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## 201019 OBITER DICTA: MID-JULY 2010

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**201019 OBITER DICTA: MID-JULY 2010**  
**Steven Alan Samson**

**Saturday, July 17**

<http://townhall.com/columnists/JonahGoldberg/2010/07/16/when-did-the-rules-change/page/full>

Jonah Goldberg senses a change in the air.

"I'm beginning to wonder if the political moment is much, much, more significant than most of us realize. The rules may have changed in ways no one would have predicted two years ago."

"In 2008, American liberalism seemed poised for its comeback. The pendulum of Arthur Schlesinger's 'cycle of history' was swinging back toward a new progressive era. Obama would be the liberal Reagan." Much of the imagery of candidate Obama was distinctly and cloyingly messianic. At that time, indeed, the new electoral cycle seemed poised to restore Camelot.

But in what Shakespeare called "the whirligig of time," this was not to be! Goldberg expresses his wonder that the old rules do not "seem to be applying; at least not too strongly. Big government seems more unpopular today than ever. The Gulf oil spill should be a Gaiasend for environmentalists, and yet three quarters of the American people oppose Obama's drilling ban. Sixty percent of likely voters want their newly minted right to health care repealed. Unlike Europe, where protestors take to the streets to save their cushy perks and protect a large welfare state, the Tea Party protestors have been taking to the streets to trim back government."

"[E]ven on the continent the rules are changing. European governments have turned into deficit hawks to the point where the American president feels the need to lecture them on their stinginess."

What shall we make of such "signs of the times?" Are people coming to their senses or are we poised on the brink of one last wild ride?

In his comments on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Benjamin Wiker notes in *10 Books Every Conservative Must Read* that "people create a worldview according to what they desire." Here Rene Girard's concept of "mimetic desire" is a helpful tool of analysis. In fact, as Girard has observed, Shakespeare's *Theater of Envy* is filled with illustrations of the dream-games people play.

As the magician Prospero put it: "We are such stuff As dreams are made on; and our little life Is rounded with a sleep."

As Wiker notes: "We live our lives as if the world conformed to our desires. When the world doesn't play along, we condemn it and live our lives dreaming of the way the world should be, would be, if we were in charge of things. Modern liberalism is the singular attempt to stop dreaming and start acting on this hubristic ambition. At its best, it follows Gonzalo, creating a nanny state

government dedicated to ensuring a comfortable, secure life for its citizens, whose lives are to be filled with material pleasures, and devoid of pain and toil. At its worst, it becomes as savage as Antonio, ruthlessly eliminating those who don't fit its grand vision. But in either case, totalitarian force is necessary to recreate the world. That is why liberalism seeks both technological mastery over nature and absolute political power to achieve its utopian visions. It seeks the power of a god, and in doing so, it must take God's place. Liberalism is secular in precisely this sense: it aims at godlike power through politics" (pp. 220-21).

The reality, to which we must awake, is that Gonzalo's and Antonio's dreams are one and the same dream. In *The Time Machine*, H. G. Wells dreamed of a humanity split into Eloi and Morlocks, and, in his book *Anticipations*, expressed his desire to marginalize and, if need be, eliminate the human Morlocks of "the Abyss." Four decades later C. S. Lewis imagined where such a "modern utopia" led: *The Abolition of Man*. Death panels, anyone?

Near the end of his posthumous book, *The Meaning of Shakespeare*, Harold C. Goddard wrote: "The *Tempest* is a profoundly Christian play." Our times are calling for a restoration of true art. Just before his discussion of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, Wiker concludes his meditation on *The Tempest* the following bridge passage: "Every art is an act of creation; and every act of literary creation brings with it a need for moral responsibility. And if it be true art, it will reveal not only technical mastery; it will be a union of wisdom, goodness, and dramatic power."

Perhaps, at last, a change in the rules (such as Prospero sought to effect) will help produce the kind of change "we can believe in." If so, it is a fragile kind of change that must be tenderly nurtured.

<http://pajamasmedia.com/phyllischesler/2010/07/16/%e2%80%9cconscience-and-conflict%e2%80%9d-2010-bolton-chesler-glick-jacobs-abu-toameh-and-woolsey-in-aspn/?singlepage=true>

Phyllis Chesler shares some observations from a panel discussion at a teleconference on "Conscience and Conflict" in which she interacted with James Woolsey, John Bolton, Charles Jacobs, and others.

