Is it possible that everybody can be wrong, and the Jews be right?

—Ahad Ha'am, 1892 (on the gentile response to Jews denying

the blood libel)

I don't think the whole world, including the friends of the Israeli people and government, can be wrong.

-Kofi Anan, 2002 (in response to IDF operation in Jenin)

You will never convince anyone that the Palestinians are the aggressors.

—Jacques Chirac to Ehud Barak, October 4, 2000.

Stupidity is a more dangerous enemy of the good than malice. One may protest against evil; it can be exposed and, if need be, prevented by use of force. Evil always carries within itself the germ of its own subversion in that it leaves behind in human beings at least a sense of unease. Against stupidity we are defenseless. Neither protests nor the use of force accomplish anything here; reasons fall on deaf ears; facts that contradict one's prejudgment simply need not be believed—in such moments the stupid person even becomes critical—and when facts are irrefutable they are just pushed aside as inconsequential, as incidental. In all this the stupid person, in contrast to the malicious one, is utterly self-satisfied and, being easily irritated, becomes dangerous by going on the attack. For that reason, greater caution is called for when dealing with a stupid person than with a malicious one. Never again will we try to persuade the stupid person with reasons, for it is senseless and dangerous.

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison

If I were a Muslim, I'd take the stupidity of Westerners as a sign from Allah that I should join Global Jihad.

- Richard Landes

To all those who have been shunned stigmatized canceled made pariahs for resisting the wave of folly this book chronicles.

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Warning to the Reader

If I'm Right, We're in Deep Trouble

This book is not for everyone. First, it's not for people who hate democracy and want to replace it with a theocracy that re-invents inquisitorial, totalitarian efforts to police thought, and resurrects holy war (religious or secular) to eliminate designated enemies. Secondly, it's not addressed to those who think that their race, or tribe, or super-tribe, or cause gives them the right to dominate others.

It is addressed to people who have liberal and progressive values, especially those capable of acknowledging that, for all its flaws, Western democracy constitutes a significant and perhaps unique step in the direction of freedom and human dignity. It is addressed to those who wish to preserve and improve that record rather than go all or nothing (perfection or destruction). It is for people who can't understand why the West seems to be falling apart, torn by a culture war that pits left against right in a winner-take-all struggle that, it seems with every news cycle, has been reaching ever-more terrifying extremes.

This book is something of a take it or leave it. You're free to walk away from this analysis and write it off as the rantings of an "Israel-firster," a Zionist propagandist. And from some points of view, that's an obvious and easy way to deal with my argument. Easy, that is, as long as you're right that I'm wrong. On the other hand, if I'm right, then you, liberal, progressive, democratic, lover of

human dignity and freedom, engage in very high-risk behavior by ignoring what I have to say.

As far as I can make out, some the great ironies of the twenty-first century and there are many candidates—are:

- Since the 9–11 assault by devout Muslims, many more Muslims proudly wear hijabs in the West, and many fewer Jews, out of fear, wear kippahs in public.
- The Jewish people are the only people who are the standing targets of state-sanctioned incitement to hate and genocide, but also the only people who are themselves accused of being genocidal.
- The same people who make heroic efforts to ban hate speech that might offend others, have immense tolerance for hate speech directed at themselves and at their Jewish co-citizens.
- The postmoderns, whose philosophy was to renounce both the illusion of objectivity and grand narratives, have produced a political movement that, in the name of progressive values and peace, has adopted a warmongering premodern grand narrative, and use "science" and "facts" to promote their cause.
- Vast numbers of people around the world want to emigrate to societies whose own elites have come to consider them the embodiment of evil.
- Western democracies, who had convinced themselves and their Jews that they had renounced Jew-hatred after the Holocaust, may be destroyed by a medieval apocalyptic movement that exploits their unacknowledged Jew-hatred.

