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The Final Fight for Nature and History

A Book Review by Mark Wegierski

In the extremely select group of billionaires on this planet, Sir James (Jimmy) Goldsmith is certainly one of the most reflective, intelligent, and decent-minded. In a hostile but informative article on the newly emerging communitarian tendency, Goldsmith was described as a "plutopundit, Euro-politician" (*The Economist*, December 24, 1994-January 6, 1995, "The Politics of Restoration", pp. 33-36). Goldsmith withdrew from active business in 1990, and has dedicated himself to public endeavors instead. He is, along with the French aristocrat Philippe de Villiers, the co-founder of a new political movement, L'Autre Europe (which campaigned in France under the name "Struggle for Values") and is a Member of the European Parliament as well as leader of the new parliamentary group, L'Europe des Nations.

The Trap, although a profound work, is quite accessible to the average intelligent reader. It is printed up in a comparatively large-sized font and there are rather unobtrusive endnotes, which do not disrupt the flow and tempo of the text. The book became a runaway bestseller when it was originally published in France in 1993. However it has not, as far as the reviewer is aware, done nearly as well in the United States.

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The first section of the book, "Measuring or Understanding?" is a straightforward critique of looking at the world (and at the success of society) strictly in terms of the Gross National Product (or economics alone). Goldsmith points out, for example, that the very critical activity of a mother bringing up her children is worthless measured in terms of GNP.

The second section, "The New Utopia: GATT and Global Free Trade" is a powerful attack on these two latter-day liberal/capitalist dogmas. Goldsmith pointedly states: "...forty-seven Vietnamese or forty-seven Filipinos can be employed for the cost of one person in

a developed country like France" (p. 26). The adoption of global free trade would therefore be utterly disastrous for the middle- and working-classes of the West, as the transnational corporations simply move their production operations offshore. But the poor of the less-developed world would not benefit much, either:

...one of the characteristics of developing countries is that a small handful of people controls the overwhelming majority of the nation's resources. It is these people ... who assemble the cheap labour which is used to manufacture products for the developed world.

Thus, it is the poor in the rich countries who will subsidize the rich in the poor countries (p. 37).

The GATT's effect on agriculture in the Third World will be even more disastrous, according to Goldsmith:

It is estimated that there are still 3.1 billion people in the world who live from the land. If GATT manages to impose worldwide the sort of productivity achieved by the intensive agriculture of nations such as Australia, then it is easy to calculate that about 2 billion of these people will become redundant. Some of these GATT refugees will move to urban slums. But a large number of them will be forced into mass migration (p. 39).

The alternative Goldsmith proposes is regional free trade blocs, between countries that are roughly equivalent in development. He also endorses a variant of the free movement of capital (but not of products), e.g. that Japanese firms that want to sell products to Europe would be required to establish their businesses in Europe, thus benefitting European workers. However, he also warns about the dangers of countries having excessive foreign debt-obligations, citing *The Economist* and a *Washington Post* editorial.

In section 3, "Nations, Artificial States and Populated Spaces," Goldsmith discusses the worldwide issue of nationalism. He restates the often-made point that the nineteenth-century European partition of Africa along arbitrary geopolitical lines, unreflective of ethnic

realities, has resulted in incredible post-colonial dislocations. Goldsmith defines a nation as "a land whose citizens, in their overwhelming majority, share a common culture, sense of identity, heritage and traditional roots" (p. 55).

Asked whether a nation can integrate foreigners, Goldsmith answers:

...nations need new blood and new ideas. But they can only absorb a limited amount at a time. They cannot allow themselves to be overwhelmed by immigration otherwise they will lose their identity and cease to be nations. Newcomers who are welcomed into a nation should want to honour and respect the customs of their new home. They must not step on shore or over the border and reject the national culture. If they do, the inevitable results are hostility, intolerance and conflict (p. 59).

Goldsmith perspicaciously turns the argument of "diversity" against Western liberals:

The West cannot understand a democratic rejection of its ideas. For the West such a rejection is a sign of either dementia or evil... The West believes that its destiny is to guide or coerce diverse human cultures into a single global civilization. It cannot tolerate the coexistence in the world of different cultures... This acute form of cultural imperialism is reinforced by international business, which considers that it would benefit from the destruction of social diversity and its replacement by a global monoculture hungry for western-type products (pp. 61-62).

