving

the Roman Empire, Hitler's fantasy of reviving German paganism in the thousand-year Reich.

This theme of reviving ancient glory is an important key to understanding fantasy ideologies, for it suggests that fantasy ideologies tend to be the domain of those groups that history has passed by or rejected – groups that feel that they are under attack from forces that, while perhaps more powerful than they are, are nonetheless inferior in terms of true virtue. Such a fantasy ideology was current in the South before the Civil War and explained much of the conduct of the Confederacy. Instead of seeing themselves as an anachronism attempting to prolong the existence of a doomed institution, Southerners chose to see themselves as the bearer of true civilization. Imperial Germany had similar fantasies before and during the Great War. They are well expressed in Thomas Mann's *Notes of an Unpolitical Man*: Germans possess true inwardness and culture, unlike the French and English – let alone those barbarous Americans. Indeed, Hitler's even more extravagant fantasy ideology is incomprehensible unless one puts it in the context of this pre-existing fantasy ideology.

In reviewing these fantasy ideologies, especially those associated with Nazism and Italian fascism, there is always the temptation for an outside observer to regard their promulgation as the cynical manipulation by a power-hungry leader of his gullible followers. This is a serious error, for the leader himself must be as much steeped in the fantasy as his followers: He can only make others believe because he believes so intensely himself. [Italics added.]

But the concept of belief, as it is used in this context, must be carefully understood in order to avoid ambiguity. For us, belief is a purely passive response to evidence presented to us – I form my beliefs about the world for the purpose of understanding the world as it is. But this is radically different from what might be called transformative belief – the secret of fantasy ideology. For here the belief is not passive but intensely active, and its purpose is not to describe the world but to change it. [Italics added.]

It is, in a sense, a deliberate form of make-believe, but one in which the make-believe is not an end in itself, but rather the means of making the make-believe become real. In this sense it is akin to such innocently jejune [naïve] phenomena as “The Power of Positive Thinking” or even “The Little Engine That Could.” To say that Mussolini, for example, believed that fascist Italy would revive the Roman Empire does not mean that he made a careful examination of the evidence and then arrived at this conclusion. Rather, what is meant by this is that Mussolini had the will to believe that fascist Italy would revive the Roman Empire.

The allusion to William James's famous essay “The Will to Believe” is not an accident, for James exercised a profound influence on the two thinkers essential to understanding both Italian fascism in particular and fantasy ideology in general – Vilfredo Pareto and Georges Sorel. All three men begin with the same assumption:

If human beings are limited to acting only on those beliefs that can be logically and scientifically demonstrated, they could not survive, simply because this degree of certainty is restricted only to mathematics and the hard sciences – which, by themselves, are not remotely sufficient to guide us through the world as it exists. Hence, human beings must have a large set of beliefs that cannot be demonstrated logically and scientifically – beliefs that are therefore irrational as judged by the hard sciences.

[Well, Dear, as you probably expect by now, I have difficulty with the above paragraph, specifically because the author of this essay, Harris, as well as James, Pareto, and Sorel seem to have a restricted understanding of science and because it seems that attempts are being made to paint a colorful scene using only black and white. More to the point is the entire concept of probability: as I tried to show you in earlier chapters (e.g., see **Ih** dealing with “Hypotheses, Probabilities, and Evidence”), ‘belief’ in the sense being used here means ‘probability’, and a summary description of all scientists is that they work diligently to associate realistic estimates of probabilities (for their “beliefs”). Consequently, Harris’s statement “beliefs that are therefore irrational as judged by the hard sciences” is rather silly: first, ‘rationality’ is only one criterion by which to judge any ‘belief’ (and as I tried to show you, e.g., in **R**, it’s not nearly so significant as evidence, since many ‘beliefs’ in relativistic and quantum mechanics don’t seem rational but are supported by evidence), and second, ‘rationality’ vs. irrationality’ is a black vs. white (or ‘true’ vs. ‘false’) view that’s only marginally appropriate when estimating probabilities. Nonetheless, this incorrect view of the sciences doesn’t distract from the points that Harris goes on to make.]

Yet the fact that such beliefs cannot be justified by science does not mean that they may not be useful or beneficial to the individual or to the society that holds them. For James, this meant primarily the religious beliefs of individuals: Did a man’s religious beliefs improve the quality of his personal life? For Pareto, however, the same argument was extended to all beliefs: religious, cultural, and political.

Both James and Pareto viewed nonrational belief from the perspective of an outside observer: They took up the beliefs that they found already circulating in the societies in which they lived and examined them in light of whether they were beneficial or detrimental to the individuals and the societies that entertained them. As a botanist examines the flora of a particular region – he is not interested in creating new flowers, but simply in cataloguing those that already exist – so, too, James and Pareto were exclusively interested in already existing beliefs, and certainly not in producing new ones.

But this was not enough for Sorel. Combining Nietzsche with William James, Sorel discovered the secret of Nietzsche’s will to power in James’s will to believe. James, like Pareto, had shown that certain spontaneously occurring beliefs enabled those who held these beliefs to thrive and to prosper, both as individuals and as societies. But if this was true of spontaneously occurring beliefs, could it not also be true of beliefs that were deliberately and consciously manufactured?

This was a radical innovation. For just as naturally existing beliefs could be judged properly only in terms of the benefits such beliefs brought about in the lives of those who believed in them, the same standard could now be applied to beliefs that were deliberately created in order to have a desired effect on those who came to believe in them. What would be important about such “artificially inseminated” beliefs – which Sorel calls myths – was the transformative effect such myths would have on those who placed their faith in them and the extent to which such ideological make-believe altered the character and conduct of those who held them – and certainly not whether they were true.

Sorel’s candidate for such a myth – the general strike – never quite caught on. But his underlying insight was taken up by Mussolini and Italian fascism, and with vastly greater sensitivity to what is involved in creating such galvanizing and transformative myths in the minds of large numbers of men and women. After all, it is obvious that not just any belief will do and that, furthermore, each particular group of people will have a disposition, based on history and character, to entertain one set of beliefs more readily than another. Mussolini assembled his Sorelian myth out of elements clearly designed to catch the imagination of his time and place – a strange blend of Imperial Roman themes and futurist images.

Yet even the most sensitively crafted myth requires something more in order to take root in the imagination of large populations – and this was where Mussolini made his great innovation. For the Sorelian myth to achieve its effect it had to be presented as theater. It had to grab the spectators and make them feel a part of the spectacle. The Sorelian myth, in short, had to be embodied in a fantasy – a fantasy with which the “audience” could easily and instantly identify. The willing suspension of disbelief, which Coleridge had observed in the psychology of the normal theater-goer, would be enlisted in the service of the Sorelian myth; and in the process, it would permit the myth-induced fantasy to override the obvious objections based on mundane considerations of reality. Thus 20th-Century Italians became convinced that they were the successors of the Roman Empire in the same way that a member of a theater audience is convinced that Hamlet is really talking to his deceased father’s ghost.

Once again, it is a mistake to see in all of this merely a ploy – a cynical device to delude the masses. In all fantasy ideologies, there is a point at which the make-believe becomes an end in itself. This fact is nowhere more clearly exhibited than in the Italian conquest of Ethiopia.

Any attempt to see this adventure in Clausewitzian terms is doomed to fail: There was no political or economic advantage whatsoever to be gained from the invasion of Ethiopia. Indeed, the diplomatic disadvantages to Italy in consequence of this action were tremendous, and they were in no way to be compensated for by anything that Italy could hope to gain from possessing Ethiopia as a colony.

