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Review

Europe vs. America

By [Tony Judt](#)

The United States of Europe: The New Superpower and the End of American Supremacy

by T.R. Reid

Penguin, 305 pp., \$25.95

The European Dream: How Europe's Vision of the Future Is Quietly Eclipsing the American Dream

by Jeremy Rifkin

Tarcher/Penguin, 434 pp., \$25.95

Free World: America, Europe, and the Surprising Future of the West

by Timothy Garton Ash

Random House, 286 pp. \$24.95

1.

Consider a mug of American coffee. It is found everywhere. It can be made by anyone. It is cheap—and refills are free. Being largely without flavor it can be diluted to taste. What it lacks in allure it makes up in size. It is the most democratic method ever devised for introducing caffeine into human beings. Now take a cup of Italian espresso. It requires expensive equipment. Price-to-volume ratio is outrageous, suggesting indifference to the consumer and ignorance of the market. The aesthetic satisfaction accessory to the beverage far outweighs its metabolic impact. It is not a drink; it is an artifact.

This contrast can stand for the differences between America and Europe — differences nowadays asserted with increased frequency and not a little acrimony on both sides of the Atlantic. The mutual criticisms are familiar. To American commentators Europe is "stagnant." Its workers, employers, and regulations lack the flexibility and adaptability of their US counterparts. The costs of European social welfare payments and public services are "unsustainable." Europe's aging and "cosseted" populations are underproductive and self-satisfied. In a globalized world, the "European social model" is a doomed mirage. This conclusion is typically drawn even by "liberal" American observers, who differ from conservative (and neoconservative) critics only in deriving no pleasure from it.

To a growing number of Europeans, however, it is America that is in trouble and the "American way of life" that cannot be sustained. The American pursuit of wealth, size, and abundance — as material surrogates for happiness — is aesthetically unpleasing and ecologically catastrophic. The American economy is built on sand (or, more precisely, other people's money). For many Americans the promise of a better future is a fading hope. Contemporary mass culture in the US is squalid and meretricious. No wonder so many Americans turn to the church for solace.

These perceptions constitute the real Atlantic gap and they suggest that something has changed. In past decades it was conventionally assumed — whether with satisfaction or regret — that Europe and America were converging upon a single "Western" model of late capitalism, with the US as usual leading the way. The logic of scale and market, of efficiency and profit, would ineluctably trump local variations and inherited cultural constraints. Americanization (or globalization — the two treated as synonymous) was inevitable. The best — indeed the only — hope for local products and practices was that they would be swept up into the global vortex and repackaged as "international" commodities for universal consumption. Thus an archetypically Italian product — *caffè espresso* — would travel to the US, where it would metamorphose from an elite preference into a popular commodity, and then be repackaged and sold back to Europeans by an American chain store.

But something has gone wrong with this story. It is not just that Starbucks has encountered unexpected foreign resistance to double-decaf-mocha-skim-latte-with-cinnamon (except, revealingly, in the United Kingdom), or that politically motivated Europeans are abjuring high-profile American commodities. It is becoming clear that America and Europe are not way stations on a historical production line, such that Europeans must expect to inherit or replicate the American experience after an appropriate time lag. They are actually quite distinct places, very possibly moving in divergent directions. There are even those — including the authors of two of the books under review — for whom it is not Europe but rather the United States that is trapped in the past.

America's cultural peculiarities (as seen from Europe) are well documented: the nation's marked religiosity, its selective prurience,^[1] its affection for guns and prisons (the EU has 87 prisoners per 100,000 people; America has 685), and its embrace of the death penalty. As T.R. Reid puts it in *The United States of Europe*, "Yes, Americans put up huge billboards reading 'Love Thy Neighbor,' but they murder and rape their neighbors at rates that would shock any European nation." But it is the curiosities of America's economy, and its social costs, that are now attracting attention.