Chesler's observations about our failure to address human rights abuses – and why – need to be communicated to the general public. Her concluding observations about Woolsey's presentation are especially noteworthy: "He further explained that boycotting Saudi oil will prove ineffective since other nations will move in as buyers. If we do not act on alternative energy plans (electricity, the electric car, the Prius, nuclear energy, etc.), 'half the world wealth will soon be in Saudi hands.'"

"In short, Woolsey views 'American dependence on foreign oil as a national security issue.'"

"Oh, I could not agree with him more. But, as both Charles and I pointed out, the war of ideas is hot upon us right now and if we do not make sure that people are being given the real news and analyses now – before it is too late – then 20-

30 years from now, radical Islamists will be driving electric cars in all the cities of America."

<http://www.debka.com/article/8916/>

The headline for this piece tells the story: "Syria massacres Kurds aided by Turkey's Israel-made drones." Who will decide how much perfidy from a NATO ally is enough? In a stable full of show horses, has anybody been left in charge?

[http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2010/07/12/health\\_care\\_rationing\\_obama\\_believes\\_in\\_106268.html](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2010/07/12/health_care_rationing_obama_believes_in_106268.html)

Nat Hentoff, one of our great civil libertarians, gets down to cases: "As a reporter, I do not use euphemisms - such as calling murderous terrorists 'militants' or 'activists.' And as an American, I can exercise my First Amendment right to say plainly that President Obama is a liar with regard to our new health-care law, often referred to as Obamacare."

The above was just for openers. Hentoff proceeds to diagnose the career of Dr. Donald Berwick, who has been put in charge of Medicare and Medicaid and who professes great admiration for the British National Health Service (NHS). Hentoff quotes him as saying in a 2008 speech: "I am romantic about National Health Service. I love it (because it is) 'generous, hopeful, confident, joyous and just.'"

One of the great ironies of our postmodern times is how much life imitates art. C. S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength* (1946), the concluding volume of his "Space Trilogy," describes a government organization called "N.I.C.E., the National Institute of Co-ordinated Experiments. . . . The N.I.C.E. was the first-fruits of the constructive fusion between the state and the laboratory on which so many thoughtful people base their hopes of a better world." Perhaps Lewis had Shakespeare's thoughtful Gonzalo in mind as an example of "thoughtful people".

The irony in this case is that the NHS has its own N.I.C.E.: "That 'just' National Health Care Service decides which care can be too costly for the government to pay. Its real-time decider of life-or-death outcomes is the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE)."

To round out the picture (or belabor the obvious), Hentoff quotes his CATO Institute colleague Michael Tanner on what we may expect from Obamacare.

"Tanner makes a grim point as Berwick rediscovers the romance of government cost-effectiveness: 'Recent reports suggest that the recently passed health-care bill will be far more expensive than originally projected. As it becomes apparent that Obamacare is unsustainable, the calls for controlling its costs through rationing will grow louder. With Donald Berwick running the government's health-care efforts, those voices have a ready ear' (dailycaller.com, May 27). Tanner then provides some of the statistics that make the moral equivalent of death panels a reality.

Tanner's (and Hentoff's) grim point is further underscored by the words of Wisdom in Prov. 8:34-36:

"Blessed is the one who listens to me,  
    watching daily at my gates,  
    waiting beside my doors.  
For whoever finds me finds life  
    and obtains favor from the LORD,  
but he who fails to find me injures himself;  
    all who hate me love death."

As it is put elsewhere in the Bible: "He who has ears, let him hear!"

## Sunday 19

<http://www.nhinet.org/epistulae10.htm>

In defense of Arizona's law, Joseph Baldacchino examines the relevant early Supreme Court decisions concerning the state police power to regulate of immigration, noting that the Supreme Court distinguished between the regulation of immigration and Congress's authority to make laws concerning the naturalization of citizens.

<http://pajamasmedia.com/victordavishanson/pity-the-postmodern-cultural-elite/?singlepage=true>

Victor Davis Hanson provides a helpful field guide that lists the identifying traits of our cultural elites - while wondering at the "weirdly antithetical two worlds" that cultural elites and ordinary Americans now inhabit. The sort of split personality that inspired H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* had, even then, long been a staple of popular literature.

## Tuesday 20

[http://www.americanthinker.com/2010/07/evil\\_educators.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/2010/07/evil_educators.html)

In his recent book, *How Evil Works*, David Kupelian surveys several venues in which evil-doing has become especially proficient. Robert Weissberg, who recently published *Bad Students, Not Bad Schools*, singles out one area for special attention and begins the attached column with a simple observation: "Here's the great paradox: the greater the requirements for the diploma, the higher the dropout rate, the greater the diploma's market value."

