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EXTolling Individualism

Dear: If you want to help stop child abuse and promote women's liberation, then I'd recommend that you commit to liberating men. And if your immediate response to that recommendation is something similar to, "Surely you jest! Would that women were as liberated as men!", then I'd ask you to think again – and with more compassion – about the plight of males.

We men come from a long line of hunters and fighters – a line stretching back in the animal kingdom for hundreds of millions of years! When we first came down from the trees, millions of years ago, we fought against beasts and other humans who attacked. Then, for hundreds of thousands of years, we fought nature: we braved the elements, returning to the security of our shelters only to recuperate. And yes, for tens of thousands of years we would cooperate with other men when hunting and fighting, but we also went alone, independent and free, having sex whenever and with whomever we pleased. That's our nature; that's our instinct; that's in our genes

And now, by nurture, we're to suppress our nature and live in the lap of an effeminate society? Eat at tables, with napkins in laps, holding knife and fork just so? Phooey! Grab the damn food with your hands, and if you're so inclined, wipe your face with the stupid tablecloth! With clenched fists, grab on to the knives and forks – for use as weapons! We're to have stupid, "pleasant" conversations with clowns who live nearby? Gimme that knife: let's see how they bleed! And then, we're to accompany women to weep over losses? Grit your teeth and move on. And on and on.

The "girly men" are to avoid wars and submerge their sexual instincts. They're to be placated with football and pornography. Instead of being adventurers, they're to be voyeurs. They're to exchange their warring and womanizing for city jobs and financial responsibilities. Instead of grimacing in their pain, they're to "show their feelings" and "be sensitive". "Phooey: she wants the damn kids, house, car, and all the rest; she can pay for them;

I'm hauling a load out West, and goin' huntin'. Tell your damn wimp of a priest to go to hell!"

That, my dear, might give you some hint about "natural man", at least insofar as I understand him. An additional hint is available from my following guess: I suspect that although essentially 100% of men want sex, only 10% of men want children; in contrast, I wouldn't be surprised if 50% or more of women want to have babies. And there's more: whereas women are reminded once a month or so that they're sexual beings, most men are reminded multiple times per day that they want sex.

Thereby, by the way, one of the fundamental ways to liberate men is to provide him with sex whenever he desires – which leads to a suggestion for a (rather long) bumper sticker:

LIBERATE MEN
MAKE RELIGION RELEVANT AGAIN:
BRING BACK THE TEMPLE PROSTITUTES!

But of course, women (and "hen-pecked" men) would be opposed to that: for at least the past 5,000 years, women (and their effeminate clerics) saw that the key to controlling men, to "socialize them", to gain power over them, was to control their sexuality. That's how (honorable) female prostitutes, all (dishonorable) clerics, and most wives "make a living"!

Let me show you more about "socialized" men, as described by others. First, though, I should point out (in case you don't come to the same conclusion by yourself): what follows (and what I wrote above) contains some gross generalizations. In particular and in reality, there aren't just two "personality types", commonly identified as "masculine" vs. "feminine" – and there aren't just five or nine or... "personality types". In reality, as I suggested in an earlier chapter and will show you a little more in a **Z**-chapter (dealing with "Zeros & Tensors"), "personality" is at least a fourth-order tensor in an "emotional space" of huge dimensions. For example, for a ten-dimensional emotional space, then to specify personality would require 10^4 numbers – and if a 100-dimensional emotional space, then 100^4 numbers (i.e., 10^8 numbers, i.e., 100 million numbers).

I should also point out that in studies of 'masculinity' and 'femininity', sociologists like to differentiate the roles of "nature vs. nurture" by using the

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words ‘sex’ vs. ‘gender’. Thus, although previously ‘sex’ was used to refer to humans and ‘gender’ to words (especially in languages such as French and German), sociologists now usually use the word ‘sex’ to distinguish biological differences between men and woman and use ‘gender’ to distinguish their cultural differences.

Now, to introduce some assessments by others, I’ll start by saying: if you think that men aren’t constrained culturally nearly so much as women, then, Dear, “you’ve got another think coming”! To get you thinking, you might want to look at the 2006 University of Melbourne Ph.D. thesis by D.S. Lusher, entitled: *Masculinities in Local Contexts: Structural, Individual, and Cultural Interdependencies*.¹ My quick reading of his thesis certainly reinforces my opinion, derived from personal experiences, that men are massively manipulated by cultural forces.

In turn, the essence of such “cultural forces” is power mongering, or what Connell calls “hegemonic masculinity”,² where by ‘hegemony’ is meant “leadership or dominance”. In his thesis, Lusher quotes the following from an article by Kenway and Fitzclarence.³

At this stage of Western history, hegemonic masculinity mobilizes around physical strength, adventurousness, emotional neutrality, certainty, control, assertiveness, self-reliance, individuality, competitiveness, instrumental skills, public knowledge, discipline, reason, objectivity, and rationality. It distances itself from physical weakness, expressive skills, private knowledge, creativity, emotion, dependency, subjectivity, irrationality, co-operation and empathetic, compassionate, nurturant and certain affiliative behaviors. In other words it distances itself from the feminine and considers the feminine less worthy. Violent males draw selectively from this repertoire, exaggerate, distort, and glorify these values, attributes, and behaviors and blend them into potent combinations.

And if you were to suggest that you’re beginning to understand, Dear, then I’d respond that no female could fully appreciate what it’s like to be a male. For example, a male is to be a “self-reliant individual” – provided, of course, that of all possibilities, he’s definitely not to be a “self-reliant individual”!

¹ Available at http://eprints.infodiv.unimelb.edu.au/archive/00002448/01/Dean_Lusher_PhD.pdf.

² As you’ll find if you read Lusher’s thesis, the thrust of his research is to test R.W. Connell’s hypotheses, references for which you can find in his thesis, including Connell’s 2002 book *Gender*.

³ Kenway, J., & Fitzclarence, L. (1997). Masculinity, violence and schooling: challenging “poisonous pedagogies”. *Gender and Education*, 9(1), 117-133.

He's to behave as more powerful males dictate. Further, although females definitely want him to be "ruggedly individualistic", yet around them, he's definitely not to be "ruggedly individualistic" (i.e., he's to be, as they desire: careful, caring, considerate...). Talk about cognitive dissonance!

Such dissonance can lead to major psychological problems – and this dissonance, this craziness, is literally beaten into males. "Try your porridge," suggests the authority, "you'll like it." "No I won't," responds the little boy, who's been encouraged to be 'individualistic' and is beginning to understand what it means. "Eat your porridge!" demands the authority. "No way," retorts the little boy, who has learned that he is to be assertive and to display certainty. Then SWAT – a hand hits me on the back of my head – from which the message is clear: "The key to this game is brute force; might makes right."

And when the little boy starts crying from the swat, of course he's told to "Shut up; stop crying like a little girl; if you're gonna behave like that [confident, self assertive, and individualistic – as a male is "supposed to be"] then you gotta learn to take your punishment like a man." That is, if a boy develops characteristics that males are "supposed to have", then he'll be beaten at home. Further, if he doesn't develop such male characteristics, if instead he displays feminine characteristics, then he'll be bullied at school – by other boys who are similarly, totally confused: trying to be confident, self assertive, and individualistic, provided that they're not confident, self assertive, and individualistic when interacting with those who are more powerful.

