



Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order

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At a time when relations between the United States and Europe are at their lowest ebb since World War II, this brief but cogent book is essential reading. Robert Kagan, a leading scholar of American foreign policy, forces both sides to see themselves through the eyes of the other. Europe, he argues, has moved beyond power into a self-contained world of laws, rules, and negotiation, while America operates in a “Hobbesian” world where rules and laws are unreliable and military force is often necessary.

Tracing how this state of affairs came into being over the past fifty years and fearlessly exploring its ramifications for the future, Kagan reveals the shape of the new transatlantic relationship. The result is a book that promises to be as enduringly influential as Samuel Huntington’s **The Clash of Civilizations**.

Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order Details

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From Reader Review Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order for online ebook

My Pseudonym says

A book basically comparing the size of America's dong to Europe's by a neocon crusader steeped in the blood of the Iraqi people.

John-paul Pagano says

Another sacred text of modern neoconservatism, this one merits the derision it has attracted. It's not terrible or completely off-base, and it's short, but it's the type of book that interested social scientists, in addition to Europeans and left-of-center folks, will hate, because it leverages history, politics and culture to render a cottage psychoanalysis of Europeans that is by equal terms sweeping and unsupported by data.

Kyle says

This is a neo-conservative text through and through (I mean actually neo-conservative, not just throwing the term around.) It is well written and many of the points made can't be argued, but I was left with a bad taste in my mouth by the end. Kagan seems to think that the U.S. not only should, but is perfectly able to project military power anywhere at anytime and alone if necessary. It's hard not to get the feeling that he doesn't consider a diplomatic victory or a political one a possibility. It all seems to be about how big your arsenal is and how much balls you've got to use it. It follows that if Europe wants the U.S. to fight under the guise of "international law" (which I agree with him is a bunch of hot air) that is because they are doing their best to have leverage on us because they are so weak and we are so strong, militarily. It follows from this that they are weak because we have been protecting them for so long with our military power allowing them to build a "paradise" of social programs with the money they would otherwise have to build weapons with. So then it is our responsibility to go about things unilaterally because we alone are keeping the western world safe, we alone know what is best for the world, and we alone have the ability to make it happen.

This book was written in 2003. I believe that any reasonable person who reads this book now, ten years later, can see how dangerous and absolutely wrong these ideas have proven to be. Fighting Afghanistan and Iraq have the U.S. reeling. Clearly fighting both of these wars was NOT something we were able to do, let alone going all out against vague enemies like "evil doers" and "terrorists" around the globe.

In the end his analysis of the distinctions between Europe and the U.S. and how they came about is very informative and thought provoking, but beyond that, it's dangerous trash.

P.S. I also found that with all the history invoked throughout that Vietnam was hardly mentioned. This is revealing. As with most political writing the authors views are most easily revealed in what they DO NOT say.

Joe says

This book gets two stars over one because it was easy to read, quick, and it does a good job of explaining the view points of a certain group of people. Unfortunately, that group of people often include key decision makers in the USG.

Kagan's argument, in *Of Paradise and Power*, can be summarized in saying that the interests and inclinations of America and Europe have diverged. Europe prefers to avoid the use of force, due to their inherent weakness, while the United States is inclined to use force, because it must. The argument is not convincing and his supporting data is often inaccurate and biased. There is an element of truth to the main themes of what he argues, however the subjective approach and disregard of any data that does not support his argument is unhelpful.

I agree with Kagan's main point that the interests and inclinations of the United States and Europe have diverged. He makes a good case for describing how Europe prefers to avoid the use of force, while it is an increasingly American tendency. I disagree with the analysis that he makes to explain these conclusions. In fairness, the book was written before the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were able to fully play out, and the failures of U.S. intelligence and application of force, with the neglect of soft power advocated by the Europeans, was not yet evident.

Ahmed Abdelhamid says

Very Realistic, worth reading & Discussion.

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Beyond Paradise and Power

Shawn says

A hought-provoking quick read.

I thought this was a really interesting book at the time that I read it; it speculates that the reason that Europe is so much less warlike and more socialist than the USA is that they don't spend ANY money on defense any more (knowing that the USA is spending a fortune). They know the USA will protect them if the shit really hits the fan, so they have been able to spend their entire budgets on other things since WWII; Kagan's implication is that Europe is a little naive about their ability to function sans military.

I need to go back and re-read this, because I suspect that it oversimplifies a lot, and I am no longer as conservative politically as I was in 2003.

Matt Gosney says

An American apologist view of America vs Europe foreign relations. It tries to sound understanding of the view the rest of the world has of America by saying that America does care about how it is perceived. What it also does is blame 'Berlin' and 'Paris' for their inability to talk sense into Washington, trying to blame others for the reasons why America goes around the UN security council and just does what it wants. He justifies that America does whatever it wants because it has to. Its well-written and researched, it can be seen why some people might get sucked into believing his points of view.

