

## America the Delusional? Overcoming Our European Temptation

*Bruce S. Thornton*

**Abstract:** *Once a colossus dominating the globe, Europe today is a doddering convalescent plagued by economic sclerosis, unaffordable entitlements, an impending demographic collapse, and a large unassimilated Muslim population. In addition, the EU's reliance on soft power has left it unable to project global power and fulfill its promise to be an important player in world affairs. Yet in spite of all of these failures and systemic problems, many in America remain infatuated with the European Union's promise of cradle-to-grave welfare and post-national multilateralism and multiculturalism. In this essay, Bruce Thornton first shows that, merely on practical grounds, many of these EU ideals have been ineffective if not dangerous. He then demonstrates that the EU model is predicated on philosophical assumptions about human nature and the human good that are diametrically opposed to those that underlay the American Founding. Thus, for America to become more like Europe, America must become less like America.*

The worldwide Great Recession that began in 2008 has taken much of the bloom off the European Union rose. These days, the enthusiastic pronouncements of recent years, when the EU was touted as a “bold new experiment in living,” one “leading the way into a new era,”<sup>1</sup> sound premature if not delusional. Equally premature have been the prophecies of Europe's future dominance in the “New European Century,”<sup>2</sup> or the prognostications that the “the twen-

ty-first century might yet belong to Europe,”<sup>3</sup> or the argument that “the European way is the best hope in an insecure age.”<sup>4</sup>

Greece's near-default on its sovereign debt, the humiliating multibillion-dollar International Monetary Fund contribution to the EU's near-trillion-dollar bailout fund, and the looming similar economic crises threatening other EU states like Ireland, Spain, and Portugal have laid bare the contradictions long underlying the EU economic project of greater integration

<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Rifkin, *The European Dream. How Europe's Vision of the Future Is Eclipsing the American Dream* (New York: Tarcher, 2004), pp. 3, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Leonard, *Why Europe Will Run the 21st Century* (London and New York: Public Affairs, 2005), p. 143.

<sup>3</sup> Tony Judt, *Postwar* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 800.

<sup>4</sup> Steven Hill, *Europe's Promise: Why the European Way Is the Best Hope in an Insecure Age* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010).

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through a common currency and centralized policies, putting at risk its very existence. This economic failure complements the EU's unmet geopolitical ambitions. Given its limited military capabilities, the EU has been unable to project global power and fulfill its promise to be an important "pole" in the "multipolar" world that was presumably created by the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Yet despite these failures of the EU project—greater prosperity, peace, and international influence through increased economic and political unification—many liberals in America continue to pursue policies, both domestic and foreign, that are moving the United States closer to the EU paradigm. Indeed, many on the Left approve of the European model as something to emulate. Partly, this reflects the place Europe has traditionally held in the imagination of some Americans. Like the Yankee ingénues in a Henry James novel, they have admired the Old World of sophistication, culture, and civilization that contrasts with the New World of crude, go-getting, frontier brashness. But these days, this admiration more fundamentally reflects the belief that Europe provides a more humane and sophisticated set of social and political values.

In the presidential election of 2004, for example, Democratic candidate Senator John Kerry, who speaks French and spent childhood vacations in France, was touted as the candidate who, sharing the European distrust of force and preference for the management of crises through transnational institutions, could be more effective in relating to our European allies. In the words of French writer Bernard-Henri Lévy, Kerry is a "European at heart."<sup>5</sup> Thus, as President, we were told, Senator Kerry could undo the damage done by the unilateralist, "Euroskeptic" George Bush. Bush's critics identified him as that most American—and despised—of cultural icons: a "cowboy" who, it was erroneously reported, had never traveled to Europe.

<sup>5</sup> Bertrand-Henri Lévy, *American Vertigo: Traveling America in the Footsteps of Tocqueville*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Random House, 2006), p. 135.

In domestic policy as well, some Americans look to Europe for guidance on issues such as homosexuality, affirmative action, and the death penalty—indeed, in some recent Supreme Court decisions, justices have cited the European Charter of Funda-

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mental Rights and rulings of the European Court of Human Rights in support of their decisions. Many also tout the European *dolce vita* lifestyle as a more humane and fulfilling way to live compared to workaholic, money-grubbing Americans. *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman, for example, believes Americans have a lot to learn from the French about family values—an opinion Claire Berlinski calls "laughable" given that the French are creating fewer and fewer families and that almost 15,000 elderly French in 2003 died during a heat wave, their bodies chilled in warehouses while their children vacationed on the Riviera.<sup>6</sup>