That is, every which way they turn, boys are taught that there's a monstrous power game going on – and the winner is the one who's most powerful. So, "socialization" of boys means succumbing to the brute force of more powerful people, and "socialization" of men means not only continuing to succumb to economic and other pressures from more powerful (more "masculine") people but also succumbing to the sexual dictates of sexually-frigid women.

Thereby, Dear, maybe you can begin to see why I suggest that to stop child abuse and to promote women's liberation, I'd recommend that you commit to helping liberate men – from the cultural construct called "masculinity". Such masculinity resides at the base of all patriarchy, which, fundamentally,

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is power mongering, obtained and maintained through physical violence – which leads me to suggest another (long!) bumper sticker

STOP CHILD ABUSE
PROMOTE WOMEN'S LIBERATION
REPEAL THE LAW OF THE JUNGLE!

But as bad as it is for boys in Western countries, it's far worse in Muslim countries. In the West, boys who haven't yet had their "brains beaten out of them" or who aren't "brainwashed" by some fundamentalist religion can at least detect signals that individualism is okay – even desirable. In Muslim countries, in contrast, the only individualists are the dictators and, of course, the apostates – until they're murdered.

Thus, when I was a kid, I could detect signals that individualism was not only "okay" but even desirable – of course, not on the playground, not in school, and certainly not at Church, but, for example, every week, when I listened on the radio to the Lone Ranger and Superman: superheroes doing what they, alone, considered "right". Further, the more I learned in school, the more I picked up similar messages. For example, I memorized and took to heart the poem *Invictus* (Latin for 'unconquerable') by William Earnest Henley (1849 – 1903), who suffered terribly ever since he was 12, when he contracted tuberculosis of the bone.

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud,
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find me, unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

And, too, there was the wonderful poem entitled *IF* by Rudyard Kipling (1865 – 1936), extolling individualism.

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream – and not make dreams your master;
If you can think – and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two imposters just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings – nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run –
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And – which is more – you'll be a Man, my son!

Those, and many more such inspiring messages (not only in radio, movies, TV-series and books such as Thoreau's *Walden's Pond* and Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, etc., but also in sports and other activities), tell the Western boy that, though cooperation is "honorable", so is individualism. Thus, in my senior year at high school, I was awarded the basketball trophy for "team

spirit” (cooperation) while my best friend won the trophy for “best player” (individualism).

And, Dear, it’s really quite important to distinguish cooperation (“team spirit”) from collectivism. As “ollysk2” wrote in his blog “Resist the Herd”.⁴

Too often, in reading various political, religious, social articles, I see a conflation of the terms ‘cooperative’ and ‘collective’ to mean the same thing. I think that it’s important to see the differences, because they are key to understanding the underlying motivations of why groups of people work together towards common goals.

You will often see me personally decrying collectives as immoral, and anti-human entities. There is a reason for this: I’m an individualist, and as such I hold that nothing is greater than the individual in moral value. In a collectivist view, people are but parts of a unifying ‘whole’, and more importantly, collectivist worldviews hold that the collective itself is of more importance than the whole...

Collectivism, essentially, is not a voluntary operation (though it can start that way...). The primary problem exists in two things:

1. The collective is self-sustaining, not sustained through the actions of individual members. The collective works to sustain itself through laws, bylaws, social stigmas, coercion, and often outright force. An example of this is taxation. In a cooperative environment, any money given to a group is done so voluntarily, with whatever primary motivation the giver has; never coerced. But in collectivist position, taxation becomes enforced. This is as true in governmental collectives as it is in religious organizations (the primary difference being that governmental collectives use the threat of force, i.e., the police, to uphold laws; religious organizations use the threat of divine force, i.e., the judgment of a deity).
2. The collectives’ goals are essentially non-negotiable. Think of the case of the government. The government sets up rules/laws to control society. While we can resist these rules, there are only two possible ways to do so. The first is to simply refuse to follow them. Civil disobedience, in the vein of Thoreau, is the usual method of doing so. The problem is, these rules can’t be resisted without consequence (either forced civil compensatory damages or criminal charges). The second way to resist is to go through the authoritative structure of the state itself, i.e., its voting apparatus or its court system. Any collective worth its salt will do everything it can to put the most... roadblocks possible in the way of resisting its will. In a Democratic society, the bureaucracy becomes the deterrent; in more authoritarian regimes, the deterrent is the use of force.

⁴ At <http://resisttheherd.wordpress.com/tag/individualism/>.

The idea of a Cooperative, in contrast, is much more compatible with individual rights. A cooperative effort is, in essence, a group of voluntary individuals working towards a common goal. The key here is voluntary. So in a cooperative society, coercion doesn't exist (as soon as coercion becomes a factor, then cooperative society has moved to a collective society).

One can easily develop a bumper sticker to summarize such ideas, e.g.,

COOPERATION – YES! COLLECTIVISM – NO!

To appreciate more, consider the following quotations.⁵

On the Difference between Individualism and Collectivism:

“A social system is a code of laws which men observe in order to live together. Such a code must have a basic principle, a starting point, or it cannot be devised. The starting point is the question: Is the power of society limited or unlimited? Individualism answers: ‘The power of society is limited by the inalienable, individual rights of man. Society may make only such laws as do not violate these rights.’ Collectivism answers: ‘The power of society is unlimited. Society may make any laws it wishes, and force them upon anyone in any manner it wishes’.”
[Ayn Rand]

“In principle, **there are only two fundamental political viewpoints.** That is, two contradictory ends of the ‘political spectrum.’ Those two principles are freedom and slavery.” [Mark Da Cunha]

“Democracy must be something more than two wolves and a sheep voting on what to have for dinner.” [James Bovard]

On Individualism:

“Over himself, over his own mind and body, the individual is sovereign... Whatever crushes individuality is despotism, whether it professes to be enforcing the will of God or the injunctions of men.” [John Stuart Mill]

“This right to life, this right to liberty, and this right to pursue one’s happiness is unabashedly individualistic, without in the slightest denying at the same time our thoroughly social nature. It’s only that our social relations, while vital to us all, must be *chosen – that* is what makes the crucial difference.” [Tibor R. Machan]

On Collectivism:

“... collectivist ethical principle: man is not an end to himself, but is only a tool to serve the ends of others. Whether those ‘others’ are a dictator’s gang, the nation, society, the race, (the) god(s), the majority, the community, the tribe, etc., is

⁵ Most of these quotations are from <http://FreedomKeys.com/collectivism.htm>.

irrelevant – the point is that man in principle must be sacrificed to others.” [Mark Da Cunha]

“...we understand only the individual’s capacity to make sacrifices for the community, for his fellow men.” [Adolf Hitler]

“To be a socialist is to submit the *I* to the *thou*; socialism is sacrificing the individual to the whole.” [Joseph Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda, National Socialist German Workers’ (“Nazi”) Party]

“Comrades! We must abolish the cult of the individual decisively, once and for all.” [Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev, addressing the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party]

But the above quotations exhorting collectivism are for cases (such as with Nazism and Communism – and to some extent any socialism) in which a society moves backward, from individualism to some sort of collectivism. Meanwhile, the following article not only recognizes that in the Islamic world, individualism has yet to emerge, but suggests why.⁶

The Origins of Modernity

by Ken Lydell

September 05, 2006 in *Daily News and Analysis*

The Christian world in 600 A.D. [CE] resembled in significant measure much of the Muslim world today. Arranged consanguine marriages [i.e., marriages of “people descended from the same ancestor”, from Latin *con* meaning ‘together’ and *sanguis* meaning ‘blood’] were the norm and most Christians in Europe retained a tribal identity. Society was then, as in the Muslim world now, collectivist. Family, clan, tribal, ethnic, community, and religious identities (and the obligations derived from them) were every bit as oppressive as those that currently prevail in Arab, Afghan, and Pakistani domains. The individual, as such, did not exist. There was no personal freedom in any meaningful sense of the word. Every person was expected to subordinate himself or herself to the common interests of a hierarchy of kinship groups – and civil and religious authorities with stiff punishments delivered to those who transgressed. Both Catholic and Orthodox religious authorities cruelly persecuted those who deviated from the official, state-sanctioned form of Christianity and saw no evil in spreading the faith through coercion. Sound familiar?

