

The American Blunders

Neil Girard

Allan Bloom, a professor of political philosophy for over 30 years in universities like Cornell and Chicago, wrote:

“The discovery of the soul’s basement, exploration into it, and attraction to its dark contents have long been Continental [European] specialties... Continental ‘depth’ was thought by intellectuals to be opposed to American ‘superficiality.’ American souls were, so to speak, constructed without a basement, more reconciled to this world and not addicted to looking beyond it, nor haunted by a sense of the groundlessness of their experience...”

Once Americans had become convinced that there is indeed a basement to which psychiatrists have the key, their orientation became that of the *self*, the mysterious free, unlimited center of our being... American nihilism [unlike Existentialists’ Nothing or the Hegelians’ Negation] is [merely] a mood, a mood of moodiness, a vague disquiet. It is nihilism without the abyss.

Nihilism as a state of soul is revealed not so much in the lack of firm beliefs but in a chosing of the instincts or passions... The soul becomes a stage for a repertory company that changes plays regularly – sometimes a tragedy, sometimes a comedy; one day love, another day politics, and finally religion; now cosmopolitanism, and again rooted loyalty; the city or the country; individualism or community; sentimentality or brutality. And there is neither principle nor will to impose a rank order on all of these. [There is only the *self*. Thus Americans] are egotists, not in a vicious way, not in the way of those who know the good, just or noble, and selfishly reject them, but because the ego is all there is in present theory, in what they are taught.” (*The Closing of the American Mind*, 1987, pp. 155-157 – emphasis in original)

One is reminded of the group of blind men who individually collided with an elephant. One concluded it was a wall, another a tree trunk, another a rope, another a fan, another a large snake. Not until someone grasped the entirety of the animal and helped each one to “connect the dots” did they grasp the simple fact that before them stood an elephant.

Long before there were American *or* Continental thinkers, Jesus said, “What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.” (Mk. 7:20-23) About six hundred years before that, the Lord said to Jeremiah, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9)

Just as the Europeans “discovered” the new continent of America and destroyed flourishing civilizations long established there, so too the philosophers have “discovered” the soul’s “basement” and congratulated themselves on having made a profound discovery. But they have no respect for those who were there long before them. God, who is said in the Bible to be a God of order and not chaos or confusion (1 Cor. 14:33), indeed brings order and peace to the soul. That men in their futile attempts to reason out all aspects of life have only discovered

their way to a dark abyss with no way to bring order and peace to their own souls and spirits only confirms that “professing to be wise they have become as fools” (Rom. 1:22), fools who said in their heart “There is no God” (Psa. 14:1) because about 100 years ago, a philosopher named Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), proclaimed that “God is dead.” Since that time, God still speaks to those with listening ears and says in effect, “The rumors of My demise are greatly exaggerated!”

Interestingly enough, Nietzsche’s proclamation is greatly misunderstood and misapplied. Bloom writes:

“‘God is dead,’ Nietzsche proclaimed. But he did not say this on a note of triumph, in the style of earlier atheism – the tyrant has been overthrown and man is now free. Rather he said it in the anguished tones of the most powerful and delicate piety deprived of its proper object. Man, who loved and needed God, has lost his Father and Savior without possibility of resurrection... Nietzsche replaces easy or self-satisfied atheism with agonized atheism, suffering its human consequences... Prior to Nietzsche, all those who taught that man is a historical being presented his history as in one way or another progressive. After Nietzsche, a characteristic formula for describing history is ‘the decline of the West.’” (Bloom, p. 195-196)

