

Fight Passion with Passion

Roger Scruton

It seems to me that A.C. Grayling agrees with so much of my analysis of the confrontation between Islamism and the West that I need not pause over the details. Like everyone who discusses the matter, I am bound to use shorthand expressions like “the West” rather than spelling out the long history that spread Christianity, Roman law, territorial jurisdiction, and free trade around the world, to the immense irritation of those who live by other precepts. The West is not a geographical but a socio-cultural concept and refers to the civilization that we have inherited and of which we are a part. There are Muslims living within the historical territories of that civilization, but Islam is not a part of the West, any more than atheism and pornography are part of Islam, widespread though they are in the former Ottoman Empire.

The main burden of my article was to point to the things worth defending in the West, and I emphasized forgiveness and irony not in order to suggest that these are effective responses to terrorism—of course they are not, and I agree with Grayling that terrorism has to be confronted, not appeased. My purpose was to show that there is a moral heart to our communities, one

that they have inherited from the Judeo-Christian tradition of religious and moral thinking, and one to which we can all attach ourselves, even if we are not Jews or Christians. Forgiveness and neighbor love (*agape*), rather than submission, form the heart of the Western bequest to us. We don't always live by those things. But we can value them, identify with them, and make them our cause. This is important, because you don't defend a way of life if you don't believe it to be something more than merely convenient or pleasant. You defend it if you believe it to have moral value in itself, and also to be bound up with your own identity as a social being. It is their failure to define that identity that makes liberals of Grayling's kind such poor spokesmen for our civilization. I wanted to take the first steps in defining what we stand for, fearing that otherwise, we might soon cease to stand for anything.

Grayling is hostile to “nationalism” but doesn't say what it is, beyond referring to the Treaty of Westphalia, and without remarking what that treaty actually achieved, which was an end to wars of religion. By defining themselves as members of a nation, people begin to treat their side-by-sideness as more important than their religious differences. I think we should distinguish national identity from the “nationalism” that Grayling presumably has in mind: the aggressive and ideological creed that arose out of the French Revolution and was spread across Europe by Napoleon's armies. I was concerned to show that secular jurisdiction (which Grayling esteems) requires a pre-political loyalty sufficient to uphold it, and that means a non-religious loyalty. Hence the need for some kind of territorial jurisdiction and a first-person plural defined over territory.

Such a first-person plural depends on settlement, language, shared history, and neighborhood—this I try to show in my book *The West and the Rest: Globalization and the Terrorist Threat*, where I also argue that the seeds of territorial loyalty were already planted in the early days of Christendom. Trace the history of the English common law to Saxon times and through the Middle Ages, when the Church in England was already called the Church

of England, and you will encounter a narrative of settlement that expresses the love of a nation and a belief in the nation as a common possession of those who have settled there. You find the same thing all across Europe in the Renaissance, and you find it in the United States today. In no other country in the world are the words “this nation” more on the lips of politicians and public figures than in America. Like many left-liberal thinkers, Grayling is under the illusion that the rule of law that has been built upon the back of national loyalties can be indefinitely extended across all kinds of religious, linguistic, and historically negotiated boundaries, to form new empires and “unions,” while still retaining its essentially liberal character. He may well accuse me of nostalgia, but I would respond by accusing him of wishful thinking. I see the European Union, with its 170,000-page manual of oppressive regulations and its edicts enforcing a post-modern morality of “non-discrimination” on people like the Italians and the Poles, as a threat to the rule of law and not an expansion of it. The fact that the people of Europe, whenever they are allowed to vote, do their utmost to reclaim their stolen national identities is a sign of the dangers contained in this kind of top-down government. And the fact that the votes of the people, when allowed, are promptly ignored, is a clear sign of just how “liberal” this new jurisdiction is.

Grayling assumes that, because the American founders deliberately separated church and state in the First Amendment, the result was a “robustly secular” polity. What does he think the phrase “one nation under God” means, I wonder, to the ordinary American today? True, in American universities people tell a kind of story concerning the ideal secular republic that would exist were the *New York Review of Books* to be delivered to every American household. But, as someone who lives in the American countryside, I would say that I live in the nearest thing to a Christian community that the modern world knows, and it is a community that defines itself politically as a nation.