This book tests readers' ability to think differently about what they thought they knew. Although the book is about the fate of the democratic modern world, under assault by a medieval religious movement, it focuses much of its attention on Israel's dilemma and the Western world's response to it. It cuts against the grain of much of the current public discourse about Israel, a country readily associated in the public sphere today with violence and oppression. In that sense, my take fits directly into the image, so readily and contemptuously dismissed as "Zionist propaganda," by precisely those people this book criticizes for their unthinking and foolish adoption of far more lethal propaganda from Palestinian, and beyond that, Caliphator cognitive-war factories. And one of the more striking abuses of both language and values is the way Palestinians accuse Israel of being the "new Nazis" and present themselves as the new "victims of genocide."

A major step in mainstreaming this previously marginal belief in the West was taken by Nobel-Prize winning author Jose Saramago, denouncing the state of Israel in April of 2002, at the very height of the first-ever jihadi suicide-terror campaign against a democratic nation (chapters 1, 3).

Intoxicated mentally by the messianic dream of Greater Israel which will finally achieve the expansionist dreams of the most radical Zionism [that is, Greater Israel, from the river to the sea]; contaminated by the monstrous and rooted "certitude": that in this catastrophic and absurd world there exists a people chosen by God and that, consequently, all the actions of an obsessive, psychological and pathologically exclusivist racism are justified; educated and trained in the idea that any suffering that has been inflicted, or will be inflicted on everyone else, especially the Palestinians, will always be inferior to that which they themselves suffered in the Holocaust, the Jews endlessly scratch their own wound to keep it bleeding, to make it incurable, and they show it to the world as if it were a banner. Israeli seizes hold of the terrible words of God in Deuteronomy: "Vengeance is mine, and I will be repaid." Israel wants all of us to feel guilty, directly or indirectly, for the horrors of the Holocaust; Israel wants us to renounce the most elemental critical judgment and for us to transform ourselves into a docile echo of its will; Israel wants us to recognize de jure what, in its eyes, is a de facto reality: absolute impunity. From the point of view of the Jews, Israel cannot ever be brought to judgment, because it was tortured, gassed and incinerated in Auschwitz.1

This rant contains all the elements of what would become "woke" attitudes of the late teens early '20s towards those they deemed morally inferior: indignation, condemnation, scorn, and certainty.

Now replace Israel in this text with those who declare her their enemy:

¹ Jose Saramago, "De las piedras de David a los tanques de Goliat,". *El Pais*, April 21, 2002, https://elpais.com/diario/2002/04/21/opinion/1019340007_850215.html; discussed in Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 139–44. This text is a response to reports of an Israeli "massacre" at Jenin (below, chap. 3).

Intoxicated mentally by the messianic dream of a global Caliphate [i.e., Islam from ocean to ocean], which will finally achieve the expansionist dreams of the most radical Muslims; contaminated by the monstrous and rooted "certitude" that in this catastrophic and absurd world there exists a people chosen by Allah and that, consequently, all the actions of an obsessive, psychological and pathologically exclusivist religious triumphalism are justified; educated and trained in the idea that any suffering that has been inflicted, or will be inflicted on everyone else, especially on the **Jews**, will always be inferior to that which they themselves suffered in the Nakba, the Palestinians endlessly scratch their own wound to keep it bleeding, to make it incurable, and they show it to the world as if it were a banner. Jihadis seize hold of the terrible words of Allah in the Quran (8:12): "I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve. Therefore, strike off their heads and strike off every fingertip of them." Palestinians want all of us to feel guilty, directly or indirectly, for the horrors of the Nakba; Caliphators want us to renounce the most elemental critical judgment and for us to transform ourselves into a docile echo of their will; Caliphators want us to recognize de jure what, in their eyes, is a de facto reality: absolute **Muslim** impunity. From the point of view of the Muslims, Islam cannot ever be brought to judgment, because the infidel has humiliated it, and because **Allah** is on their side.

What we have in these two paragraphs is the double inversion so characteristic of twenty-first century public discourse. On the one hand, while both these statements are true of some Jews and some Palestinians/Muslims, the ugly attitudes depicted permeate the mainstream of the Muslim public sphere to a far greater degree, whereas the ones Saramago attributes to Jews, when not outright wrong, inhabit the very margins of the Jewish/Israeli public sphere.