What is truly sad in all this is that Nietzsche’s “profound insights” are only the quite predictable outcomes of a shattered and abandoned faith. His deep insight into things probably enabled him to see the varied disbeliefs and even apostasy that was rampant in the various “Christian” orders and sects, especially among the clergy, with whom he came into contact. Whatever his personal reasons, he reached a stage where he rejected Christianity – and God. For whatever reasons, he decided that he could not believe in a Christ or God, who could create such a religious state of affairs as “Christianity” and sadly Nietzsche was unable to reach the truth that God did not create it but that rather men and Satan have done for more in creating it than God has. As a result, his intellect was consumed with the impossible task of finding another way to the peace, order and life that only the Spirit of God brings. In the last part of his life, Nietzsche spent a year in an insane asylum and then died as an invalid some years later attended first by his mother and then his sister. The popularity of Nietzsche’s philosophies only deepens the tragedy behind his ruined faith. “The decline of the West” is the natural consequence of collectively and culturally turning our backs on God, the Creator Spirit of Life, Truth, Love and Goodness (who did *not* die), whose ways incorporate everything that is good in life. The man who uses the actions of other men, however highly placed in religious organizations and institutions they may be, to destroy his own faith is only giving into the seed of rebellion that lurks in every man’s heart against the rightful rulership of God.

LIBERTY TO RISE ABOVE

God spoke to Moses and said, “Proclaim liberty throughout the land.” (Lev. 25:10) Every fifty years, everyone was to be returned to full ownership of their properties. *Every* man was to be free to pursue his own life in obedience to God’s laws and ways. As the revelation of man’s wickedness deepens, by the time of the judges, every man did what was right in his own eyes. (Jdgs. 21:25) It is never recorded in the Bible that the fiftieth year, the year of Jubilee, was

ever actually and fully put into practice and this is likely one of the reasons the Lord sent the people of Israel into captivity in Babylon.

Freedom and liberty was an integral part of Jesus' message to His disciples. He said, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you *free*." (Jn. 8:31-32 - emphasis added) And Paul wrote, "For you, brethren, have been called to *liberty*; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." (Gal. 5:13 - emphasis added) It has been well observed that democracies, through the emphasis upon equal rights for all and through the degradation and disintegration of nobility (that is, the aristocracy, which cannot be replaced by merely wealthy, "high society" types however much they might want to believe it to be so), have no real or satisfying "upper levels" of society for which to aspire or aim. Democracies generally devolve into individuals long known in European philosophy as "bourgeois," a "diminished, egotistical, materialistic being without grandeur or beauty of soul...the most contemptible failure of modernity, which must at all costs be overcome... [The bourgeois] most of all cannot afford to look to his real self, [he] denies the existence of the thinly boarded-over basement in him, [he] is most made over for the purposes of a society that does not even promise him perfection or salvation but merely buys him off." (Bloom, p. 157, 177) In America, the bourgeois individual is usually in the middle class and prefers to think of himself as neither poor nor rich and succeeds only in making himself, precisely as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) predicted in *Emile*, into a nothing. So long as the individual remains focused on himself and fails to learn to love and care for others – the main goal of truly following Christ – he will remain a stunted, blighted bourgeois, an incomplete, virtually soulless quasi-human being.

Bourgeois is epitomized by one Singapore citizen's description of life in Singapore: "Singapore is like a warm bath. You sink in, slit your wrists, your life blood floats away, but hey, it's warm." (Mark Jacobson, "The Singapore Solution," *National Geographic*, Jan. 2010, p. 149) The author also reports, "Eating is the true national pastime and refuge." In the same article, the ruling autocrat said, "To lead a society...one must understand human nature. I have always thought that humanity was animal-like. The Confucian theory was man could be improved but I'm not sure he can be. He can be trained, he can be disciplined." (ibid, p. 140) Only in Christ and God can man be improved. Singapore's methods only remove aspirations for such spiritual greatness that enables one to overcome the tendency to devolve into mere bourgeois society.