On many other issues, liberals in general align with the same values and ideals that underlie the European model, as conservative Jonah Goldberg indicated when he complained that President Bill Clinton "thinks like a European."<sup>7</sup> As Timothy Garton Ash put it, "'Blue' America often turns out to be a European shade of pink. On several of the key social issues, American

<sup>6</sup> Claire Berlinski, *Menace in Europe: Why the Continent's Crisis Is America's Too* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006), pp. 15–16. For Krugman's column, see "French Family Values," *The New York Times*, July 29, 2005, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/29/opinion/29krugman.html> (February 17, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Timothy Garton Ash, "The New Anti-Europeanism in America," in *Beyond Paradise and Power*, ed. Tod Lindberg (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), p. 126.

Democrats seem to be closer to Europeans than they are to Republicans.”<sup>8</sup>

The “Europeanization” of America has intensified under the Obama Administration. Actions like the quasi-nationalization of General Motors and the increased government regulation of the finance industry have intensified state control of the economy. Likewise, the recently passed health care legislation moves this country closer to the EU social welfare model in which the state attempts not just to insulate its citizens from the tragic contingencies of existence, but also to provide them with leisure, comfort, and protection against the consequences of their own bad choices.

In foreign policy as well, President Obama has embraced the EU “postmodern” view of interstate relations, which is distrustful of military force and looks instead to diplomacy, multilateralism, and transnational institutions to create global order. Barack Obama explicitly campaigned on the need “to reinvigorate American diplomacy,” as he put it in a *Foreign Affairs* article, and “to rebuild the alliances, partnerships, and institutions necessary to confront common threats and enhance common security.”<sup>9</sup> Hence, as President, he has apologized abroad for the alleged militarist and unilateralist sins committed by his “cowboy” predecessor and has extended his hand repeatedly—and so far fruitlessly—to the mullahs in Iran in order to prevent them from developing nuclear weapons.

In this essay, I hope to dispel the illusions of those who have fallen for the European temptation by highlighting the failure of the EU project. The EU project suffers from several problems that the Europeans have so far been unable to solve: economic sclerosis, unaffordable entitlements, demographic collapse, and a large unassimilated Muslim population. In addition,

<sup>8</sup> Timothy Garton Ash, *Free World: America, Europe, and the Surprising Future of the West* (New York: Vintage, 2004), p. 65.

<sup>9</sup> Barack Obama, “Renewing American Leadership,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2007, at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/62636/barack-obama/renewing-american-leadership> (June 20, 2010).

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the EU reliance on “soft power” on the international stage has been a failure.

Apart from the pragmatic issue that many of these EU ideals have so far been ineffective, if not dangerous, the EU model is predicated on philosophical assumptions about human nature and the human good that are contrary to those that underlay the American Founding and alien to the American experience. In the remainder of the essay, I will show how radically the EU’s utopian ideals differ from America’s founding principles.

## THE FAILURE OF THE “EUTOPIAN” PROJECT

### *Economic Sclerosis*

The greater integration of the 27 EU member-states’ economies, most visibly evident in the common currency used by the 17 states of the “euro zone,” has not overcome the impediments to economic growth and development caused by *dirigiste* government policies.

Though still collectively an economic powerhouse, Europe’s economies for the past two decades have been troubled by low rates of growth, chronic unemployment, and economic sclerosis compared to the U.S. economy. Whether the issue is per capita GDP, productivity, high tax burdens, percentage of working-age citizens employed, research and development, worker-friendly requirements for wages and benefits, impediments to entrepreneurs, early generous retirement, or regulations concerning hiring and firing, EU policies impede economic growth and vitality and leave

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It is no surprise that the EU states most in economic danger—Greece, Portugal, and Spain—are ranked at the bottom of the World Bank’s “Ease of Doing Business” survey of 27 Western economies (the U.S. ranks second).<sup>10</sup> The comparative impact of the current global recession illustrates this disparity: While the euro zone GDP declined 4.2 percent in 2009, U.S. GDP went down 2.6 percent. Nor has the EU’s economic recovery kept pace with that of the U.S.: GDP in the EU increased 1.8 percent in 2010, and GDP in the U.S. increased 2.9 percent.<sup>11</sup>

***Unaffordable Entitlements***

An important factor in retarding the EU economies is the expensive social welfare entitlements enjoyed by Europeans. While the U.S. federal and state governments spend roughly 18 percent of GDP on pensions, welfare, and health care costs, the EU spends nearly 29 percent.<sup>12</sup> The list of entitlements seems endless: unemployment benefits, welfare payments, pensions, paid maternity leaves, child-care subsidies, free

