

## James Kurth and the Fate of Western Civilization

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Published online: 24 April 2014  
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And this also has been one of the dark places of the earth....I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here....Sand-banks, marshes, forests, savages,—precious little to eat fit for a civilized man, nothing but Thames water to drink.  
—Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

One great statesman of the south predicted the downfall of slavery by the inevitable laws of population. Whether this prophecy is ever fulfilled or not, it is nevertheless plain that a very different-looking class of people are springing up at the south, and are now held in slavery, from those originally brought to this country from Africa.  
—Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

Socrates pointed out that self-satisfaction is the death of philosophy. To pursue wisdom one must desire it. But to desire something, one has to understand not only its appeal but also one's lack of it. We do not seek what we believe we already possess. Hobbes saw, like Socrates, that a major affliction of mankind was that everyone considers himself wise. So it is today. Only a brave few welcome bracing criticism and challenges to *idéés reçus*.

James Kurth is a distinguished academic with the highest credentials: He has a Stanford B.A. and a Harvard M.A. and Ph.D. He is the Claude Smith Professor

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of Political Science at Swarthmore College, a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, and a member of the board of editors of its journal *Orbis*, among many other honors and distinctions. Among his most famous students are Peter Berkowitz of the Hoover Institution and Robert George of Princeton.

For decades Kurth has been a gadfly to the academic establishment and the cultural leadership of the United States, reminding them of unfashionable truths, and making the case to think fearlessly about the gravest problems facing the United States and Western powers generally. He once warned readers, “[M]y view of the prospects for success [in democratizing Iraq and the Muslim world] is rather dark and pessimistic, and might even seem un-American.”<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere, he wrote that Samuel Huntington’s view of the clash between civilizations and the clash within Western civilization, a view he largely agrees with, “may not be stark and dark enough,” and faulted Huntington’s “typical American optimism.”<sup>2</sup> While Kurth is certainly not un-American, his outlook on politics and the prospects for Western civilization cannot be called optimistic and runs strongly counter to the self-satisfied secular liberalism of many of today’s elites.

Much of Kurth’s output has appeared in journals and magazines aimed at an educated, but not solely academic readership, including policy makers and opinion leaders: the *National Interest*, the *American Conservative*, *Orbis*, the *Intercollegiate Review*, *First Principles*, *Modern Age*, the *American Interest*, and more. His work might usefully be broken up into some broad sections. Kurth has written on foreign policy, articulating what used to be called a “realist perspective.” But, since “realism” also stands for a strain of academic theorizing about international relations, which Kurth finds “banal,”<sup>3</sup> his view is perhaps better called a “geopolitical” orientation.<sup>4</sup> He has written on civilizational conflict, with some trenchant criticisms of the condition of the postmodern West. He has written on the American scene, and on the fate of American conservatism,

<sup>1</sup>James Kurth, “America, Democratization, and the Muslim World,” *Watch on the West: A Newsletter of FPRI’s Center for the Study of America and the West* 6, no. 1 (March 2005), <https://www.fpri.org/ww/0601.200503.kurth.americademocratizationmuslimworld.html>.

<sup>2</sup>James Kurth, “Samuel Huntington (1927–2008): Ideas Have Consequences,” Foreign Policy Research Institute, *E-Notes*, January 2009, <https://www.fpri.org/enotes/200901.kurth.samuelhuntingtonideashaveconsequences.html>; and “The Late American Nation,” review of *Anglosphere: The Future of the English-Speaking Nations in the Internet Era*, by James C. Bennett; *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Century*, by Robert Cooper; *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity*, by Samuel P. Huntington; *The Case for Sovereignty: Why the World Should Welcome American Independence*, by Jeremy A. Rabkin; and *A New World Order*, by Anne-Marie Slaughter, *National Interest*, no. 77 (Fall 2004): 117–26.

<sup>3</sup>James Kurth, “Inside the Cave: The Banality of I.R. Studies,” *National Interest*, no. 53 (Fall 1998): 29–40.

<sup>4</sup>James Kurth, “History and Geography: A Meditation on Foreign Policy and FPRI’s 50th Anniversary,” Foreign Policy Research Institute, *E-Notes*, September 16, 2005, <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/20050916.history.kurth.historygeographyfpri50.html>.

which he rightly observes is not conservative in a European sense, but an effort to conserve classical liberalism.<sup>5</sup> And he has explored religious and historical themes. In all his writings Kurth stresses the importance of culture for understanding political life, and the role of tradition in intimating directions of possible change and providing resources for the repair of damaged institutions.

