

# DOES WESTERN CIVILISATION HAVE A FUTURE?

CD KEMP LECTURE

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## Does Western Civilisation Have a Future?

I'm honored to be asked to give the C D Kemp Lecture before members of the Institute he founded and which lives on after him. I've been in Australia for a couple of weeks on what I like to think of as my 'Head for the hills! It's the end of the world!' tour. But don't worry, it's like Barbra Streisand's farewell tour, I'll be back to do another end-of-the-world tour in a year or two.

Whether or not the western world is ending, it's certainly changed. It's a very strange feeling from the perspective of four decades on to return to a famous book C D Kemp wrote in 1964, *Big Businessmen*, a portrait of a now all but extinct generation of Australian industrialists. They were men whose sense of themselves in relation to the society they lived in was immensely secure. They had an instinctive belief in the culture that raised them and enriched them. To have pointed out such a fact at the time would have seemed superfluous: it was still shared by many forces in society—bank managers, kindergarten teachers, even Anglican clerics.

None of these pillars of what we used to regard as conventional society is quite as sturdy as it was, and most of them have collapsed. Many mainstream Protestant churches are, to one degree or another, post-Christian. If they no longer seem disposed to converting the unbelieving to Christ, they can at least convert them to the boggiest of soft-left political clichés. In this world, if Jesus were alive today he'd most likely be a gay Anglican vicar in a committed relationship driving around in an environmentally-friendly car with an 'Arms Are For Hugging' sticker on the way to an interfaith dialogue with a Wiccan and a couple of Wahhabi imams.

Yet, if the purpose of the modern church is to be a cutting-edge political pacesetter, it's Islam that's doing the better job. It's easy to look at gold-toothed Punjabi yobs in northern England or Algerian pseudo-rappers in French suburbs and think, oh well, their Muslim identity is clearly pretty residual. But that's to apply westernized notions of piety. Today the mosque is a meetinghouse, and throughout the west what it meets to discuss is, even when not explicitly jihadist, always political. The mosque or madrasah is not the place to go for spiritual contemplation so much as political motivation. The Muslim identity of those French rioters or English jailbirds may seem spiritually vestigial but it's politically potent. So, even as a political project, the mainstream Protestant churches are a bust. Pre-modern Islam beats post-modern Christianity.

As for many teachers, they regard the accumulated inheritance of western civilization as an unending parade of racism, sexism, imperialism and other malign -isms, leav-

ened only by routine genocides. Even if this were true—which it's not—it's not a good sustaining narrative for any nation unless it's planning on going out of business.

And, speaking of business, even the heirs of those Big Businessmen C D Kemp wrote about feel obliged to join the ranks of the civilizational self-loathers. I notice that in its commercials the oil company BP—that's to say, British Petroleum—now says that BP stands for 'Beyond Petroleum': the ads are all about how it's developing environmentally-friendly ways to conserve energy; in other words, it's ashamed of the business it's in.

The question posed here tonight is very direct: 'Does Western Civilization Have A Future?' One answer's easy: if western civilization doesn't have a past, it certainly won't have a future. No society can survive when it consciously unmoors itself from its own inheritance. But let me answer it in a less philosophical way:

Much of western civilization does not have any future. That's to say, we're not just speaking philosophically, but literally. In a very short time, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and other countries we regard as part of the western tradition will cease to exist in any meaningful sense. They don't have a future because they've given up breeding. Spain's population is halving with every generation: Two grown-ups have a total of one baby. So there are half as many children as parents. And a quarter as many grandchildren as grandparents. And an eighth as many great-grandchildren as great-grandparents. And, after that there's no point extrapolating, because you're over the falls and it's too late to start paddling back. I received a flurry of letters from furious Spaniards when the government decided to replace the words 'father' and 'mother' on its birth certificates with the less orientationally offensive terms 'Progenitor A' and 'Progenitor B'. This was part of the bureaucratic spring-cleaning of traditional language that always accompanies the arrival in law of 'gay marriage'. But, with historically low numbers of progeny, the designations of the respective progenitors seem of marginal concern. They'd be better off trying to encourage the average young Spaniard to wander into a Barcelona singles bar and see if anyone wants to come back to his pad to play Progenitor A and Progenitor B. ('Well, okay, but only if I can be Progenitor A...')