Indeed, at the core of Saramago's passage lies its inversion of reality. On the one hand, Saramago misreads the Biblical passage—"Vengeance is mine, says the Lord"—and accuses the Jews of his misreading.² On the other hand,

² Indeed, shortly before Saramago's piece, an orthodox rabbi voiced exactly the opposite opinion: "The Orthodox Jewish viewpoint, across the board, with rare exceptions, is that vengeance is God's alone. . . . Throughout two millennia of exile and suffering, the Jewish people have never

multiple Qur'anic passages explicitly call on the faithful to exercise violence on Allah's behalf; and the number of jihadis who believe they are the agents of Allah's divine wrath and the tools of his vengeance, outnumber several times over, all the Jews on the planet.

This empirical imbalance in accuracy gets further inverted when it comes to prominent Western thought leaders willing to denounce these two forms of zealotry. Curiously enough, as eagerly as many like Saramago view Israeli Jews negatively, as unthinkingly as they project onto them deliberate malice, as easily as they turn a fringe Jewish phenomenon into the symbol of Jewish being, that's how few dare to say anything remotely similar about Islam and Muslims. On the contrary, much intellectual effort in the twenty-first century has gone into insisting the jihadi narrative is marginal to Islam, that Muhammad is a "Prophet of Peace," and "moderate, peaceful Muslims," are the "vast majority," when not "99.9%" of the billion plus Muslims on the planet. As a result, few will utter anything resembling the (largely accurate) paragraph above about Muslim triumphalism, while many feel free to shout the (deeply inaccurate) paragraph about Israelis from the rooftops of Western publications. And in so doing, these Western "thought leaders" have transformed themselves into a "docile echo of their [enemy's] will."

In 1897, Ahad Ha'am (Asher Ginsburg) wrote about the blood libels circulating in Europe at the time. Echoing an oft-heard rejoinder to Jewish claims that the stories were libels, he quoted a common dismissal from the gentiles: "Is it possible that the whole world is wrong and the Jews are right?" In 2002, a century later, UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, expressed a similar astonishment at Israel's denial of massacre allegations at Jenin: "I don't think the whole world, including the friends of the Israeli people and government, can be wrong." And yet, the answer to the question: "Could the "the whole world," including the self-professed friends of Israel, be wrong to side with jihadis against Israel, as at Jenin?" is "Yes."

encouraged the exercise of vengeance by human beings." Charles Radin, "Israel mourns as 10 fall to lone Palestinian sniper," *Boston Globe*, March 4, 2002.

³ Juan Cole, Muhammad: Prophet of Peace Amid the Clash of Empires (New York: Nation Books, 2018). Critique: Andrew Harrod, "Juan Cole Invents a Peaceful Islam," The American Spectator, December 10, 2018.

⁴ The quote is from President Obama: Ian Schwartz, "Obama: This 'Medieval Interpretation Of Islam' is Rejected by '99.9%' of Muslims, Not a 'Religious War," *Real Clear Politics*, February 1, 2015.

⁵ Joel Brinkley, "Israel Starts Leaving Areas, but Will Continue Drive," *New York Times*, April 8, 2002.

The challenge to you, critical reader of a critical author, is to undergo the following mental exercise: what if ... you (and the "entire international community" as journalists like to call it)6 are wrong about Israel, indeed, wrong about the challenges that face the democratic world in the twenty-first century? What if, in trying to escape from the imaginary frying pan of too much "Jewish control" (they invented propaganda you know), you have leapt headlong into the very real fires of a jihad you do not, will not, acknowledge?

Scholars of millennial movements must imitate Odysseus, tied to the mast in order to listen to the sirens' song without getting mesmerized . . . fatally. The German government sent Hitler to investigate the Thule Society and its populist front, the German Worker's Party) in 1919, and he ended up converting to their millennial message, and crashing all Europe onto the rocky shores of a millennial war that, for casualties, dwarfed the just completed "War to End all Wars." The millennial scholar dealing with Caliphators must navigate a double danger, between on the one hand, the Scylla of such horror at the monstrosity of it all, that we become the mirror opposite—violent haters of our enemies—and on the other, the Charybdis of such fear of it, that, as a protective measure, we adopt their hatreds against our own societies. It turns out, that's no easy task.