Why invade, then? The answer is quite simple. Ethiopia was a prop – a prop in the fantasy pageant of the new Italian Empire – that and nothing else. And the war waged in order to win Ethiopia as a colony was not a war in the Clausewitzian sense – that is to say, it was not an instrument of political policy designed to induce concessions from Ethiopia, or to get Ethiopia to alter its policies, or even to get Ethiopia to surrender. Ethiopia had to be conquered not because it was worth conquering, but because the fascist fantasy ideology required Italy to conquer something – and Ethiopia fit the bill. The conquest was not the means to an end, as in Clausewitzian war; it was an end in itself. Or, more correctly, its true purpose was to bolster the fascist collective fantasy that insisted on casting the Italians as a conquering race, the heirs of Imperial Rome.

To be a prop in someone else's fantasy is not a pleasant experience, especially when this someone else is trying to kill you [italics added], but that was the position of Ethiopia in the fantasy ideology of Italian fascism. And it is the position Americans have been placed in by the quite different fantasy ideology of radical Islam.

The terror attack of 9-11 was not designed to make us alter our policy, but was crafted for its effect on the terrorists themselves: It was a spectacular piece of theater. The targets were chosen by al Qaeda not through military calculation – in contrast, for example, to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor – but entirely because they stood as symbols of American power universally recognized by the Arab street. They were gigantic props in a grandiose spectacle in which the collective fantasy of radical Islam was brought vividly to life: A mere handful of Muslims, men whose will was absolutely pure, as proven by their martyrdom, brought down the haughty towers erected by the Great Satan. What better proof could there possibly be that God was on the side of radical Islam and that the end of the reign of the Great Satan was at hand? [Italics added.]

As the purpose of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia was to prove to the Italians themselves that they were conquerors, so the purpose of 9-11 was not to create terror in the minds of the American people but to prove to the Arabs that Islamic purity, as interpreted by radical Islam, could triumph. The terror, which to us seems the central fact, is in the eyes of al Qaeda a byproduct. Likewise, what al Qaeda and its followers see as central to the holy pageant of 9-11 – namely, the heroic martyrdom of the 19 hijackers – is interpreted by us quite differently. For us the hijackings, like the Palestinian “suicide” bombings, are viewed merely as a *modus operandi*, a technique that is incidental to a larger strategic purpose, a makeshift device, a low-tech stopgap. In short, Clausewitzian war carried out by other means – in this case by suicide.

But in the fantasy ideology of radical Islam, suicide is not a means to an end but an end in itself. Seen through the distorting prism of radical Islam, the act of suicide is transformed into that of martyrdom – martyrdom in all its transcendent glory and accompanied by the panoply of magical powers that religious tradition has always assigned to martyrdom.

In short, it is a mistake to try to fit such behavior into the mold created by our own categories and expectations. Nowhere is this more tellingly illustrated than on the videotape of Osama bin Laden discussing the attack. The tape makes clear that the final collapse of the World Trade Center was not part of the original terrorist scheme, which apparently assumed that the twin towers would not lose their structural integrity. But this fact gave to the event – in terms of al Qaeda's fantasy ideology – an even greater poignancy: Precisely because it had not been part of the original calculation, it was therefore to be understood as a manifestation of divine intervention. The 19 hijackers did not bring down the towers – God did.

Most of our misunderstandings of al Qaeda's goals have come about for one fundamental reason: In the first weeks after 9-11, it was impossible to determine whether or not al Qaeda had embarked on a systematic and calculated Clausewitzian strategy of terror simply because at that date we did not know, and could not know, what was coming next.

In the days and weeks following 9-11 there was a universal sense that it would happen again at any moment – something shocking and terrifying, something that would again rivet us to our TV screen. And indeed, the anthrax scare seemed at first to be designed precisely to fit this bill. It even had something that 9-11 lacked, namely the ability to frighten people who sat quietly in their living rooms in little towns across America, to make ordinary people feel alarmed undertaking ordinary daily activities, such as opening the mail. But, leaving aside the question of whether al Qaeda was in fact directly or indirectly responsible for the anthrax letters, what was most striking about this episode was that it showed dramatically that if al Qaeda had elected to launch a Clausewitzian war of terror against the United States, even acts of terror on a vastly smaller scale than 9-11 would still be assured of receiving enormous media coverage 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Indeed, even if another agent was behind the scare, it is still hard to understand how al Qaeda could fail to profit by the lesson the scare taught – that the American media, by nature, could be trusted to amplify even the least act of terrorism into a continuing saga of national nightmare.

But leaving aside the anthrax episode, there was in fact no such act committed by al Qaeda in the months following 9-11. Nor does the possibility that one might still occur change the fact that during this critical initial period, one did not. This in itself is a remarkably telling fact.

Acts of terror, as noted earlier, can be used to pursue genuine Clausewitzian objectives in precisely the same way that normal military operations are used, as was demonstrated during the Algerian war of independence. But this requires that the acts of terror be deployed with the same kind of strategic logic that applies to normal military operations. If you attack your enemy with an act of terror – especially one on the scale of 9-11 – you must be prepared to follow up on it immediately. The analogy here to time-honored military strategy is obvious: If you have vanquished your enemy on the field of battle, you must vigorously pursue him while he is in

retreat, i.e., while he is still in a state of panic and confusion. You must not let him regroup psychologically, but must continue to pummel him while he is still reeling from the first blow.

This al Qaeda failed to do. And the question is: Why?

Of course, given our limited knowledge, it is possible that al Qaeda did plan follow-up acts of terror but was simply unable to carry them out due to our heightened state of awareness as well as our military efforts to cripple al Qaeda in its base of operations in Afghanistan. But it is hard to believe that these factors could have precluded smaller-scale acts of terror – of the kind employed in Algeria and, more recently, by the Palestinian suicide bombers. What was to keep al Qaeda operatives from blowing themselves up at a Wal-Mart in Arkansas or a McDonald's in New Hampshire? Very little. And while it is true that such acts would lack the grandiose effect of 9-11, they would have brought terrorism home to the average American in a way that even 9-11 had not done and, as evidenced by the anthrax episode, would have multiplied enormously the already enormous impact on the American psyche of al Qaeda's original act of terror.

This was the reason why I, like millions of other Americans, spent the first few weeks after 9-11 either watching television constantly or turning it on every 15 minutes: We were prepared to be devastated again. Our nerves were in a state of such anxious expectation that a carefully concerted and orchestrated campaign of smaller-scale, guerrilla-style terror, undertaken in out-of-the-way locales, could well have had a catastrophically destabilizing effect on the American economy and even on our political system.

But such Clausewitzian terror is quite remote from the symbolic drama enacted by al Qaeda on 9-11 – a great ritual demonstrating the power of Allah, a pageant designed to convey a message not to the American people, but to the Arab world. A campaign of smaller-scale acts of terror would have no glamour in it, and it was glamour – and grandiosity – that al Qaeda was seeking in its targets. The pure Islamic David required a Goliath. After all, if David had merely killed someone his own size, where would be the evidence of God's favor toward him?

If this interpretation is correct, then it is time that we reconsider some of our basic policy in the war on terror. First of all, it should be obvious that if our enemy is motivated purely by a fantasy ideology, it is absurd for us to look for the so-called root causes of terrorism in poverty, lack of education, a lack of democracy, etc. Such factors play absolutely no role in the creation of a fantasy ideology. On the contrary, fantasy ideologies have historically been the product of members of the intelligentsia, middle-class at the very least and vastly better educated than average. [Italics added.] Furthermore, to hope that democratic reform would discourage radical Islam ignores the fact that previous fantasy ideologies have historically arisen in a democratic context; as the student of European fascism, Ernst Nolte, has observed,

parliamentary democracy was an essential precondition for the rise of both Mussolini and Hitler.