<sup>10</sup> See World Bank Group, “Doing Business: Economy Rankings,” 2011, at [www.doingbusiness.org/economyrankings/?regionid=5](http://www.doingbusiness.org/economyrankings/?regionid=5) (February 16, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> See U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, updated weekly, at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html> (February 17, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> For figures on U.S. entitlement spending for 2009, see “GDP / Spending by Function,” at <http://www.usgovernmentsspending.com> (February 17, 2011). For the EU, see EurActiv.com, “EU Social-Protection Expenditure on Rise,” at [www.euractiv.com/en/en/socialeurope/eu-social-protection-expenditure-rise/article-159368](http://www.euractiv.com/en/en/socialeurope/eu-social-protection-expenditure-rise/article-159368) (February 17, 2011).

university education, expansive sick leave, restricted working hours, generous paid vacation and holiday leave, and government-provided health care. As EU champion T. R. Reid puts it, falling into the EU government “safety net” is “like falling into a large, soft bed with a down comforter for protection against the cold and a matron standing by with a warm cup of tea to soothe discomfort.”<sup>13</sup>

As desirable as these boons may be, they all cost money and depend on an expanding economy that creates jobs and increases tax revenues. As we currently see in Greece, a sluggish economy has the opposite effect, constricting the funds available for

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welfare spending. At the same time, social spending continues to increase as the demand for more entitlements grows and an aging, longer-living population stresses budgets further. Given that by 2050 the EU economies will have a mere two workers for every retiree, the EU social welfare paradise is heading for bankruptcy.<sup>14</sup>

***Demographic Collapse***

These economic woes are worsened by the precipitous demographic decline affecting the EU nations. For a people to maintain their population, they need a fertility rate of 2.1 children per woman. The EU currently has a fertility rate of 1.5. If these rates continue, by 2050, the EU will have 7 million fewer people, a loss

<sup>13</sup> T. R. Reid, *The United States of Europe: The New Superpower and the End of American Supremacy* (New York: Penguin, 2005), p. 146.

<sup>14</sup> Giuseppe Carone and Declan Costello, “Can Europe Afford to Grow Old?” *Finance and Development*, September 2006, at [www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2006/09/carone.htm](http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2006/09/carone.htm) (June 22, 2010).

similar to the effects of plagues, wars, and famines.<sup>15</sup> The impact on the economy will be devastating, as the working-age population will fall by 48 million people while the number of retirees will rise by 58 million.<sup>16</sup> As economist Guillermo de la Dehesa writes:

[T]his demographic shift could be very severe for the EU's future growth.... A graying population means a less active population, less entrepreneurship, less innovation, higher and probably unsustainable public expenditures, all of which will result in lower growth.<sup>17</sup>

The most important resource for modern free-market economies is the people who think up new products and services, creating jobs for other people and generating tax revenues. Broader malign effects on the wider culture attend this demographic decline, as childless people find it easier to care more about their own private *carpe diem* pleasures and *dolce vita* lifestyle than they care about the larger society and the future vitality of its ideals and principles. They also become less willing to spend the money and make the sacrifices necessary to defend their countries and their values from attack.

### *EUrabia*

This last concern is particularly troublesome in terms of the next problem afflicting the EU paradigm: Muslim immigration. At least 20 million Muslim immigrants live in Europe. At first, these immigrants came as workers, their numbers swelling due to "family reunification programs" and lax "asylum" policies. Once arrived, they have been left unassimilated into the cultures of their host countries and shut

out of the job market because of restrictive employment regulations. At the same time, they have been able to enjoy lavish social welfare entitlements: The four Muslims who perpetrated the London bombings in 2005 had received half a million pounds of social welfare money.

Worse yet, fashionable multicultural fantasies about the non-Western "Other" victimized by past European sins such as colonialism and imperialism have left many Europeans incapable of demanding fidelity to Western political ideals and social mores, all the while eager to appease and enable Muslim immigrant violence and other social pathologies even at the expense of cherished Western values such as free speech or women's rights.

Hence the creation of the new thought crime "Islamophobia," used to silence anyone who criticizes Islam. The Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci was charged with "defaming Islam" in her two books defending Western values against Islamic intolerance, and Dutch Member of Parliament Geert Wilders is being tried for his outspoken defense of Western values and criticisms of Islam's theologically justified violence in his short film *Fitna*.