Three key events reshaped the Christian world and laid the foundation for modern secular societies. The first of those was the rejection of marriage between first or second cousins by the Orthodox clergy in 623 CE and incrementally by the Catholic church until the practice was universally forbidden by 1100. The Catholic church

⁶ Copied from http://kenlydell.typepad.com/islamic_evil/.

dallied because mass conversions to the faith ordered by rulers entailed legitimizing previous consanguine marriages that were forbidden in other Catholic realms. As there is absolutely no scriptural basis for banning consanguine marriages, what motivated the Orthodox and Catholic clergy to do so? Christian religious leaders correctly surmised that familism and its clan and tribal manifestations served to undermine both civil and religious authority.

Centuries of exogamy [viz., “the custom of marrying outside a community, clan, or tribe” – in contrast to ‘endogamy’] created for different families common interests in the welfare of their newly married children. People who would have once been fierce competitors under the old system of marriage found good reason to cooperate in the new system. Interfamilial marriages bind people together while consanguine marriages drive them apart. This change in social structure over time utterly destroyed the European institutions of clan and tribe, although the Scots, late to the party, retain superficial clan identities. If your ancestry is European, rest assured that at one time your ancestors organized themselves into clans and tribes, and marriage between cousins in your family was the normal state of affairs.

This profound change in marriage customs laid the foundation for the modern nation-state based on ethnic identity. By releasing people from the binding obligations of family, clan, and tribe it also created “wobble room” for the emergence of the West’s greatest innovation, the Italian Renaissance. When we think of the Renaissance we too often regard Humanism, interest in classical antiquity, pictorial art, literature and scientific progress as its hallmarks. *They were instead the products of something very new. This was an assertive and expansive individualism that made the cultural products of the Renaissance possible.* [Italics added] This second, major transformation of European culture laid the foundation for the next. That was the Protestant Reformation.

The advent of individualism necessarily led to challenges to both civil and religious authority, which had in the past combined to serve the interests of both of those parties. The state supported the authority of the official religion and the official religion in turn supported the state that empowered it. Sound familiar? Welcome to Europe’s most devastating war in terms of the percentage of civilian casualties suffered. That is the 30 Years War. The cruelty involved was just as bad as Muslim depredations during times of jihad. In the end, the war was a stalemate concluded with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Wars between Christians would never again be fought in the name of the “True Faith”. This weakened the power of the state in matters of religion and religion in mobilizing state power on its behalf. And so the modern Western secular state was born in the aftermath of incredible, barbarous, Christian religious violence.

There are, of course, other Western political and cultural innovations that in time fostered the further development of individualism and the freedom it demands. Delicious though they may be they are frosting on the cake. The development of a shameless desire for individual liberty entailed circumscribing the power of family,

clan, tribal, civil, and religious authorities. Authoritarian regimes based on inherited privilege would in the Western world be brought low in time. Political disputes in the West are now largely confined to matters of economic collectivism versus individualism seasoned by miscellaneous single-issue grievances.

I have in general described three major events that re-shaped the Western world: the destruction of tribalism and the resultant advent of individualism that in the end triumphed over the combined power of church and traditional state. This interpretation of history is uniquely my own. Bearing that in mind what can we make of events in the Muslim world?

As long as Muslims are more loyal to family, clan, tribe, and faith than they are to any other cause, modernity is beyond their grasp. *Individualism is at the very heart of modernity and is its driving force.* [Italics added] There is no practical way that Muslims can free themselves from the cultural shackles long abandoned by the Western world until they do what the West has done. I will not live long enough to see that day, and it is likely that your children will fail to do so as well.

In the Islamic world – and in all backward societies in which some sort of collectivism prevails (patriarchy, tribalism, Nazism, communism, religious fundamentalism) – boys don't hear messages promoting individualism; instead, the predominant message is to support “the collective”, in Islam called “the Umma” [also spelled “Ummah” and “Ummeh”]. The result is the “totalitarianism” described well in the following⁷ by Ibn Warraq.⁸

Islam: A Totalitarian Ideology

By Ibn Warraq

Islam is a totalitarian ideology that aims to control the religious, social, and political life of mankind in all its aspects – the life of its followers without qualification, and the life of those who follow the so-called tolerated religions, to a degree that prevents their activities from getting in the way of Islam in any manner. And I mean Islam. I do not accept some spurious distinction between Islam and “Islamic fundamentalism” or “Islamic terrorism.” The terrorists who planted bombs in Madrid on March 11, 2004, and those responsible for the death of approximately 3,000 people on September 11, 2001 in New York, and the Ayatollahs of Iran, were and are all acting canonically [i.e., according to their law]. Their actions reflect the teachings of Islam,

⁷ Copied from <http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/ReadArticle.asp?ID=15393>; published in the 18 October 2004 issue of FrontPageMagazine.com.

⁸ At <http://www.petitionspot.com/petitions/manifesto> the following information about Ibn Warraq (a pseudonym) is available: “author, notably of *Why I am Not a Muslim*, *Leaving Islam: Apostates Speak Out*, and *The Origins of the Koran*, is at present Research Fellow at a New York Institute conducting philological and historical research into the Origins of Islam and its Holy Book.

whether found in the Koran, in the acts and teachings of the Prophet Mohammed, or in Islamic Law that is based upon them.

Islamic Law, the Sharia, is the total collection of theoretical laws that apply in an ideal Muslim community that has surrendered to the will of God. According to Muslims, it is based on divine authority that must be accepted without criticism, doubts, and questions. As an all-embracing system of duties to God, Sharia controls the entire life of the believer and the Islamic community. *An individual living under Islamic Law is not free to think for himself.* [Italics added]

Given the totalitarian nature of Islamic law, Islam does not value the individual, who has to be sacrificed for the sake of the Islamic community. Collectivism has a special sanctity under Islam. Under these conditions, minorities are not tolerated in Islam. Freedom of opinion and the freedom to change one's religion, the act of apostasy, are punishable by death. Under Muslim law, the male apostate must be put to death, as long as he is an adult, and in full possession of his faculties. If a pubescent boy apostatizes, he is imprisoned until he comes of age, when if he persists in rejecting Islam, he must be put to death.

Elsewhere, in a long article⁹ in the *New English Review*, the same author shows that Islam displays “standard characteristics” of any fascism. Illustrative is the following quotation, emphasizing the suppression of individualism by any fascism.

