
THE NEW VICHY SYNDROME

WHY EUROPEAN INTELLECTUALS
SURRENDER TO BARBARISM

THEODORE DALRYMPLE

"This book is a typical Theodore Dalrymple product: erudite,
witty, authoritatively blunt and, above all, wise."

—Christopher Caldwell, author of *Revolution and Its Enemies in Europe*

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THE NEW VICHY SYNDROME

*Why European Intellectuals
Surrender to Barbarism*



THEODORE DALRYMPLE

Encounter Books  New York • London

PREFACE



The works of man from dying we may save,
But man himself moves onward to the grave.

—GEORGE CRABBE, 1823

Were we, the old connoisseurs, those who revered Europe as it used to be, of genuine music and poetry as once they were, nothing but a pig-headed minority suffering from a complex neurosis, whom tomorrow would forget or deride? Was all that we called culture, spirit, soul, all that we called beautiful and sacred, nothing but a ghost long dead, which only a few fools like us took for true and living? Had it perhaps indeed never been true and living? Had all that we poor fools bothered our heads about never been anything but a phantom?

—HERMANN HESSE, *STEPPENWOLF*, 1927

Anyone who would be creative must have the self-confidence to plough his own furrow and the humility to accept justified criticism. This, as anyone who has tried it will confirm, is a difficult balance to achieve. Arrogance on the one hand and meek submission to the opinion of critics on the other are twin deformations to be avoided and are in dialectical relationship to one another. It is easy to swing, pendulum-like, between the two.

Likewise, a civilization must be open to outside influences if it is not to become self-satisfied in a state of inanition, but not so open that it can see nothing in its own achievements worthy of preservation. No trick is harder to pull off than to conserve while changing.

Western Europe is in a strangely neurotic condition, of being smug and anxious at the same time, or of veering suddenly between complacency and despond and back again. On the one hand, it believes that it has at last created a social and political system that, give or take a reform or two, is the full and final answer to the age-old question of how man is to live in society. Such serious social problems as persist are not the consequences of its system, but hangovers from the past that can be reformed out of existence.

On the other hand, there is anxiety that Europe is falling behind in a globalized world in which non-participation in the race is not an option, especially for an overpopulated region without sufficient natural resources even to feed itself, let alone live at the high standard of living to which it has become accustomed and the achievement of which it now sees as the main purpose of human existence.

Europe wants, as of right, both security and luxury in a world that neither can nor wants to grant it either. Understanding and denying this at the same time, it looks forward with apprehension but does nothing practical to meet the challenges. It is like the rabbit mesmerized by the stoat: it wishes the dangers would simply go away and not come back again.

But while it fears the future, it hates the past. The reasons are not difficult to discern. There is disappointment that the continent is no longer the center of the world, as it was for some hundreds of years, a position to which it long thought it was entitled; but, in addition, the history of the past century (the twentieth) seems nothing but a catalogue of catastrophe. Let me here quote the classicist Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, in his introduction to his popular lectures *Plato and His Dialogues*, published in 1931:

I have never met a young man who passed through [the Great War], or grew up after it, who has any belief in progress at all.

The very concept of progress, applied either to the future or to the past, is illusory or naïve; and therefore the past is but a prelude to or preparation for the events that exposed the illusion for what it was. And this was before the Second World War, which was the icing on the cake of despair, as it were.

The habit of seeing in the past no *gloire*, but only whatever leads up to our present discontents, has become general and widespread with the extension of education and the diffusion of information through the media of mass communication. A kind of miserabilist historiography has become the mark of the sensitive and well-informed, proof against any facile optimism about the past. I came across a fine example, almost a *reductio ad absurdum*, of this way of looking at things in Paris recently, where I picked up a book by the writer Patrick Besson, called *Haine de la Hollande*.