In a life lived by truly following after Christ, a life described as "abundant" (Jn. 10:10), a life accomplished by submitting to the Spirit of God who leads into all truth (Jn. 16:13) – a life not to be confused with the religiosity of mere churchianity, yet another predictable by-product of egalitarian democracy – one routinely, even constantly aspires to lead a life comparable to the greatest Man who ever lived, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Man in whom His mortal enemies could find no fault (Jn. 8:46, 19:4) and upon whom His spiritual enemies had no hold or power. (Jn. 14:30) His life, death and resurrection are the source for the most (and the most beautiful!) acts of kindness, love and service this world has ever seen – *in spite of* the leaven of clergyism, institutionalism and religiosity that has encrusted itself upon the way of taking up one's cross, dying to self and following after Christ alone. (Lk. 9:23)

ENLIGHTENMENT'S ERRORS

It was the spiritual naivete of the Enlightenment thinkers that caused them to make

several errors. As Paul wrote, “The natural man does not receive [understand, grasp] the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Cor. 2:14) Chief among these errors are:

- supposing reason, unaided by God, could produce life worth living. Jesus still says, “Apart from Me, you can do nothing.” (Jn. 15:5)
- mistaking the religiosity practiced by most sects and clergy to be the true way of following Christ and assuming that men truly following Christ is what has produced the impotence and disease men most often call “church.”
- underestimating the extent, reach and power of any evil once it is unleashed. Just as there was no God for many of these philosophers, it would seem there was no devil, no determined arch-enemy of God and man, intelligent, even genius in his crafty and subtle schemes, mighty in his ultimately doomed attempt to overthrow the rule of God and prevent the eventual rule of man as God’s chosen heirs. (see Heb. 2:8-9) Evil, to them, was merely some impersonal force that could be overcome by reason alone. Even philosophers like Max Weber (1864-1920) came to understand that reason alone could never produce any useful set of values.
- failing to see that elements of nature could be incorporated into civil society on any other basis than upon European culture.

Bloom writes:

“[John] Locke [(1632-1704)] said that ‘a day laborer in England is better clothed, housed and fed than a king in America,’ meaning an Indian chief. But [Alexis de] Tocqueville [(1805-1859)] notes that there is nevertheless something impressive about the American king. Perhaps the savage gains something in the comparison if pride, independence, contempt for death, freedom from anxiety about the future and other such qualities are taken into consideration. From the point of view of this savage, nature begins to look good rather than bad... The idle [detached from having to manufacture, maintain or upgrade the “wheels” of his own lifestyle, society and culture], savage man can enjoy [the pleasant sentiment of existence which reaches beyond the mere fear of death which both Locke and Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) built their social theories upon]. The busy bourgeois cannot [enjoy this pleasant sentiment of existence] with his hard work and his concern with dealing with others rather than [simply] being himself.” (Bloom, p. 169,171)

The contrast between “savage” and “civilized” man was yet again observed when a “civilized” photographer spent two weeks with a nomadic “savage” hunter-gatherer tribe in Africa called the Hadza. He wrote, “There are things I envy about the Hadza – mostly, how free they appear to be. Free from possessions. Free of most social duties. Free from religious strictures. Free of many family responsibilities. Free from schedules, jobs, bosses, bills, traffic,

taxes, laws, news, and money. Free from worry. Free to burp and fart without apology, to grab food and smoke and run shirtless through the thorns.” The author of that article found life with the Hadza too hard for his soft, “civilized” body though and left after two weeks of what he called “one insanely committed camping trip.” After listing some of the Hadza’s routine hardships, he continues, “The days I spent with the Hadza altered my perception of the world. ...they made me feel calmer, more attuned to the moment, more self-sufficient, a little braver, and in less of a constant rush. I don’t care if this sounds maudlin: My time with the Hadza made me happier. It made me wish there was some way to prolong the reign of the hunter-gatherers...” (Michael Finkel, “The Hadza,” *National Geographic*, Dec. 09, p. 118) Though the Hadza hardly reflect a pattern by which all men should live, they certainly present strong evidence that the price men have paid to be “civilized” (as European and American philosophers and statesmen have understood the concept) has been too high – certainly “civilized,” societal man has no real basis for peering down his nose in disdain and contempt at the ignorant “savage.”