Islam, Middle East, and Fascism

by Ibn Warraq

In a speech that he gave at Columbia University, Umberto Eco spelled out fourteen features that he considered were typical of Eternal Fascism (which he also calls Ur-Fascism), adding however this explanatory detail: “These features cannot be organized into a system; many of them contradict each other and are also typical of other kinds of despotism or fanaticism. But it is enough that one of them be present to allow fascism to coagulate around it...”

Umberto Eco #13: “Ur-Fascism (Eternal Fascism) is based upon a selective populism, a qualitative populism, one might say. In a democracy, the citizens have individual rights, but the citizens in their entirety have a political impact only from a quantitative point of view – one follows the decisions of the majority. For Ur-Fascism (Eternal Fascism), however, individuals as individuals have no rights, and “the People” is conceived as a quality, a monolithic entity expressing the Common Will. Since no large quantity of human beings can have a common will, the Leader pretends to be their interpreter...”

⁹ Copied from http://www.newenglishreview.org/custpage.cfm?frm=3766&sec_id=3766.

Liberal democracy extends the sphere of individual freedom and attaches all possible value to each man or woman. Individualism is not a recognizable feature of Islam; instead the collective will of the Muslim people is constantly emphasized. There is certainly no notion of individual rights, which developed in the West, especially during the eighteenth century. The constant injunction to obey the Caliph, who is God's Shadow on Earth, is hardly inducive to creating a rights-based individualist philosophy. The hostility to individual rights is manifest in these two excerpts, one from the great Ibn Khaldun, and one from a recent Muslim thinker A.K. Brohi, a former Minister of Law and Religious Affairs in Pakistan who has often written on human rights from an Islamic perspective.

First, Ibn Khaldun: "All religious laws and practices – and everything that the masses are expected to do – requires group feeling. Only with the help of group feeling can a claim be successfully pressed... Group feeling is necessary to the Muslim community. Its existence enables (the community) to fulfill what God expects of it."

Now A.K. Brohi: "Human duties and rights have been vigorously defined and their orderly enforcement is the duty of the whole of organized communities and the task is specifically entrusted to the law enforcement organs of the state. The individual if necessary has to be sacrificed in order that that the life of the organism be saved. Collectivity has a special sanctity attached to it in Islam... [In Islam] there are no 'human rights' or 'freedoms' admissible to man... in essence the believer owes obligation or duties to God, if only because he is called upon to obey the Divine Law, and such human rights as he is made to acknowledge seem to stem from his primary duty to obey God." (Note the chillingly frightening, fascist and totalitarian phrase, "the individual if necessary has to be sacrificed.")

From all of which, Dear, maybe you're beginning to see why I advocate not only the liberation of men (and women) but the liberation of all humans – from the animal principle "might makes right".

When "might makes right", the plight of people can be outlined pictorially using schematics of pyramids. To see what I mean, consider first the "pyramid of power" in a typical family of religious fundamentalists, such as most Mormons, Evangelical Christians, Conservative Catholics, Muslims, etc. If you'll think about such cases for a few minutes, then even if I don't take the time to sketch and label a pyramid, I suspect that you'll quickly form an appropriate picture in your mind: the father at the top of the pyramid, the mother below, and the kids at the bottom. From that "picture", however, it doesn't necessarily follow that the pyramidal (or hierarchical or patriarchal) picture is abusive. It can represent a picture of authority – and as you know, in most (if not all) fundamental religions, the man is considered to be "head" of the family.

I should add that in some cases, the family pyramid has a woman at the top – such as your grandmother! In the case of Islam, too, at least at its start, it may have been that Muhammad considered his wife, Khadijah, to be the head of the family, since she was 15 years his senior, a successful businesswoman, and originally his employer. I wouldn't be surprised if Muhammad's experiences with Khadijah caused his (for the time) “revolutionary” promotion of the status of all women (compared with the backward Christians) – which is a revolution that clerics in many Muslim countries (such as Iran and Saudi Arabia) have managed to reverse.

But the family pyramid is just the first of a host of “pyramids of power” that existed and continue to exist in essentially all societies. In patriarchal tribal societies, at the top of the pyramid is a male tribal (or clan) leader (or chief), below him is some “counsel of elders” (or advisors, usually chosen by the tribal leader – perhaps with advice from existing counsel members), and at the bottom of the tribal pyramid is the (male) heads of each household. In such tribal societies, the tribal leader (Geronimo, Hammurabi, Moses...) would commonly claim that his leadership was sanctioned by “the gods” – but just in case the people were unconvinced by that claim, the tribal leader would create a militia (warriors, “storm troopers”, Gestapo) to enforce his decisions with brute force.

As population expanded and tribes interacted, still another power pyramid was established, sitting atop lower pyramids. In ancient times, this led first to city-states (led by a “bull of a man” such as Gilgamesh), then to “empires” (led by kings and emperors, from Sargon the Great through to Napoleon), and then in the 20th Century to dictators (Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, etc.). The kings and emperors (who almost always had their henchmen clerics promote that they were ruling by “divine right”) and the dictators (who claimed to be serving some “sacred” ideology, including fascism and communism) would ensure that those at the top of all sub-pyramids contained within their empires (rulers of smaller states, city leaders, tribal leaders, heads of families) conformed to their dictates – again through the use of force.

Such “pyramid schemes” continue to be the basis of governance in most Islamic countries. At the top of their pyramids allegedly sits their god (“THE God” i.e., “Al-Lah”, or Allah), claimed to be all knowing, all powerful, and all pretty-much everything else (except, they claim, not all evil) – who (it is claimed) will punish people for eternity if they don't obey.

* Go to other chapters *via*

The rules to be obeyed were supposedly transmitted to “the mad poet” Muhammad, as recorded in the Quran (and subsequent laws books). Meanwhile, those who actually have the reins of power in their hands (the clerical leaders and various hereditary kings, presidents, and army generals) claim that they are simply executing “Allah’s will”. And at the base of this huge pyramid, carrying the entire superstructure on their back, are the heads of each household – who at least get to rule over their wives and children (with authority from Allah, as interpreted by the ruling clerics).

Humanists in the West consider such a pyramid schemes to be not only barbaric but even “unbelievable”. Yet, religious fundamentalists in the West consider the scheme to be correct – save for misidentifications of details about the ruling god and which “holy book” is “holy”.

Thereby, Dear, maybe you’re beginning to see more about what I mean by liberation of men – and can begin to appreciate how astoundingly difficult it will be to accomplish such liberation. Recently, in an article in *The Dissident*, Manfred Weidhorn provided the following description of some of the characteristics and causes of the problem – and did so with much more understanding and skill than I’m able to muster (and, probably, with much more than I’d ever be able to muster).¹⁰

Islamic Democracy: An Exercise in Futility?

BY MANFRED WEIDHORN

The Dissident, No. 3

IN THE DEBATE THAT PRECEDED THE 2003 WAR AGAINST IRAQ, neoconservatives [in or allied with the G.W. Bush administration] spoke of making Iraq a showcase of liberal democracy for the Muslim world. They were confident that once the blessings of our form of government were visible to all, the states neighboring Iraq would rush to embrace liberal democracy as well.

When doves objected that democracy could not take root so easily in the Middle East, some neoconservatives accused them of racism for implying that Muslims, especially Arabs, are different from other people and not mature enough for democracy.

Unfortunately, many Muslims are indeed not ready for democracy, not because they are inferior but, on the contrary, because they are superior – at least in their own eyes.