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Equally effective at enforcing appeasement has been the fear of Muslim violence. After the 2006 global Muslim riots and killings over some cartoons of Mohammed published by a Danish newspaper, rather than defend this core value of free speech, the EU instead proposed a "media code" to regulate speech about religion. EU Justice Minister Franco Frattini assured the Muslim world that "we are aware of the

<sup>15</sup> See Eurostat, "Fertility Statistics," at [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Fertility\\_statistics](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Fertility_statistics) (February 17, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Carone and Costello, "Can Europe Afford to Grow Old?"

<sup>17</sup> Guillermo de la Dehesa, *Europe at the Crossroads: Will the EU Ever Be Able to Compete with the United States as an Economic Power?* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006), p. 85.

consequences of exercising the right of free expression” and that “we can and we are ready to self-regulate that right,” frankly admitting that fear of violent “consequences” would lead to restrictions on free speech.<sup>18</sup>

The predictable result of this combination of appeasement and neglect has been the creation of a sullen, alienated population overrepresented in criminal behavior, prison populations, and welfare rolls. These underemployed and unassimilated Muslims thus become vulnerable to the Islamist doctrine that a return to the purity of the faith and the practice of jihad against the infidel will heal their alienation.

Given that they are confident in the righteousness and superiority of their faith, and moreover are reproducing at a higher rate than their dwindling and aging European hosts, the increasing numbers of Muslim immigrants presage serious social and political problems, from increased terrorist attacks like the London and Madrid bombings to growing immigrant enclaves such as the *banlieues* (suburbs) ringing Paris that exclude European political and social ideals such as democracy, human rights, and secularism and replace them with Islamic Sharia law. Whether Europe responds to these challenges with further appeasement and erosion of core political values or with a xenophobic or even neo-fascist backlash, the problem is unlikely to be solved without profound social and political dislocations.

### *The Failure of Soft Power and Internationalism*

Finally, the EU vision of relying on soft power rather than military force to defuse conflict and create global order, peace, and prosperity has failed at the grandiose ambition that in a “multipolar” world, “one of these essential poles will be Europe,” as French

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Bruno Waterfield, “EU Moves to New Media Rules on Religion,” *TheParliament.com*, February 9, 2006 at [http://www.theparliament.com/no\\_cache/latestnews/news-article/newsarticle/eu-moves-to-new-media-rules-on-religion/](http://www.theparliament.com/no_cache/latestnews/news-article/newsarticle/eu-moves-to-new-media-rules-on-religion/) (February 17, 2011).

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President Jacques Chirac put it in 1995.<sup>19</sup> Oxford University’s Kalypso Nicolaidis defines this “postmodern” foreign policy as one that requires nations to surrender some of their sovereignty to international organizations that presumably enforce common values and serve common interests. This “security community” will rely on “civilian forms of influence and action” over military force and will attempt to create “tolerance between states” and “move beyond the relationships of dominance and exploitation with the rest of the world.”<sup>20</sup>

This ideal assumes that such global “norms” even exist—a proposition that is hard to square with the multiplicity of cultural goods evident across the globe. Yet just on the basis of past performance, the international laws and covenants, institutions like the various “world courts,” and transnational organizations like the EU itself or the United Nations, all of which embody this utopian goal, have done little to prevent the slaughter of millions of people in civil wars, interstate conflicts, genocide, and ethnic cleansing in places like Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Sri Lanka, Kashmir, Somalia, Lebanon, Darfur, Congo, or Rwanda, to name just a few.

The fact remains that creating global order and stopping violators of the peace requires the ability to project lethal military power. Yet Europe’s failure in the 1990s to stop the genocide, ethnic cleansing, mas-

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in John J. Miller and Mark Molesky, *Our Oldest Enemy: A History of America’s Disastrous Relationship with France* (New York: Broadway, 2004), p. 242.

<sup>20</sup> Kalypso Nicolaidis, “The Power of the Superpowerless,” in *Beyond Paradise and Power*, pp. 97, 103.

sacres, and torture next door in the Balkans, and the humiliation of relying on the military power of the United States to do so, exposed the truth that, even collectively, the EU nations are “military pygmies,” as one-time NATO Secretary-General Lord Robertson put it.<sup>21</sup> Thus, for all their vaunted soft power, the Europeans are limited in their geopolitical reach.

Moreover, this pacifism disguised as a preference for soft power is possible only because the security of the EU nations is guaranteed by the United States, which spends more on defense than the rest of the world put together. This U.S. security umbrella, by freeing European nations from spending on their own militaries, likewise makes more affordable the EU’s generous social welfare entitlements, as well as maintaining the global order necessary for the functioning of a globalized economy.