Unlike King Canute, who demonstrated that he could not turn back the tide, the American education establishment has spent trillions of taxpayer dollars in an effort to circumvent this "paradox" by relaxing the requirements, diminishing the diploma's market value, and encouraging a rising market demand for a college diploma. The result is an assembly-line system for manufacturing high school graduates that stifles achievement and rewards failure. It would challenge the talents of a Dante or a Dickens to properly dramatize the resulting absurdities.

Weissberg begins and ends with the appealing thought that someday a libertarian billionaire will create a museum of failed government policies. He proposes that

a wing be dedicated to educational policies and be designated "Inferno" after the Eighth Circle of Dante's masterpiece. Perhaps the museum itself should be located in the vicinity of the Museum of Modern Art and named the Museum of Mutually Assured Destruction (MOMAD).

Note to a friend:

One of Peter Jones's books that focuses on the Gnostic revival is *Spirit Wars: Pagan Revival in Christian America*. The chapter on Eric Voegelin in *10 Books Every Conservative Must Read* touches on this topic, too.

## Wednesday 21

<http://pajamasmedia.com/blog/universities-and-government-bureaucracies-the-lefts-chokepoint-charlies/?singlepage=true>

Tom Blumer describes the depredations of America's commissariat in two fields: higher education and the government bureaucracy. In summary: "The communists had their checkpoints. Leftists have their chokepoints. Those who occupy positions in university systems, government bureaucracies, as well as certain union and professional organizations, often with the active assistance of the courts, serve as the system's 'Chokepoint Charlies.'"

<http://www.wnd.com/index.php?fa=PAGE.view&pageId=181749>

This piece on unmanned aerial vehicles, or drones, caught my eye. John Whitehead, who is cited by Nat Hentoff, practices law just up the road from here. The sale of a UAV to Gaston County was announced in February 2006, although the FAA quickly shot down the idea of using it to police crowds due to concerns about interference with flight lanes.

Benjamin Wiker's book addresses the larger problem raised by C. S. Lewis and other critics of scientism: "The new sophistry works through a union of moral relativism and technical power. 'Should we do this?' (which assumes there is a moral order) is replaced by 'How can we do this?' Questions of morality are considered obsolete in the face of practical demonstrations of the technical power to transgress all natural and hence moral boundaries" (10 Books, p. 85). Wiker continues: "A true conservative will not violate [moral] limits even if he can, and in fact, considers his moral caliber to show forth most clearly when he can violate them but he will not. By contrast, the new liberal as techno-sophist believes we can demonstrate that the limits are not natural or sacred simply by violating them" (p. 87). His description here of the true conservative is reminiscent of Galadriel's act of self-denial in *Lord of the Rings*.

## Thursday 22

<http://pajamasmedia.com/blog/more-muslim-riots-in-france/?singlepage=true>

Once again, youths are running amok in some of France's "sensitive urban zones." Ryan Mauro observes: "The riots are the result of a French government too afraid

to exercise control over its own territory. The question now is how long it will take for Islamism to transform these areas into Sharia enclaves."

This is what happens when a supine government chooses to give up the ghost. A true heir of the Spanish philosopher and essayist, Jose Ortega y Gasset, would have an abundance of exemplary material for writing a Gallican sequel to Ortega's 1921 critical review, *Invertebrate Spain*.

<http://www.danielpipes.org/8649/turkey-in-cyprus-vs-israel-in-gaza>

In response to Turkey's assertion that Gaza is "an open-air prison," Daniel Pipes compares the Turkish seizure of northern Cyprus in 1974 with the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza (the "Disengagement Plan") in 2005.

"The subsequent occupation of 37 percent of the island amounted to a 'forced ethnic cleansing' according to William Mallinson in a just-published monograph from the University of Minnesota. In contrast, if one wishes to accuse the Israeli authorities of ethnic cleansing in Gaza, it was against their own people, the Jews, in 2005."

Turkey has subsequently more than doubled the size of the Turkish population on Cyprus with settlers from Anatolia, an action that the Cypriot government regards as illegal. These events recall the ethnic cleansing and population exchanges of Greeks and Turks that followed the First World War.

Pipes's article displays photographs that show a Cypriot version of the Berlin Wall with signs designating a no man's land of "forbidden zones." Given France's "sensitive urban zones" and the "no-go zones" in many European cities, the idea seems to be catching on.