Equally absurd, on this interpretation, is the notion that we must review our own policies toward the Arab world – or the state of Israel – in order to find ways to make our enemies hate us less. If the Ethiopians had tried to make themselves more likable to the Italians in the hope that this would make Mussolini rethink his plans of conquest, it would have had the same effect. There is no political policy we could take that would change the attitude of our enemies – short, perhaps, of a massive nationwide conversion to fundamentalist Islam.

The second consequence to follow from the adoption of this model for understanding our enemy is that we need to reconsider the term “war” as it is currently deployed in this case. When the Japanese started the Pacific war by bombing Pearl Harbor, it was not because Pearl Harbor was a symbol of American power; it was because it was a large naval base and the Japanese had the quite rational strategic goal of crippling the American Pacific fleet in the first hours of the war. Furthermore, the act itself would not have taken place if the Japanese had believed themselves otherwise capable of securing their political goals – i.e., American acceptance of Japanese hegemony in Asia and the Pacific. And the war would have immediately ceased if the United States, in the days following the attack, had promptly asked for a negotiated settlement of the conflict on terms acceptable to the Japanese.

In the case of the war begun at Pearl Harbor, all the parties knew exactly what was at issue, and there was no need for media experts to argue over the “real” objective behind the attack. Everyone knew that the Japanese attack was the result of a strategic decision to go to war with America rather than accept the American ultimatum to evacuate Manchuria. In each of these cases, both sides entered into war even though a political solution was available to the various contending parties. The decision to go to war, therefore, was made in a purely Clausewitzian manner: The employment of military force was selected in preference to what all sides saw as an unacceptable political settlement.

This was not remotely the case in the aftermath of 9-11. The issue facing the U.S. was not whether to accept or to reject al Qaeda’s political demands, which were nebulous in the extreme. Indeed, al Qaeda did not even claim to have made the attack in the first place! The U.S. and its allies were placed in the bizarre position of first having to prove who their enemy was – a difficulty that, by definition, does not occur in Clausewitzian war, where it is essential that the identity of the conflicting parties be known to each other, since otherwise the conflict would be pointless.

That we are involved with an enemy who is not engaged in Clausewitzian warfare has serious repercussions on our policy. For we are fighting an enemy who has no strategic purpose in anything he does – whose actions have significance only in terms of his own fantasy ideology. [Italics added.] It means, in a strange sense, that while we are at war with them, they are not at war with us – and, indeed, it would be an

enormous improvement if they were. If they were at war with us, they would be compelled to start thinking realistically, in terms of objective factors such as overall strategic goals, war aims, and so forth. They would have to make a realistic, and not a fantasy-induced, assessment of the relative strength of us vs. them. But because they are operating in terms of their fantasy ideology, such a realistic assessment is impossible for them. It matters not how much stronger or more powerful we are than they – what matters is that God will bring them victory.

This must be emphasized, for if the fantasy ideology of Italian fascism was a form of political make-believe, the fantasy ideology of radical Islam goes even one step further: It is, in a sense, more akin to a form of magical thinking. While the Sorelian myth does aim, finally, at transforming the real world, it is almost as if the “real” world no longer matters in terms of the fantasy ideology of radical Islam. Our “real” world, after all, is utterly secular, a concatenation of an endless series of cause and effect, with all events occurring on a single ontological plane. *But the “real” world of radical Islam is different – its fantasy ideology reflects the same philosophical occasionalism that pervades so much of Islamic theology. That is to say, event B does not happen because it is caused by a previous event A. Instead, event A is simply the occasion for God to cause event B, so that the genuine cause of all events occurring on our ontological plane of existence is nothing else but God. But if this is so, then the “real” world that we take for granted simply vanishes, and all becomes determined by the will of God; and in this manner the line between realist and magical thinking dissolves.* [Italics added.] This is why the mere fact that there is no “realistic” hope of al Qaeda destroying the United States – and indeed the West as a whole – is not of the slightest consequence. After all, if God is willing, the United States and the West could collapse at any moment.

This element of magical thinking does not make al Qaeda any less dangerous, however. For it is likely that in al Qaeda’s collective fantasy there may exist the notion of an ultimate terror act, a magic bullet capable of bringing down the United States at a single stroke – and, paradoxically, nothing comes closer to fulfilling this magical role than the detonation of a very unmagical nuclear device. That this would not destroy our society in one fell swoop is obvious to us; but it is not to our enemies, in whose eyes an act of this nature assumes a fantasy significance in addition to its sufficiently terrifying reality – the fantasy significance of providing al Qaeda with a vision of ultimate and decisive victory over the West.

In the initial aftermath of 9-11, President Bush continually spoke of al Qaeda not as terrorists, but as “evildoers” – a term for which he was widely derided by those who found it offensively simple-minded and childish. Evildoers, after all, are characters out of fairytales, not real life. Who really sets out for the deliberate purpose of doing evil, except the wicked dwarfs and trolls of our childhood fantasies?

Mr. Bush’s critics – who seem unfortunately to have won the semantic battle – were both right and wrong. They were right in observing the fairytale provenance of the word “evildoer,” but they were wrong in denouncing Mr. Bush’s use of it. For,

whether by instinct or by cunning, Mr. Bush struck exactly the right note. The evildoer of the fairytale, after all, is not motivated in his conduct by his wish to change the way other people act; his objectives are not to persuade or cajole or threaten others into doing as he wishes them to do. Instead, other people exist in his eyes only as an opportunity to do evil. He doesn't want to manipulate them for his selfish purpose; rather, his one and only purpose is to inflict evil on them – evil and nothing more.

Rather than interpreting 9-11 as if it were a Clausewitzian act of war, Mr. Bush instinctively saw it for what it was: the acting out of demented fantasy. When confronted with the enigma of 9-11, he was able to avoid the temptation of trying to interpret it in terms of our own familiar categories and traditions. Instead of looking for an utterly mythical root cause for 9-11, or seeing it as a purposeful political act on the Clausewitzian model, he grasped its essential nature in one powerful metaphor, offering, in a sense, a kind of counterfantasy to the American people, one that allowed them to grasp the horror of 9-11 without being misled by false analogies and misplaced metaphors. How much wiser Montezuma would have been if he had said, "I do not know who these white-skinned strangers may be, or where they come from, or what they want. But that they are here to do evil I have no doubt. So let us act accordingly."

But, Mr. Bush's critics argued, the term "evildoers" dehumanizes our enemy. And again, the critics are both right and wrong. Yes, the term does dehumanize our enemy. But this is only because our enemy has already dehumanized himself. A characteristic of fantasy ideology is that those in the throes of it begin by dehumanizing their enemies by seeing in them only objects to act upon. It is impossible to treat others in this way without dehumanizing oneself in the process. The demands of the fantasy ideology are such that it transforms all parties into mere symbols. The victims of the fantasy ideology inevitably end by including both those who are enacting the fantasy and those upon whom the fantasy is enacted – both those who perished in the World Trade Center and those who caused them to perish; and, afterwards, both those who wept for the dead and those who rejoiced over the martyrs.