Seventeen European nations are now at what demographers call 'lowest-low' fertility—1.3 births per woman, the point at which you're so far down the death spiral you can't pull out. In theory, those countries will find their population halving every 35 years or so. In practice, it will be quicker than that, as the savvier youngsters figure there's no point sticking around a country that's turned into an undertaker's waiting room. So large parts of the western world are literally dying—and, in Europe, the successor

population to those aging French and Dutch and Belgians is already in place. Perhaps the differences will be minimal. In France, the Catholic churches will become mosques; in England, the village pubs will cease serving alcohol; in the Netherlands, the gay nightclubs will close up shop and relocate to San Francisco. But otherwise life will go on much as before. The new Europeans will be observant Muslims instead of post-Christian secularists but they will still be recognizably European: It will be like *Cats* after a cast change: same long-running show, new actors, but the plot, the music, the sets are all the same. The animating principles of advanced societies are so strong that they will thrive whoever's at the switch.

But what if they don't? In the 2005 rankings of Freedom House's survey of personal liberty and democracy around the world, five of the eight countries with the lowest 'freedom' score were Muslim. Of the 46 Muslim majority nations in the world, only three were free. Of the 16 nations in which Muslims form between 20 and 50 per cent of the population, only another three were ranked as free: Benin, Serbia and Montenegro, and Suriname. It will be interesting to follow France's fortunes as a fourth member of that group.

If you think a nation is no more than a 'great hotel' (as the Canadian novelist Yann Martel described his own country, approvingly), you can always slash rates and fill the empty rooms—for as long as there are any would-be lodgers left out there to move in. But there aren't going to be many would-be immigrants out there in the years ahead—not for aging western societies in which an ever smaller pool of young people pay ever higher taxes to support ever swelling geriatric native populations. And, if you believe a nation is the collective, accumulated wisdom of a shared past, then a dependence on immigration alone for population replenishment will leave you lost and diminished. That's why Peter Costello's stirring call—a boy for you, a girl for me, and one for Australia—is, ultimately, a national security issue—and a more basic one than how much you spend on defence.

Americans take for granted all the 'it's about the future of all our children' hooey that would ring so hollow in a European election. In the 2005 German campaign, voters were offered what would be regarded in the US as a statistically improbable choice: a childless man (Herr Schroeder) vs a childless woman (Frau Merkel). Statist Europe signed on to Hillary Rodham Clinton's alleged African proverb—'It takes a village to raise a child'—only to discover they got it backwards: on the Continent, the lack of children will raze the village. And most of the villagers still refuse to recognize the contradictions: You can't breed at the lethargic rate of most Europeans and then bitch and whine about letting the Turks into the European Union. Demographi-

cally, they're the kids you couldn't be bothered having.

One would assume a demographic disaster is the sort of thing that sneaks up on you because you're having a grand old time: You stayed in university till you were 38, you took early retirement at 45, you had two months a year on the Cote d'Azur, you drank wine, you ate foie gras and truffles, you marched in the street for a 28-hour work week... It was all such great fun there was no time to have children. You thought the couple in the next street would, or the next town, or in all those bucolic villages you pass through on the way to your weekend home.

But the strange thing is that Europeans aren't happy. The Germans are so slumped in despond that in 2005 the government began running a Teutonic feelgood marketing campaign in which old people are posed against pastoral vistas, fetching young gays mooch around the Holocaust memorial, Katarina Witt stands in front of some photogenic moppets, etc., and then they all point their fingers at the camera and shout 'Du bist Deutschland!'—'You are Germany!'—which is meant somehow to pep up glum Hun couch potatoes. Can't see it working myself. The European Union got rid of all the supposed obstacles to happiness—war, politics, the burden of work, insufficient leisure time, tiresome dependents—and yet their people are strikingly unhappy. Consider this poll taken in 2002 for the first anniversary of 9/11: 61 per cent of Americans said they were optimistic about the future, as opposed to 43 per cent of Canadians, 42 per cent of Britons, 29 per cent of the French, 23 per cent of Russians and 15 per cent of Germans. I wouldn't reckon those numbers will get any cheerier over the years.