Americans work much more than Europeans: according to the OECD a typical employed American put in 1,877 hours in 2000, compared to 1,562 for his or her French counterpart. One American in three works more than fifty hours a week. Americans take fewer paid holidays than Europeans. Whereas Swedes get more than thirty paid days off work per year and even the Brits get an average of twenty-

three, Americans can hope for something between four and ten, depending on where they live. Unemployment in the US is lower than in many European countries (though since out-of-work Americans soon lose their rights to unemployment benefits and are taken off the registers, these statistics may be misleading). America, it seems, is better than Europe at creating jobs. So more American adults are at work and they work much more than Europeans. What do they get for their efforts?

Not much, unless they are well-off. The US is an excellent place to be rich. Back in 1980 the average American chief executive earned forty times the average manufacturing employee. For the top tier of American CEOs, the ratio is now 475:1 and would be vastly greater if assets, not income, were taken into account. By way of comparison, the ratio in Britain is 24:1, in France 15:1, in Sweden 13:1.^[2] A privileged minority has access to the best medical treatment in the world. But 45 million Americans have no health insurance at all (of the world's developed countries only the US and South Africa offer no universal medical coverage). According to the World Health Organization the United States is number one in health spending per capita—and thirty-seventh in the quality of its service.

As a consequence, Americans live shorter lives than West Europeans. Their children are more likely to die in infancy: the US ranks twenty-sixth among industrial nations in infant mortality, with a rate double that of Sweden, higher than Slovenia's, and only just ahead of Lithuania's—and this despite spending 15 percent of US gross domestic product on "health care" (much of it siphoned off in the administrative costs of for-profit private networks). Sweden, by contrast, devotes just 8 percent of its GDP to health. The picture in education is very similar. In the aggregate the United States spends much more on education than the nations of Western Europe; and it has by far the best research universities in the world. Yet a recent study suggests that for every dollar the US spends on education it gets worse results than any other industrial nation. American children consistently underperform their European peers in both literacy and numeracy.^[3]

Very well, you might conclude. Europeans are better—fairer—at distributing social goods. This is not news. But there can be no goods or services without wealth, and surely the one thing American capitalism is good at, and where leisure-bound, self-indulgent Europeans need to improve, is the dynamic generation of wealth. But this is by no means obvious today. Europeans work less: but when they do work they seem to put their time to better use. In 1970 GDP per hour in the EU was 35 percent below that of the US; today the gap is less than 7 percent and closing fast. Productivity per hour of work in Italy, Austria, and Denmark is similar to that of the United States; but the US is now distinctly outperformed in this key measure by Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, ...and France.^[4]

America's longstanding advantage in wages and productivity—the gift of size, location, and history alike—appears to be winding down, with attendant consequences for US domination of the international business scene. The modern

American economy is not just in hock to international bankers with a foreign debt of \$3.3 trillion (28 percent of GDP); it is also increasingly foreign-owned. In the year 2000, European direct investment in the US exceeded American investment in Europe by nearly two fifths. Among dozens of emblematically "American" companies and products now owned by Europeans are Brooks Brothers, DKNY, Random House, Kent Cigarettes, Dove Soap, Chrysler, Bird's Eye, Pennzoil, Baskin-Robbins, and the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Europeans even appear to be better at generating small and medium-size businesses. There are more small businesses in the EU than in the United States, and they create more employment (65 percent of European jobs in 2002 were in small and medium-sized firms, compared with just 46 percent in the US). And they look after their employees much better. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights promises the "right to parental leave following the birth or adoption of a child" and every West European country provides salary support during that leave. In Sweden women get sixty-four weeks off and two thirds of their wages. Even Portugal guarantees maternity leave for three months on 100 percent salary. The US federal government guarantees nothing. In the words of Valgard Haugland, Norway's Christian Democratic minister for children and family: "Americans like to talk about family values. We have decided to do more than talk; we use our tax revenues to pay for family values."