## Geopolitics

Kurth's thoughts on geopolitics will only seem controversial due to the head-spinning ideological fantasies that have been let loose in American political discourse. In particular, the idea of conservatism has become entangled in neoconservative zeal to spread democracy. Thus, someone like Andrew Bacevich, or Kurth himself, appears as a dissentient and radical voice. Kurth has written extensively about the foreign and military policy of the United States, in both the post-Cold War and post-9/11 contexts, as it relates to NATO, Africa, Eastern Europe, China, the Balkans, the Baltics, and more.<sup>6</sup> He has offered serious criticisms of the misguided pursuits of humanitarian internationalists

<sup>5</sup>James Kurth, "Untitled Note," *American Conservative*, August 28, 2006, 17–18; "The Crisis of American Conservatism: Inherent Contradictions and the End of the Road," Foreign Policy Research Institute, *E-Notes*, December 2012, <http://www.fpri.org/articles/2012/12/crisis-american-conservatism-inherent-contradictions-and-end-road>.

<sup>6</sup>James Kurth, "The Vatican's Foreign Policy," *National Interest*, no. 32 (Summer 1993): 40–52; James Kurth, "Eastern Questions, Western Answers," review of *The Wrath of Nations: Civilization and the Fury of Nationalism*, by William Pfaff, *National Interest*, no. 34 (Winter 1993): 96–101; "America's Grand Strategy," *National Interest*, no. 43 (Spring 1996): 3–19; "To Sing a Different Song: The Choices for the Baltic States," *National Interest*, no. 56 (Summer 1999): 81–88; "American Strategy in the Global Era," *Naval War College Review* 53, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 7–25; "The American Way of Victory," *National Interest*, no. 60 (Summer 2000): 5–16; "Models of Humanitarian Intervention: Assessing the Past and Discerning the Future," *FRPI Wire* 9, no. 6 (August 2001), <http://www.fpri.org/fpriwire/0906.200108.kurth.humanitarianintervention.html>; "The Next NATO," *National Interest*, no. 65 (Fall 2001): 5–16; "Iraq: Losing the American Way," *American Conservative*, March 15, 2004, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/iraq-losing-the-american-way/>; "America's Identity and American Foreign Policy," *Watch on the West: A Newsletter of FPRI's Center for the Study of America and the West* 5, no. 10 (December 2004), <http://www.fpri.org/ww/0510.200412.kurth.americaindentityforeignpolicy.html>; "The Rise of China," Foreign Policy Research Institute, *E-Notes*, July 15, 2005, <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/20050715.asia.kurth.riseofchina.html>; "History and Geography"; "Splitting Islam," *American Conservative*, September 26, 2005, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/splitting-islam/>; "The British Roots of America Are Real," History News Network, <http://hnn.us/article/9237>, reprint of "In These Pages," *Orbis* 49, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 1–6; "America's Democratization Projects Abroad," *American Spectator* 39, no. 8 (October 2006): 40–47; "Humanitarian Intervention after Iraq: Legal Ideals vs. Military Realities," *Orbis* 50, no. 1 (2006): 87–101; "One-Child Foreign Policy," *American Conservative*, August 27, 2007, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/one-child-foreign-policy/>; "Defining Deterrence Down," *American Conservative*, February 25, 2008, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/defining-deterrence-down/>; "The New Liberalism in Global Politics: From Internationalism to Transnationalism," Foreign Policy Research Institute, *E-Notes*, March, 2011, <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/201103.kurth.transnationalism.html>; and "The Foreign Policy of Plutocracies," *American Interest*, September 27, 2011, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/articles/2011/09/27/the-foreign-policy-of-plutocracies/>.

and neoconservatives, and exposed the similarities between them.<sup>7</sup> Against today's bipartisan orthodoxy, which supports interventionism of one kind or other, he accounts for states' actions based on their geographic positions and, importantly, their historical patterns of conduct, focusing on spheres of interests and vital security interests. Thus, Kurth points out President George W. Bush's radicalism in proposing the expansion of NATO into the Baltics given Russia's long-standing interest in the area going back to Peter the Great.<sup>8</sup> A focus on the history and tradition of Iraq leads Kurth to assess the chances of the United States democratizing that country as roughly zero.<sup>9</sup>