It should also be noted that Aldous Huxley’s (1894-1963) “savage” in *Brave New World*, as twisted as his existence had become in its own right, chose to hang himself rather than become a vicarious display of real life for the blighted and stunted “people” that were more products of scientific and social engineering than they were human beings, especially as they were not whole human beings living in spirit, soul and body harmony, neither as individuals nor in community with others.

Locke made a value judgment that has repercussions sounding to this day. The American Indians, in many cases, followed a path of wisdom, contemplation, morality and nobility that puts many American and European practices to shame. Locke’s “better” included a grimy, filthy, soot-covered London riddled with tuberculosis that killed Pocahantus, one of the first American Indian visitors to England, within a year or so. Since Locke’s time, we can add the slaughter of the American buffalo (bison) to displace the American Indians and the forced relocation of these “savages” to reservations that were dismally inappropriate and unsuited for life. The “civilized” rational man has not performed well in the case of the American “savage,” to say the least.

STRIKE ONE, STRIKE TWO

The American “civilized” bourgeois (middle class), in assuming that the self is both without a “basement” and that its depths are understood and navigable with aid of psychiatrists have committed at least two spiritual blunders of immense proportions. First, they have failed to accept God’s opinions about man. God has judged man to be fallen and worthy of dire eternal punishment for his rebellion against the life and truth that is God. Rather than destroying mankind immediately, God has allowed human history to clearly demonstrate the complete inability of man to rule himself while simultaneously demonstrating to the angels the complete inability of His arch-enemy, Lucifer or Satan, to be comparable to the Most High God (see Isa. 14:14) as he also will always be unable to rule man in any truly productive and beneficial manner. God has magnanimously offered eternal life to any person who will believe in what He has done in Christ crucified on the cross. (Jn. 3:16, 1 Jn. 3:1, etc.)

Second, the Americans have placed their faith in the ability of men to guide them through the dark recesses of the human soul. The Lord said to Jeremiah, “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD.” (Jer. 17:5)

The influence of psychiatry is not to be supposed to be limited merely to a counseling setting. Edward Bernays (1891-?), Sigmund Freud's nephew, took Freud's views of the mind, particularly the id, ego and superego, and formulated the science of propaganda (which, after WWI and II, had an unfavorable connotation because of German, Nazi and Soviet usage of propaganda – though few seem to recognize or admit that the U.S. and England were just as expert and prolific in its uses – so “propaganda” underwent a face change and began to be called “public relations”). Now ad-men, psychiatrists in their own right, use radio and television to repeatedly pound the public with visions of gadgets, comforts and lifestyles in what some market specialists dubbed the “gospel of consumption,” convincing the American people to buy more than they actually needed. Their strategies are so successful that the strength of the nation now rests on the buying and selling of goods services. Another telling observation is that nearly three-quarters of Americans are overweight and obese. The Americans have followed the psychiatrists all too well!

Americans also generally fail to see how the modern “liberal education” – a degree in which is virtually required to even enter any lucrative career opportunity – dovetails so deeply into Satan's overarching schemes to overthrow the rule of God. Unfortunately, the “church” (especially the mega-“church”) has adopted so many of the teaching practices of the university, with its lecturing professor speaking down to a passive audience of hundreds, even thousands, that now more than half of the Americans claiming to be “Christians” routinely attend a mega-“church” and have no idea how much of an abomination their apostasy is to God.