Yet despite such widely bemoaned bureaucratic and fiscal impediments to output, Europeans appear somehow to manage rather well.^[5] And of course the welfare state is not just a value in itself. In the words of the London School of Economics economist Nicholas Barr, it "is an efficiency device against market failure"^[6]: a prudential impediment to the social and political risks of excessive inequality. It was Winston Churchill who declared in March 1943 that "there is no finer investment for any community than putting milk into babies." To his self-anointed disciples in contemporary America, however, this reeks of "welfare." In the US today the richest 1 percent holds 38 percent of the wealth and they are redistributing it ever more to their advantage. Meanwhile one American adult in five is in poverty—compared with one in fifteen in Italy.^[7] The benefits don't even trickle down anymore. To many foreigners today this is a distinctly unappetizing vision: the "American way of life" is at a steep discount. As an economic model the US is not replicable.^[8] As a social model it offers few redeeming qualities. One is reminded of Oliver Goldsmith's mordant reflections upon an earlier age of private greed and public indifference:

*Ill fares the land, to hast'ning ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay.*^[9]

2.

This is the case put forward by Jeremy Rifkin and T.R. Reid. Rifkin is the more ambitious of the two, rather too much so: his book, *The European Dream*, is replete with efforts to summarize everything from church history to Enlightenment philosophy, all to the end of demonstrating that it is individualist America that is

stuck in a time warp and cooperative Europe that represents the future. I think he is fundamentally right: but the case can only be hurt by the jejune summaries of the "Making of the Bourgeoisie" or the "Rise of the Nation-State," as well as by a crassly reductionist account of American materialism, and a hodgepodge of ill-advised allusions to chaos theory, the "Great Chain of Being," Hobbes, Descartes, Hegel, and the Enclosure Acts.

The European Dream isn't as bad a book as some reviewers have suggested and it has something important to say. Of contemporary America Rifkin writes:

With only our religious fervor to hold on to, we have become a "chosen people" without a narrative—making America potentially a more dangerous and lonely place to be.

But the book would have been a whole lot better had Rifkin stuck to what he knows about and not tried so hard to say something "important."

T.R. Reid is a journalist and his account of European superiority, which covers much the same territory as Rifkin's, is shorter, sharper, more readable, and less pretentious. It has some amusing vignettes: notably of American innocents—Jack Welch, George W. Bush (and most recently Bill Gates) —caught up in a brave new world of European regulations they can neither understand nor ignore. And Reid, like Rifkin, demonstrates very effectively just why the European Union, with its regulatory powers, its wealth, and its institutional example, is a place Americans will need to take extremely seriously in coming decades.

But though their books are timely, neither writer is saying anything very new. Their damning bill of particulars regarding the United States is familiar to Europeans—it was in 1956 that Jimmy Porter, in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, sardonically observed that "it's pretty dreary living in the American age—unless of course you're American," and one way or another that thought has echoed down the decades to the present day. But just because there is something profoundly amiss in the US today, and something no less intuitively appealing about the European social compact, this does not license us to tell fairy stories.

An anyone seeking in these books an account of the origins of the EU will be led badly astray. Reid and Rifkin trip over themselves to praise the founding fathers of Europe for their foresight and wisdom in guiding Europe to its present eminence. According to Reid, in "the years following the Schuman Declaration, the European Movement took the continent by storm." The European Coal and Steel Community was a "rip-roaring economic success." Rifkin goes further: Europe, he writes, is "a giant freewheeling experimental laboratory for rethinking the human condition..."(!)

These claims are absurd.^[10] The European Union is what it is: the largely unintended product of decades of negotiations by West European politicians seeking to uphold and advance their national and sectoral interests. That's part of its problem: it is a compromise on a continental scale, designed by literally hundreds of committees. Actually this makes the EU more interesting and in some ways

more impressive than if it merely incarnated some uncontentious utopian blueprint. In the same vein, it seems silly to write, as Rifkin does, about the awfulness of American "cookie-cutter housing tracts" as yet another symptom of American mediocrity without acknowledging Europe's own eyesores. This is a man who has never stared upon the urban brutalism of Sarcelles, a postwar dormitory town north of Paris; who has not died a little in Milton Keynes; who has avoided the outer suburbs of modern Milan. Reid is right to insist that Europe has the best roads, the fastest trains, the cheapest plane fares. And yes, the EU is indeed closer, as Rifkin notes, "to the pulse of the changes that are transforming the world into a globalized society." But it isn't perfect by any means.