For example, given that 17 percent of Europe’s oil is imported from the Middle East, most of it through the Strait of Hormuz, the EU economies depend on U.S. military power in the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf to keep the oil flowing.<sup>22</sup> As Robert Kagan has written, a globalized economy of “saloon keepers” needs a “sheriff” to “enforce some peace and justice in what Americans see as a lawless world where outlaws need to be deterred or destroyed, often through the muzzle of a gun.”<sup>23</sup>

Merely on practical grounds, then, the EU project has so far not succeeded in achieving its aims and thus is a dubious model for the United States. Yet all political policy reflects a philosophical vision, a set of

notions about human nature, human motivation, and the human good. At this level as well, many of the ideas underlying the EU vision are contrary to those that animated the American Founding.

### THE EU’S PROGRESSIVE PRINCIPLES

The philosophical ideas of the EU reflect the continental Enlightenment notion that a universal, essentially rational human nature is progressing away from the irrational superstitions and traditions such as religion that in the past defined and disordered human life and society. This progress has been spurred by the growth of knowledge, which has created the “human sciences” such as economics, psychology, and sociology. These “sciences” in turn generate techniques for reorganizing and improving social, political, and economic institutions in order to create peace, equality, and justice and to liberate people from traditional superstitions so that they can recognize and act upon their own best interests and achieve happiness.

This vision creates what French political philosopher Chantal Delsol calls “techno-politics”—top-down government by technical elites who craft policies that intervene in society and the economy in order to mitigate the harsh inequalities of free-market capitalism through government regulations and welfare entitlements.<sup>24</sup> The goal will be to lessen and eventually eliminate the irrational nationalist or religious prejudices and intolerance that foment social disorder and injustice. Hence the intrusive and extensive economic regulations of the EU; the generous social welfare benefits now redefined as “rights” by the EU’s Charter of Fundamental Rights; the legally codified and enforced demands for tolerance, respect, and inclusion; and the animus against Christianity notoriously evident in the refusal to acknowledge Europe’s Christian roots in the EU Constitution.

<sup>24</sup> Chantal Delsol, *Icarus Fallen: The Search for Meaning in an Uncertain World*, trans. Robin Dick (Wilmington, Del.: ISI Books, 2003), p. 109.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Peter Beaumont and Ed Vulliamy, “Armed to the Teeth,” *The Observer* (London), February 10, 2002, at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/feb/10/usa.terrorism> (February 17, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> Data at European Union, Directorate-General for Energy, “Registration of Crude Oil Imports and Deliveries in the European Union (EU27),” January–August 2010, at <http://ec.europa.eu/energy/observatory/oil/doc/import/coi/eu-coi-from-extra-eu-2010-01-08.pdf> (February 24, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Vintage, 2004), pp. 35–36.

These radical Enlightenment ideals underlying the EU's domestic policies inform its foreign affairs behavior as well. Given the universal progress from irrational restraints on people to rational techniques for managing and improving human life, there is a global "harmony of interests" because all peoples desire the same ends as Westerners: peace, prosperity, and political freedom. Once educated to these true

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interests, all peoples will realize that these goods can best be obtained not by force and the pursuit of parochial nationalist interests, but by networks of interstate agreements that adjudicate disputes rationally and subject the behavior of nations to clearly defined international rules and protocols enforced by transnational organizations, allowing peace and prosperity to flourish. Then war will give way to diplomacy: rational discussion, negotiation, respect and tolerance for the other side's demands, and a mutual desire to adjudicate grievances without the destruction and suffering that attend the use of force—what the Europeans call "soft power."

Just taken on their own terms, these assumptions about human nature and progress are dubious at best and hard to support by the empirical evidence of history. Despite the astonishing explosion of scientific knowledge over the past two centuries, no laws governing human social, political, and economic behavior akin to the laws of physics or mathematics that can justify the intrusive reorganization of society by elites wielding techniques reflecting those laws have been discovered. Every attempt to do so over the past two

centuries has ended in bloody failure and tyranny, for such meddling based on abstract theories founders on the sheer complexity and quirky unpredictability of human nature and its irrational passions and stubborn willfulness.

No more convincing are the various schemes for creating international order that are predicated on the alleged "harmony of interests" obscured by religious, tribal, or nationalist superstitions. The peoples of the world pursue multiple goods, some of them incompatible with those prized by the West. Western-style political freedom, for example, may conflict with the duty to obey God and his commands, as Islamists like Sayyid Qutb, the Ayatollah Khomeini, and Osama bin Laden believe.