What's the most laughable article published in a major American newspaper in the last decade? A good contender is a *New York Times* column by the august Princeton economist Paul Krugman. The headline was 'French Family Values', and the thesis is that, while parochial American conservatives drone on about 'family values', the Europeans live it, enacting policies that are more 'family friendly'. On the Continent, claims Professor Krugman, 'government regulations actually allow people to make a desirable tradeoff—to modestly lower income in return for more time with friends and family.'

How can an economist make that claim without noticing that the upshot of all these 'family friendly' policies is that nobody has any families? Isn't the first test of a pro-family regime its impact on families?

As for all that extra time, what happened? Europeans work fewer hours than Americans, they don't have to pay for their own health care, they don't go to church and they don't contribute to other civic groups, they don't marry and they don't have kids to take to school and basketball and the county fair.

So what do they do with all the time?

Forget for the moment Europe's lack of world-beating companies: They regard capitalism red in tooth and claw as an Anglo-American fetish, and they mostly despise it. And in fairness some of their quasi-state corporations are very pleasant: I'd much rather fly Air France than United or Continental. But what about the things Europeans supposedly value? With so much free time, where is the great European art? Assuredly Gershwin and Bernstein aren't Bach and Mozart, but what have the Continentals got? Their pop culture is more American than it's ever been. Fifty years ago, before European welfarism had them in its vise-like death grip, the French had better pop songs and the Italians made better movies. Where are Europe's men of science? At American universities.

Meanwhile, Continental governments pour fortunes into prestigious white elephants of Euro-identity, like the Airbus 380, the QE2 of the skies, capable of carrying 500, 800, a thousand passengers at a time, if only somebody somewhere would order the damn thing, which they might consider doing once all the airports have built new runways to handle it. Don't get me wrong, I'm sure it's a swell idea. It'll come in very useful for large-scale evacuation operations circa 2015.

'When life becomes an extended picnic, with nothing of importance to do,' writes Charles Murray in *In Our Hands*, 'ideas of greatness become an irritant. Such is the nature of the Europe syndrome.' The Continent has embraced a spiritual death long before the demographic one. In those 17 European countries which have fallen into 'lowest-low fertility', where are the children? In a way, you're looking at them: the guy sipping espresso at a sidewalk café listening to his iPod. Free citizens of advanced western democracies are increasingly the world's wrinkliest teenagers: the state makes the grown-up decisions and we spend our pocket money on our record collection. Hilaire Belloc, incidentally, foresaw this very clearly in his book *The Servile State* in 1912—before teenagers or record collections had been invented. He understood that the long-term cost of a softened state is the infantilization of the population. The populations of wealthy democratic societies expect to be able to choose from dozens of breakfast cereals at the supermarket, thousands of movies at the video store, and millions of porn sites on the Internet, yet think it perfectly normal to demand that the state take care of their elderly parents and their young children while they're working—to, in effect, surrender what most previous societies would have regarded as all the responsibilities of adulthood. It's a curious inversion of citizenship to demand control over peripheral leisure activities but to contract out the big life-changing stuff to the government. And it's hard to come up with a wake-up call for a society as dedicated as latter-

day Europe to the belief that life is about sleeping in.

Australia has more economic freedom than the EU and fewer distorting demographic problems, so, along with America, it's one of the two countries with a sporting chance of avoiding the perfect storm about to engulf the rest of the west. But at some point it too will have to confront these issues—not just the falling birth rate and aging population, but the underlying civilizational ennui of which the big lack of babies is merely the most obvious symptom. I feel bad running around like a headless chicken shrieking about this stuff. But let's face it, scaremongering is the default mode of the age. We worry incessantly, because worrying is the way the responsible citizen of an advanced society demonstrates his virtue: He feels good about feeling bad. So he worries mostly about what offers the best opportunities for self-loathing—climate change, or the need to increase mostly harmful foreign aid to African dictatorships. This is a kind of decadence. September 11th 2001 was not 'the day everything changed', but the day that revealed how much had already changed. On September 10th, how many journalists had the Council of American-Islamic Relations or the Canadian Islamic Congress or the Muslim Council of Britain in their rolodexes? If you'd said that whether something does or does not cause offence to Muslims would be the early 21st century's principal political dynamic in Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, Belgium, France and the United Kingdom, most folks would have thought you were crazy. Yet on that Tuesday morning the top of the iceberg bobbed up and toppled the Twin Towers.