Besson is a Serbophile, who sees both NATO's war against Serbia and the subsequent trial of Slobodan Milosevic as wrong. As it happens, I agree with him; the war, begun on a lying pretext, by an arrogant ultimatum designed to be unacceptable to its recipient, solved no problem, and was won only by the resort to the very crimes of which Serbia was accused, i.e. the bombing of civilian targets. It also brought about the very ethnic cleansing that it was supposedly designed to stop. As for the trial of Milosevic, it invented a new kind of kangaroo court, one whose summary and pre-ordained verdict took years to arrive at, at an immense financial cost—a court that made up its procedural rules to suit the verdict as it went along.

M. Besson allows himself to hate Holland, however, because the trial took place in the Hague. His book starts with the following words:

First, the geographical point of view. On the map, it is a ridiculous little piece of cheese gnawed by mice.

It does not even cross M. Besson's mind that the creation of a country that has been one of the richest and freest in the world for hundreds of years might actually constitute a triumph of the human spirit.

Then there is the history:

The Dutch began their career in the history of the world by collaboration with the Romans. They resisted the Franks no better who, indicating by their prescience the intrinsic value of this superior race, quickly judged the Dutch climate disgusting and removed to the south, as far as the Seine, where they felt better.

I wish that I could say that this was all meant ironically, but the book was printed in Serbia; and whatever else one might say about the Serbs, their xenophobia is rarely a matter of irony. Besides, the book continues:

Some distinguished liars have tried to make us believe that there was, from 1600 to 1700, a Dutch "Golden Age." It is a grotesque fable. Let us take, for example, Vermeer, the petit bourgeois painter par excellence, capable of spending six months painting a servant pouring some milk. Vermeer is heavy, narrow, empty and even stupid. His poetry has no heart, his intelligence no balls. He is as cold as a condemned man. It is technique put at the service of the void, a sort of of cinematic Hollywood production before its time.

As for Rembrandt, he is no better: "morbidly emphatic," "nauseatingly grandiloquent."

During "the so-called Golden Age," the Dutch "took advantage of the lack of liberty elsewhere in Europe to enrich themselves by publishing, in editions of a quality less than mediocre, works forbidden elsewhere" (such as Descartes and Laclos, for example).

Here is how a man who describes Belgrade as "sacred" describes Amsterdam, whose domestic architecture is surely some of the greatest ever produced by mankind:

Amsterdam is a humid death-chamber where the only people who show a bit of life or warmth are the countless African, Asian and Arab prostitutes, drowned in beer or soft drugs. Amsterdam is a nostalgia with neither subject nor object. It lies between softness and death. Adipose civil servants, gouty retirees and stupid tourists wander along its canals in silence which, by their very mediocrity, discourage suicide. Amsterdam smells of French fries, its women, of course, of mussels.

This is all as if someone who disagreed with American foreign policy said that, therefore, Tennessee Williams couldn't write plays, Audubon couldn't paint birds, and Edison was uninventive.

In fact this kind of historiography, which traces a current discontent or complaint backwards and then claims it to be the whole of history, is now predominant. The number of grievance-bearers is so great that it includes almost the whole of the population, and is much increased since mass immigration so greatly balkanized the populations Europe. In Europe, even the rich and powerful can now imagine themselves to be an oppressed minority.

A belief that one's history contains nothing good or worthwhile leads either to utopian dreams of a new beginning, or a failure to resist those utopian dreams: in other words to fanaticism or apathy. Fanaticism is resentment in search of power;

consumerism is apathy in search of happiness.

Out of Africa, always something new; out of Europe, what exactly? Collapse?
Extremism?

1.

SOMETHING ROTTEN



There is something is rotten in the state of Europe, but it is not easy to say what it is or where it comes from. Partly it is difficult because, short of the Big Bang, the Garden of Eden, or the Unmoved Mover, there is no final cause of anything; when tracing back the origin of social or political problems, it is always open to someone to say that the origin had its own origin in turn, and that *this* is therefore the *real*, the *true*, origin.