There is one decisive advantage to the "evildoer" metaphor, and it is this: Combat with evildoers is not Clausewitzian war. You do not make treaties with evildoers or try to adjust your conduct to make them like you. You do not try to see the world from the evildoers' point of view. You do not try to appease them, or persuade them, or reason with them. You try, on the contrary, to outwit them, to vanquish them, to kill them. You behave with them in the same manner that you would deal with a fatal epidemic – you try to wipe it out.

So perhaps it is time to retire the war metaphor and to deploy one that is more fitting: the struggle to eradicate disease. The fantasy ideologies of the 20th Century, after all, spread like a virus in susceptible populations: Their propagation was not that suggested by John Stuart Mill's marketplace of ideas – fantasy ideologies were not

debated and examined, weighed and measured, evaluated and compared. They grew and spread like a cancer in the body politic. For the people who accepted them did not accept them as tentative or provisional. They were unalterable and absolute. And finally, after driving out all other competing ideas and ideologies, they literally turned their host organism into the instrument of their own poisonous and deadly will.

The same thing is happening today – and that is our true enemy. The poison of the radical Islamic fantasy ideology is being spread all over the Muslim world through schools and through the media, through mosques and through the demagoguery of the Arab street. In fact, there is no better way to grasp the full horror of the poison than to listen as a Palestinian mother offers her four-year-old son up to be yet another victim of this ghastly fantasy.

Once we understand this, many of our current perplexities will find themselves resolved. Pseudo-issues such as debates over the legitimacy of “racial profiling” would disappear: Does anyone in his right mind object to screening someone entering his country for signs of plague? Or quarantining those who have contracted it? Or closely monitoring precisely those populations within his country that are most at risk?

Let there be no doubt about it. The fantasy ideologies of the 20th Century were plagues, killing millions and millions of innocent men, women and children. The only difference was that the victims and targets of such fantasy ideologies so frequently refused to see them for what they were, interpreting them as something quite different – as normal politics, as reasonable aspirations, as merely variations on the well-known theme of realpolitik, behaving – tragically enough – no differently from Montezuma when he attempted to decipher the inexplicable enigma posed by the appearance of the Spanish conquistadors. Nor did the fact that his response was entirely human make his fate any less terrible.

Now, Dear, I hope that you’ll seriously consider the above essay by Harris; I would suggest that you read it again (and again!). It is, I think (as do millions of others) a brilliant assessment of the “fantasy ideology” of the Islamists. I think, however, that two additional points should be made.

One important point is that there’s a method (which Harris didn’t mention) to immediately squelch the fantasy ideology of fanatic Islamists, namely, with an extensive educational campaign: let them know that the next time they try something similar to 9-11 (or worse, e.g., with nuclear or biological weapons), then we will destroy the epitome of their fantasy world, viz., Mecca. As you can find on the internet, such a suggestion has subsequently been made, albeit relatively quietly. Thus, as far as I know, only one member of Congress (Thomas Tancredo, R, Colorado) has had the courage to suggest such retaliation.

Would that, instead, Congress would unanimously pass a relevant resolution to that effect (complete with notification that relevant Geneva Convention Rules of War dealing with “cultural and historical sites” are inappropriate in this case of terrorist-initiated wars). And of course it’s not that I’m advocating that America should bomb Mecca (although we might, if we were nuked), but to let the crazies know that Congress has given the President authority to deprive the Islamists of their fantasy. Also, I should admit the possibility that their reaction would be something similar to “What – me worry? Allah will protect his holy site”, but if there are some sane Muslims in the Islamic world, maybe they would do what they can to constrain Muslim terrorists.

And a second point that I think should be made about Harris’s article is that he failed to apply his obvious skills to examine the similar fantasy world in which Bush (and cohorts) apparently dream. In what I think is an even embarrassing contrast, he seems to praise Bush. Harris wrote:

In the initial aftermath of 9-11, President Bush continually spoke of al Qaeda not as terrorists, but as “evildoers” – a term for which he was widely derided by those who found it offensively simple-minded and childish. Evildoers, after all, are characters out of fairytales, not real life. Who really sets out for the deliberate purpose of doing evil, except the wicked dwarfs and trolls of our childhood fantasies?

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What Harris failed to comment upon – and perhaps failed to notice – is that Bush is living in his own fantasy world (albeit based in Christianity rather than Islam). Others, however, have seen Bush’s delusion, as I’ll now illustrate with the following quotation.⁴

The Ideology of American Empire

by Claes G. Ryn

The president of the United States has committed his country to goals that will require world hegemony, not to say supremacy. In numerous speeches and statements since September 2001, President Bush has vowed to wage an exhaustive, final war on terror

⁴ Available on the internet; originally published in *Orbis*, Summer 2003, pp. 383–397; published by Elsevier Science Limited on behalf of Foreign Policy Research Institute.

and to advance the cause of a better world. “Our responsibility to history is clear: to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil...”

In the president’s opinion, the United States represents universal principles. He summarizes them in the word ‘freedom.’ As mankind’s beacon of political right, the United States must, he believes, remove obstacles to freedom around the world. Accomplishing this task is associated in the president’s mind with using American military might. Even before 9/11/01, in June 2001, he informed the Congress that the “Department of Defense has become the most powerful force for freedom the world has ever seen...” Since 9/11, the U.S. government has relentlessly mobilized and deployed that force far and wide, with effects that remain to be seen...

When the 9/11 terrorists struck, the time had long been ripe for systematically implementing an ideology of empire, but in his election campaign George W. Bush had seemed an obstacle to such a course. He advocated a more restrictive use of American power. If he had done so out of genuine conviction, 9/11 brought a profound change of heart. The already available ideology of empire helped remove any inhibitions the president might have had about an activist foreign policy and helped shape his reaction to the attack. It can be debated to what extent his advisors and speechwriters, who were to varying degrees attracted to the ideology, along with numerous media commentators of the same orientation, were able to channel the president’s anger. In any case, President Bush moved to embrace the idea of armed world hegemony. The attack on America could have elicited a much different reaction, such as a surgical and limited response; it became instead the occasion and justification for something grandiose.

In spite of its great influence, the ideology of empire is unfamiliar to most Americans, except in segments that appear disparate but are in fact closely connected. Drawing these connections is essential to assessing the import and ramifications of the evolving Bush Doctrine.

Though heavily slanted in the direction of international affairs, the ideology of American empire constitutes an entire worldview. It includes perspectives on human nature, society, and politics, and it sets forth distinctive conceptions of its central ideas, notably what it calls ‘democracy,’ ‘freedom,’ ‘equality,’ and ‘capitalism.’ It regards America as founded on universal principles and assigns to the United States the role of supervising the remaking of the world. Its adherents have the intense dogmatic commitment of true believers and are highly prone to moralistic rhetoric. They demand, among other things, “moral clarity” in dealing with regimes that stand in the way of America’s universal purpose. They see themselves as champions of ‘virtue’. In some form, this ideology has been present for a long time.

There are similarities between the advocates of the ideology of American empire and the ideologues who inspired and led the French Revolution of 1789. The Jacobins, too, claimed to represent universal principles, which they summed up in the slogan “liberty, equality, and fraternity.” The dominant Jacobins also wanted greater

economic freedom. They thought of themselves as fighting on the side of good against evil and called themselves “the virtuous.” They wanted a world much different from the one they had inherited. The result was protracted war and turbulence in Europe and elsewhere. Those who embody the Jacobin spirit today in America have explicitly global ambitions. It is crucial to understand what they believe, for potentially they have the military might of the United States at their complete disposal.