Kurth also makes clear how the ideological style of American politics has corrupted our understanding of history or made ignorance of history seem like a virtue. He protests unhistorical criticism of the Catholic Church,<sup>10</sup> and points out how pro-intervention voices have been ignorant of history in Iraq<sup>11</sup> and elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> In Kurth's historically informed view, we should not expect countries with very different cultures readily to change. That this apparent truism needs to be stated is itself evidence of the importance of Kurth's voice. In 2004 he predicted failure in the Iraq campaign, and in 2005 as the quagmire grew out of Bush's "delusional" quest, he suggested that the way out of Iraq may be to split Sunni and Shia groups—a classic *divide et impera* recommendation.<sup>13</sup>

It will be made to seem pusillanimous and possibly un-American to suggest the United States should not act globally and unilaterally, since it is the indispensable nation. Kurth, however, reminds us that no matter how great America is (in power or moral stature), there is no possible world where one country of men has an unlimited ability—much less right—to control the affairs of all other nations. The attempt to do so arises from heresy and hubris posing as patriotism. "When George Bush has said that America is the light of the world, that is clearly a heretical paraphrase of the true statement that Jesus Christ is the light of the world. And that statement is a heresy. And to persist in that and act upon that belief can only

<sup>7</sup>Kurth, "New Liberalism in Global Politics."

<sup>8</sup>Kurth, "To Sing a Different Song."

<sup>9</sup>Kurth, "Iraq: Losing the American Way," "Splitting Islam," and "Humanitarian Intervention after Iraq."

<sup>10</sup>James Kurth, "The Defamation of Pope Pius XII," *Modern Age* 44, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 283–87, [http://www.mmisi.org/ma/44\\_03/kurth.pdf](http://www.mmisi.org/ma/44_03/kurth.pdf).

<sup>11</sup>Kurth, "Models of Humanitarian Intervention" and "Iraq: Losing the American Way."

<sup>12</sup>Kurth, "Rise of China" and "History and Geography."

<sup>13</sup>Kurth, "Splitting Islam."

bring about a debacle.”<sup>14</sup> By contrast, Kurth calls for a renewal of Christian and especially Catholic social doctrines, which would include a serene and confident patriotism but no such idolizing of the state. In a striking defense of the Franco regime, Kurth points to the failures of modern secular liberalism in both pre- and post-Franco eras. While acknowledging the sin of Franco’s slaughter of 30,000 Loyalists, Kurth sees value in Franco’s “Catholic Integralism.” Admitting that we cannot go back to doctrines and practices rooted in the early twentieth century, he suggests that Western societies that are in decay from out-of-control liberalism could nevertheless be renewed by European-style Christian Democratic political movements.<sup>15</sup>

### Western Civilization

Since the major civilizations align with regions and religions, civilizational clashes are both geopolitical clashes and threats to the order of nation states, thus eroding the basis of a great power balancing strategy. The potential for clashes to erupt between and within civilizations is a major concern of Kurth’s. Among the critical problems within the West he points to are liberal and (nominally) conservative internationalism in strategy, and a plutocratic elite with a globalized worldview. A doctrine of universal rights has evolved to the point that the political distinction between citizen and alien is breaking down, and even to broach the subject is seen as a sign of malign intent. Kurth also sees problems rising from the postmodernist and feminist agenda that opposes itself to the American creed, which Huntington describes as comprised of “individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, the separation of church and state.”<sup>16</sup> Kurth writes:

The multicultural coalition and its feminist core despise the European versions of Western civilization, which they see as the work of “dead white European males.” They also despise the American version or the American creed, particularly liberalism, constitutionalism, the rule of

<sup>14</sup>James Kurth, “Debunking ‘American Theocracy,’” interview by Alice Chasan, Beliefnet, June 2006, <http://www.beliefnet.com/News/2006/06/Debunking-American-Theocracy.aspx?p=1>.

<sup>15</sup>Kurth, “Vatican’s Foreign Policy.” James Kurth, “For Whom the Bell Tolls: The Franco Regime and Contemporary Spain,” *Modern Age* 55, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 27–36.