Goldsmith expresses profound scepticism about latter-day America. First, he discusses James Madison's surprisingly prophetic views of black-white relations. Madison had understood that such relations would invariably be very difficult. The attempted solution of re-migration to Africa (suggested by Madison) failed to catch on. (The establishment of Liberia, Goldsmith points out, also coincidentally resulted in the displacement of the native population by a tiny immigrant elite, which although itself black, behaved in a colonial fashion.) The central problem was not only the physical abuse of slavery, but also the fact that blacks had been robbed of their preexistent cultural identities and histories — a point which Malcolm X himself made in the adoption of his famous name. At the same time, Goldsmith sees it as doubtful that African-Americans will ever want to identify with mainstream America, given their tortured experience. However, he also sees that recent Hispanic and Asian immigration has only exacerbated such problems. Goldsmith honestly identifies 1965, when the Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments were passed, as a critical turning point. "They abolished the policy which,

previously, had organized immigration in a manner that reflected the pattern of cultural origin already established in America" (p. 64). He points to the *Time* magazine story predicting that Americans of European descent would be in a minority shortly after 2020, and comments

...it will be impossible to avoid social torment. The destabilization and in some cases social breakdown of the cities, the multi-ethnic, multi-tongued population, the rapid geographic mobility which has resulted in uprooted ... or broken families, have all contributed to widespread disorientation (p. 66).

The two main contradictory responses to this crisis are separatism — a search for historic roots outside America — and homogenization:

[some] have sought to eliminate diversity and to build a homogenized society by denying the existence of cultural, ethnic and even gender differences. Homogenization has brought into question the differences between men and women... Replacing the natural complementarity of men and women by competition between them will change society — particularly in a culture in which it is fashionable to emphasize the individual ... [it] will further threaten the stability of the family (p. 67).

Turning to Europe, Goldsmith calls for a decentralization of the EU structures, and a greater emphasis on the nations of Europe as opposed to the centralized bureaucracy in Brussels. He is particularly against the single-currency model.

In section 4, "Rethinking the Welfare State," Goldsmith embraces the principle of "subsidiarity" which means that problems should be addressed, as far as possible, at the family, local, or regional level. "The idea that society consists of a multitude of individuals is wrong. In reality a robust society consists of families and local communities. These are the true building blocks... (p. 90).

Goldsmith goes on to make a number of proposals (e.g. for education vouchers) — some of which sound a little too rosy and unrealistic — that would try to put his vision into practice.

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Section 5, "Modern Agriculture and the Destruction of Society" is a relatively brief yet extremely cogent indictment of agribusiness. Goldsmith offers us a series of horrific images from the intensive farming industry. "In chicken, it has been demonstrated that since the end

of the last century the carcass fat content has risen by nearly 1,000 per cent" (p. 108). Even leaving aside the profound social dislocations engendered by agribusiness, there is the fact that industrialized food production has made many food products increasingly unhealthy for human consumption (because of high levels of saturated fat and artificial chemicals), increasingly prone to disease or blight (because of the lack of genetic diversity), and also prone to new plagues of the worst possible type, which could easily be passed on to humans. (Fearsome new diseases arise especially because of the common practice of feeding these industrially-produced animals on ground-up remains of their own species.) Goldsmith is especially critical of biotechnology.

Section 6, "Nuclear Energy: The Big Lie" is an excoriation of the nuclear industry. He inveighs against "the nucleocrats." What particularly frightens Goldsmith is that there has not yet been *one* commercial nuclear plant that has been completely decommissioned — a process which Goldsmith believes will cost *billions* of dollars per facility (if it can even be done!) and which should be factored into the calculations of the actual cost of nuclear energy. He also points out that there are now about 1,000 tonnes of plutonium in the world, which simply never existed forty-five years ago. Goldsmith's views in this matter contrast sharply with those of James Lovelock, a very hard-headed ecologist, who argues that coal and oil are ecologically worse than nuclear power.

Section 7, "Why?", is the most theoretically dense part of the book. Goldsmith points to the social and ecological apocalypse looming before us and seeks to explain its intellectual sources. Among these are the Judeo-Christian tradition (which called on man "to subdue the earth," placing him above nature and all the other animals); Enlightenment philosophy (which deified science and reason), and Marxism-Leninism (which Goldsmith simply sees as the Enlightenment philosophy in a particularly virulent form).

The principal beliefs of the Enlightenment were that human reason, freed from the impediments of tradition and prejudice, can and should emancipate man from the constraints of religion, history and the natural world (p. 170).

Goldsmith reacts against the scientism, out-of-control technological development, anthropocentrism, and universalism of the Enlightenment complex. He would like to reinterpret the Judeo-Christian outlook, rather than throw it out entirely.

Sir James Goldsmith tries to move from the stewardship model of nature (which can fairly easily be read into Judeo-Christian tradition) to a wholly naturalistic vision, ending with the letter attributed to the American Indian Chief Seattle. This is a call for re-integrating the human and the natural. As far as Goldsmith is concerned the final worldwide fight for

Nature (for humankind to live attuned to her cycles, rhythms and imperatives) and for history (for the sense of genuine community and identity) is just beginning■