The philosopher who most influenced the old Jacobins was Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78), who asserted in *The Social Contract* (1762) that “man was born free, but he is everywhere in chains.” The Jacobins set out to liberate man. The notion that America’s military might is the greatest force for freedom in human history recalls Rousseau’s famous statement that those who are not on the side of political right may have to be “forced to be free.”

The new Jacobins have taken full advantage of the nation’s outrage over 9/11 to advance their already fully formed drive for empire. They have helped rekindle America’s long-standing propensity for global involvement. Knowingly or unknowingly, President Bush has become the new Jacobins’ leading spokesman, and he is receiving their very strong support. Reflexes developed by American politicians and commentators during the Cold War have boosted the imperialistic impulse. Many cold warriors, now lacking the old enemy of communism, see in the goal of a better world for mankind another justification for continued extensive use of American power. President Bush’s moralistic interventionism gains additional support and credibility from a number of antecedents in modern American politics. Woodrow Wilson comes immediately to mind. But the current ideology of empire goes well beyond an earlier, more tentative and hesitant pursuit of world hegemony, and it has acquired great power at a new, formative juncture in history.

The most conspicuous and salient feature of the neo-Jacobin approach to international affairs is its universalistic and monopolistic claims. The University of Chicago’s Allan Bloom (1930–92) argued in his best-selling *The Closing of the American Mind* that what he called “the American project” was not just for Americans. “When we Americans speak seriously about politics, we mean that our principles of freedom and equality and the rights based on them are rational and everywhere applicable.” World War II was for Bloom not simply a struggle to defeat a dangerous enemy. It was “really an educational project undertaken to force those who did not accept these principles to do so...” If America is the instrument of universal right, the cause of all humanity, it is only proper that it should be diligent and insistent in imposing its will.

The new Jacobins typically use ‘democracy’ as an umbrella term for the kind of political regime that they would like to see installed all over the world. In their view, only democracy, as they define it, answers to a universal moral imperative and is legitimate. Bringing democracy to countries that do not yet have it ought to be the defining purpose of U.S. foreign policy. One may call this part of neo-Jacobin ideology ‘democratism.’ It has been espoused by many academics, Duke University

political scientist James David Barber prominent among them. “The United States should stand up and lead the world democracy movement,” he wrote in 1990. “We have made democracy work here; now we ought to make it work everywhere we can, with whatever tough and expensive action that takes...”

International adventurism has often served to distract nations from pressing domestic difficulties, but in America today, expansionism is often fueled also by intense moral-ideological passion. Since the principles for which America stands are portrayed as ultimately supranational (for Bloom they are actually opposed to traditional national identity), ‘nationalism’ may not be quite the right term for this new missionary zeal. The new Jacobins believe that as America spearheads the cause of universal principles, it should progressively shed its own historical distinctiveness except insofar as that distinctiveness is directly related to those principles. Though countries confronted by this power are likely to see it as little more than a manifestation of nationalistic ambition and arrogance, it is nationalistic only in a special sense. Like revolutionary France, neo-Jacobin America casts itself as a savior nation. Ideological and national zeal become indistinguishable. “Our nationalism,” write Kristol and Brooks about America’s world mission, “is that of an exceptional nation founded on a universal principle, on what Lincoln called ‘an abstract truth, applicable to all men and all times’...”

The surge of globalist political-ideological aspirations was even more blatantly and pointedly expressed by the Bush Sr. administration in a draft Pentagon planning document that was leaked to the New York Times. It had been produced under the supervision of then Undersecretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz. The draft plan dealt with the United States’ military needs in the post–Cold War era, setting forth the goal of a world in which the United States would be the sole and uncontested superpower. The draft plan assigned to the United States “the pre-eminent responsibility” for dealing with “those wrongs which threaten not only our interests, but those of our allies or friends, or which could seriously unsettle international relations.”

The goal of American world dominance was presented as serving the spread of democracy and open economic systems. American military power was to be so overwhelming that it would not even occur to the United States’ competitors to challenge its will. This vision of the future might have seemed the expression of an inordinate, open-ended desire for power and control, uninhibited by the fact that the world is, after all, rather large. But significantly, many commentators considered the vision entirely plausible. The Wall Street Journal praised the draft plan in a lead editorial favoring “Pax [Peace] America...”

In mid-September 2002, President Bush sent to the U.S. Congress the president’s annual statement on strategy, the National Security Strategy, which gave clear evidence that he was abandoning his earlier calls for a more “humble” U.S. foreign policy. Though the report was framed as a strategy for combating terrorism, the stated objectives supererogated any need to respond to acute external or internal threats. The report defined what amounted to a new and highly ambitious role for

America in the world. Released the day after the president asked the Congress to authorize the use of preemptive military force against Iraq, it provided justifications for American intervention against potential security threats, while also formulating a new and much broader international agenda. The report in effect set forth a doctrine of American armed hegemony. The president justified this ascendancy as serving both America's security needs and its efforts to promote freedom, democracy, and free trade. The Washington Post said that the Strategy gave the United States "a nearly messianic role."

It meant not only acceptance but also extension of the old Wolfowitz draft plan. Indeed, Wolfowitz is now Deputy Secretary of Defense [subsequently, Director of the World Bank] and a highly vocal and assertive proponent of American activism around the world. According to the report, America's strength and influence in the world is "unprecedented" and "unequaled." The United States, "sustained by faith in the principles of liberty and the value of a free society," also has "unparalleled responsibilities, obligations, and opportunities" beyond its borders. The report calls for possessing such overwhelming military power as to discourage any other power from challenging American hegemony or developing weapons of mass destruction. It overturns the old doctrines of deterrence and containment. Committing the United States to a much expanded understanding of security, it argues that the United States must reserve the right to act preemptively and unilaterally against potentially threatening states or organizations.

But the president approved an even wider goal. The Strategy commits the United States to making the world "not just safer but better." In explaining the report, a senior administration official said that besides leading the world in the war against terrorists and "aggressive regimes seeking weapons of mass destruction," the United States should preserve the peace, "extend the benefits of liberty and prosperity through the spread of American values," and promote "good governance." In familiar-sounding words, the report describes America's strategy as a "distinctly American internationalism that reflects the union of our values and our national interests."

A New Kind of War

The foreign policy of George W. Bush's immediate two predecessors, Bush Sr. and Bill Clinton, had a strong Wilsonian tilt. But neither president followed any sustained, consistent strategy. By contrast, the Bush Doctrine as set forth in the National Security Strategy and other places commits the United States to a bold, comprehensive, and elaborate foreign policy. The publicly and formally stated U.S. goal, in sum, is to establish global supremacy. The United States would set itself up as the arbiter of good and evil in the world and, if necessary, enforce its judgments unilaterally.

Reservations expressed in Europe and elsewhere about American unilateralism and global aspirations have been scorned and dismissed by proponents of empire as a failure to recognize the need to combat evil in the world. Kenneth Adelman, a former

* Go to other chapters *via*

<http://zenofzero.net/>

deputy ambassador to the UN and a highly placed advisor on defense to the U.S. government, couched his advocacy of imperial designs in terms of fighting terrorism. “I don’t think Europeans should cooperate with the United States as a favor to the United States. They should be very grateful to the United States and cooperate because we have a common enemy – terrorism. In my mind, it’s a decisive moment in the conflict between civilization and barbarism.”

Since America is at war it is, in a way, not surprising that some of its leaders should be portraying America as being on the side of good and those not eager to follow America’s lead as aiding and abetting evil. Stark rhetoric has been used before to get Americans to support or sustain war, but the war aims spoken of today are derived from a consciously universalistic and imperialistic ideology. Therein lies an important difference, and a great danger.