<sup>16</sup>James Kurth, “The Real Clash,” *National Interest*, no. 37 (Fall 1994): 3–15, available at [http://www.keck.ucsf.edu/~craig/James\\_Kurth\\_The\\_Real\\_Clash.pdf](http://www.keck.ucsf.edu/~craig/James_Kurth_The_Real_Clash.pdf).

law, and free markets. (They also in practice reject the separation of church and state, because they want to use the state against the church, especially to attack a male-dominated clergy as a violation of equal opportunity and to attack the refusal of church hospitals to perform abortions as a violation of women's rights.) The multicultural project has already succeeded in marginalizing Western civilization in its very intellectual core, the universities and the media of America.<sup>17</sup>

Also troubling are flows of immigration: Islamists (not to be confused with all Muslims), who harbor hostilities toward the European nations into which they are immigrating; and Latin Americans in the United States who belong in the Western tradition (as Hispanics and Catholics) and are not hostile to the West, but are being encouraged to resist assimilation under the banner of multiculturalism. These problems, Kurth insists, exemplify the bankruptcy of postmodern attitudes prevalent among Western elites.

One need not be sanguine about the fate of Western civilization, however, to feel that at times Kurth's gloom exceeds just bounds.

In railing against the plutocratic globalized elites in business,<sup>18</sup> the feminists and deconstructionists, the multiculturalists and the liberal humanitarians—all perfectly fine targets of conservative ire—Kurth allows his practical concerns to undermine a truly historic sensibility, which he elsewhere deploys to great effect. At times, Kurth appreciates the contingency of history, the long and embedded traditions that account for how we live now, the complexity of affairs, and the role of chance.<sup>19</sup> But when he writes about the present state of affairs his perspective is foreshortened to the past half-century. While the social changes in Western societies have been rapid and large, it might help alleviate some of our gloom to ponder whether Gloria Steinem and Michel Foucault are the titans who can destroy the civilization built by the likes of Plato, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Shakespeare, Montaigne, Luther, Calvin, and Montesquieu, and so many princes, popes, and popular legislators.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>James Kurth, "The Rich Get Richer," *American Conservative*, September 25, 2006, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/the-rich-get-richer/>; "Foreign Policy of Plutocracies."

<sup>19</sup>James Kurth, "The Decline and Fall of Almost Everything: Paul Kennedy Peers into the 21st Century," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 156–62; "Models of Humanitarian Intervention"; "Iraq: Losing the American Way"; "Rise of China"; "History and Geography"; *What Are We Fighting For? Western Civilization, American Identity, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute, Center for the Study of America and the West, 2009), <http://www.fpri.org/pubs/200901.kurth.fightingfor.pdf>; and "Crisis of American Conservatism."

As to the danger of unassimilated immigrants, we have to resist the temptation to extrapolate short-term trends. A rise in the fortunes of immigrants may well result in slowing their birth rates and changing their attitudes at the same time. A society that has assimilated Greek, Roman, and Christian ideas must be, more than anything else, a formidable synthesizing power. It is also very difficult, in the present, in heat and in tumult, to weigh the exact importance of controversies on the hijab in France, Sharia-compliant bonds, or the recognition of Sharia-based claims in English courts. Are we sailing again to Lepanto, or just enduring the civil *bousculades* of a diverse and free society?

The immigration of large numbers of Central and South Americans into the United States is another matter. Kurth repeatedly complains that the Immigration Act of 1965 brought serious changes to patterns of immigration. He is right of course that there are mounting political problems in the U.S. around the issue of immigration. He speculates that a return to immigration policies similar to the pre-1965 patterns might help, but does not seem convinced that this will happen. But here, we are talking about classes of people who are affiliated with Western civilization. They are seeking work and the betterment of their families, not attempting to destroy the Great Satan. The crucial point, which Kurth does understand but might have stressed more, is that culture is not carried in the blood. Kurth does note that for Huntington, culture has to do with ideas, values, and traditions, and not particular ethnicities.<sup>20</sup> American culture may yet prove dynamic enough to assimilate new groups, maybe even to check the ghettoization wrought by multiculturalism.

Of course, there is a danger that multiculturalism could harden into nationalism on the part of the disparate groups. Discussing the breakup of the Habsburg Empire and various contemporary crises, Kurth points out how extreme nationalism contributes to social and political disunity, in the Balkans, in Iraq, and elsewhere.<sup>21</sup> “The diverse nationalities that composed the Habsburg empire...were too small and too hostile toward each other,” to establish an order when the Habsburg Empire collapsed, a process abetted by Western and especially American errors of statecraft.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Kurth, “One-Child Foreign Policy.”