¹⁰ Copied from http://www.the-dissident.com/Islamic_Democracy.shtml, where the following information about the author is provided: “Manfred Weidhorn is a professor of English at Yeshiva University and the author, most recently, of *The Person of the Millennium* and the forthcoming *An Anatomy of Skepticism*.”

And, judging them by a long-ago standard of our own, in a sense they are superior. Not biologically, genetically, innately superior, but culturally so.

To understand why, one has to look at the historical and philosophical bases of liberal democracy.

Everyone is familiar with the characteristics of American-style “democracy”: the absence of a privileged class of aristocracy and clergy; the potential for people from all social circumstances to run for any office in the land; the participation of all adults in the process of selecting political leaders; the separation of church and state and the consequent freedom to worship, or not worship, as one pleases; the minimal role of government in private life; the settling of disputes by means of debate and voting rather than violence; the rights of minorities; the peaceful rotation of parties in power. In practice, of course, democratic countries have enacted (and continue to enact) laws that violate this theoretical sketch, but by and large liberal democracies hew to the aforementioned rules.

All of these characteristics of liberal democracy can be traced back to two metaphysical causes – egalitarian individualism and skepticism – that are partly rooted in Christianity.

The link between Christianity and democracy raises a red flag to Muslims, and not just on grounds that Christians are “infidels” who instigated the Crusades. Islamic suspicions of Christianity are more deeply justified, because liberal democracy is an offspring of Christian tenets that pose a severe challenge to traditionalist Islam. And it is precisely these traditionalist forms of Islam that dominate the Middle East.

To say that there are two opposed religions, and that democracy springs from one and not the other, is an oversimplification (one need only look at Islamic democracies like Indonesia). Nevertheless the two religions differ qualitatively, in that Christian Europe underwent a series of ordeals that Islam was spared: particularly the Protestant Reformation and the Scientific Revolution. Democracy therefore is best characterized as the offspring of a traumatized and severely modified, perhaps even an effete and emasculated, Christianity, rather than of “Christianity” as such.

CHRISTIAN INDIVIDUALISM

For most people, the main definition of liberal democracy is the one that hits home in their everyday life: our right to say whatever we want to say. Only gradually does it dawn on us that this right also means other people’s right to say things – and even to live in ways – that we believe are wrong.

The mature definition of democracy rests, then, on the assumption that your opinions are as valid as mine; in other words, it rests on egalitarian individualism. And, counterintuitive as it may seem to Westerners, egalitarian individualism is not self-evident or automatic; indeed, it has only a short history, as these things go. What

prompted the rise of egalitarian individualism was Christianity, building on Jewish foundations – but leaving out the third monotheism of the Book, Islam.

Before the rise of Christianity, and in virtually all non-Christian societies since then, the inequality of human beings was, and has remained, a given. A division between aristocrats (or plutocrats) and untouchables (or slaves, serfs, or workers) has been the norm. Slavery continued for over a millennium even in Christendom, of course, but the new faith set in motion forces that would abolish that institution.

Whereas Judaism taught that every Law-abiding Jew was entitled to salvation, Christianity extended this notion, potentially at least, to every human being. Of course, this egalitarianism was reserved for heaven; back here on earth, elitism continued to flourish, albeit in a new guise. The Catholic Church was (and is) hierarchical, and claimed an intermediary role between God and the individual Christian. The Reformation, however, harkened back to the philosophical roots of Christianity in Judaism, removed all intermediaries between equal individuals and their Lord, and thus (contrary to the intentions of Luther) set in motion the egalitarian individualism that we have come to take for granted.

No parallel developments occurred in Islam. On the contrary, an influential injunction of Muhammad demands that the individual “not separate himself from the community” and its laws. In the words of Bernard Lewis, this makes “conformism and obedience basic religious obligations” of Islam, and rules out the “right” of individuals to dissent from those obligations. Other interpretations of Islam have emerged, but these, for better or for worse, do not hold sway over the Middle East.

ORIGINAL SIN

No less important than the Reformation in fostering egalitarian individualism was the Christian doctrine of original sin.

All early societies presumed that the masses are unqualified to rule – even Athenians restricted suffrage to a minority of male inhabitants. This created, for ancient and medieval philosophy, the problem of determining who is fit to rule. Eventually, however, the attempt to sort fit from unfit rulers was rendered irrelevant by the doctrine that every last human being is depraved at heart.

Grant that assumption, and liberal democracy is – or seems to be – a logical conclusion. The belief that liberal democracy springs from optimism about the trustworthiness of the People is, in fact, the opposite of the post-Christian situation. As James Madison observed, if men were angels, government would not be necessary.

The liberal democracy embodied in the U.S. Constitution reflects the reality that men are at best mischievous and at worst malicious. By spreading and dividing power as widely as possible, pitting competing sinners against each other, liberal democracy

may provide a less-than-ideal solution to the problem of original sin. But it remains, as Churchill reminded us, better than all the other solutions.

One can immediately see how hopelessly at odds liberal democracy is with the many Islamic societies in which ayatollahs, monarchs, or dictators tacitly claim exemption from institutional accountability by presuming to speak for, or in some way represent, the will of Allah or the welfare of society; and in which many people willingly grant that exemption, at least to the clerics.

SKEPTICISM

An even more important Christian contribution to liberal democracy was skepticism.

Skepticism? Did not Jesus say, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”?

He did. But 1600 years later, the Reformation succeeded in creating a military standoff between the Protestant rebels and the Catholic Church, plunging Western Europe into an intellectual crisis.

Here were two camps, each claiming to stand for the Christian truth and consigning the other to hell. A sensitive Christian would have had to ask: 1) Which side is right? 2) How can I even begin to determine that? 3) If each side is so sure of itself, and one side is bound to be wrong, why may not both be wrong, since self-assurance obviously cannot be a guideline?

Thus did Europe come down with a bad case of metaphysical jitters, to which a revival of ancient skepticism seemed to be the cure.

Skepticism was further promoted by the Scientific Revolution.

The early modern scientists were devout Christians who thought they were honoring God by uncovering His natural laws. Eventually, however, the theologically friendly aim of science proved incompatible with the content of revealed religion. So, too, did the form of scientific inquiry.

The Scientific Revolution began when the new kind of scientist, notably the pioneering Galileo, discarded reliance on book, tradition, and authority and turned instead to experimentation. One did not need to be an expert on the interpretation of Holy Writ to perform an experiment to discover scientific laws. Not only the findings but the procedures of scientific experiments rendered written “revelations,” and their traditionalistic interpretation, irrelevant to the truth. Religious zealots who appeal to the words of the Bible, as if these words prove anything now, seem to be nothing more than credulous fools.

In traditionalist cultures, moreover, the Truth (whether Judaic, Christian, or Muslim) is not only unchanging, universal, and unconditional – therefore enforced against

questioning – but it also encompasses all realms, visible and invisible. The skeptical scientist, however, can answer his ceaseless questions only through physical experiments. Truth becomes experimental and plastic, but is limited to the physical, experimentally pliable world. The old certitudes of metaphysics and ethics are consigned to the invisible, spiritual, supernatural realm whose “truths” are irresolvable matters of opinion. Science thus introduced an unbridgeable gap between the world of the quantifiable “is” and the purely speculative “ought” – the latter being the realm of theology, ethics, and aesthetics. The invisible truths of those realms lapsed into subjectivity: objective science can only describe, never prescribe. [You might recall, Dear, that I challenged that platitude in earlier chapters (e.g., in the **M**-chapters and in **V**) but here, I’ll let it pass.]