The belief in American moral superiority knows no party lines. In an article critical of the George W. Bush administration’s way of preparing for war against Iraq, Richard C. Holbrooke, ambassador to the UN under President Clinton, expressed a view ubiquitous in the American foreign policy establishment: “Over the past 60 years, the United States has consistently combined its military superiority with moral and political leadership.” The word ‘consistently’ is telling. The notion that, unlike other nations, America is above moral suspicion, provides the best possible justification for the desire to exercise American power.

It seems to the proponents of the ideology of American empire that, surely, America the virtuous is entitled to dominate the world. Some of them have worked long and hard to make this point of view dominant in American foreign policy. President Bush was merely echoing what others had been saying when he stated: “There is a value system that cannot be compromised, and that is the values we praise. And if the values are good enough for our people, they ought to be good enough for others.”

Many members of the so-called Christian right share the view that America has a special mission, but give this notion a triumphalist religious cast beyond the moralism typical of neo-Jacobin ideology. They believe that the United States, as led by a man of God, has a virtually messianic role to play, especially in the Middle East, where God’s chosen people, Israel, must be supported by the United States against their enemies. Breaking sharply with the mainstream of traditional Christianity, which has made a distinction between the things of God and the things of Caesar, this form of religion identifies a particular political power, America, with God’s will.

[Italics added.] George W. Bush’s rhetoric has sometimes suggested that he is drawn to such thinking. “Evangelical” Christianity of this kind may rest on rather simplistic theological, biblical, and historical assumptions and arguably have virtually no influence over America’s dominant national culture, but it provides considerable political support for neo-Jacobinism, which does have such influence. In its practical effects on United States foreign policy, this religious triumphalism puts a religious gloss on neo-Jacobinism. It does not Christianize U.S. foreign policy, but makes it less humble and more belligerent.

Both in domestic and international affairs the new Jacobins are strongly prejudiced against the traditions of old, historically evolved nations and groups. These only retard the emergence of a new order based on what they consider universal principles. In their view, the distinctive traits of different societies and cultures should yield to the homogeneity of virtuous democracy.

The new Jacobins are trying to clear away obstacles to the triumph of their ideology and of their own will to power. They exhibit a revolutionary mindset that will inexorably lead to disaster. Alongside what President Bush called “history’s unmarked graves of discarded lies” lie the graves of the self-righteous, the people whose moralism concealed, even from themselves, their importunate will to power. As Ronald Reagan preached, the idealistic utopians and the well meaning are responsible for some of the world’s worst evils. Self-righteousness blinds one to one’s own sins.

Even if the opinions examined in this article are assessed in the most generous and charitable spirit, their element of political-ideological imperialism is hard to miss. A philosophically and historically inclined observer is reminded of the terrible and large-scale suffering that has been inflicted on mankind by power-seeking sanctioned or inspired by one or another kind of Jacobin moral and intellectual conceit. Communism, one of the most radical and pernicious manifestations of the Jacobin spirit, has disintegrated, at least as a major political force. But another panacea for the world is taking its place. *The neo-Jacobin vision for how to redeem humanity may be less obviously utopian than that of communism. It may strike some as admirably idealistic, as did communism. But the spirit of the two movements is similar, and utopian thinking is utopian thinking, fairly innocuous perhaps if restricted to isolated dreamers and theoreticians but dangerous to the extent that it inspires action in the real world. The concern voiced here is that neo-Jacobinism has come to permeate American public debate and is finally within reach of controlling the military might of the United States.* [Italics added.]

Prudence, realism, compromise, and self-restraint are indispensable qualities in politics. They have been reflected in traditional American institutions, in great decisions made by American statesmen, and sometimes in American public opinion. They have constituted the first line of defense against all manner of foreign and domestic threats, including surges of passion and eruptions of extremism. Given the atrocities of 9/11 and the need for a firm American response, the prominence of crusaders in the Bush administration is perhaps not surprising. But it is also a sign that needed old American virtues are weakening or disappearing. The continued ascendancy of neo-Jacobinism would have disastrous consequences. By acting under its influence America’s leaders may be setting in motion fateful developments that they and their successors will not be able to control.

As a less theoretical assessment of the “fantasy” worldview found in the Bush Administration, Dear, consider the following quotation from a 17

October 2003 *New York Times* article by Ron Suskind entitled “Without a Doubt”. I encourage you to read this quotation carefully, Dear, because if you don’t, you’ll probably say to yourself something similar to “I must have read that wrong!”

In the summer of 2002, after I [the reporter, Ron Suskind] had written an article in *Esquire* that the White House didn’t like about Bush’s former communications director..., I had a meeting with a senior adviser to Bush. He expressed the White House’s displeasure, and then he told me something that at the time I didn’t fully comprehend – but which I now believe gets to the very heart of the Bush presidency.

The aide said that guys like me were “in what we call the reality-based community,” which he defined as people who “believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.” I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. “That’s not the way the world really works anymore,” he continued. “We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality – judiciously, as you will – we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors... and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.”

I agree with Suskind that this assessment by “a communications adviser to the president” summarizes much about G.W. Bush’s administration.⁵ Cocooning themselves with supernatural delusions and delusions of grandeur, they’ve formed an unreality-based community; they’ve adopted a worldview concocted by savages and ideologues, and now live in a world of make believe. Meanwhile, the potentials for the rest of us, for the “reality-based community” throughout the world, are as scary as were the consequences of the Nazis, Stalinists, and Maoists.

For example, responding to the above-referenced report by Suskind, Chris Floyd wrote the following in the 22 October 2004 issue of the online Russian “newspaper” *The Moscow Times*:⁶

Anyone with any knowledge of 20th-Century history will know that this same megalomaniacal outburst [as reported by Suskind] could have been made by a “senior adviser” to Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini or Mao. Indeed, as scholar Juan Cole points out, the dogma of the Bush Cult is identical with the “reality-creating” declaration of

⁵ As far as I know, this source has not yet been identified. But in an article in the 21 January 2005 issue of *The Wall Street Journal* entitled “Way Too Much God” by Peggy Noonan (a self-described “friend” of President Bush), she defined the source further as “a communications adviser to the president.”

⁶ More easily viewed at <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article7137.htm>.

Mao's *Little Red Book*: "It is possible to accomplish any task whatsoever." For Bush, as for Mao, "discernible reality" has no meaning: political, cultural, economic, scientific truth – even the fundamental processes of nature, even human nature itself – must give way to the faith-statements of ideology, ruthlessly applied by unbending zealots.

Thus: The conquered will welcome their killers. The poor will be happy to slave for the rich. The Earth can sustain any amount of damage without lasting harm. The loss of rights is essential to liberty. War without end is the only way to peace. Cronyism is the path to universal prosperity. Dissent is evil; dissenters are "with the terrorists". But God is with the Leader; whatever he does is righteous, even if in the eyes of unbelievers – the "reality-based community" – his acts are criminal: aggressive war that kills thousands of innocent people, widespread torture, secret assassinations, rampant corruption, electoral subversion.

Indeed, the doctrine "Gott mit Uns" [God is with us] is the linchpin of the Bush Cult. Tens of millions of Americans have now embraced the Cult's fusion of Bush's leadership with Divine Will. As a Bush volunteer in Missouri told Suskind: "I just believe God controls everything, and God uses the president to keep evil down... God gave us this president to be the man to protect the nation at this time." God appointed Bush; thus Bush's acts are godly. It's a circular, self-confirming mind-set that can't be penetrated by reason or facts, can't be shaken by crimes and scandals. That's why Bush's core support... stays rock-solid, despite the manifest failures of his administration. It's based on blind faith, on poisonous fantasy: simple, flattering ("We're uniquely good, God's special nation!"), comforting, complete – so unlike the harsh, bewildering, splintered shards of reality.