Indeed, Europe is facing real problems. But they are not the ones that American free-market critics recount with such grim glee. Yes, the European Commission periodically makes an ass of itself, aspiring to regulate the size of condoms and the curvature of cucumbers. The much-vaunted Stability Pact to constrain national expenditure and debt has broken down in acrimony, though with no discernible damage to the euro it was designed to protect. And pensions and other social provisions will be seriously underfunded in decades to come unless Europeans have more children, welcome more immigrants, work a few more years before retiring, take somewhat less generous unemployment compensation, and make it easier for businesses to employ young people. But these are not deep structural failings of the European way of life: they are difficult policy choices with political consequences. None of them implies the dismantling of the welfare state.^[11]

Europe's true dilemmas lie elsewhere. In the Netherlands, in Paris and Antwerp and other cities, antagonism and incomprehension between the indigenous local population and a fast-growing minority of Muslims (one million in the Netherlands, over five million in France, perhaps 13 million in the EU to date) has already moved on from graffiti and no-go zones to arson, assaults, and assassinations. Turks, Moroccans, Tunisians, Algerians, and others have been arriving in Western Europe since the 1960s. We are now seeing the emergence of a third generation: in large part unemployed, angry, alienated, and increasingly open to the communitarian appeal of radical Islam.^[12]

For nearly four decades mainstream European politicians turned a blind eye to all this: to the impact of de facto segregated housing; isolated unintegrated communities; and the rising tide of fearful, resentful white voters convinced that the boat was "full." It has taken Jean-Marie Le Pen, the assassinated Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn, and a flock of demagogic anti-immigrant parties from Norway to Italy to awaken Europeans to this crisis—and it augurs badly that the response of everyone from Tony Blair to Valéry Giscard d'Estaing has been to cry "Havoc!" and wind up the drawbridge.

For the other problem facing Europe, and the two are of course connected, is the pressure on its outer edges. The European Union is almost too attractive for its own good—in contrast with the United States, which is widely disliked for what it *does*, the EU appeals just by virtue of what it *is*. Refugees and illegal immigrants from half of Africa periodically drown in their desperate efforts to cross the Straits of Gibraltar or beach themselves on Italy's southernmost islands —or else they land safely, only to get shipped back. Turkey had been trying for nearly forty years to

gain admission to the European club before its application was (reluctantly) taken up last month. Ukraine's best hope for a stable democratic future lies inside Europe—or at least with the prospect of one day getting there, which would greatly strengthen the hand of Viktor Yushchenko and his supporters in the aftermath of their recent victory. And the same of course is true for the remnant states of former Yugoslavia. But while Brussels is all too well aware of the risks entailed in ignoring Africa or leaving Ukraine or Bosnia to fester at its gates—much less casting 70 million Turkish Muslims into the fold of radical Islam—Europe's leaders are deeply troubled at the prospect (and the cost) of committing the EU to extending itself to the edges of Asia.

These are Europe's real challenges. The EU may be, as Reid and Rifkin suggest, a luminous model of trans-state cooperation, justice, and harmony.^[13] But it will not be easy for the EU to integrate its ethnic and religious minorities, regulate immigration, or admit Turkey on workable terms.^[14] Yet should it mismanage the permanent crisis on its eastern and southern borders, Europe is going to be in very serious difficulties indeed. And that, not some sort of atavistic anti-Americanism or rocket-envy, is why many reasonable Europeans and their leaders are utterly enraged by President George W. Bush.

To the Bush administration "Islam" is an abstraction, the politically serviceable object of what Washington insiders now call the GWOT: the Global War on Terror. For the US, the Middle East is a faraway land, a convenient place to export America's troubles so that they won't have to be addressed in the "homeland." But the Middle East is Europe's "near abroad," as well as a major trading partner. From Tangier to Tabriz, Europe is surrounded by the "Middle East." A growing number of Europeans come from this Middle East. When the EU begins accession talks with Turkey, it will be anticipating its own insertion into the Middle East. America's strategy of global confrontation with Islam is not an option for Europe. It is a catastrophe.

3.