But it's important to remember: radical Islam is only the top-eighth of that iceberg—it's an opportunist enemy taking advantage of a demographically declining and spiritually decayed west. The real issue is the seven-eighths below the surface—the larger forces at play in the developed world that have left Europe too enfeebled to resist its remorseless transformation into Eurabia and call into question the future of much of the rest of the world. The key factors are:

- i. **i) Demographic decline;**
- ii. **ii) The unsustainability of the social democratic state;**
- iii. **iii) Civilizational exhaustion.**

None of these is Islam's fault. They're self-inflicted. If you doubt that, forget about fast Islamifying Europe and look at the most geriatric jurisdiction on the planet. In Japan, the rising sun has already passed into the next phase of its long sunset: net population loss. 2005 was the first year since records began in which the country had more deaths than births. Japan offers the chance to observe the demographic death spiral in its purest form. It's a country with no immigration, no significant minorities and no desire for

any: just the Japanese, aging and dwindling.

At first it doesn't sound too bad: compared with the United States, most advanced societies are very crowded. If you're in a cramped apartment in a noisy congested city, losing a couple of hundred thousand people seems a fine trade-off. The difficulty, in a modern social democratic state, is managing which people to lose: already, according to *The Japan Times*, depopulation is 'presenting the government with pressing challenges on the social and economic front, including ensuring provision of social security services and securing the labor force.' For one thing, the shortage of children has led to a shortage of obstetricians. Why would any talented ambitious med. school student want to go into a field in such precipitous decline? Birthing is a dying business.

At the beginning of the century, the country's toymakers noticed they had a problem: toys are for children and Japan doesn't have many. What to do? In 2005, Tomy began marketing a new doll called Yumel—a baby boy with a range of 1,200 phrases designed to serve as companions for the elderly. He says not just the usual things—'I wuv you'—but also asks the questions your grandchildren would ask if you had any: 'Why do elephants have long noses?' Yumel joins his friend, the Snuggling Ifbot, a toy designed to have the conversation of a five-year old child which its makers, with the usual Japanese efficiency, have determined is just enough chit-chat to prevent the old folks going senile. It seems an appropriate final comment on the social democratic state: in a childish infantilized self-absorbed society where adults have been stripped of core responsibilities, you need never stop playing with toys. We are the children we never had.

And why leave it at that? Is it likely an ever smaller number of young people will want to spend their active years looking after an ever greater number of old people? Or will it be simpler to put all that cutting-edge Japanese technology to good use and take a flier on Mister Roboto and the post-human future? After all, what's easier for the governing class? Weaning a pampered population off the good life and re-teaching them the lost biological impulse or giving the Sony Corporation a license to become the Cloney Corporation? If you need to justify it to yourself, you'd grab the graphs and say, well, demographic decline is universal. It's like industrialization a couple of centuries back; everyone will get to it eventually, but the first to do so will have huge advantages: the relevant comparison is not with England's early 19th century population surge but with England's industrial revolution. In the industrial age, manpower was critical. In the new technological age, manpower will be optional—and indeed, if most of the available manpower's alienated young Muslim men, it may well be a disadvantage. As the most advanced society with

the most advanced demographic crisis, Japan seems likely to be the first jurisdiction to embrace robots and cloning and embark on the slippery slope to transhumanism.

The advantage Australians and Americans have is that most of the rest of the west is ahead of us: their canoes are already on the brink of the falls. But Australians who want their families to enjoy the blessings of life in a free society should understand that the life we've led since 1945 in the western world is very rare in human history. Our children are unlikely to enjoy anything so placid, and may well spend their adult years in an ugly and savage world in which ever more parts of the map fall prey to the reprimativization that's afflicted Liberia, Somalia and Bosnia.

If it's difficult to focus on long-term trends because human life is itself short-term, think short-term: Huge changes are happening now. For states in demographic decline with ever more lavish social programs and ever less civilizational confidence, the question is a simple one: Can they get real? Can they grow up before they grow old? If not, then western civilization will go the way of all others that failed to meet a simple test: as Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in 1870, 'Nature has made up her mind that what cannot defend itself shall not be defended.'