This closed mind-set is constantly reinforced by the ubiquitous right-wing media – evoking the threat of demonic enemies on every side, relentlessly manufacturing righteous outrage – and by Bush's appearances (epiphanies?) at his carefully screened rallies, where even the slightest hint of demurral from his Godly greatness is ruthlessly expunged. For example, three schoolteachers were ejected from a Bush rally under threat of arrest last week. Not for protesting – they hadn't said a word – but merely for wearing T-shirts that read, "Protect Our Civil Liberties". Thus the faithful "create the new reality" of undivided loyalty to the Leader'.

The dogma of Bush's godliness is no rhetorical flourish; it has been forged with blood and iron. Consider General Jerry Boykin, who, in uniform, toured churches across the United States, declaring openly that "George W. Bush was not elected by the majority of the American people; he was appointed by God" to lead his "Christian nation" against Satan and the "idol-worshippers" of Islam, as Salon.com reports. Bush then made Boykin the Pentagon's chief of military intelligence – the point man for wringing information out of Islamic captives in the "war on terror". The result – confirmed even by the Pentagon's own anemic investigations – was a military intelligence system gone berserk, systematically torturing and occasionally murdering prisoners who, as the Red Cross notes, were overwhelmingly innocent of any crime.

Bush signed orders removing these prisoners from the protection of U.S. and international law; Boykin's boys then visited divine wrath upon the heathens. But these atrocities cannot be crimes, because Bush and Boykin are, in the general's phraseology, "Kingdom warriors" in the "Army of God".

This isn't politics as usual – not even an extreme version of it, not McCarthyism revisited, Reaganism times two, or Nixon in a Stetson hat. There's never been anything like it in American life before: a messianic cult backed by vast corporate power, a massive cadre of religious zealots, a highly disciplined party, an overwhelming media machine and the mammoth force of history's most powerful government – all led by men who "create new realities" out of lies, blood, theft and torment.

Their 'empire' – their Death-Cult, their power-mania – is an old madness rising again.

Additional Europeans are very worried about the signs of religious fanaticism and fascism in the US – as is illustrated by the following:⁷

A governing party in a country considers itself at war against an ill-defined enemy who threaten its way of life (e.g., Jews, Gypsies, Muslims, Socialists, Islamist Terrorists). The enemy is demonized by writers and pundits, and an atmosphere of public fear and anger is created. Then, officially to protect the public against this enemy, the state abrogates civil liberties, procedures for arrest and detention without trial are introduced, the state creates a secret police which can spy on citizens and foreigners alike. The state allies itself with big business to protect its way of life and promote national security. In return for a weakening of the state controls on business activity, union power, regulation, environmental restrictions, business agrees to work in "the national interest" – after all, it will make a lot of money on war production. Public opinion is manipulated so that dissent from the "national purpose" becomes socially unacceptable.

Those are the conditions which Europeans will recognize as the precursors of fascism. The transition from conservatism to fascism is never very clear cut. One philosophy can shade very easily into the other. It could be said to happen when a "Law and Order" policy shades into an "Order and Law" one.

It couldn't happen in the United States of America ?

Well, Italy, Germany and Spain were all democracies before their dictators came to power. In the UK there were people who thought Mussolini was right – he was bringing order to the chaotic Italians – he was making the trains run on time. It could

⁷ Quoted from <http://www.eurolegal.org/useur/usneocon3.htm>, the homepage of Neocon Foreign Policy; authorship isn't identified.

be said that Bush's selection for the Presidency by the US Supreme Court was the American equivalent of the 1992 Fascist March on Rome.

The Fascist March on Rome.

The European fascist dictators of the early 20th Century could not have achieved power if the ideological preconditions had not first been created by the philosophers, politicians, pundits, and press. In the USA, people like Bobbitt, Cheney,... Rumsfeld, Kristol, Perle, Podherotz and Murdoch are hard at work doing just that. We in the UK have had the special burden of the Blair/Straw/Blunkett Troika allying themselves to the Neoconservatives and committing UK troops to an unlawful war.

The United States of America saved Europe from fascism.

It is Europe's duty to recognize the pernicious doctrines of Neoconservatism for what they are and to warn the USA to guard against the mistakes we ourselves made in the quite recent past. European leaders must now consider the Bush Administration as a fascist regime and guard against a repetition of the policy of appeasement initiated by a minority of European political leaders – Aznar, Berlusconi, Blair at the forefront – against the wishes of the overwhelming majority of European electors. Time alone will tell if Blair's much-vaunted "special relationship" with Bush will turn out to be the 21st Century equivalent of Signor Mussolini's "special relationship" with Herr Hitler.

And, Dear, if you're thinking something close to "it just couldn't be this bad", then how about still another quotation from the online version of the UK's Guardian (at <http://www.guardian.co.uk>):

US Christian fundamentalists are driving Bush's Middle East policy

George Monbiot – Tuesday April 20 2004 – The Guardian

To understand what is happening in the Middle East, you must first understand what is happening in Texas. To understand what is happening there, you should read the resolutions passed at the state's Republican party conventions last month. Take a look, for example, at the decisions made in Harris County, which covers much of Houston.

The delegates began by nodding through a few uncontroversial matters: homosexuality is contrary to the truths ordained by God; "any mechanism to process, license, record, register or monitor the ownership of guns" should be repealed; income tax, inheritance tax, capital gains tax and corporation tax should be abolished; and immigrants should be deterred by electric fences. Thus fortified, they turned to the real issue: the affairs of a small state 7,000 miles away. It was then, according to a participant, that the "screaming and near fist fights" began.

I don't know what the original motion said, but apparently it was "watered down significantly" as a result of the shouting match. The motion they adopted stated that Israel has an undivided claim to Jerusalem and the West Bank, that Arab states should

be “pressured” to absorb refugees from Palestine, and that Israel should do whatever it wishes in seeking to eliminate terrorism. Good to see that the extremists didn’t prevail then.

But why should all this be of such pressing interest to the people of a state which is seldom celebrated for its fascination with foreign affairs? The explanation is slowly becoming familiar to us, but we still have some difficulty in taking it seriously.

In the United States, several million people have succumbed to an extraordinary delusion. In the 19th Century, two immigrant preachers cobbled together a series of unrelated passages from the Bible to create what appears to be a consistent narrative: Jesus will return to Earth when certain preconditions have been met. The first of these was the establishment of a state of Israel. The next involves Israel’s occupation of the rest of its “biblical lands” (most of the Middle East), and the rebuilding of the Third Temple on the site now occupied by the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa mosques. The legions of the antichrist will then be deployed against Israel, and their war will lead to a final showdown in the valley of Armageddon. The Jews will either burn or convert to Christianity, and the Messiah will return to Earth.

What makes the story so appealing to Christian fundamentalists is that before the big battle begins, all “true believers” (i.e., those who believe what they believe) will be lifted out of their clothes and wafted up to heaven during an event called the Rapture. Not only do the worthy get to sit at the right hand of God, but they will be able to watch, from the best seats, their political and religious opponents being devoured by boils, sores, locusts and frogs, during the seven years of Tribulation which follow.