THE TRUE MEANING OF DEMOCRACY

The new intellectual order meant that, in politics, liberal democracy eventually replaced monarchy, aristocracy, and theocracy. The metaphysical basis of liberal democracy is that, in non-scientific matters, no one knows what the truth is, and every individual’s opinion is as valid as everyone else’s, at least pending experimentation. The additional, pragmatic basis for liberal democracy is a pessimism about claims to special knowledge made by original sinners who are not to be trusted.

What used to be unitary, unquestioned, and all encompassing in Biblical Israel, in medieval Europe, and even in Reformation Geneva is now a matter of subjective “taste.” In a world with only small and multiple truths, no single viewpoint can be allowed to prevail. Hence the need to avoid authoritarianism; and hence the need to separate church and state: we no longer have a way of ascertaining which, if any, of the contending claimants to spiritual truth is right.

Liberal democracy can flourish only where there is no overarching, predetermined, divinely ordained truth that is represented by a few self-appointed (or tradition-appointed) leaders. Accompanying the scientific shift from revealed truth to experimental measurement – measurement that can, in principle, be checked by any individual – is a shift from government by authoritative writings and personages to government by measurement, i.e., by counting heads. If science would have each person (potentially) experiment to discover the truth about the physical world, democracy solicits each person’s opinions about the supernatural and ethical realm about which science offers no guidance.

As to Truth, rather than opinion – that is none of democracy’s business.

Democracy does not know which religion is true, or which economic or social policy is best. Since the truth is the product of deliberations that, in different times and places, have different results, [then] what Manhattan, Kansas, finds obscene will not appear so in Manhattan, New York, and there is no way to tell which of the two interpretations is correct. All truth is local, *ad hoc*, and untethered from any deeper or higher reality.

* Go to other chapters *via*

Democracy throws everything into the public forum for groundless and inconsequential “debate” followed by the only thing that counts: the counting of heads. The election results, however, yield only a ramshackle, gimcrack “truth” that enables government by consensus. [The adjective ‘gimcrack’, Dear, means “flimsy or poorly made but deceptively attractive”; as a noun, it means “a cheap and showy ornament.”] If the consensus dissipates, the remedy is not long in coming: a new government, arising from a new headcount. This process comes close to being, or seeming to be, the political form of scientific experimentation.

To be sure, the object of the true scientific experiment is the establishment of something sound about the material world, while the object of an election is to establish what a majority of the voting population thinks is sound. In other words, ignorant supposition, propagandistic commonplace, and widely accepted truism replace verifiable truth. Democracy begins with skepticism about received wisdom, but ends with agreed-upon myths that, while having the appearance of facts, are actually based not on facts (whatever that might mean in a political context) but on fortuitous concatenations of appearances.

Yet these truisms are not seen as such by those who believe them: they are seen as true, but in a special sense akin to fiction. Participating in an election, like reading a novel, requires a willing suspension of disbelief; it is a process of making a truce among contending truisms that are seen by their believers as true – but not so incontestably true as to require enforcement against a recalcitrant majority [minority?], once heads have been counted and the minority’s “truths” have been rejected.

THE “SUPERIORITY” OF ISLAM

Now we can see how the neoconservatives’ confidence about bringing democracy to Islam was wrongheaded.

Much of the Muslim world, now in its fourteenth century chronologically, looks suspiciously like fourteenth-century Christendom. Revealed Truth is still dominant. A Golden Age akin to that of High Medieval Europe was not followed, as in Europe, by a Reformation to enhance egalitarian individualism, or by a Scientific Revolution to ensconce metaphysical skepticism.

Traditionalist Islam is securely in possession of answers to questions about the meaning of life – at the very time that a common lament in the West is precisely that those answers are gone forever. By no coincidence, the Islamic ideal remains imposition of the revealed law, sharia, heedless of any separation of church and state based on a division between opinion and reality. Religion and politics are, as they were for so long in the West, inextricable, and religious authorities exert influence that even Hasidic Jews and fundamentalist Christians do not advocate.

Yet, lacking our egalitarian and skeptical assumptions, all of this is good in the eyes of traditionalist Muslims. The West is a relativistic (and, in the resulting vacuum, a

hedonistic) nightmare in the eyes of those who find themselves in possession of the revealed Truth.

Islam is superior, of course, only if one's place in the cosmic scheme of things, as revealed in the Koran, is true; it is inferior if that presumed truth is merely an illusion. But what egalitarian skeptic can say what is or is not an illusion, when it comes to the ethical and the supernatural?

Compared to the Truth and its Laws, liberal democracy is a poor and contemptible thing. It is also vulnerable, because while a democracy is not so easy to topple as a top-down theocracy, it is easy to undermine democracy through the manipulation of public opinion. Enough bloodletting turns Western opinion squeamish, and enough repetition confirms as truths such dubious truisms as that "Bush lied" or that Democrats would "cut and run." Meanwhile, the establishment of democracy in non-skeptical societies leads to the very opposite of the neoconservative dream: namely, the victory of theocrats, whether in Algeria, Palestine, or, as it seems, Iraq.

Neoconservatives often decry relativism without realizing that democracy institutionalizes it. Hindus are free to abstain from beef, Jews and Muslims from pork, pre-Vatican II Catholics from meat on Fridays, vegetarians from meat every day. That each group formally respects all the others publicly while disagreeing with each other in private is relativism in action. Murder, to be sure, is a universal absolute evil, but only because it violates equal, individual "rights."

Relativism is the ultimate Western "truth," and is the bane of Islam. What looks to us like noble openmindedness about other "belief systems" looks to traditional Muslims, with their confident possession of the Truth, like the spineless, ignorant toleration of evil. What looks to a liberal democrat like the blessed freedom to do what one pleases is, to Muslims, slavery to sin. In turn, what looks to us like Islamic obduracy on behalf of an illusion looks to Muslims like integrity on behalf of revealed truth.

Westerners tend to believe that liberal democracy is the best, nay the only, solution to social ills; Muslims believe that liberalism and democracy create those ills. To traditionalist Muslims, the rule of the majority is sacrilegious: How can the voice of the people be allowed to drown out the voice of God? And as for the liberal component of liberal democracy, how can there be a "right" to do what is wrong? The Western emphasis on personal-liberty licenses alcoholic consumption, usury, and, of course, debauchery: sexual display and perversion, feminine autonomy and anatomy. All of this violates God's law – in the Jewish and Christian view too, until those religions were subverted by individualist skepticism.

We are indeed in the midst of a clash of civilizations, but it is not a clash of Islam and Christianity. It is a clash between tolerance bred of relativism, and patriarchy bred of tradition. Islam can, in fact, justifiably be seen as upholding a venerable cause that Christians and Jews have fecklessly abandoned.

Let me be clear: this discussion has not been about Islamic terrorists and sociopaths; nor have I yet discussed whether the proper response to them is military or diplomatic. Such questions are matters of means, not ends. I am discussing the ends of traditional Islam, which used to be those of Judaism and Christianity: the ends established by God, enunciated by His prophets, and written in His books.