Eivind says

I'm not giving a star-rating for this one. You see, I'd need to give it two distinct ones for my review to make any sense.

Is this a fair and balanced account of the differences between America and Europe when it comes to foreign policy ? No. Not even close. It's a book-length defence of Americas policy and a book-length critique of everything the author perceives as wrong with Europe, and when it comes down to it, the entire book can be summarized as "Europe should double it's military budget, and be much more willing to use it aggressively outside their own territory, the way USA does."

If judged as an attempt at what the book-title and the cover claims it's going to do, namely to contrast and compare, naming advantages and disadvantages of both approaches, this book is a failure. 1 star. It also does not help that the book, despite its shortness, has an AMAZING number of repetitions. Europe is "weak", USA is "strong" he says. I ran grep on the book, he uses the word "weak" 1117 times.

It's also somewhat amusing to note that he critiques Europe harshly for not properly recognizing the massive threat to the west posed by Saddams weapons of mass destruction. (Is Iraq today a bigger or a smaller threat to "the west" than it was before the second gulf war ?)

The book also suffers from a severe lack of organization. It reads like a unstructured ramble. Not a series of

clearly defined chapters about different aspects, instead you have the feeling that the same points are repeated in every chapter. For this reason too: 1 star.

When the book nevertheless has some value, it's because it offers a glimpse into how hawkish conservatives in USA think. It's interesting, not for what he says about foreign-policy, but for what the book says about the author, and others like him. You don't learn anything worthwhile about foreign policy from this book (beyond "be more militaristic", and that's a sentence, not a book), but if you're unfamiliar with the way neocons in USA think, then it'll teach you, by way of showing an example. Judged by this criteria it deserves 3 stars.

Arian Ghorbani says

Before I get into the actual review, I've seen a few other reviews of this essay, and I must say, the amount of insecurity and demagoguery present in the majority of negative reviews is enormous. The essay gives an excellent argument, and defends it clearly. None of the holier-than-thou reviews shown here have served to debunk it in any fashion, instead branding it as "neoconservative propaganda" and waving it away in disgust. The book in no way shows any bias for or against America or Europe, instead attempting (quite successfully, in my view) a neutral analysis of the place of each political bloc in the new world order. Any claim that this is a nationalistic piece of propaganda clearly did not read the parts claiming European superiority in social policy and moral standing, or the entire beginning tearing into American amorality in international affairs. It is an overall neutral piece with a hopefully written ending, and any claims otherwise are born from incredible insecurity over meaningless politicking.

Robert Kagan's perception of where the world would be politically today was clearly, deeply flawed in retrospect. However, despite these flaws, the overall sentiment of his essay here was powerful in message and concise in telling. In "Of Paradise and Power", Kagan describes a world in which the European Miracle has created a microcosm of social paradise in Europe, where peace springs eternal and the social outdoes the military. However, this miracle cannot survive without being granted an incubated space. The guard for this space, it turns out, is the United States. The claims of the United States being some barbaric nation as compared to those of Europe is not entirely inaccurate, Kagan claims, but rather an incomplete picture - instead, the United States is required to remain in its barbaric position in order to protect the European Miracle from an equally barbaric world. This argument is well thought out and defended, despite some inaccurate predictions of current day. This book serves to provide a look into the evolving view of American hegemony with the turn of the century, and despite clear flaws, is still powerful in its message to this day.

Stuart says

This book is a review of the differences between American and European views of international power politics, which derive from their different histories and their relative power. I am only roughly familiar with world politics -- a news listener but not an expert or a political junkie. For me the book is a 5 for interest and usefulness, because it is thought-provoking, readable, informative, and relevant to important matters, about like a stimulating magazine article or TED talk. But this book is also a 3 for presentation, because it is repetitious, several points could have used more explanation, and the footnoting for quotes or details seems

haphazard. It emerged from a journal article and seems to have been expanded too far too fast; a book-length treatment should have been more thorough. So I give it a 4: worth the frustrations.

Antigone says

Robert Kagan's famous essay is a thoughtful, thorough and, at times, incendiary exploration of the strains currently existing among the countries that compose the West. The author brings these tensions to light by drawing out the distinct philosophical disparities between Europe's steadfast aim toward a negotiated "paradise" of perpetual peace and America's conviction of the continuing necessity for (and use of) military "power." How can these perspectives coalesce into a unified approach to foreign policy? The first step would have to be to air those differences in an attempt to understand them.