Nor is it obvious that religion is destined to wither away as civilization progresses and increasingly secularizes, an idea based on the dubious materialist assumption that religion is merely a Marxist "opiate" or a Freudian "illusion" rather than an expression of humanity's spiritual needs. Indeed, our current age of wondrous technological sophistication and economic development has also seen a global explosion in the growth of religious fervor.

Finally, nationalism remains a powerful locus of communal identity and cohesion even in Europe, where public interest in the EU is low as evidenced by the anemic voter turnout for EU parliamentary elections. As we have seen during the current global recession and the bickering between Germany and Greece over funding the latter's bailout, at times of crisis, even the EU nations look first to their own individual economic or security interests, as well as the demands of their voters, rather than to the needs or lofty principles of the supranational EU.

## AMERICA'S FOUNDING PRINCIPLES

### *A Sober View of Human Nature*

More important, all of these utopian ideals are different from those upon which the American order was



founded. Of course, the Founders believed in the possibility of political progress, believing, as Alexander Hamilton put it in *Federalist* No. 1, that “societies of men are really capable...of establishing good government from reflection and choice.” And they understood that such progress might require jettisoning some of the past. Hence, they did not suffer “a blind veneration for antiquity, for custom, or for names, to overrule the suggestions of their own good sense, the knowledge of their own situation, and the lessons of their own experience,” as Madison put it.<sup>25</sup>

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Yet these constructive efforts at improvement were based on the given of a human nature permanently subject to destructive passions and selfish interests. Throughout the *Federalist*, whether the topic is the need for a strong union, the preference for a republic rather than a direct democracy, or the separation of powers, the authors repeatedly emphasize the irrational well-springs of human behavior.

For example, Hamilton reminds us in *Federalist* No. 6 that “men are ambitious, vindictive, and rapacious.” In *Federalist* No. 10, Madison’s famous discussion of factions—groups adverse to the rights of other citizens or to the common good—likewise reflects a sober view of human nature and the power of “opinions” formed by a “fallible” reason and influenced by “passions”: “The latent causes of faction,” Madison summarizes,

“are thus sown in the nature of man.” Since human nature cannot be improved beyond such motives that create faction, “relief is only to be sought in the means of controlling its effects.” This control can be achieved, then, not by some scheme to change human nature and engineer a new man, but by a well-constructed republican government in which power is separated among the different branches of government.

Indeed, government itself is necessary precisely because, as Hamilton puts it in *Federalist* No. 15, “the passions of men will not conform to the dictates of reason and justice, without constraint.” So too John Adams, who dismissed the notion of human perfectibility given the permanent human passions like envious rivalry:

Emulation next to self-preservation will forever be the great spring of human actions, and the balance of a well-ordered government will alone be able to prevent that emulation from degenerating into dangerous ambition, irregular rivalries, destructive factions, wasting seditions, and bloody civil war.<sup>26</sup>

But it is Madison who provided in *Federalist* No. 51 the most famous expression of this fundamental truth: “But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.”

Clearly, the modern notion that human reason can progress and be perfected to the degree that utopian schemes such as the EU are feasible was alien to the Founding generation, whose thinking about a flawed human nature reflected the tragic realism taught them by experience, their reading of classical authors like Thucydides, and Christian theology.

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<sup>25</sup> Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, *The Federalist*, ed. George W. Carey and James McClellan (Indianapolis: The Liberty Fund, 1990).

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot*, 7th ed. (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1985), p. 91.

***Government of the People, by the People,  
for the People***

Equally alien to the American political character is the “techno-politics” embodied in the elitist administrative apparatus of the EU. The U.S. has been defined by the opposite assumption: that rule by citizens, in whose consent resides the authority for government in the first place, will be more efficacious at securing the public weal and protecting against the tyranny of the few. Thus, the independent initiative and self-reliance of the citizenry is preferred to the dictates of government officials in managing social, economic, and political affairs.

Alexis de Tocqueville noticed this defining characteristic of American democracy, which he explicitly contrasted with the centralizing tendencies of Euro-

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***In the EU model, since enlightened government elites are the givers and caretakers of rights, they know better how to manage the lives of their citizens. Hence the growth of government power and its increasing intrusion into people’s lives.***

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pean government: “If the opinion that the [American] citizen entertains of himself is exaggerated, it is at least salutary; he unhesitatingly confides in his own powers, which appear to him to be all-sufficient.” Moreover, de Tocqueville connected self-rule to the protection of freedom, anticipating the “democracy deficit” that attends the ceding of authority to a “nanny state” like the EU: “It profits me but little, after all, that a vigilant authority always protects the tranquility of my pleasures and constantly averts all dangers from my path, without my care or concern, if this same authority is the absolute master of my liberty and my life.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve and Francis Bowen (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), Vol. I, p. 5.