Timothy Garton Ash would probably not dissent from much of the preceding analysis. In his engaging new book he actually goes further than Rifkin and Reid in certain respects. As an international citizen, he notes, the United States is irresponsibly delinquent. The EU gave away \$36.5 billion in development aid in 2003. The US managed just one third that amount—and much of that foreign aid either went to Israel or else came with strings attached: nearly 80 percent of all American "development aid" obliges recipients to spend the money on American goods and services. On Iraq alone the US spent eight times the amount it gave in overseas aid to everyone else. The US is the meanest of all the rich countries on the OECD's Development Assistance Committee. The Europeans are by far the most generous.

There is more. The US contains just 5 percent of the world's population (and falling), but it is responsible for 25 percent of the world's greenhouse gas output per annum. Each year our atmosphere has to absorb twenty metric tons of carbon dioxide for every American man, woman, and child; but just nine tons for every

European. And the American share continues to grow, even as the Bush administration blocks any international action on pollution or global warming. The *real* weapons of mass destruction, in Garton Ash's view, are global poverty and incipient environmental catastrophe. On these genuine threats to our common civilization, the European Union has a strikingly superior record. Contemporary American pundits, the "*terribles simplificateurs*" who babble glibly of Mars and Venus or Clashing Civilizations, attract Garton Ash's amused disdain. But on the insouciant indifference of the present incumbent of the White House he is utterly unforgiving: "It was said of ancient Rome that the emperor Nero fiddled while the city burned. In the new Rome, the president fiddled while the Earth burned."

All the same, *Free World* is by no means just another indictment of America.

Timothy Garton Ash knows Europe—or, rather, he knows the many different Europes, the variable geometry of squabbles and interests and alliances that limit the EU's capacity to make itself felt in world politics. He shares the widespread English suspicion of French mischief-making. And he balances his remarks about the US with some well-aimed shots at the Common Agricultural Fund—noting that while in the year 2000 the EU donated \$8 per head to sub-Saharan Africa, it managed to set aside, in the form of subsidies, \$913 for every cow in Europe.

But for all that Garton Ash is actually quite optimistic about both Europe *and* the United States. More surprisingly, he is optimistic—even, as it seems to me, a touch irenic—about the future of the Western alliance. In part, to be sure, this is driven by what he sees as urgent necessity: the West had better stop squabbling and find a way to work together for the common good, because it only has about twenty years left before China (and then India) becomes a great power and the narcissistic minor differences between Europe and America will be lost to view: "In a longer historical perspective, this may be our last chance to set the agenda of world politics."

That agenda, in Garton Ash's account, is to set aside recent quarrels and "reinvent" the post-cold war West as an example and advocate of freedom: freedom from want, freedom from fear, freedom from human and ecological oppression (the chapter on global poverty and environmental risk is revealingly titled "The New Red Armies"). The Rooseveltian echoes are no coincidence—what Garton Ash has in mind really is a new Atlantic Alliance and it is not by chance that Winston Churchill occupies a prominent place in his argument. For this is a very British book. The choice between Europe and America is presented as one that the British understand better than anyone else (because they have lived it for sixty years); Atlantic reconciliation is thus something that London—perched uncomfortably on the edge of continental Europe and with half an eye cast permanently on Washington—is best placed to help bring about.

But is Britain really, as Garton Ash writes, a "seismograph" or "thermometer" of European-American relations? It is true that the UK today manages both to be part of the European Union and to manifest some of the trashier aspects of American

commercial culture, but I doubt that this is what Garton Ash has in mind. He appears, rather, to see London's role as mitigating the damage done by American unilateralism on the one hand and "Euro-Gaullism" on the other ("the Chiracian version of Euro-Gaullism leads nowhere"). An internationally minded "Euroatlanticism" is his ideal and Tony Blair incarnates it: "Tony Blair has grasped and articulated this British national interest, role, and chance better than any of his predecessors." Of course, Garton Ash can hardly deny that Blair has so far ducked the challenge of selling the European Constitution to a skeptical British public. And I don't think he harbors any illusions about the "special relationship." Yet he still insists that Great Britain has this vital role to play in bridging the Atlantic gap.