Grayling’s odd view of America connects, I think, with his equally odd view of the fate of liberty today. There is a suggestion of cloud cuckoo land in his declaration that we are as vigilant as ever concerning our freedoms,

since the ACLU has been defending some of them against the administration of President Bush. When did a member of the ACLU ever vote Republican, I wonder? Belgium has hate-speech laws in place that make it all but impossible to criticize Islam, “Islamophobia” being a crime—an opinion upheld, incidentally, by the United Nations Human Rights Council. Nowhere in the West, apart from America, can you laugh at Islam and count on your government to protect you—although of course it would protect you (not that it would need to do so) if you laughed at Christianity. A Dutch member of parliament was recently forbidden entry to Britain by the home secretary, on account of his “obnoxious” views, even though he was coming to address our own parliament on a topic of national concern. Our parliament in Britain has passed laws criminalizing hunting with hounds; smoking in public houses and private clubs; running an adoption agency on Christian principles; and employing whom you want in your own business—all because these offend the politically correct orthodoxies of a self-appointed elite, and regardless of the fact that they are integral to the way of life of many British people. It is not yet a crime for a Christian nurse to pray for her patient in a National Health Service hospital, but it seems that it is a sacking offense. Likewise, “homophobia” is not a crime in Britain, but you have to be careful what you say or do, especially if you are attempting to run a hotel or a boarding house on Christian principles. Hate-speech edicts are rampant on American campuses, ready to accuse the unwary of the hatred they did not know they felt. Home schooling—a fundamental right of all those who have children for whom they care—has called down the wrath of the state in Belgium (the case of MP Alexandra Colen and journalist Paul Belien) and is now about to be controlled by a British state whose educational incompetence is precisely what has led to the movement for home schooling. A growing climate of intimidation has been noticed, it seems, by everyone except Grayling—maybe because people like Grayling don’t suffer any damage to their way of life by the loss of hunting with hounds, smoking in the pub, employing whom you want, bringing up your children as Christians, or following Christian precepts. This indicates that Grayling ought not to

be so cavalier in suggesting that the liberal values that we both esteem can be protected when it is liberals, rather than conservatives, who are charged with defining and policing them. Toleration does not mean *approving*, but the opposite: It means permitting that of which you disapprove, including the enormous list of things which get up the nose of the liberal elite.

I assume that readers of *AZURE* will know how one-sided is Grayling's brief aetiology of Islamist resentment. He does not mention Ibn al-Wahhab, his influence in Arabia, and the subsequent adventures of the Wahhabists in nineteenth-century Afghanistan and India. He does not mention the continuing export of Wahhabism by Saudi Arabia, or the formation of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt by Hassan al-Banna, or the influence of that brotherhood in defining the Islamist agenda. He assumes, as so many people do, that Arab = Muslim, and that the problems of the Arabs are what the Muslim world is most concerned about. Arabs form 20 percent of Muslims, and a substantial minority of Arabs are Christians. The agenda of Arab nationalism was defined by Michel Aflaq, a Paris-educated Greek Orthodox Christian. And the Greek Orthodox in Palestine were prominent among those who led the resistance to Israel. The Islamization of the Palestinian cause is a new phenomenon, and to a great extent the work of Hamas. There is not much evidence that al-Qaida noticed the Palestinians until the political expediency of doing so was brought home to its leadership, and the problems of the Palestinians are precisely problems that could be solved if only people stopped thinking of their fundamental loyalties in religious terms but recognized home, territory, and neighborhood—in short, nation—as a better template.

One thing that makes Islam so difficult to live with is the sparse allowance of laughter with which it has to be swallowed. I think this is true of Grayling's brand of liberalism too. There is of course a serious point to be made about drink and what it does by way of easing human conflict—any reader of the *Thousand and One Nights* and the Sufi poets knows this. But

there is also a need, when discussing matters of life and death, to recognize the saving grace of laughter: hence my remarks. I invite Grayling to join me in drinking a good bottle of Lebanese wine and in reflecting on the history of that country and what it says about the interconnection between the freedoms that he values and the national idea that he rejects.

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