It is strange that Europe should be the sick man of Europe. In many ways, things have never been better on the old continent; to take but one illustration of this fact, life expectancy has never been higher. When my father was born, in 1909, his life expectancy was forty-nine; if he had been born today, his life expectancy would be approaching eighty. No doubt Keats, Schubert, and Mozart packed a lot into their lives, but most people would nonetheless opt for long rather than short life spans.

The increase in wealth and the physical standard of living has been startling, moreover; in 1960, Sicilian peasants still slept indoors with their farm animals, and my working-class patients remembered sharing outside lavatories with several other households. In France, the years in which it lost its colonial empire are known as *les trente glorieuses*, the glorious thirty, when the French economy grew so fast that absolute poverty was eliminated and the country obtained one of the best infrastructures in the world. Germany's *Wirtschaftswunder* after the war really was a wonder; it was spoken of without cynicism, and transformed a country that the US Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau, Jr., wanted to keep forever in a state of rural pre-industrialization into the largest exporter of manufactured goods in the world, a remarkable achievement. It did this, moreover, while creating the very model of a model liberal-democratic state.

And yet, for all this success, there is a pervasive sense of impending doom, or at least of decline, in Europe. For example, as a European, I cannot help but feel how far and how fast the continent is falling behind the rest of the world whenever I visit Singapore, Peking, or even Dubai.¹

I am not concerned here to endorse the social or political arrangements of these places, or assert that I wish to copy them, let alone live in them. I remark merely on the strength of their economies, on the obvious energy and intelligence that they are

able to engage at all levels of the population. Compare how a laborer works in England with how his equivalent works in China or Singapore! The latter works urgently, putting his heart and soul into his work, as if something important depended upon it. He is participating in something larger than himself. For the former, there is nothing larger, or at any rate more important, than himself, and therefore he is in no hurry and feels little compulsion, either internal or external, to exert himself mightily. Whatever the explanation for the extreme, urgent, and nervous energy displayed by workers in the East, I do not think that external compulsion can be the whole, or even the major part, of it. Slave labor, after all, is not particularly efficient. Nor am I saying that this energy is wholly good, beneficial, or attractive in itself. There is clearly more to the good life than working fantastically, one might even say fanatically, hard,² though we should not underestimate, either, the importance of work as a source of self-respect.

No, when a European sees all this energy he knows that his continent cannot hope to match it, as surely as an aging man knows when he sees a young athlete in his prime that he cannot hope ever to rival his loose-limbed strength or grace. His best days are behind him, and it is little consolation to him that he is now, thanks to his age, wiser, richer, or less tormented by ambition than the younger man.

Should this matter? No one travelling through Europe would conclude from what he saw that life there was unbearable, far from it. In many countries, on the contrary, life seems distinctly good. The people are healthy (the Dutch are by now the tallest people in the world, a tribute to the abundance, if not to the excellence, of food there), they do not have to work excessively to survive, they are housed and warmed, they have disposable income enough to secure their entertainments, of which there is a greater choice than ever before. Viewed from the perspective of absolute standards, there is nothing much to be morose about.

Alas—or perhaps it is a good thing—man is a comparing animal, at least when he has the knowledge necessary to compare himself with others: which, in these times of unprecedented access to information (indeed, it is not necessary nowadays to go to information; it will come to you whether you want it or not), and of mass travel, he is more than ever liable to make comparisons. What makes him happy is not so much a high standard of living for himself, as a higher standard of living than someone else. As Gore Vidal remarked, it is not sufficient that I should succeed, it is necessary that someone else should fail. And this applies not only to the standard of living, but to achievements of other kinds.

The awareness that the gap between Europe and much of the rest of the world, in point of both wealth and achievement in other spheres, has dramatically decreased, and in some instances reversed, was bound to give rise to unease, even if it was regarded as inevitable in the long run.³ No one likes to see his place in the pecking order decline.