I find that a very odd claim. Tony Blair is a political tactician with a lucrative little sideline in made-to-measure moralizing.^[15] But his international adventures have alienated Britain from many of its fellow EU members without gaining any influence over Washington, where the British prime minister's visits are exercises in futility and humiliation. Yes, in certain respects the UK today has real affinities with America: the scale of poverty in Britain, and the income gap between rich and poor, has grown steadily since the 1970s and is closer to that of the US than anything found in Western Europe. British hourly productivity is well below most West European rates. However, New Labour was supposed to combine the best of the European social model and American entrepreneurship: Garton Ash himself concedes it has not quite managed this.^[16]

Free World understates the challenge facing Brits—or other Europeans— seeking to draw the US back into any common international project beyond the GWOT. Timothy Garton Ash is right to insist that there is more to America than neocons and Republican know-nothings and that their present dominance will pass. But his book is about the here and now. So we can't ignore that the people making policy in Washington aren't interested in reading Timothy Garton Ash's "Declaration of Interdependence." The very last thing they want is some "common initiative" in the Middle East. And they couldn't care less about his "New Red Armies." Yes: in its own interest "America should want Europe to be a benign check and balance on its own solitary hyperpower." That is good advice. But no one in power is listening.

Conservative think tanks in Washington are lobbying against any consolidated European international presence—in the words of David Frum, a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and former Bush speechwriter, it "raises important strategic questions" (i.e., we don't like it).^[17] The new US secretary of state was widely quoted in 2003 to the effect that the United States intends to "forgive Russia, ignore Germany, and punish France." According to the authors of a recent Atlantic Council report, the Bush administration regards Europe as being "on probation," its future standing with Washington dependent on better behavior.^[18] For the first time since World War II, influential voices are suggesting that a united Europe would be a threat to American interests and that the US should block its emergence.

Moreover, the common European-American values upon which Timothy Garton Ash's argument rests may not be quite as common as he suggests. In its widespread religiosity and the place of God in its public affairs, its suspicion of dissent, its fear

of foreign influence, its unfamiliarity with alien lands, and its reliance upon military strength when dealing with them, the US does indeed have much in common with other countries: but none of them is in Europe. When the international treaty to ban land mines was passed by the UN in 1997 by a vote of 142–0, the US abstained; in company with Russia and a handful of other countries we have still not ratified it. The US is one of only two states (the other is Somalia) that have failed to ratify the 1989 Convention on Children's Rights. Our opposition to the international Biological Weapons Convention is shared by China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Cuba, and Iran.

Abolition of the death penalty is a condition for EU membership, whereas the US currently executes prisoners on a scale matched only in China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the Congo. American opposition to an International Criminal Court has been supported in the UN and elsewhere by Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Indonesia, Israel, and Egypt. The American doctrine of "preventive war" now finds its fraternal counterpart in Muscovite talk of "preventive counterrevolution."^[19] And as for the United Nations itself, the jewel in the crown of international agencies set in place after World War II by an earlier generation of American leaders: as I write, a scurrilous, high-decibel campaign is being mounted from Washington to bring down Kofi Annan, the UN secretary-general, and cripple his institution.

So what can Europe do? In the first place, resist the temptation to make a virtue of the present tensions. It is pointless to deny their existence. In past eras the role of Europe's "other" — the close neighbor against whom Europeans measure their own distinctive identity — was variously occupied by Turkey and Russia; today that role is being filled by the United States. But like Garton Ash, I think it would be a mistake to follow Jürgen Habermas's advice and try to build European unity around "transatlantic value differences." Europeans certainly need to find a purpose and define their common role, but there are better ways to do it.

One would be to get on with ratifying their proposed constitution. This document arouses paranoia and anxiety in Washington (and London); but it is actually quite dull and anodyne. Much of it consists of practical prescriptions for decision-making procedures in a cumbersome body of twenty-five-plus separate sovereign states. The constitution also strengthens the role of European courts and extends the EU's cross-border competence in criminal law and policing (a wholly laudable objective for anyone serious about fighting terrorists). But otherwise it just gives substance and application to the EU's claim to "coordinate the economic and employment policies of the member states." It is not a very inspiring document—its leading drafter, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, is no Thomas Jefferson—but it will do much practical good.

