

Yearning for the Past: Is Human Society Regressing?

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Theme: [History](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

“Yesterday, all my troubles seemed so far away
Now it looks as though they’re here to stay
Oh, I believe in yesterday”—The Beatles 1965

In the 1970s, I had a staunch conservative colleague, a political science professor, who was the only professor I ever met who openly used his classroom as a bully pulpit for his political views. Once, in a seminar he and I participated in, I asked him to tell the audience what conservatives conserve since they obviously are not conservationists. He was caught off guard by the question but eventually stated two platitudes: our values and our way of life. I tried to show him that both were meaningless expressions. To be meaningful, the pronoun “our” needs a specific antecedent. Without one, it could refer to any group—the wise or the stupid, the good or the bad, the ugly or the beautiful. Likewise the phrase “way of life” and the word “values” also must have some specific content to be meaningful. Some people value fairness and honesty, others cheating and lying. Some ways of life involve robbery and assault and others, serving people. Sentences that lack specific content are rarely meaningful. But I doubt that I convinced my colleague. Someone who doesn’t want his mind changed is difficult to convince! So have some fun and ask your favorite conservative what conservatives conserve and judge her/his reply. Does it make any sense? is the question.

Yet, the word “conservative” has always had a specific and precise meaning. It was coined by François-René de Chateaubriand in 1818. He used the word as the title of a magazine whose object was to restore the Bourbon monarchy by undoing the policies instituted during the French Revolution. Chateaubriand and others sought to return France to the time of the *Ancien Régime* (old order). Since that time, conservatives have tried to preserve the status *quo* or, better still, to return to “the way things were” at sometime in the past. In different times and at different places, of course, there are different old orders, so there is no single group of ideas that are conservative. Conservatives from different parts of the world often disagree among themselves. But the unifying attitude is always a yearning for the past.

In Europe in the nineteenth century, the yearning was for a return to the time before the French Revolution, before 1789. In America, some conservatives yearn for a return to the 1920s, others the 1850s, and still others to the 1600s. In Germany, some still yearn for a return to the 1930s. In Israel, some yearn for a time before the Christian era. And in the Arab world, some yearn for a time before the death of Muhammad. These yearnings are deeply felt. So the question is, Is human society regressing?

Look at the evidence. In America, the rights of wage-earners to organize and collectively bargain has been largely eliminated. The Supreme Court has torn the heart out of the Voting

Rights Act and governors throughout the nation have begun to limit the right to vote of many citizens. The elimination of regulations used to promote the fairness of business is constantly sought. And racism has become rife. In Europe anti-Semitism is again becoming [common](#). Israel, whose founders were staunchly progressive socialists, has now become a banal reactionary state. The voices of reaction are loud and heard everywhere while the voices of progress are hardly heard at all. Active progressive movements exist nowhere. The voices of progress have fallen silent. Conservatives everywhere are measuring progress by walking backwards!

Conflict within and between societies was once manifested as conflict between reactionaries and progressives. But today things are different. Reactionaries and progressives engage in mere skirmishes while the real conflict is taking place between two large conservative societies—the Western and the Arabian. Skirmishes can often be resolved by compromise, but conflict between two diametrically opposed cultures can not. What can either side give up that would mollify the other? Their forms of government? Their economic practices? Their cultural values? I suspect not! America promises to “degrade and destroy” ISIL. There is no space for compromise.

But Islamic conservatism is not comprised of a group of individuals. It does not consist of an organization. It is an ideology. It cannot be shot with a gun. It cannot be stabbed with a knife. It cannot be poisoned. It cannot be blown to bits with a missile. As any American should know, just as the ideology of racism has not been annihilated after numerous generations, the ideology that holds ISIL together cannot be destroyed either. The killing of people who hold that ideology will have no effect on its existence. It has already become a Lernean Hydra. Each lopped off head grows two more.

On September 11, 2001, the United States set out to punish those responsible for crashing airliners into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon even though the perpetrators died in the crashes. America would extract its “pound of flesh” along with millions of gallons of blood. Although ostensibly done to protect Americans, some of the flesh and blood extracted was and continues to be American. But no one can convincingly argue that Americans are safer today than they were on September 10th. Butchering the flesh and spilling the blood has achieved nothing. Now the American government wants more. But the degree of safety Americans enjoy is inversely related to the number of jihadists killed. The more killed, the less safe Americans are.

There are 1.6 billion Muslims in the world. How many Americans will die trying to kill even one percent of them? Even if one percent is killed, how many of the others will become jihadists? How many years of killing will this take? The human race can very easily annihilate itself in this mad attempt to “degrade and destroy.”

That human society is regressing is obvious if the proliferation of cyberware being developed is discounted. Cyber trinkets will not solve human problems. So the question to be answered is not is human society in regress but how far back it will go—the 1920s, the eighteenth century, the Middle Ages, the seventh century, or perhaps the Stone Age. What will the denouement of the human race be?

John Kozy is a retired professor of philosophy and logic who writes on social, political, and economic issues. After serving in the U.S. Army during the Korean War, he spent 20 years as a university professor and another 20 years working as a writer. He has published a textbook in formal logic commercially, in academic journals and a small number of

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