But there are even darker worries haunting Europe. It is one thing to fret over a decline that leads you to inhabit a static, but rich and genteel, country that is more like museum of past achievement than a living, breathing power,⁴ but another to

contemplate absolute decline. For once the machinery of international competition is set up, there is no standing still: you can go only forwards or backwards. If you don't keep up, you will go back, not relatively but absolutely, and Europe is blessed neither with natural resources nor huge tracts of virgin land upon which its population might lead a simpler life than that demanded by advanced economies.



ANXIETY

The arrival of at least two giant industrial nations on the scene—India and China—disquiets Europeans for three reasons. The first is that it is inherently difficult to compete with the combination of cheap labor and high technology; the second is that the only means of doing so, by technological advance that keeps ahead of the competition, looks increasingly beyond the continent's capacity. The continent that invented science as a self-conscious method of accumulating more knowledge about nature and the means by which it might be used to achieve human ends (evil as well as good, of course) has increasingly lost its position of leadership, and is now reduced to the application of what others discover or develop. A crude illustration of the decline of European science is the ratio of the number of Nobel Prizes won by British and American scientists in the fields of physics and chemistry for the periods 1940-1975 and 1976-2005. (British scientists were the most prolific winners of Nobel Prizes in Europe.) In the former period, British scientists won 37.5 percent as many prizes for physics as American scientists; in the latter period, 4.5 percent. For chemistry the figures were 93.3 percent and 16.7 percent respectively. Moreover, the figures declined not only relatively, but absolutely: from 9 to 2 in the case of physics, and from 14 to 6 in the case of chemistry.⁵

No doubt the relation between success in pure science and industrial or economic prowess is not a straightforward one. Entire countries have overtaken Britain economically without contributing a twentieth as much as Britain to the sum total of man's scientific knowledge. Not only Britain, however, but the whole of Europe cannot be said to be in the forefront of world technology, either, though there may be isolated areas in which it leads. And this relative decline—which in some cases may even be absolute—is both humiliating in itself and bodes ill in a competitive world. Moreover, there is not much confidence anywhere that change for the better is at hand, or indeed that anyone knows, even in principle, let alone practice, how to bring it about. I shall explore the deep-seated reasons for this later in the book.

The third cause for anxiety in Europe over the rise of India, China, and other lesser, but still considerable, countries as competitors is Europe's strategic vulnerability. It is almost entirely dependent for its energy on foreign and distant resources. These

resources are in areas or countries that are either politically unstable or potentially hostile—competition for their resources could easily turn acute. The economic downturn that caused a decline in the price of oil will probably not last forever, as downturns in the past have not lasted for ever;⁶ and often a period of exuberant growth follows. Then competition for energy resources will be fierce, and resort to force or the threat of force might be necessary. How would Europe fare if such an eventuality came to pass?

Europe is not only non-militaristic, it is anti-military.⁷ The profession of arms has no prestige whatever; on the contrary, it has the very reverse of prestige. No thought is more alien to the modern European mind, brought up in a lasting peace that followed two of the most catastrophic wars in history, than that he who desires peace must prepare for war. Even to entertain such a thought is to be branded a warmonger, as someone who secretly or openly glorifies the cull of young men, and increasingly of others, known as war.



WEAKNESS

A lack of military preparedness and capability, however, has its consequences. When, in the wake of the Danish cartoon affair, the Danish embassy in Damascus was attacked with the obvious connivance of the Syrian government, how did, how could, Europe respond? The impression was given, and it was a correct one, that Europe had no means of dealing with a couple of cunning and treacherous mullahs who stirred up trouble for Denmark, other than by virtually giving in to demands that certain important subjects henceforth be placed, *de facto*, off limits for discussion. Even if the policy of appeasement were not officially enunciated, what was made abundantly clear by the whole episode was that there would be no retaliation by European countries for threats made to their own citizens: and that there would be no retaliation because there could be no retaliation. The quiet life was clearly preferred to the costs of securing a free one; if only we appeased enough, there would be peace in our time.