Above all, it will enable Europe to continue playing to its international strengths in spite of American obstruction^[20] and the Bush administration's efforts to pick off or otherwise pressure individual EU member states. For the EU today isn't just an interesting blueprint for interstate governance without the drawbacks of supranational sovereignty. Europe experienced the twentieth century—invasion, occupation, civil war, anarchy, massacres, genocide, and the descent into

barbarism —to a degree unmatched anywhere else. The risks inherent in a "war of choice" (Iraq), or the abandonment of international agencies in favor of unilateral initiative, or an excessive reliance on military power, are thus clearer to Europeans than to most other peoples: "Europeans want to be sure that there is no adventure in the future. They have had too much of that."^[21] The United States, by contrast, had no direct experience of the worst of the twentieth century—and is thus regrettably immune to its lessons.

American-style belligerent patriotism, as Garton Ash notes, is rare in contemporary Europe. This dislike of bellicosity goes well beyond traditional pacifism: Europeans no longer even *think* about interstate relations in martial terms. But *pace* American critics, this makes Europeans and their model more rather than less effective when it comes to addressing international crises. The US is still rather good at the old-fashioned art of making war. But war-making is the exception in modern international affairs. The real challenge is preventing war, making peace—and keeping it. And this is something at which Europe is going to be increasingly adept.

The countries of the EU already provide the largest share of the world's peacekeepers and international policemen. Europeans have a real, if limited, military capacity—though they will need to commit more resources to the planned 60,000-man "Euro-force" if it is to be effective. The best European troops—for example, the British army—have been trained for decades to work with occupied and warring civil populations, a skill with which the US Army is shockingly unfamiliar. It will be a long time before the EU develops and implements a common foreign policy—though the new constitution would facilitate that, if only by creating a European foreign minister authorized to speak for the whole union. But when it does at last speak with a single voice in international affairs, the EU will wield a lot of power.

The reason is not that the EU will be rich or big—though it already is both. The US is rich and big. And one day China may be richer and bigger. Europe will matter because of the cross-border template upon which contemporary Europe is being constructed. "Globalization" isn't primarily about trade or communications, economic monopolies or even empire. If it were it would hardly be new: those aspects of life were already "globalizing" a hundred years ago.^[22] Globalization is about the disappearance of boundaries—cultural and economic boundaries, physical boundaries, linguistic boundaries—and the challenge of organizing our world in their absence. In the words of Jean-Marie Guéhenno, the UN's director of peacekeeping operations: "Having lost the comfort of our geographical boundaries, we must in effect rediscover what creates the bond between humans that constitute a community."^[23]

To their own surprise and occasional consternation, Europeans have begun to do this: to create a bond between human beings that transcends older boundaries and to make out of these new institutional forms something that really is a community. They don't always do it very well and there is still considerable nostalgia in certain quarters for those old frontier posts. But something is better than nothing: and

nothing is just what we shall be left with if the fragile international accords, treaties, agencies, laws, and institutions that we have erected since 1945 are allowed to rot and decline—or, worse, are deliberately brought low. As things now stand, boundary-breaking and community-making is something that Europeans are doing better than anyone else. The United States, trapped once again in what Tocqueville called its "perpetual utterance of self-applause," isn't even trying.

—January 12, 2005

Notes

[1] The US television network that recently broadcast a passing glimpse at Janet Jackson's anatomy was excoriated for its wanton lapse of taste; but the avalanche of accompanying commercials for products designed to enhance male potency passed quite without comment. The female breast, it seems, can rot a nation's moral core; but malfunctioning penises are wholesome family fare.

[2] See Robin Blackburn, *Banking on Death: Or, Investing in Life: The History and Future of Pensions* (Verso, 2002) p. 201, Table 3.2.

[3] For the 2003 PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) report, issued by the OECD on December 6, 2004, see www.pisa.oecd.org.

[4] See Andrew Sharpe, Appendix Table 2, "Output per House Levels in the OECD Countries Relative to the United States" for 2003; Centre for the Study of Living Standards, *International Productivity Monitor*, No. 9 (Fall 2004), at www.csls.ca/ipm/9/sharpe-tables.pdf.