And I am discussing the ends of the post-Reformation, scientific West, which, as embodied in liberal democracy, are empty at best, non-existent at worst. Any end, any conception of the “Good” – any end but the equal freedom of all others to pursue contradictory ends – is treated in the West as a threat to the tolerant order, and rightfully so. Skeptical, egalitarian, individualism has made claims to non-scientific truth (as opposed to mere opinions about non-scientific matters) [that?] seem arrogant and disrespectful of other individuals’ equal right to their own “truths.” This relativistic posture is the product of a highly specific path of Western historical development, and for those who have not been acculturated to it, it is unnatural and incoherent.

The neoconservatives, eager to bring the blessings of the West to Islam, made the highly questionable assumption that liberal democracy reflects natural and universal aspirations. Thus, they believed that people who lack liberal democracy will naturally welcome its establishment by us. But as wonderful as democracy may seem to those who have been taught liberal-democratic pieties, it seems an impious fraud to those who have not been so educated.

Obviously Muslims carry no anti-democracy gene. But the Muslim world is dominated by traditional Islamic culture, which sees democracy as a curse rather than a blessing. And from a non-relativist point of view about the ends of life – which a mere 600 years ago was our own view – the Muslims are right.

The evident inadequacy of military opposition to militant Islam has produced much talk of “public diplomacy,” meaning efforts to display the West’s tolerance of Islam – along with its tolerance of everything else. Such efforts are entirely beside the point, or even harmful, since they emphasize the very relativism that a non-skeptic finds so odious. If we are to defend liberal democracy, it will have to be on some other basis than that it allows for everyone to go to hell in his own handbasket. We will have to show the *goodness* of our way of life, for all its flaws.

Islam, which is undergoing a revival not unlike those in Judaism and Christianity, is better positioned than they are to retain its hold on the imagination of its people because it is still in its uncontaminated, medieval phase. Democracy in the Middle East therefore faces – to borrow a *bon mot* from Defense Secretary Rumsfeld – a long, hard slog.

Dear: I hope you’ll read Weidhorn’s essay again; I found it to be amazingly insightful. The one topic that perhaps he didn’t address adequately is that Islam contains an astounding fatalism, promoting Muslim docility, and used

* Go to other chapters *via*

by rulers to perpetuate their rule. This fatalism is contained in the phrase commonly used by Muslims, “Inshallah”, meaning, “As God wills it.”

But that point aside, from Weidhorn’s assessments of “a long, hard slog” and “I will not live long enough to see that day, and it is likely that your children will fail to do so as well”, I expect that you, too, are discouraged by the prospects for expanding liberation of all humans, eliminating child abuse, and attaining more peace and prosperity. Once again it appears that cultural change needs to be expedited – and again and again, doing that has been found to be extremely difficult.

To try to help solve such humongous problems as those outlined above, to try to convince people who are certain they possess “the truth” that they are deluded, to work toward exchanging collectivism’s coercion and violence with individualism’s rights and responsibilities, plus share in the mutual benefits of cooperation – and all, to try to improve prospects for worldwide peace and prosperity – the following two ideas seem to have sufficient experimental support that they could be called “general principles”.

1) *The best way to try to teach anybody anything is by example.*

Consequently, if more-developed nations seek to help under-developed nations to eliminate child abuse, liberate women, and help men to develop their individual ideas of honor and to recognize everyone as members of one human family, in short, if more-developed nations are to help other nations to adopt humanism, then we would be well-advised to put much greater effort into ensuring that our own houses are in order. Instead, in nations such as the US, child abuse is rampant, not all women are liberated from patriarchs, and patriarchal religions (such as fundamentalist Christian sects and Mormonism) are not only practiced but even promoted by huge groups of damnable, childish, even infantile, proselytizers (e.g., Mormon missionaries), not only within the country but abroad.

2) *In the long run, it’s better by far if people solve their own problems.*

Certainly more-developed nations can try to help, but similar to wise parents, probably the best way to help is to standby with an ample supply of bandaids.

For example, in Iraq, two Muslim factions (the Sunnis and Shias) are currently at each other’s throats (literally), similar to Christian factions in

Europe during the 30-years war; each side is “certain” that it’s in possession of “the truth”. To try to help, rather than the US inserting itself between the warring factions, better by far would be, for example, to drop leaflets asking people on each side to skeptically consider the claims of both sides and, in any manner possible, try to spread the understanding that “truth” can never be attained, only approached asymptotically using the scientific method.

Another example of how to help people solve their own problems can be seen in the Arab Development Reports published by the United Nations Development Programme.¹¹ From those reports, surely you’ll also conclude that there’s a large group of intelligent and competent Muslims who are fully aware of the many problems in their societies and who have developed sound policies (which their societies are capable of undertaking) to try to solve some of those problems. We could help by supporting such Muslims.

And as still another example of how to help Muslims (in the long run), some brave people from Muslim countries have not only rejected Islam (some, openly, while others, fearing for their lives, have adopted pseudonyms) but also warn the West about not attempting to appease militant Muslims. An excellent illustration is the following “manifesto”,¹² created and signed by the indicated twelve people, most of whom are “ex-Muslims”.

MANIFESTO: Together facing the new totalitarianism

After having overcome fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism, the world now faces a new totalitarian global threat: Islamism.

We, writers, journalists, intellectuals, call for resistance to religious totalitarianism and for the promotion of freedom, equal opportunity, and secular values for all.

The recent events, which occurred after the publication of drawings of Muhammed in European newspapers, have revealed the necessity of the struggle for these universal values. This struggle will not be won by arms, but in the ideological field. It is not a clash of civilizations nor an antagonism of West and East that we are witnessing, but a global struggle that confronts democrats and theocrats.

¹¹ Available at <http://www.undp.org/>. And let me add, Dear, not only my encouragement for you to learn more about the UNDP (and the UN!) but also my disgust of the meager support for the UNDP (and the UN) given by the oil-rich nations of Saudi Arabia and Iran.

¹² Copied from <http://www.petitionspot.com/petitions/manifesto>, with the webpage apparently created by Mark Jefferson.

Like all totalitarianisms, Islamism is nurtured by fears and frustrations. The hate preachers bet on these feelings in order to form battalions destined to impose a liberticidal and unegalitarian world. But we clearly and firmly state: nothing, not even despair, justifies the choice of obscurantism, totalitarianism, and hatred. Islamism is a reactionary ideology which kills equality, freedom, and secularism wherever it is present. Its success can only lead to a world of domination: man's domination of woman, the Islamists' domination of all the others. To counter this, we must assure universal rights to oppressed or discriminated people.

We reject « cultural relativism », which consists in accepting that men and women of Muslim culture should be deprived of the right to equality, freedom, and secular values in the name of respect for cultures and traditions. We refuse to renounce our critical spirit out of fear of being accused of “Islamophobia”, an unfortunate concept which confuses criticism of Islam as a religion with stigmatization of its believers.

We plead for the universality of freedom of expression, so that a critical spirit may be exercised on all continents, against all abuses and all dogmas.

We appeal to democrats and free spirits of all countries that our century should be one of Enlightenment, not of obscurantism.

12 signatures:¹³ Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Chahla Chafiq, Caroline Fourest, Bernard-Henri Lévy, Irshad Manji, Mehdi Mozaffari, Maryam Namazie, Taslima Nasreen, Salman Rushdie, Antoine Sfeir, Philippe Val, Ibn Warraq

¹³ At the referenced website, the following information is given about the 12 people who signed this “Manifesto”:

Ayaan Hirsi Ali, of Somalian origin, is member of Dutch parliament, member of the liberal party VVD. Writer of the film *Submission*, which caused the assassination of Theo Van Gogh by an Islamist in November 2004, she lives under police protection.