Generally speaking, Americans are “not haunted by a sense of the groundlessness of their experience.” (Bloom, p. 157) It is not that American souls have no “basement” – indeed the growing darkness and evil in America proves its existence all too well. Rather, with its roots deeply into the Bible and a belief in God (however superficial and trite some of that is or may have been for some), at least until the last half century, America operated under conditions that seriously curbed and restrained evil. Therefore, those individuals with “cracks” in their “basement floors” were less frequent and more isolated and quietly sought psychiatric or medical help, secretly drank alcohol or suffered silent agonies if they were never led to the spiritually healing waters of Christ. As the American “church,” from its inceptions already divided into many sects (many founding fathers actually preferred this arrangement because they had seen the corruption and power mongering of the vast, monolithic Catholic “church” in Europe), is absorbed into the worldwide apostasy, the great falling away from the faith (Mt. 24:10, 2 Ths. 2:3), its most basic precept is lawlessness, doing whatever seems right and best in one's own eyes. As a result, the ability of most (including those who claim to follow Christ) to care for others has grown cold. (Mt. 24:12) Tocqueville's prediction about democracy has become especially appropriate for the “church” who has absorbed the world's relativism (lawlessness) and political philosophies into its own practices. Tocqueville wrote, “In democratic societies, each citizen is habitually busy with the contemplation of a very petty object, which is himself.” (as quoted in Bloom, p. 86) Whereas the true follower of Christ is engrossed in the transcendent nature of God who sent His Son to die in our rightful place, the “church” most often provides a place to simply do one's “own thing” in the name of Christ and God.

PRINCE OF PEACE AND KING OF KINGS

As even more “basements” in American souls open up, life in this country will become worse than it already is. The 1960s can already be viewed as an uprising against stale and

lifeless bourgeois religiosity, an uprising that was ultimately and largely (but not entirely) absorbed back into bourgeois circles as most of the rebels of the sixties became “the establishment” by the eighties. The post-WWII financial boom produced wealthy generations that failed to understand how groundless democracy (without the direct leading and intervention of God) is as a way of living a life that matters and has significance (even if only on a small scale). Many people of these generations still fail to understand how far-reaching Sigmund Freud’s (1856-1939) soulless man actually is. (Freud did not believe in a soul but simply in a merely physical mind that expressed man’s thoughts, feelings and desires.) The psychiatrists do *not* have the keys to the soul – they only know some of the combinations to some of the locks in the hallways of the self.

Paul, in writing about the deep-rooted and even antagonism between Jew and Gentile, wrote, “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both [Jew and Gentile] one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.” (Eph. 2:14-16)

Through what He did on the cross, He becomes our peace between one another. *He* is our “social contract.” Men without Him can make agreements but they will never be cemented together under the rule of the Prince of peace, the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who do not rely on Him cannot look much beyond their own interests so as to see and be enabled to attend also to the interests of others (Phlp. 2:4) and as a result they cannot attain to the fullness and completeness of life found only in Christ Jesus. This *is* the emptiness of the Enlightenment.

We do well to note that the enmity between ourselves is rooted in our own “basements.” Paul wrote, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find... I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.” (Rom. 7:18, 21-23)

The soul’s “basement” that has attracted the European thinkers by its dark contents is nothing less than the flesh nature enslaved by the presence of evil and held in bondage under the law of sin. Whether the bondage is expressed in the superficiality and selfishness of the bourgeois, the hatred and violence against other men of the “savage” or the self-righteous Phariseism and legalism of modern churchianity, the source and result is the same: The human soul is enslaved to evil that prevents him from ever progressing on to the divinely-enabled love that is the very nature of God.

Paul concludes his description of the darkness within by crying out, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom. 7:24-25) It is Jesus who has delivered us from the fear and power of death. (Heb. 2:15) It is Jesus who delivers us from being trapped in our own “basements,” that slavery to the evil our inner spiritual man does not wish to participate in. (Rom. 7:15) It is Jesus who brings us into spiritual maturity that enables us to love one another as He loved us and that confirms to all men that we truly are genuine followers of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 1:5-8, Jn. 13:34-35)

There is no other king like *the* King Jesus Christ. In the end, there will be no other King whatsoever as *every* knee will bow to His name. (Phlp. 2:9-10) Wise men still seek Him and

blessed are those who bend their knees and hearts before Him now. God still commands all men everywhere to repent and obey only Him. (Acts 17:30)

Let he who has ears hear.

Neil Girrard
Paidion Books
P.O. Box 327
Capitan, NM 88316

Website – www.paidionbooks.org

Email – paidion@paidionbooks.org

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