Europe has hardly navy enough to suppress the Somali pirates, let alone protect its interests against a more serious ill-wisher with a hold over its energy supplies. Merely because bellicosity is a vice, cowardice is not a virtue. Nor will the latter earn the respect, but rather the contempt, of those who do not share an anti-military point of view.

Prosperous as never before, long-lived as never before, Europeans look into the future with anxiety or even with fear, as if they had a secret sickness that had not yet made itself manifest by obvious symptoms or signs but that was nevertheless eating

them away in their vital parts. They are aware that, in Chinese parlance, the mandate of heaven has been withdrawn from them; and in losing that, they have lost everything. All that is left to them is to preserve their remaining privileges as best they can; *après nous*, as a well-known mistress of Louis XV is said to have remarked, *le deluge*.

2.

DEMOGRAPHIC WORRIES, OR THE DEARTH OF BIRTH AND ITS CONSEQUENCES



In *The Sonnets*, Shakespeare tells the young man to whom they are addressed that he must have children, in particular a son, or else he has lived in vain, indeed badly and selfishly. The very first lines of the sequence are:

From fairest creatures we desire increase,
That thereby beauty's rose might never die . . .

The message is conveyed *ad* what would be *nauseam* were it not for Shakespeare's sublime poetic gift:

Be not self-willed, for thou art much too fair
To be death's conquest and make worms thine heir.

Or:

Is it for fear to wet a widow's eye
That thou consum'st thyself in single life?
Ah, if thou issueless shalt hap to die,
The world will wail thee like a makeless wife,
The world will be thy widow and still weep.

Or:

Who lets so fair a house fall to decay,
Which husbandry in honour might uphold
Against the stormy gusts of winter's day
And barren rage of death's eternal cold?
O none but unthrifths! Dear my love you know,
You had a father; let your son say so.

In fact, I could cite scores of passages that convey this, or a closely allied thought, which for most of human history has been a commonplace: namely, that the passing on of one's life to another generation is both part of what makes human life worth living, and testimony that it is in fact worth living.

But modern Europeans, it seems, do not agree. They are not concerned to replace

themselves, and have other things on their minds. Here are the fertility rates of several European countries in 2004:

Ireland: 1.99
France: 1.90
Norway: 1.81
Sweden 1.75
UK: 1.74
Netherlands: 1.73
Germany: 1.37
Italy: 1.33
Spain: 1.32
Greece: 1.29

The replacement fertility rate for developed countries such as those in the above list is generally taken to be 2.1.⁸ Not a single western European country, therefore, has a fertility rate that will ensure that its population will maintain itself at its current size.

Moreover, life expectancy is continuing to rise. Some of the countries with the lowest fertility rates (Spain and Italy, for example) have among the highest life expectancies in the world, and they are still rising. This rise in turn raises fears that the economically active proportion of the population will decline, and that those unfortunate enough still to be in employment will have to devote ever more of their labor-time to the maintenance of the numerous aging drones in their midst. This will create tensions, all the more so as the youth culture which, paradoxically, predominates in an aging population is not exactly solicitous or respectful of the comfort, opinions, and welfare of the elderly.



IMMIGRANTS INSTEAD OF CHILDREN

One solution, joyously embraced by some, especially by liberal intellectuals, but feared by the majority, is mass immigration from far-away countries of which we know nothing. Europe has always known population movements, of course, peaceful, violent, horrific, beneficial, as the case may be.⁹ But yet the type of mass immigration that it has experienced recently is of a different type, that renders large cities unfamiliar to those who grew up in them. This is anxiety-provoking in itself; we have enough change to assimilate in the technological sphere without the added anxieties produced by not understanding the basic cultural, ethical, and social assumptions of our neighbors.

In particular, of course, there are deep and often unspoken anxieties about the size

and increase in the Moslem population of Europe. This population is younger than the native, or non-Moslem, population;¹⁰ it is constantly being enlarged by what are known as “fetching” marriages, that is to say marriages in which a resident Moslem finds a bride or a groom in his ancestral land and then, under family reunification rules, brings her or him to Europe; and finally, the fertility rate among Moslems is feared to be much higher than the native population.