Pipes quotes Steven Plaut, a Haifa University scholar who has visited this area. Plaut conveys the atmosphere of wraith-like suspended animation that fills the ghost town of Famagusta: "Nothing has changed. . . . It is said that the car distributorships in the ghost town even today are stocked with vintage 1974 models. For years after the rape of Famagusta, people told of seeing light bulbs still burning in the windows of the abandoned buildings."

Plaut's description of Famagusta called to mind one blogger's account several years ago of her motorcycle ride through a Ukrainian ghost town near Chernobyl. Early during the Second World War, another young woman, the philosopher Simone Weil, captured the same dark presentiment in *The Iliad: or the Poem of Force*. There is nothing so terrible, she said, as the destruction of a city. Such ghost towns threaten to spread over more of the landscape.

[http://www.americanthinker.com/2010/07/what\\_the\\_naacp\\_tea\\_party\\_battle.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/2010/07/what_the_naacp_tea_party_battle.html)

Robert Weissberg notes that "the post-1960s civil rights agenda has been the single most powerful force in expanding Washington power." He prefaces this remark by giving a succinct summary of what is at issue between the NAACP and the Tea Partiers.

"The NAACP and its numerous allies have for decades led the charge to expand government power, including intruding into areas once considered absolutely off-limits to local government, let alone Washington. Tea Partiers are not libertarians, but they've had enough with government power run amok. This disagreement is, to use Thomas Sowell's words, an unbridgeable conflict of visions: the Tea Party's agenda, even stripped of any racial component, contravenes the NAACP's *raison d'être*, so when the NAACP complains about insensitivities, it is just saying, 'You intend to destroy us.'"

Our dialogue of the deaf got started in earnest during the Great Society when we were infected by a tough strain of the French disease: over-regulation. As the seepage from the Federal Register spreads far beyond the Tidal Basin, over-regulation has evolved into over-nanny-fication of America in more recent years. So who are the "cheese-eating surrender-monkeys" today?

<http://www.nationalreview.com/planet-gore/231319/reids-lame-effort-pass-climate-bill/chris-horner>

Regarding the delayed consideration of the proposed climate bill, Chris Horner smells a skunk. The post-election lame duck agenda expected to wrap up the 111th Congress is threatening to become so packed that it may tip the scales on the rest of the year.

In the "This Week" section of the current *National Review* (August 2), note is taken of federal judge, Joseph Tauro, and his ruling that "laws to protect marriage as the union of a man and a woman are the products of irrational bigotry and therefore unconstitutional. The specific law in his sights was the Defense of Marriage Act, a bipartisan law signed by President Clinton that defines marriage in the traditional way for purposes of federal law. Thus when the courts of Massachusetts decided to redefine marriage, federal programs were not obliged to give spousal benefits to same-sex partners. Judge Tauro ruled, incredibly, that the Tenth Amendment blocks the federal government from adopting its own definitions. In effect, then, it gives state judges the power to set federal policy. This concern for state prerogatives is for show: The logic of Tauro's decision would authorize federal courts to force unwilling states to recognize same-sex marriage. But he is not the only false actor in this drama. Obama's Justice department – including the Office of the Solicitor General, run at the time by Elena Kagan – 'defended' the Defense of Marriage Act by calling it unjust and attacking its strongest justification. Liberals in different branches of government have worked out a tidy division of labor. The executive branch will pretend to support marriage, and the courts will pretend to enforce the law."

Thus we Americans are expected to bow to Soviet realism, viz. the old Soviet-era adage: "We pretend to work; they pretend to pay us."

**Friday 23**

[http://townhall.com/columnists/JonahGoldberg/2010/07/23/open\\_conspiracy\\_is\\_no\\_longer\\_merely\\_ajar/page/full](http://townhall.com/columnists/JonahGoldberg/2010/07/23/open_conspiracy_is_no_longer_merely_ajar/page/full)



Jonah Goldberg ties the recent leak of an e-mail listserv, called "Journalist," with H. G. Wells' old notion of an *Open Conspiracy*, which rather clearly illustrates the bias against conservatives and Republicans that is characteristic of liberal bloggers, journalists, and academics. As Goldberg makes clear with a few examples, such bias is nothing new. What may be worth examining, then, is some of the back-story to Wells's idea.