The true believers are now seeking to bring all this about. This means staging confrontations at the old temple site (in 2000, three US Christians were deported for trying to blow up the mosques there), sponsoring Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, demanding ever more US support for Israel, and seeking to provoke a final battle with the Muslim world/Axis of Evil/United Nations/ European Union/France or whoever the legions of the antichrist turn out to be.

The believers are convinced that they will soon be rewarded for their efforts. The antichrist is apparently walking among us, in the guise of Kofi Annan, Javier Solana, Yasser Arafat or, more plausibly, Silvio Berlusconi. The Wal-Mart corporation is also a candidate (in my view a very good one), because it wants to radio-tag its stock, thereby exposing humankind to the Mark of the Beast.

By clicking on www.raptureready.com, you can discover how close you might be to flying out of your pajamas. The infidels among us should take note that the Rapture Index currently stands at 144, just one point below the critical threshold, beyond which the sky will be filled with floating nudists. Beast Government, Wild Weather, and Israel are all trading at the maximum five points (the EU is debating its constitution, there was a freak hurricane in the south Atlantic, Hamas has sworn to avenge the killing of its leaders), but the second coming is currently being delayed by

an unfortunate decline in drug abuse among teenagers and a weak showing by the antichrist (both of which score only two).

We can laugh at these people, but we should not dismiss them. That their beliefs are bonkers does not mean they are marginal. American pollsters believe that 15-18% of US voters belong to churches or movements which subscribe to these teachings. A survey in 1999 suggested that this figure included 33% of Republicans. The best-selling contemporary books in the US are the 12 volumes of the Left Behind series, which provide what is usually described as a “fictionalized” account of the Rapture (this, apparently, distinguishes it from the other one), with plenty of dripping details about what will happen to the rest of us. The people who believe all this don’t believe it just a little; for them it is a matter of life eternal and death.

And among them are some of the most powerful men in America. John Ashcroft, the attorney general, is a true believer, so are several prominent senators and the House majority leader, Tom DeLay. Mr. DeLay (who is also the co-author of the marvelously named DeLay-Doolittle Amendment, postponing campaign finance reforms) traveled to Israel last year to tell the Knesset that “there is no middle ground, no moderate position worth taking”.

So here we have a major political constituency – representing much of the current president’s core vote – in the most powerful nation on Earth, which is actively seeking to provoke a new world war. Its members see the invasion of Iraq as a warm-up act, as *Revelation* (9:14-15) maintains that four angels “which are bound in the great river Euphrates” will be released “to slay the third part of men”. They batter down the doors of the White House as soon as its support for Israel wavers: when Bush asked Ariel Sharon to pull his tanks out of Jenin in 2002, he received 100,000 angry emails from Christian fundamentalists, and never mentioned the matter again.

The electoral calculation, crazy as it appears, works like this. Governments stand or fall on domestic issues. For 85% of the US electorate, the Middle East is a foreign issue, and therefore of secondary interest when they enter the polling booth. For 15% of the electorate, the Middle East is not just a domestic matter, it’s a personal one: if the president fails to start a conflagration there, his core voters don’t get to sit at the right hand of God. Bush, in other words, stands to lose fewer votes by encouraging Israeli aggression than he stands to lose by restraining it. He would be mad to listen to these people. He would also be mad not to.

Mad? Delusional? Worse: both Bush and Bin Laden are exporting their delusions, at extreme peril for the survival of the rest of us.

Actually, though, it’s not just America’s exporting their religious delusions that’s cause for concern; the export of American consumerism and environmental callousness is similarly crazy. I’d even go so far as to state that I expect that globalization, with consumerism (and associated resource

depletion and environmental degradation) plus cultural homogenization (including the spread of democracy), will almost certainly create the most challenging problems that humanity has ever had to face since the melting of the last ice age and the Bubonic plague.

These problems have a huge number of components, for all people and differently for people in countries both rich (or “Western” or “Northern” or “developed”) and poor (or “Eastern” or “Southern” or “underdeveloped”). For all people (as I tried to show you in **X5**), there’s “no way” that natural resources (including species diversity) can tolerate everyone consuming at rates comparable to those currently “enjoyed” by most citizens of “rich countries”: not only are there insufficient natural resources (e.g., oil), but ecosystems will not tolerate such stresses (and will collapse).

For people in rich countries, I expect that their political systems will not survive the discontent when their people find that globalization leads to substantial reductions in their “living standards”, possibly leading to various types of fascist regimes (as may be currently occurring in the US, with a collusion in the Republican Party among the “Religious Right”, the rich, and industrial corporations). For people in poor countries, I expect that although the majority of people will welcome democratization and improved living standards, government and religious leaders will resist the incipient changes in their cultures (and, therefore, in their positions of power within those cultures) and will give more “moral” and financial support to various types of “terrorists”. From such possibilities, I see the potentials for more damages to the environment, more terrorism, and more war. But my “assignment” was not to address all such problems but to focus on impediments to peace and prosperity caused by religions – especially caused by religious “fundamentalists” who apparently are unable to “get real”.

Yet, in spite of the above caveats, surely it’s not hopeless to explore prospects for relatively more peace and prosperity, e.g., fewer wars, less terrorism, reduced poverty and suffering, and more opportunities for all people to realize their potentials. Besides, and especially when such prospects appear dim in the smoke of war and dust of deprivation, it’s advantageous to try to reach some high ground, to try to get a better view. In the present case, some “high ground” can be gained by thinking “long term”. For example, there’s the assessment by the famous 18th Century Scottish economist and philosopher Adam Smith: “Science is the great antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and superstition.”

Thereby, given what scientists have accomplished during the past ~500 years, questions posed include: What are the prospects for more peace and prosperity during the next 10 to 100 generations? What about during the next 1,000 generations? I think that one answer is that, if humanity can make it through the next ~100 years without biological or nuclear warfare (admittedly an “iffy” proposition), then surely there will be amazing peace and prosperity 100,000 years from now! In the next chapter, I’ll offer some suggestions about how humanity may be able to extricate itself from such insanity: in a nutshell, the idea is that there has been a huge error, misidentifying “evil”: the real evil is ignorance, the real need is to “get real”, and the key is education.

In his book *Philosophy for Laymen*, Bertrand Russell summarized it well:

The pursuit of philosophy [the love of knowledge] is founded on the belief that knowledge is good, even if what is known is painful. A man imbued with the philosophic spirit, whether a professional philosopher or not, will wish his beliefs to be as true as he can make them, and will, in equal measure, love to know and hate to be in error. This principle has a wider scope than may be apparent at first sight. Our beliefs spring from a great variety of causes: what we were told in youth by parents and school-teachers, what powerful organizations tell us in order to make us act as they wish, what either embodies or allays our fears, what ministers to our self-esteem, and so on. Any one of these causes may happen to lead us to true beliefs, but is more likely to lead us in the opposite direction. Intellectual sobriety, therefore, will lead us to scrutinize our beliefs closely, with a view to discovering which of them there is any reason to believe true. If we are wise, we shall apply solvent criticism especially to the beliefs that we find it most painful to doubt, and to those most likely to involve us in violent conflict with men who hold opposite but equally groundless beliefs. If this attitude could become common, the gain in diminishing the acerbity of disputes would be incalculable.

In the next several chapters, I’ll explore possibilities of improving prospects for peace and prosperity, “diminishing the acerbity of disputes”, by expanding knowledge, diminishing delusions, through improved education and thereby, imbuing more people “with the philosophical spirit.” Before turning to that, however, why don’t you try to lift your own spirits by getting some more exercise?