To meet the challenge, however, you must board the ship and enter the straits of Messina. If you feel up to the task . . . turn the page. If not, just sit in your tub tweeting about white, racist privilege, while you bleed out.

⁶ Richard Landes, "Everybody Agrees: The BBC and CNN on UNSC Resolution #2334 and Kerry's Speech," Al Durah Project, uploaded February 18, 2017, interview, 20:54, https:// vimeo.com/256281399.

⁷ Richard Landes, Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), chapter 12.

Introduction

Reflections of a Heretical Medievalist

On History, Values, and Astounding Stupidity

As the reader will rapidly understand, this book expresses astonishment at a collective folly that I see at this troubling dawn of the new millennium. As a result of it, value judgments, including judgments on the stupidity of given utterances, permeate the book's look at an epoch-defining, disastrous configuration that crystallized in the Western public sphere two decades ago, at the turn of the millennium. This book is much more judgmental than the normal professional historical fare, even though I claim to be an historian and to write a reliably accurate history (of the present).

So, in order to make clear on what basis I make these judgments, I lay out some of the key values that inform this work. If you disagree with these values, the book may not have much to offer (except reaffirmation that your antidemocratic side is winning); but if you agree with them, then *stupidity matters*, if only because stupidity is a negative indicator for longevity.

Let me phrase the issue of values in terms of a set of choices between two poles of behavior. Overall, the issue concerns a choice between invidious zero-sum relations and generous positive-sum ones. Throughout the book, I refer to the values delineated in the second column as "demotic," from the Greek word for people (demos), in that I think they are values that empower all the people,

including commoners, at once to dismantle the "Prime Divider" that privileges honor-driven aristocrats over stigmatized commoners, and instead, to create dignity cultures of egalitarianism and freedom, ones in which the whole people (commoners and elites) share the same rights and opportunities. Demotic values make mutual freedom possible. They don't solve every problem; life is messy and sometimes bitter. But they unquestionably make life much sweeter for everyone, even those whose domineering wings are clipped by their demands.

Domineering	Demotic
zero-sum: for me to win, you	positive-sum: for me to win you must
must lose	win
Manual labor stigmatized;	Dignity of manual labor, unearned
honor to those who don't work,	wealth is shameful
contempt for laborers	
Honor: peer-group granted status	Dignity: integrity-based (self-)esteem
Social order from coercive	order from voluntary association,
imposition, hierarchy	(social) contract
rule or be ruled	reciprocally granting freedom to each
	other
disciplining/dominating/	mutual self-discipline, self-control
controlling others	
resolving disputes through	resolving through a discourse of fairness
violence	
blaming/scapegoating the other	self-criticism
tribal solidarity: my side right or	justice: whoever's right my side or not
wrong	
hostility to the "other"	empathy for the other
authority from caste, class,	authority from merit
connections	
destructive envy	constructive competition
self-aggrandizing by belittling	respecting dignity and success of others
others	
war as a first resort (sport of kings)	war as a last resort
censorship to protect honor	freedom of speech to get at truth

The value judgments in this book are addressed to those who share a principled preference for the demotic choices outlined in the right-hand column, and yet who (knowingly or not) deal on a regular basis with people who, in the name of those principles, undermine those values repeatedly. This book tries to identify these *demopathic* attacks that, even as they invoke generosity and empathy, actually undermine (the historically rare) societies that favor demotic choices. I believe that dedication to these principles, despite the powerful gravitational (natural/hard-wired/limbic) pull of the left-hand column, has created modern, (relatively) free, and (remarkably) productive societies. So let me make clear again at the outset: this book is addressed to genuine liberals and progressives, people who cherish these demotic values.