Therefore, when the French newspapers reported, in a triumphant and even triumphalist way that the birth rate in France had recently become the highest in Europe (though still not quite reaching the replacement rate), publishing cartoons to accompany the reports of a rejuvenated Marianne¹¹ baring her arm and flexing her demographic biceps, there was a ghost at the banquet: that is to say, the proportion of babies born to Moslem mothers. There was not a single word on this delicate subject; it would have been an intellectual and moral solecism to mention it. Instead, the articles suggested that the figures represented a triumph for the French welfare state, which allegedly made it easier, more comfortable, or more economically advantageous for women to have children than anywhere else in Europe.

The same ghost was notable by its absence from the paper by the French National Institute for Statistical and Economic Studies, entitled *Demographic balance sheet: a record natural increase*. The Institute faced both practical and ethical problems, the practical problem being that French census and registration data do not contain information about the religious affiliations of French citizens. The ethical problem was that of the danger of throwing fuel on a fire, or even of starting the fire itself, if such information had been gathered and made available, for example by surveying the given names of those born in the country over a determined period, which would surely have given a rough idea of the proportion of children born to Moslem parents.



SOMETHING MISSING

But it is certainly not difficult to find anxieties expressed by the French and others about the demographic evolution of France. Wild speculations and statements abound and flourish in an atmosphere in which hard data are sometimes difficult to come by, because the French state insists that once someone becomes French by citizenship, his ancestors become, metaphorically speaking, the Gauls, and he is therefore not to be distinguished from any other Frenchman, in statistics or anywhere else. It would take considerable conceptual subtlety as well as empirical knowledge to disentangle the truth and lies of all this.

Let us now turn to the question of how far demographic fears are justified. Here it is

essential to make a general point: a projection is not a prediction. What has happened in the past may not happen in the future; what has not happened in the past may happen in the future. Nothing is easier than to provoke anxiety and alarm than by extending ever upwards the line of a graph showing exponential growth, until some impossible and catastrophic situation is reached.

If you seed a Petri dish containing the right growth medium with the bacterium *Staphylococcus aureus*, the colony will grow at such a rate that, if it were to continue, the whole of the biosphere would soon consist of nothing else but *Staphylococcus aureus*. But—of course—that does not happen. The germ does not take over the world because the conditions necessary for its exponential growth do not continue to hold. If you look at the history of recent failed apocalyptic predictions (and there is nothing modern man seems to like more, to judge from the sale of books, than the contemplation of his own species-annihilation), they fail because the authors have not appreciated sufficiently the difference between a projection and a prediction. Within my lifetime, the earth has been destined to freeze over or heat up to the point that the planet will be uninhabitable for humans,¹² population has been destined to rise so fast that mass famine on an unprecedented scale was literally inevitable, the spread of AIDS was to decimate the population of the world without anybody being able to do anything about it, and hundreds of thousands if not millions of my countrymen were doomed to contract a variant of Creutzfeld-Jakob disease because of having eaten meat infected with mad cow disease. No doubt there were many other predicted apocalypses of which I failed to take notice, and everyone will have his favorite. While it is no doubt true that there might one day be such an apocalypse, if only a fraction of what was predicted in the last three decades to happen had actually happened it would have gone hard for the human race. Instead, it has flourished—to the point at which its flourishing is itself the precondition of further inevitable apocalypses.

Bearing this in mind, let us consider the premises of the demographic gloom that has overtaken Europe and (more especially) commentators about Europe.



APOCALYPSE SOON, OR NOT

First, there is the unexamined assumption that a successful country—successful in the economic sense—must have a large and expanding population.

Certainly, large populations are not necessary for economic success. Singapore and Hong Kong are among the most successful economies in the world, which in the relatively short space of forty years far outstripped in productivity the economy of the colonizing nation, Britain. Denmark, a country with neither a large nor fast-expanding