<sup>21</sup>Kurth, “To Sing a Different Song,” “The Next NATO,” and “Humanitarian Intervention after Iraq.” James Kurth, “The Tragic Death of the Habsburg Empire,” *Modern Age* 49, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 498–507, [http://www.mmsi.org/MA/49\\_04/kurth.pdf](http://www.mmsi.org/MA/49_04/kurth.pdf).

<sup>22</sup>Kurth, “Tragic Death,” 503.

Kurth speculates about a counterfactual British-style resolution of the Habsburg Empire, in which states gradually took on more autonomy; and also speculates about a counterfactual survival of the Habsburg Empire. The aim of these exercises is to point out the graceless manner in which the Great Powers opposed the Habsburg Empire in 1918, and especially the ideological pretensions of Woodrow Wilson, who, in advocating an extreme version of national self-determination, helped create a tragedy that still resonates today.

The historic legacy of social heterogeneity in even relatively homogenous European states should make us skeptical of the use of power for the pursuit of visionary ends, and more willing to entertain a chastened view of the scope of government.<sup>23</sup> While social disharmony can be decried, the effort to impose uniformity leads to numerous evils. Kurth's insights into the difficulty of transforming other nations' cultures, such as Iraq's, might serve as a warning to those who feel that Americans need to agree on a cultural creed. While Kurth does stress the importance of culture, there is another less prominent aspect of his thought that might supply a better basis for unity in the midst of diversity: law as a crucial component of a free society, and as a part of the balanced classical heritage, which blended ideas of freedom and individuality with self-discipline and self-restraint.<sup>24</sup> It may be enough for a state to function if its citizens honor the authority of its laws, not on account of their approval of what the government does, nor on account of the benefits they wrest from it, nor, again, on account of the visionary ends it holds out for them to pursue, but merely because not to do so confines them to that "tract of time, wherein the will to contend by battle is sufficiently known."<sup>25</sup> A law-abiding disposition, as Hobbes taught, is a revolutionary change in the human condition, and a major component of our civilization. In a genuinely civil association that allows culture to develop from below without being displaced by aggressively "enlightened" government, the recognition of the authority of the law is a type of community and a type of loyalty.

### Empire of Adolescents

As Kurth sees it, Western civilization is under pressure: globally, from competing civilizations in which too often good social order is conceived tribally,

<sup>23</sup>See interview by Chasan, "Debunking 'American Theocracy,'" where Kurth expresses his view that a true conservative accepts limits to human power out of humility and faith, and seeks to make the best of a fallen world.

<sup>24</sup>Kurth, *What Are We Fighting For?*

<sup>25</sup>Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Michael Oakeshott (New York and London: Collier Books, 1962), 100.



and internally, from a variety of forces including unrelenting secularization. Rationalistic humanitarianism and the doctrine of universal human rights have become the new public doctrine, if not religion. Unfortunately, this doctrine undermines the interests of states, making it hard to justify any differential in the rights enjoyed by anyone anywhere. The rationalistic belief that all human problems are solvable by human action guided by science equally supports grand projects and undermines prudence. Sitting uneasily with a grandiose ideological belief in the West's world-historical privilege are radical doctrines that critique its institutions as structures of domination. The irony, Kurth points out, is that the culture that values human liberty so highly is now seen by many of its own elites as a dungeon. The sustained attack upon modern liberty began with Marx and continued with people who, though radicalized by their reading of Nietzsche and Heidegger, never let go of their Marxism. The result today is a doctrine that asserts that all social relations are founded upon power, yet still promises that "liberation" is somehow possible, if only all existing authority and law is torn down.