Demotic societies (largely Western so far) are hardly free of faults, and, given the immense technological empowerment these principles have provided, some of those faults are potentially catastrophic (WMDs, global warming). But whatever these shortcomings, demotic cultures offer vast improvements in freedom for commoners, freedom to speak, freedom from hunger and pain, and freedom to correct the (inevitable) abuses of both the society and its governing officials and public authorities. No earlier Prime Divider society has ever provided so vast a number of its members with so many wondrous advantages.

The economist Carlo Cipolla defined stupidity as "creating damages for others even when it does not advantage you." In game theory terms, Cipolla's stupid person plays a gratuitously self-defeating zero-sum game in which, without winning, he nonetheless damages others, who might otherwise be favorable. In this book, I define astoundingly stupid as "those who create advantages for those who want to hurt them," those who, in the name of positive-sum principles, fall dupe to the hard, zero-sum strategies of their self-declared, demopathic enemies. And they do this repeatedly, with no apparent inkling of where the road paved with their "good" intentions leads. Fool me once, shame on you; fool me dozens of times . . . ?

Overwhelming Odds against What Happened

My medieval history professor at Princeton, Patrick Geary, began his lecture on Europe in the eleventh century, with the following paradox: If one looks at the world in the year 1000, the most successful civilizations, the "first world" of the day, was made up of Song China and Abassid Arabia. The European West would be down at the bottom of the third world—vulnerable to waves of

raiders invading from all sides, exporters of primary goods, including human beings.3 And if one looked to the West for any small success stories, it would be the German Ottonians, then led by their third Otto, mirabile mundi, renovator of Rome. At the bottom of the pile of Western prospects, one would probably put the future hexagon of France, where an excommunicated king, leader of a new and failing dynasty, "ruled" over a countryside increasingly riven by castleprotected warlords who plundered the peasantry at will.

And yet, when one looks back from the end of that same century, France is the powerhouse of Europe, and Europe the new power on the globe. In that eleventh century, France became the font of an exceptionally vigorous and expansive new culture: pilgrimage, church architecture, urban and rural communes, markets and fairs, university learning, legal thought, religious reform movements, "heresies" and new ecclesiastical orders, lay literature, chivalry, troubadour poetry, crusading knights. The Arabs who met the crusaders in the late 1090s, in their deeds-of-God-through-us phase, referred to all Western Europeans as "Franks." Indeed, this new Europe had shifted quite suddenly from victim of invasion to aggressive conqueror, poised with its new and constantly developing technology, for encounters with the rest of the world that would result in global mastery over the rest of the millennium.4

Had this lecture taken place shortly after Superbowl 2017, where the New England Patriots overcame 99.8% odds, my professor might have used it to illustrate the problem: looking at Europe in 1000, one would have given Europe very low odds in becoming the leading force on the planet in the coming centuries, and one would have certainly considered Y1K France the least likely to become Europe's leader in this transformation (unless you had your eye on the Peace of God).5

Let's do a thought experiment on the year 2000. Go back two decades ago, say to January 2000, and look ahead into the new century: who would be the winners and losers in the coming century, the coming millennium? With the Y2K computer "bug" safely passed, it was full steam ahead for global civil society and the internet that created so many dazzling new possibilities. The big winners in the

³ Our word "slave" coming from the Slavs that Europe exported to the Muslim world.

⁴ For a medieval take: Robert Bartlett, The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950-1350 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). Within the framework of modernity: David Landes, The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are so Rich and Some so Poor (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999) estimates that by 1500 the West was decisively superior to the rest of the world in technology and cultural expansion.

⁵ Richard Landes, Relics, Apocalypse and the Deceits of History: Ademar of Chabannes, 989-1033 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

new, the global, millennium? The Western societies that produced these agents and technologies of globalization: those who could innovate, navigate the open currents of cyberspace, the world without borders, the world of cooperation and hybridization. Not tribal cultures bent on war. Certainly, that's how the promoters of the European Union felt at the launch of the Euro (1999–2002).

One might argue finer points—Europe vs US, China, India, vs the West, maybe even a peaceful *New Middle East* from Lebanon and Syria, via Israel, Palestine and Jordan to Egypt and beyond (!). But at the bottom of the list of possibilities for success in the new century, was a tiny millenarian Muslim movement, based largely in the caves of Afghanistan that wanted to spread *Dar al Islam* to the entire world in this generation, the *Caliphators*.