Chahla Chafiq, writer from Iranian origin, exiled in France is a novelist and an essayist. She's the author of *Le nouvel homme islamiste, la prison politique en Iran* (2002). She also wrote novels such as *Chemins et brouillard* (2005).

Caroline Fourest is essayist, editor in chief of *Prochoix* (a review that defends liberties against dogmatic and integrist ideologies), and author of several reference books on « laïcité » and fanaticism: *Tirs Croisés: la laïcité à l'épreuve des intégrismes juif, chrétien et musulman* (with Fiammetta Venner), *Frère Tariq: discours, stratégie et méthode de Tariq Ramadan*, and *la Tentation obscurantiste* (Grasset, 2005). She received the National prize of laïcité in 2005.

Bernard-Henri Lévy, French philosopher, born in Algeria, engaged against all the XXth century « isms » (Fascism, antisemitism, totalitarianism, terrorism); he is the author of *La Barbarie à visage humain*, *L'Idéologie française*, *La Pureté dangereuse*, and more recently *American Vertigo*.

Irshad Manji is a Fellow at Yale University and the internationally best-selling author of *The Trouble with Islam Today: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith* (en français: “*Musulmane Mais Libre*”). She speaks out for free expression based on the Koran itself. Née en Ouganda, elle a fui ce pays avec sa famille musulmane d'origine indienne à l'âge de quatre ans et vit maintenant au Canada, où ses émissions et ses livres connaissent un énorme succès.

Illustrative of the dangers the signatories braved by signing the above “Manifesto” is given in the following report by Diana West in Townhall.com.¹⁴

Twelve voices defend freedom as Big Media cowers

By Diana West

Monday, March 20, 2006

Last month, 12 mainly European-based, mainly Muslim or ex-Muslim intellectuals, alarmed by the spell on free speech cast by Cartoon Rage 2006, signed onto an anti-totalitarian manifesto for freedom of expression published by Denmark’s Jylland-Posten... But beyond the blogosphere, coverage of the manifesto – not the last word on the subject, but certainly a start – has been sparse, just as though freedom of

Mehdi Mozaffari, professor of Iranian origin and exiled in Denmark, is the author of several articles and books on Islam and Islamism such as: *Authority in Islam: From Muhammad to Khomeini*, *Fatwa: Violence and Discourtesy*, and *Globalization and Civilizations*.

Maryam Namazie: writer, TV International English producer; Director of the Worker-communist Party of Iran’s International Relations; and 2005 winner of the National Secular Society’s Secularist of the Year award.

Taslina Nasreen was born in Bangladesh. A medical doctor, her positions defending women and minorities brought her in trouble with a committee of integrist called « Destroy Taslima » and to be persecuted as an « apostate ».

Salman Rushdie is the author of nine novels, including *Midnight’s Children*, *The Satanic Verses* and, most recently, *Shalimar the Clown*. He has received many literary awards, including the Booker Prize, the Whitbread Prize for Best Novel, Germany’s Author of the Year Award, the European Union’s Aristeion Prize, the Budapest Grand Prize for Literature, the Premio Mantova, and the Austrian State Prize for European Literature. He is a Commandeur of the Ordre des Arts et Lettres, an Honorary Professor in the Humanities at M.I.T., and the president of PEN American Center. His books have been translated into over 40 languages.

Antoine Sfeir was born in Lebanon, Christian; he chose French nationality to live in an universalist and « laïc » (real secular) country. He is the director of *Les cahiers de l’Orient* and has published several reference books on Islamism such as *Les réseaux d’Allah* (2001) and *Liberté, égalité, Islam : la République face au communautarisme* (2005).

Philippe Val is director of publication of Charlie Hebdo (Leftwing French newspaper [that] republished the cartoons on the prophet Muhammad by solidarity with the Danish citizens targeted by Islamists).

Ibn Warraq, author notably of *Why I am Not a Muslim*, *Leaving Islam: Apostates Speak Out*, and *The Origins of the Koran*, is at present Research Fellow at a New York Institute conducting philological and historical research into the Origins of Islam and its Holy Book.

¹⁴ Copied from

[http://www.townhall.com/Columnists/DianaWest/2006/03/20/twelve_voices_defend_freedom_as_big_med ia_cowers?page=full&trackbacks=true](http://www.townhall.com/Columnists/DianaWest/2006/03/20/twelve_voices_defend_freedom_as_big_media_cowers?page=full&trackbacks=true).

speech weren't in peril. And just as though the signatories, for affirming freedom of speech, weren't either.

But they are. A crude death threat has been posted at the British Muslim Web site, ummah.com – the kind of Web site where, as Time magazine reported after the London underground bombings last year, a poem said to have been posted by Abu Mousab al-Zarqawi glorified terror-bombings in Iraq, and another user wrote that “killing Americans is not murder, it is retaliation.”

This time, under a thread entitled “Writers Slam Islamic ‘Totalitarianism’,” the names of the Free Expression 12 appeared and someone wrote:

“Now we have drawn out a hit list of a ‘Who’s Who’ guide to slam into. Take your time but make sure their (sic) gone soon – oh, and don’t hold out for a fatwa it isn’t really required here... Has anyone got that Christian kaffir ‘Ibn Warraq’s’ real name yet?”

Scrolling through such illiterate spewings is a little like reading an interactive bathroom wall; but since the Internet has linked and even activated jihadi terrorists, it’s not something to ignore. The poster continued:

“Well them [sic]disbelievers [the signatories] have in effect signed a death wish via this statement so to hell with them, we’ll just provide the help that they so dearly crave.”

I asked Ibn Warraq, author of the superb *Why I Am Not a Muslim* (Prometheus, 2003) written after the Rushdie affair, about the threat. “We must take it seriously in one sense, but we mustn’t let it stop us in our tracks,” he said. He’s right, of course; although most of the “world” – writers, journalists, intellectuals – have already been stopped in their tracks, intimidated, paralyzed, almost dysfunctionally so. How to jump-start them again?

As far as I can tell, the manifesto has inspired just one outlet, an Irish Web site called *The Blanket*, to publish the Danish cartoons “in protest against totalitarianism,” editor Anthony McIntyre said last week. This makes *The Blanket*, which will also be profiling the manifesto signers, the sole journal in the British Isles, online or on paper, to do so. “We wanted to show solidarity with those writers who were prepared to stick their necks out in defense of free speech,” McIntyre said.

So here we are, living in a world where a manifesto for free speech constitutes “(sticking) their necks out,” draws death threats on the one hand, and silence on the other. Why did they sign it, then? Ibn Warraq offered the words of John Stuart Mill: “*A man who has nothing for which he is willing to fight; nothing he cares about more than his own personal safety is a miserable creature who has no chance of being free, unless made and kept so by exertions of better men than himself.*” [Italics added.]

But the question, of course, is how to “fight”. Animals fight and establish “right” by might. In contrast, notice that the 12 who signed the above “Manifesto” chose to “fight” with words – and thereby, exposed themselves to violence from extremist “animals”. Which then leads to a more general question, How to extinguish violence? – a question that I’ll begin to address in the next chapter, after you address the question: How should I get some more exercise?!