Wells has already written *The Time Machine* and other works by the time he wrote a futuristic scenario/blueprint with a very long title: *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress: Upon Human Life and Thought*. It was the publication of *Anticipations* around 1901 that brought him to the attention of the Webbs, who along with George Bernard Shaw had founded the Fabian Society nearly two decades earlier. In the years and decades to follow, Wells and Shaw became a rather formidable twosome in debates over a wide range of social, cultural, and political issues. Whatever position we might expect the Progressive "bienpensants" of today to take, Shaw and Wells helped articulate a century ago. They were well-matched to each other in debating skills and intellectual fire-power, but also equally matched by the opposing tag-team of G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc. My own acquaintance with the debates they generated began with the research I first undertook forty years ago for my master's thesis, *The Methodical Conquest*, which grew to unmanageable size by the time I broke it off and hastily threw something together from April to July of 1974.

Wells's idea of an open conspiracy developed out of his disagreements with the Fabian Society, with which he parted company after a few years. In fact, he wrote a novel, *The New Machiavelli*, that reflected his disdain for the Webbs and the Fabian strategy of burrowing into the political establishment under false colors. George Bernard Shaw, for his part, included Wells in the Fabian stained-glass window of 1910 as a gargoyle/jester in the gesture of thumbing his nose at their puritanical pieties. By contrast, Wells's idea of an Open Conspiracy was for socialists to be frank about their beliefs and their goals.

For the most part, the American Left has continued the Fabian tradition of concealment. The Intercollegiate Socialist Society was an early Fabian-inspired movement that was founded in New York City in 1905. Its successors included the League for Industrial Democracy, the Americans for Democratic Action, and the Students for a Democratic Society. With the First World War, then the New Deal of the 1930s, and then again with the Great Society in the 1960s, the stage had been set for a series of increasingly successful transformations of the political apparatus along lines originally envisioned by the Fabians. The Open Conspiracy turns out to have been one side of a dialectic that is represented by these New Machiavellians.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703724104575379630952309408.html>

Sen. James Webb reviews the background of nondiscrimination laws and calls for a corrective.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/22/AR2010072204029.html>

Concerning a lame-duck session following the election, Charles Krauthammer suggests that Republicans and the electorate prod Democrats to take "the pledge." I suppose there is not harm in that - just so long it is not prefaced by the words "Read my lips."

## Saturday 24

[http://www.mmisi.org/ir/33\\_01/rahe.pdf](http://www.mmisi.org/ir/33_01/rahe.pdf)

Paul Rahe's "The Constitution of Liberty within Christendom" echoes both Friedrich von Hayek's *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960) and the early political science writing of work of Francis Lieber (1798-1872), particularly "Anglican and Gallican Liberty" (1849), which Hayek cited in his book, and *On Civil Liberty and Self-Government* (1853). Rahe is the author of "Don Corleone, Multiculturalist," which I have used in the classroom, and some major treatises that include *Republics Ancient and Modern* and the more recent *Soft Despotism, Democracy's Drift*. The article's first paragraph sets its thesis boldly.

"The civilization of the West is rendered an intelligible unit and distinguished from the alternatives by three characteristics present nowhere else: monotheism in religion, philosophy and science as a means for understanding the natural world, and self-government. The first originates with the Jews; the second and third, with the Greeks. They become fully intertwined in the Middle Ages only under the aegis of Western Christianity."

[http://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2010/07/dem\\_senator\\_turns\\_on\\_the\\_diver.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2010/07/dem_senator_turns_on_the_diver.html)

We may hope Sen. Webb's blast leads to the end of what Clarice Feldman here calls the "diversity shakedown."

<http://pajamasmedia.com/blog/the-lottery-makes-a-strong-statement-about-charter-schools/?singlepage=true>

Christian Toto interviews Madeleine Sackler about her documentary, *The Lottery*, which follows the stories of four children whose families seek to have them admitted to a charter school, Harlem Success. "'[P]arents were forced to put their kids and themselves through something no one should have to experience,' she says of the nerve-racking lottery process."

<http://www.businessinsider.com/22-statistics-that-prove-the-middle-class-is-being-systematically-wiped-out-of-existence-in-america-2010-7>

Michael Snyder has a series of columns on our tough economic times and troubling signs for the future. I shuffled and diversified my portfolio earlier this week in the face of the continuing economic hammer blows. Hiding money in a sock would have been a better investment strategy than almost anything in the stock market the last two years - and might have even outperformed the market during the last ten years.

