

Equality As The American Creed and “Harmony” As the Liberal Creed:

More on Ideological Blinkers

The argument of Lang, Habbakuk , Chesterfield and others about the American creed is an important one. It is important because it provides an intellectual explanation for the zealous, unreasoning quality of American foreign policy. It is an argument that can be extended to include academic analysis as well and it is also an argument that can be expanded to include countries that possess a liberal political culture. America is not alone in this. It is perhaps simply more zealous.

There is an important critique of Western social and political science that argues that rather than there being a value neutral “social science”, in fact this social science is under girded by the liberal pluralist assumptions and values of the European Enlightenment such as individualism, secularism and liberal pluralism. The consequence is that this social science ends up legitimating policy. Thus, whether it is globalization and American capitalism or if it is democracy and American democratization , social science scholarship walks in lock step synchronization with policy. The consequence is that social science research comes to conclusions that validate policy. For example, social science asserts that democracy is a universal concept and is not logically confined to the Western European and North American Enlightenment heartland as others might reasonably conclude.

The linkages established in the foregoing of the acceptance of the concept of the American creed and a validating set of ideological blinkers in social science have a

further intellectual extension. The liberal theorist Isaiah Berlin was deeply disturbed by the barbarism of the wars of communism and fascism in the Twentieth Century. In a famous essay, he controversially laid the blame for communism and fascism significantly at the feet of the assumptions of liberal democracy itself, or more precisely what he called the unexpected monism of European Enlightenment liberal thought (Isaiah Berlin, "Political Liberty and Pluralism" in I. Berlin, The Proper Study of Mankind). This meant that while such thought appears at first glance to be committed to diversity and pluralism, in fact it retains the compulsive appeal of the desirability and reassurance of a single encompassing system of thought that predates the Enlightenment. He said that while the surface appearance of liberal diversity appears to belie this, in fact he noted that such thought proceeded with the understanding that Enlightenment man is so fundamentally rational that when differences of opinion occur, these differences will be reasonably "harmonized" by both parties (In California terms, "I'm OK, are you OK?"). Against this assumption, no man can hold uncompromisingly and unbending to a contrary point of view. As a consequence, when liberalism encounters such an obdurate uncompromising point of view, the liberal reaction can become uncompromising itself due to its self-confidence of the assumed superiority of Enlightenment "reason" as it understands it (For a critical discussion of these revisionist ideas see M. Lilla, R. Dworkin, and R. Silvers, Eds., The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin (2001)).

. At this point, the "monism" attributed to the Enlightenment by Berlin adopts the attitude of the Greek philosophers towards the "barbarians" outside of the city who are either ignored or forcibly repressed. In the contemporary era, these "barbarians" are by and large those conservative cultures such as Islam, Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism

in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Ironically, it is thus arguably the case that the West becomes the perpetrator in the present assumed “clash of civilizations”.

Strongly implied in the foregoing is the observation that Liberal nations are by no means necessarily peaceful nations. This is illustrated in the French, British and American colonial wars spanning the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries when liberal democracy was spread at the points of bayonets upon politically conservative societies. There is, as it were, the “case study” of American and Western liberal ideas including liberal democracy, attempting to alter the Muslim commitment to community and family and not the individual, to religion and not secularism and to tradition as the reproducer of enduring values and not an imagined utopia. This line of thought leads logically to the war on terror. Massive statistical data reveals the depth of the profound dislike by Muslims of America and its version of liberal foreign policy. It is the case, that America is launched on a drum beating ideological liberal democratic crusade whose principles will either be embraced or nations who resist will face sanctions or the possibility of military invasion. However, this reservoir of ill will remains without violent repercussions except for the more angry 1-3% violent radical minority responsible for the acts of terror directed against America.

While the hostility towards America remains highly polarized and potentially dangerous, the greater part of the Muslim and non-Muslim world appear to agree that the “realist” compromising approach of Baker and Hamilton represents a persuasive diplomatic path to conflict resolution. Unfortunately, the American approach to international conflict is the ideological one sketched in the preceding. It has been made clear that George Bush on the one hand rejects the Baker/Hamilton formula and on the

other hand this analysis has made it clear that he remains constrained by both the ideological blinkers of the American creed of equality and the ideological blinkers of his certainty of the “reasonableness” and “harmony” of Enlightenment liberal thought . “Right “ is on his side and this accounts for the fervor of his position.

Born by the force of the American creed and by the certainty of Enlightenment assumptions, George Bush is flailing about in the interior of an ideological paper bag, which is partially of his own construction and partially of his uncritical inheritance of conduct conforming to the American and Enlightenment creeds. What is clear is that the discourse of the war on terror is largely that of an American ideological monologue. Bin Laden and al Zuhairi have learned which of George Bush’s ideological buttons to push and thus the latter is understandably confused and perhaps intellectually overwhelmed about theological matters of “good “and “evil”. Meanwhile, al Qaida works assiduously to extend its successes beyond the achievements of the forced American evacuation of Saudi Arabia and the creation of a major military diversion in Iraq.

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