Where would the odds-makers in January of 2000, put the chances of a Caliphator takeover of even one Western democracy in the twenty-first century, however brief? Less than 0.2%? Anyone who took them more seriously, whether Samuel Huntington or Daniel Pipes or Steven Emerson, got dismissed as belligerents who sought to create the clash about which they warned. If most people, still in the 2020s, think Caliphator success is a complete impossibility, imagine how incredulous people were before 9–11 and its successor attacks. Of course, the danger here arises in that, precisely what the observer dismisses as impossible, acts as a summons for the doer of impossible things. "By declaring war on the United States from a cave in Afghanistan, bin Laden assumed the role of an uncorrupted, indomitable primitive standing against the awesome power of the secular, scientific, technological Goliath; he was fighting modernity itself."

And in that mistake, one risks a bruising battle with one of the most painful laws of apocalyptic dynamics: "Wrong does not mean inconsequential" ... especially in the case of active cataclysmic movements. Hitler was wrong about his *Tausendjähriger Reich* by 988 years, but that's small consolation to the tens of millions whom he killed while trying during those first twelve.

And yet, as this book seeks to elucidate, at the end of the year 2000, and over the course of the following three years, the winds suddenly shifted out of the Western sails. David Brooks, writing in 2017, looked back with bewilderment at the sudden collapse:

Starting decades ago, many people, especially in the universities, lost faith in the Western civilization narrative. They stopped

⁶ Laurence Wright, The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11 (New York: Vintage, 2006), 426.

⁷ Landes, Heaven on Earth, chapter 2.

teaching it, and the great cultural transmission belt broke. Now many students, if they encounter it, are taught that Western civilization is a history of oppression. It is as if a prevailing wind, which powered all the ships at sea, had suddenly ceased to blow.8

Actually, no. It was the prevailing wind that powered Western, modern, ships that ceased to blow. But the winds in the sails of the Caliphators grew mighty. In 2000, Global Jihad became the strong horse ... a realization so difficult for Westerners to even contemplate that, when Bin Laden claimed it after 9–11, they thought it was nothing but posturing. We infidels, it turns out, were doing the posturing in pretending it was nonsense.

In a sense, this book should not have had to be written, and I should be able to work on the origins of modern Western civilization in the demotic millennialism of eleventh-century France to my heart's content. 9 If we had done a good job of teaching each generation about what modernity had accomplished, if we had kept an eye on just what it was about medieval attitudes and practices that we had knowingly, willingly, and with great difficulty, renounced—like the pervasive notions that women and manual laborers should belong to men of honor, to be sold and given over along with property, or that religious authorities had the right to torture and execute people whom they felt mis-interpreted "their" sacred scriptures, or that rulers should go to war annually to "plunder and distribute," or that for the sake of honor, one had to shed blood—then the reappearance of such traits would not pose such a problem of recognition. But something has happened, and we seem to sleepwalk past avatars of medieval monsters without even noticing them; we dismiss them as figments of our imagination, as monsters in the closet. Or worse, some imagine that they are teddy bears we can hug; and that the folks warning us against them are just racist xenophobes. 10

And yet, I will argue in this book, the paradox that faces us runs as follows: Indeed, it is absurd for Caliphators to believe they can take over the West; the chasm between ability and desire is so great that it justifiably elicits Western infidel derision. But that's not their feeling: in the intensity of their passionate desire, they ignore the very "realities" that so reassure us. In matters apocalyptic, undertaking a wildly asymmetric war against vastly more powerful forces reassures believers that they fight on the right, the just, on God's, side. And

⁸ David Brooks, "The Crisis of Western Civ," New York Times, April 21, 2017.

⁹ Richard Landes, While God Tarried: Disappointed Millennialism from Jesus to the Peace of God, 33–1033. Forthcoming.

¹⁰ On Steven Spielberg's contribution to this attitude vis-à-vis ETs, see Landes, Heaven on Earth, 404-5.

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