***Natural Rights as a Limit on Government***

Political freedom, autonomy, and self-reliance are other fundamental assumptions of the American order that contrast with the more paternalistic traditions of Europe that facilitate the EU’s top-down rule by elites through expanding government bureaucracies. J. Hector St. John Crevecoeur marked this distinction as early as 1782: “Europe contains hardly any other distinctions but lords and tenants; this fair country alone is settled by freeholders, the possessors of the soil they cultivate, members of the government they obey, and the framers of their own laws, by means of their representatives.”<sup>28</sup> This freedom is one of the “unalienable rights” that define human nature and that government exists to protect. Hence the ideal of limited government, allowing free citizens to manage their lives and solve their problems with minimal interference from the state.

In contrast, in the EU model, the government bestows these rights, reflecting the progressive evolution of political culture and human reason, from which historical process these “rights” emerge to be then codified in law. Since enlightened government elites are the givers and caretakers of these rights, they know better how to manage the lives of their citizens. Hence the growth of government power and its increasing intrusion into people’s lives.

Yet the American order understands that if rights are, like social-welfare entitlements, the gifts of government, then an ever-expanding government can take them away. For as Madison notes in *Federalist* No. 48, “power is of an encroaching nature” and requires limits in order for the rights and freedom of the citizens to be safe from this expansionary appetite. George Washington, in his 1796 Farewell Address, likewise linked the necessity of “reciprocal checks in the exercise of political power” and “dividing and distributing it into different depositories” to the “love of power,

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<sup>28</sup> J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, trans. Albert E. Stone (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1981), pp. 79–80.

and proneness to abuse it, which predominates in the human heart.”<sup>29</sup> Limiting government, not expanding it as in the EU model, will thus be the best guarantor of the freedom and rights of the people.

### *The Central Role of Religion in Public Life*

The radical secularism central to the EU project also is contrary to the roots of American order. The Declaration of Independence asserts that humans “are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights” that governments are created to secure, thus locating human rights in man’s nature as created by God. This belief that human freedom and other rights arise from God was something of a truism in early America. De Tocqueville remarked on this aspect of

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*Early Americans knew that if our rights do not come from God, then they are contingent, the accidents of history or the gifts of other men, and thus vulnerable to the chance of historical change and the vagaries of an “encroaching” political power.*

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the American character when he wrote, “The Americans combine the notions of Christianity and of liberty so intimately in their minds that it is impossible to make them conceive the one without the other.”<sup>30</sup>

Evidence for de Tocqueville’s observation can be found everywhere in the writings of the Founding generation. “The sacred rights of mankind,” Hamilton wrote, “are not to be rummaged for among old parchments or musty records. They are written, as with a sunbeam, in the whole volume of human nature, by the hand of Divinity itself.”<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in *The American Republic: Primary Sources*, ed. Bruce Frohnen (Indianapolis: The Liberty Fund, 2002), p. 76.

<sup>30</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. I, p. 17.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Michael Novak, *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002), p. 3.

This divine origin of the rights government is formed to protect thus creates a central role for religion in public life. “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity,” Washington said in his Farewell Address, “Religion and morality are indispensable supports.... Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that National morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.”<sup>32</sup>

In 1798, John Adams explicitly linked this need for religion to the destructive passions of human nature:

We have no government armed with power of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution is made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.<sup>33</sup>

Even Thomas Jefferson, whose private beliefs tended toward deism, wrote, “And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God?”<sup>34</sup> Early Americans knew that if our rights do not come from God, then they are contingent, the accidents of history or the gifts of other men, and thus vulnerable to the chance of historical change and the vagaries of an “encroaching” political power.