[5] Note, too, that the steadily rising cost of private medical insurance in the US puts at least as much of a burden on American firms as social taxation and welfare privileges place upon their European counterparts—while providing none of the attendant social benefits.

[6] Katrin Benahold, "Love of Leisure, and Europe's Reasons," *The New York Times*, July 29, 2004.

[7] Following the OECD definition of a family income, less than 50 percent of the mean personal income of the nation.

[8] Appetizing or not, the American economic model could never be replicated anywhere else. Americans are the world's consumers of last resort. But their national deficits on budget and current account are reaching unprecedented levels. The collapsing dollar is sustained only by foreigners' willingness to hold it: Americans are currently spending other people's money on other people's products. Were the US any other country it would by now be in the unforgiving hands of the International Monetary Fund.

[9] *The Deserted Village* (1770).

[10] As is Reid's description of David Beckham as "Europe's Michael Jordan." Beckham is a journeyman footballer with a first-class hairdo and a celebrity wife. He would never have made the cut in the days of Pele, Johann Cruyff, or Ferenc Puskas. His prominence on European sports pages illustrates the power of transcontinental marketing, but in this as other respects Beckham is just a depressing monument to the spirit of our age: he is, in Camus's phrase, a "*prophète vide pour temps médiocre*." The pertinent analogy here is not Michael Jordan but Dennis Rodman.

[11] In any case, America's present indebtedness is at least as much a lien on the future as Europe's welfare commitments. And Americans who point fingers at the European pension gap should recall that were United Airlines, General Motors, or any other semisolvant company to abandon its unfundable pension commitments, it is US taxpayers who would be left with the tab.

[12] For a thoughtful and rather more optimistic account of the French case, see Herman Lebovics, *Bringing the Empire Back Home: France in the Global Age* (Duke University Press, 2004).

[13] Perhaps not so very harmonious: already West European leaders are asking why they should make generous budget transfers to new members like Slovakia, only to see the latter use these subsidies to hold down their local corporate tax rates and thereby steal business and factories from their more expensive Western colleagues.

[14] The Turkish dilemma is complicated, and well-meaning European liberals can find themselves on both sides of the debate. For a sensitive and cogently reasoned summary of the case for keeping Turkey at a certain distance, see the interview with Robert Badinter, a former French minister of justice and longstanding Europhile, in *Le Figaro*, December 13, 2004.

[15] At the last Labour Party conference, rather than try to defend his reasons for going to war in Iraq, Blair simply informed the audience that he "believes," that they must share his "faith," and that in any case (like Martin Luther: "Here I stand, I can do no other") he would not budge.

[16] Indeed he cites a popular joke: Britain was promised that Blair's Third Way would bring it American universities and German prisons— what it is actually getting are American prisons and German universities.

[17] Frederick Studemann, "US Conservatives Cast Wary Eye at EU Treaty," *Financial Times*, November 5, 2004. The new tone of anxiety about a renascent Europe can even be found in august journals of mainstream foreign policy debate. See, for example, Jeffrey L. Cimbalò, "Saving NATO from Europe," in *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2004.

[18] See Bowman Cutter, Peter Rashish, and Paula Stern, "Washington Wants Economic Reform in Europe," *Financial Times*, November 22, 2004.

[19] The phrase is used by Kremlin adviser Gleb Pavlovski to describe President Putin's emerging strategy for addressing "containment" challenges at Russia's edges. I am indebted to Ivan Krastev of the Central European University in Budapest for this reference, in his unpublished essay on "Europe's Fatal Attraction."

[20] The US continues to impede European efforts to reach a nuclear settlement with Iran. Even on such a volatile issue, Washington has been more concerned about the risks of a successful European initiative than the benefits of a regional settlement.

[21] Alfons Verplaetse (governor of the National Bank of Belgium).

[22] On this, see the magisterial opening paragraphs of John Maynard Keynes's essay *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (Penguin, 1995).

[23] Jean-Marie Guéhenno, *The End of the Nation-State*, translated by Victoria Elliott (University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 139.

Letters

February 24, 2005: Avis Bohlen, [HOW BUSH SCUTTLED THE BIOWEAPONS PROTOCOL](#)

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