There are those who resist such discussions. In fact, it might be time to draw attention to the bewildering number of people who appear to believe that if we cannot have a perfect conversation we should have no conversation at all. The perfect conversation would be, of course, one in which you are: a) absolutely correct in everything you say, b) persuasive enough to change everyone's mind, c) powerful enough to effect immediate change and d) assured that whenever anyone references this conversation in the future he/she will be compelled to admit how astonishingly brilliant you are. Well, that's conversational nirvana and about as rarely sighted as a wild white elephant in the modern-day Hindu Kush. Most of us are stuck in the standard communicative muddle, attempting to make the best of ill-chosen words, thorny facts and a point that's clearly been cobbled together on the instinctive fly. That muddle is what we have to work with. That muddle is what we have to try.

One may not agree with all of Mr. Kagan's rhetoric, or anyone's rhetoric for that matter - confronting the issue at this juncture is, I believe, important enough. And he's certainly done that.

Judith says

I think it's not too much to say that this book revolutionized my understanding of the meta level of foreign policy, especially as it concerns the EU, the USA and their partnership. It explains very well the thinking among an influential group of American policymakers. A must read!

Joseph Stieb says

Robert Kagan's brilliant and concise book analyze the differences between how the US and Europe have come to see international politics. He was writing during 2002 and 2003 in the midst of a transatlantic dispute over the Iraq War. Kagan contends that this dispute was not just about Iraq, but that it reflected deeper political and philosophical differences that mostly relate to power. He contends that the disparity of power and different views of power are at the heart of the increasing divergence in foreign policy between the US and Europe.

This book had many insightful points, so I'll just recount a few that stood out to me. The US and Europe

clearly have had a vast military power gap since the end of WWII. Europe seemed more willing to tolerate threats like Iraq and to deal with them through persuasion, pressure, containment, and incentives. The US, however, had a much lower threat tolerance, which seems to make less sense on the surface because the US was so powerful. Kagan uses a cutting analogy to connect power to threat tolerance. Let's say you are in the woods armed only with a knife, and there's a bear prowling around. You will probably lie low because the alternative of hunting the bear and seeking confrontation is riskier than evasion and self-defense. Now let's say you have a rifle. If you have so much power, why should you tolerate a threat to your security? The logic here dictates that the person with more power will seek confrontation in order to eliminate threats it feels it would rather not tolerate? The first person is Europe, and the second is the US. As a much weaker power, Europe avoids conflict and focuses on self-defense. In contrast, the vastly more powerful US seeks to eliminate threats because its power has changed its psychology. Also, the fact that the US has become the global cop in so many regions means that the backlash of terrorism is pointed at America, so Europe has much less to be worried about.

Another crucial point is that the Europeans see themselves as building a Kantian liberal international order within Europe in which the use of force is strongly discouraged. Kagan says that the establishment of a rules-based, integrated, peaceful, and functional European system is possibly the greatest accomplishment ever in international politics. The French lamb has settled down with the German lion, and war between the powers of Europe seems highly unlikely. The Europeans tend to criticize the US for its unilateral streak and its willingness to use force and sometimes bend international law for security reasons. Kagan points out that the European criticism is highly ironic because one of the essential reasons the Europeans have created a Kantian system is that the Americans continue to live and act in a Hobbesian one. The US and the USSR vanquished Nazi Germany and made the postwar order possible. The US cast a security umbrella over Western Europe that guaranteed everyone's security, reducing fear between France and Germany to the point where they could integrate and become friends. The US continues to enforce international law and address threats inside and outside of Europe, but in order to make the liberal European order it has to, or at least thinks it has to, flex military muscles more often than Europeans find appropriate. He suggests that Americans and Europeans should get used to this double standard of American behavior. They will probably be able to be Kantian in the zone of paradise, but a mix of Kantian and Hobbesian in the anarchic zones of power. The US is the guardian of the gates of paradise, but cannot fully enter. The growing enmity between the US and Europe comes from the fact that the Europeans see the US use of force and unilateralism as a threat to their system, which is based more strictly on law, economic integration, and diplomacy. Thus in the lead to Iraq we saw Britain, France, and Germany all trying to reign in the US in different ways, which was hell-bent on erasing the Iraqi threat.

Even before I read this book, I have long puzzled over the Kagan line: "America did not change on September 11. It only became more itself." What exactly is this "self?" Kagan sees the American character as so fundamentally idealistic that we can't, or don't, separate ideology from interest. We have always been about expanding the circle of liberty and democracy, for better or worse. But mostly better, especially in the 20th century. We have consistently identified our interests with the freedom and prosperity of others in ways that make it seem worth fighting for democracy in far-flung places like Iraq and Vietnam. After 9/11, Kagan says we only accelerated our tendency to see the world in these terms and our willingness to use force to eliminate threats to liberty/democracy/capitalism and expand that circle. I am personally skeptical of this notion because of the peculiarities of the Bush administration, but I find it fascinating nonetheless. Kagan does not evaluate the wisdom or morality of this tendency, but he asserts that it is hard to deny. I found a lot of parallels here with Cayton and Anderon's "The Dominion of War" and Suri's "Liberty's Surest Guardian."