### *Healthy Patriotism*

Next, the animus against nationalist loyalties and patriotism, the distrust of national feeling that in part rationalized the creation of the EU, is fundamentally opposed to the traditional patriotism of Americans

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in *The American Republic: Primary Sources*, p. 76.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Novak, *On Two Wings*, p. 71.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 33.

who recognized and celebrated their country's unique political goods and identity. Tocqueville linked this love of country to the political freedom that made American government what the ancient Greeks called the "common thing," the possession of all the citizens:

In the United States the interests of the country are everywhere kept in view; they are an object of solicitude to the people of the whole Union, and every citizen is as warmly attached to them as if they were his own. He takes pride in the glory of his nation; he boasts of its success, to which he conceives himself to have contributed; and he rejoices in the general prosperity by which he profits. The feeling he entertains towards the state is analogous to that which unites him to his family, and it is by a kind of selfishness that he interests himself in the welfare of his country.<sup>35</sup>

This patriotic affection born of political freedom fosters a willingness to fight and die for one's country and the fellow citizens who share those political ideals. But no one will fight and die for a faceless, transnational administrative bureaucracy like the EU or the U.N.

### *National Sovereignty and a Strong Defense*

Finally, the subordination of the national interest and foreign policy to the protocols and aims of a transnational institution is inimical to America's tradition of national self-reliance and distrust of what Jefferson, in his 1801 Inaugural Address, called "entangling alliances." "The Great rule of conduct," Washington advised in his Farewell Address, "in regard to foreign Nations, is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little *political* connection as possible."<sup>36</sup>

Americans have always understood, as expressed again by Washington, that "no nation can be trusted farther than it is bounded by its interests."<sup>37</sup> The lofty ideals and goals used to justify the creation of interna-

<sup>35</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. I, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in *The American Republic: Primary Sources*, p. 78.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Miller and Molesky, *Our Oldest Enemy*, p. 46.

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*America's security and interests should never be subordinated to the interests, principles, or goals of other nations, no matter how much these interests are dressed up in idealistic rhetoric or marketed with promised utopian boons.*

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tional covenants, laws, and institutions all, in the end, fall prey to the interests of the sovereign nations that comprise such bodies and that frequently use those ideals to mask their pursuit of their own foreign policy goals. The serial failures of the League of Nations, the United Nations, and the EU testify to this reality.

America's security and interests must thus, in the end, rely on its principles and goals as determined by its own citizens. They should never be subordinated to the interests, principles, or goals of other nations, no matter how much these interests are dressed up in idealistic rhetoric or marketed with promised utopian boons.

As a corollary to this national self-reliance, the United States has developed a powerful military to protect its interests and security, and it should maintain the will to use this lethal power according to American needs and principles. Never should America cede control of this force to the veto power of any transnational institution or rely on such bodies to protect its security and interests. This recognition of the need for a strong defense and the willingness to spend treasure on creating and maintaining it stand in stark contrast to the puny militaries and virtual pacifism of the EU.

### **PRESERVING AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM**

All of these American ideals—political freedom and autonomy, citizen independence and self-reliance, limited government, religion, patriotism, and nationalist autonomy backed up by vigorous military power—comprise American exceptionalism. These ideals that define our nation would have to be weakened or

discarded if America were to follow the EU road to utopia.

Regrettably, we have already been travelling down that road for decades. By the early 20th century, the rise of Progressivism had established in the public discourse the doctrine of social, economic, and political change controlled and directed by technical elites. This class, backed by government power, would work to improve and perfect life and solve problems based on what Bradley C. S. Watson describes as a “faith in intelligence and expertise translated into support for a vast state mechanism that would be confidently dedicated to ensuring growth—by means of progressive education, the administrative state, and redistribution of capital.”<sup>38</sup>

The expansion of the federal government that commenced under Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, was furthered by Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society programs, and has intensified under Barack Obama is continuing this process. The result is increased entitlement spending and government intrusion into the economy, education, and social life. Consequently, the U.S. is now facing many of the same fiscal problems that afflict Europe, with entitlement spending project-

ed to double by 2050 and public debt slated to rise to 180 percent of GDP by 2035.<sup>39</sup> And let us not forget the erosion of traditional independence and self-reliance, the constriction of freedoms, and the infantilizing of Americans that follow the greater intrusion of government power into our daily lives and business.

Such policies and the philosophy behind them require that the ideals of American exceptionalism be discarded if the U.S. is to follow the path of the EU, as many liberals believe we should. The cost of abandoning those ideals would be larger and more expensive government and increasing encroachments on the quintessential American political goods of individual freedom and self-reliance. Without a political sea change in the next few years, the United States will continue to head down the road to nowhere.

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<sup>38</sup> Bradley C. S. Watson, “Darwin’s Constitution,” *National Review*, May 17, 2010, p. 32.

<sup>39</sup> See The Heritage Foundation, “2010 Budget Chartbook,” at <http://www.heritage.org/budgetchartbook/> (February 17, 2011).