<http://spectator.org/archives/2010/07/16/americas-ruling-class-and-the/print>

As a follow-up to the Michael Snyder piece, here is a lengthy reflection on the perilous state of America and its "country class" by Angelo Codevilla, who has written several hard-hitting books and lengthy articles on the character of nations and international politics. Codevilla was the featured dinner speaker at the Philadelphia Society meeting in April.

<http://www.bigquestionsonline.com/columns/josef-joffe/are-we-all-europeans-now>

Josef Joffe notes the waning of American exceptionalism and gives a preview of a projected social democratic future in America, which, he notes, started before the 2008 election and will be increasingly difficult to reverse. Anyone who wishes to understand what this means should meditate on the Prophet Samuel's warning of what to expect with the passing of Israelite exceptionalism (1 Sam. 8). *Sic transit gloria mundi!*

How should we respond? Michael Medved's blog (July 22) has a useful warning to conservatives: "If conservatives hope to succeed in their determined efforts to take the government back, they should drop the popular but misguided slogan about 'taking our country back.'

"This punchy little phrase - ubiquitous on signs and in speeches at tea parties and Republican rallies - could actually drive away some of the independent voters the anti-Obama forces need most for victory. Even worse, the push to "take our country back" brings with it unavoidable racial overtones that pragmatic conservatives should scrupulously avoid."

"Yes, an arrogantly incompetent president has combined with a corrupt collection of nanny-state, leftist hacks to grab (temporary) control of the Washington levers of power. But that doesn't mean that America itself has been seized or stolen. The nation, with its free market economy and incomparably dynamic private sector, is always bigger and better and, ultimately, more powerful than the government."

So I agree with Medved that we must take the country forward, not back. The Great Society, the New Deal, the Progressive movement, and King Saul's reign are all anachronistic. If we go back, it should only be to recover first principles. As Francis Lieber put it: "All I acknowledge is Patria Cara, Carior Libertas, Veritas Carissima" [I love my country, I love liberty more, I love truth the most].

<http://www.bigquestionsonline.com/columns/roger-scruton/muhammad-was-right-about-debt>

More thoughts on social democracy: this time from the philosopher Roger Scruton. "High taxes on all who work hard, take risks, and keep the economy going, combined with a free ride for all those from whom votes can be most easily purchased - such is the tendency of the democratic state. Nobody in Greece or Portugal has ever doubted it, and only a residual glimmer of the Protestant work ethic has distracted the Germans from the truth that they are not really entitled to complain when the Greek political class tries to transfer the cost of its borrowing, which it cannot pay, to the German taxpayer, who can. For that is

what social democracy means, and social democracy has been Germany's greatest postwar export."

It is time for us to jump back onto the temperance wagon and swear off the Kool-Aid.

PS: After writing that last line, I had dinner and went back to reading Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, published in November 1790. Burke knew our times better than we do ourselves. Toward the end of his masterpiece Burke wrote the following about a revolutionary government that had not yet been in power as long as our present Administration has.

"Far from any increase of revenue in their [the national assembly's] hands, I find, by a report by M. Vernier, from the committee of finances, of the second of August last [1790], that the amount of the national revenue, as compared with its produce before the revolution [of 1789], was diminished by the sum of two hundred millions, or eight millions sterling of the annual income, considerably more than one-third of the whole!"

"If this be the result of great ability, never surely was ability displayed in a more distinguished manner, or with so powerful an effect. No common folly, no vulgar incapacity, no ordinary official negligence, even no official crime, no corruption, no speculation, hardly any direct hostility which we have seen in the modern world could in so short a time have made so complete an overthrow of the finances and, with them, of the strength of a great kingdom. - *Cedò quì vestram rempublicam tantam amittis tam cito?* [Cicero: "Tell me, how did you lose a republic as great as yours so quickly?"]

Burke may be regarded as a prophet for our times. "A more distinguished manner?" "So powerful an effect?" Who can write with such terrible irony Karl about the "terrible simplifiers" (Jacob Burckhardt's phrase) of today? As Marx noted, "History repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce." It is now long past time to send out the clowns.

[http://green.yahoo.com/blog/guest\\_bloggers/56/almost-invisible-mirrored-tree-house-built-in-sweden.html](http://green.yahoo.com/blog/guest_bloggers/56/almost-invisible-mirrored-tree-house-built-in-sweden.html)

Moving from the sublimely ludicrous revolutionary faith of the philosophes to the subliminal gamesmanship of *Homo Ludens*, let us round out our discussions of our political terrarium with photos of a whimsical jest: a Swedish tree aerie!