Kurth is not merely an anti-leftist, however. He disdains the libertarian Right, which has contributed to the erosion of traditional values through a radical view of the freedom of capital. Kurth's criticism is not Marxist, but Catholic and localist. The political elite's interests are often tied to the needs of global corporations; the business and cultural elite's interests are in maximizing wealth and shareholder return.<sup>26</sup> To them, the policies of nation states—including their own—are but tools to further their own aims.<sup>27</sup> The only kind of freedom compatible with this vision of humans as "consumers" is a radical expressive individualism that tends to licentious extremes. Another irony: the United States, as the hegemon of the world, provides both security and economic stability—at least as long as her power and political will hold out.<sup>28</sup> But in its soft power, its ability to influence the world for good, the U.S. has lost touch with its Greco-Roman and Christian values, its Protestant and British core, and now offers the world the image of the adolescent as the ideal human type.<sup>29</sup> At the moment the United States has

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<sup>26</sup>Kurth, "The Rich Get Richer."

<sup>27</sup>Kurth, "Foreign Policy of Plutocracies."

<sup>28</sup>Kurth, "America's Grand Strategy" and "American Way of Victory."

<sup>29</sup>James Kurth, "The Adolescent Empire: America and the Imperial Idea," *National Interest*, no. 48 (Summer 1997): 3–15; "American Strategy"; and "The Fate of the West in the Age of Globalization: Triumph or Twilight?" *Watch on the West: A Newsletter of FPRI's Center for the Study of America and the West* 1, no. 10 (December 2000), <https://www.fpri.org/ww/0110.200012.kurth.triumphortwilight.html>.

the power to spread its influence, it is spreading a doctrine of individual self-gratification without bounds, which may even be a form of barbarism.<sup>30</sup>

Kurth's critique of egoism is both correct and old. Tocqueville, Lasch, Bell, Bellah, and many others are a veritable choir of communal concern. Egoism is a worthy target, but should not be confused with individualism *tout court*. True, a Russian crank penned a pamphlet portentously called "The Virtue of Selfishness," but this was hardly the last word on human freedom. In the modern era, individualism, as described by Burckhardt and celebrated by Montaigne, Cervantes, and Shakespeare, transformed Western civilization. The premodern world of affective, prescriptive bonds is dead and gone, but the rise of individualism set loose an enduring nostalgic longing for stability. Today, the choice is between individualism and anti-individualism, respect for freedom or a collapse into collectivism.

Individuality, so far from being an antisocial impulse, is a condition of true sociality, friendship, and love. Only between individuals are such bonds possible. Between mere hominid animals, some tribal affiliation or affective unity may exist, rooted in some specious sentiment of a "species being." But neither civic engagement nor true patriotism is a function of mere proximity or solidarity. As to the purported centrality of the acquisitive egoist in modern times, prominent British political theorist Michael Oakeshott has written:

Of course, this disposition displayed itself in commerce. But anyone who believes that Frère Jean des Entommeurs or [Giuseppe] Parini were "possessive individualists," or that it was of such persons that Pico della Mirandola, or Montaigne or Hobbes or Pascal or Kant or Blake or Nietzsche or Kierkegaard wrote is capable of believing anything.<sup>31</sup>

We could say much the same of the "expressive" variant of individualism or any number of defective beliefs about what freedom means. The modern individual's willingness to "sally forth," however quixotic his aims, and make something of himself rests on an idea of creative will that is undoubtedly Christian in origin and inseparable from the dynamism,

<sup>30</sup>James Kurth, "Religion and Globalization: The Templeton Lecture on Religion and Word Affairs," *FRPI Wire* 7, no. 7 (May 1999), <http://www.fpri.org/fpriwire/0707.199905.kurth.religionglobalization.html>; "American Versus the Rest?" *Watch on the West: A Newsletter of FPRI's Center for the Study of America and the West* 1, no. 1 (October 1997), <http://www.fpri.org/ww/0101.199710.kurth.americavswest.html>.

<sup>31</sup>Michael Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 242n1; also see 237–42, where Oakeshott discusses the formidable range of expressions of the individualist character.

synthesizing energy, and hopefulness of Western culture at its best. Kurth suggests that it is perhaps only the influence of the Catholic Church that might curb the excesses of modern liberalism, and it may be worth remembering that one of the earliest and greatest individualists, Montaigne, was a Catholic.<sup>32</sup>

Whether Kurth's gloomy civilizational predictions come true or not, he has consistently challenged his readers to seek to understand what is culture, why it matters, and what are appropriate uses of political power. We should be grateful for having a voice like Kurth's that cuts through the ideological reveries of today's elites and forces us to examine the stark and dark possibilities of living in a fallen world.

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<sup>32</sup>Kurth, "Vatican's Foreign Policy."