To some extent, there is a big question mark surrounding this book. After 9/11, in the period of immense sympathy for the US in Europe, could the US have built a broad and militarily potent coalition to address

threats like terrorism, WMD, and rogue states? Supposedly pacifistic nations like France seemed willing to step up and help the US. However, we never really asked. The Bush administration eschewed foreign help in Afghanistan and killed any possibility of a broad coalition by breaking international law repeatedly and shifting the focus of the War on Terror to Iraq. So who knows? Maybe the structural and philosophical differences Kagan points out in this book really aren't that deep, and the more mundane answer relates to the mistakes of fallible and contextual human beings. Maybe a different president would have used the post 9/11 moment not to build a campaign against Iraq but to build a united coalition of nations to combat a common threat. Kagan's story fits well with the history that happened, but it sometimes feels a little too grand and deterministic to be the answer.

I hope the length of my review convinces you that this is worth a read. It will seriously take about 2 hours. I've honestly spent more time thinking about it than reading it. It is certainly a product of his age, and Kagan has been wrong about many claims in this book. He tends to paint in overly broad strokes, but there's something to his major claims. Btw I thought it was kind of funny that this book had basically the same message as Lt. Nathan Jessup's speech at the end of *A Few Good Men*. Check it out.

Aaron Mak says

Let me save you some time. The theme of the book is thus:

“America is confident and strong. Europe is fearful and weak. America has by far the biggest stick. Consequently, by might and therefore by right, America can be, and is, the biggest dick.”

His biggest gripe against all these other weaklings is their question of “How will the sole superpower be controlled?”

Perhaps he should watch *Batman vs Superman*? (Which coped out by (a) posting Superman is inherently good, and (b) posing an even bigger threat in the form of Doomsday.)

While Kagan did not say so outright, his answer is that the USA need not, and ought not, be controlled. See theme above.

One telling example is Kagan's depiction of the International Criminal Court. From his telling of it, he considered the ICC a hindrance to American ability to act (i.e. American unilateralism, which somehow everyone must implicitly accept as being right), and that the ICC's proclaimed goal of enforcing international law merely being a manifestation of a weak Europe, prompted by their misguided reliance on rules and order.

Another example is Kagan's casual declaration of the death of the Westphalian system, i.e. the death of national sovereignty (and somewhat legitimizing the misplaced concept of “sub-sovereignty”), in support of the pre-emptive strike doctrine (which he correctly calls “preventive”). It reads less like an actual belief than an attempt to justify what can only be called an American hegemony. He did not, and did not care to, work through the implications of that declaration, which contradict his assumptions about America's place in the world (e.g. as a sovereign nation, as being inherently “good”, etc.).

Fifteen years after publication, this book has, ironically, aged well. It reads at once like a Trumpian foreign policy bible and, despite Kagan's assertion of a unipolar world, a somewhat accurate description of today's

multipolar world. Not because Kagan got his facts right. Far from it. It has aged well because of things he barely mentioned: the rise of a China who is more than willing to throw its weight (both economic and military) around, the spectre of a Cold War USSR that refuses to die, America's (specifically, Trump's) eagerness to tear down any and all international institutions. With so many other nations willing to flout the "international order" (which has been, as many Asian countries are fond to point out, established by "the West"), sole reliance on rules and institution is no longer sufficient.

But that is giving him too much credit. After all, if a scholar happened upon the correct conclusion by way of a misguided argument and being borne out by subsequent, unpredicted events, it merely speak to his luck, not his scholarship.

Andrea says

Quite a small book. Honestly, things written in the book are interesting. I agree with a lot of it and it's a nice way to show true differences between America and Europe. With that being said, this book is old and quite irrelevant in 2018. European thinking about security has changed over the past few years with terrorist attacks, and Europe's struggling with nations that just want to act on their own. They lack experience, will and means to deal with these new issues. America has stayed the same, with exception that China is growing stronger and stronger in every sense. One thing I did not like is how the author explains that americans are idealists that believe in freedom and how they want the best for the world but know that they can get that with guns. Is it seriously possible to say that their military actions in every part of the world were because they wanted good for the people or is it because they had a lot to gain? If they were such true idealist, people in those countries would now live in modern functioning societies not in ruins where there is no law and guerillas are fight for power. With that being said, I feel this is a book for somebody who is interested more in "past times". If you need something newer, just skip.
