THE NARCISSISM OF MINOR DIFFERENCES
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THE NARCISSISM OF MINOR DIFFERENCES
HOW AMERICA AND EUROPE ARE ALIKE
AN ESSAY IN NUMBERS

PETER BALDWIN
FOR MY SONS,
Lukas and Elias,
who negotiate both sides
of this supposed divide
with aplomb
# CONTENTS

*Acknowledgments* ix  

**INTRODUCTION** 1  
**ONE**  The Economy 15  
**TWO**  Health Care 40  
**THREE**  The Rest of the Welfare State 60  
**FOUR**  Crime 74  
**FIVE**  More Broadly 91  
**SIX**  Education and the Higher Pursuits 97  
**SEVEN**  The Environment 122  
**EIGHT**  Civil Society 148  
**NINE**  Nationalism 160  
**TEN**  Religion and Science 163  
**ELEVEN**  Assimilation 176  
**TWELVE**  Lumping and Splitting 183  
**THIRTEEN**  A Meeting of the Twain? 204  
**FOURTEEN**  Separated at Birth? 216  
**FIFTEEN**  The Post Facto State 227  
**SIXTEEN**  How the West Was One 236  
**SEVENTEEN**  Acorn and Oak 243  

*A Note on Sources* 251  
*Notes* 253  
*Figure Sources* 285  
*Index* 311
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model was not only a reality, but also a crucial issue in the recent election campaigns in the new EU nations of the former East Bloc, led me to ponder how distinctive this model actually was. Versions of this material were presented in a lecture at Syddansk Universitet, Odense, and as the James Seth Memorial Lecture at the University of Edinburgh in 2007. I am grateful to Klaus Petersen, Frank Castles, and Richard Parry for those invitations.

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INTRODUCTION: EUROPE AND AMERICA, HISSING COUSINS

THE ATLANTIC GETS EVER WIDER. Not just in a physical sense, as oceans rise and coastlines recede, but also in ideological terms. Europe and America appear to be pitted against each other as never before. On one shore, capitalist markets, untempered by proper social policies, allow unbridled competition, poverty, pollution, violence, class divides, and social anomie. On the other side, Europe nurtures a social approach, a regulated labor market, and elaborate welfare networks. Possibly it has a less dynamic economy, but it is a more solidaristic and harmonious society. “Our social model,” as the voice of British left liberalism, the Guardian, describes the European way, “feral capitalism,” in the United States. With the collapse of communism, the European approach has been promoted from being the Third Way to the Second Way. The UK floats ambiguously between these two shores: “Janus Britain” in the phrase of the dean of transatlanticist observers, Timothy Garton Ash. It is part of
Europe, says the British Left; an Anglo-Saxon coconspirator, answer its continental counterparts.

That major differences separate the United States from Europe is scarcely a new idea. But it has become more menacingly Manichaean over the last decade. Foreign policy disagreements fuel it: Iraq, Iran, Israel, North Korea. So does the more general question of what role the one remaining superpower should play while it still remains unchallenged. Robert Kagan has famously suggested that, when it comes to foreign policy, Americans and Europeans call different planets home. Americans wield hard power and face the nasty choices that follow in its wake. Europeans, sheltered from most geopolitical strife, enjoy the luxury of approaching conflict in a more conciliatory way: Martian unilateralism confronts Venusian multilateralism. But the dispute goes beyond diplomatic and military strategy. It touches on the nature of these two societies. Does having the strongest battalions change the country that possesses them? After all, America is not just militarily strong. It is also—compared to Europe—harsh, dominated by the market, crime-ridden, violent, unsolidaristic, and sharp-elbowed. Competition is an official part of the national ideology and violence the way it spills over into everyday life. Or so goes the argument: a major battle of worldviews and social practices separates America from Europe.

The idea that the North Atlantic is socioculturally parted is elaborated in both Europe and America for reasons that are as connected to domestic political needs and tactics as they are to any actual differences. American criticism of Europe, when it can be heard at all, typically concerns foreign policy or trade issues. American conservatives occasionally make the old continent a symbol for what they see as the excesses of the welfare state and statutory regulation. But the longstanding European criticism of America has become more vehement and widespread and is now shared by right and left alike. Europeans are keen to define an alternative to American hegemony, now that Europe no longer needs the protection of the United States in a post-cold-war world. Beset with internal fractures and disagreements, they have rediscovered the truism that nothing unites like a common enemy.

In other words, this is not a symmetrical dispute. American anti-Europeanism exists, of course, but it pales next to its European counterpart. “There are no anti-European demonstrations,” as Russell Berman writes, “no burning of French or German flags, no angry mobs with pitchforks and tractors in front of Louis Vuitton boutiques or BMW dealerships. American ‘anti-Europeanism’ is not an equal partner but only an anemic afterthought to the

European spectacles.”5 The renaming of french fries in the congressional cafeteria in 2003 (rescinded by 2006) is about as far as things have gone. Even the characterization of the French as cheese-eating surrender monkeys was self-caricature, with The Simpsons mocking American troglodytes. Occasionally, a Richard Perle, or his equivalent, gives some Europeans a hard time for disagreeing with the U.S. administration on foreign policy. Policy wonks in DC think tanks may argue the fine points of labor deregulation, extolling alleged American flexibility compared to European sclerosis. But they still breakfast on microwaved simulacra of croissants without considering them emblematic of a larger Kulturkampf, and they vacation eagerly in Provence. The battle is rarely joined in reverse. When the talk is about possible gulfs across the Atlantic, one almost never hears about differences whose tendency cuts against European amour propre. The Europeans concerned with gun control or the death penalty have few counterparts among American observers pointing out the significant transatlantic difference in terms of the presence (strong and increasing) of neofascist parties in Europe, contrasting to their utter absence in America. Or detailing the well-integrated status of Muslims in the United States, their relegation almost wholly to the social margins across the Atlantic (at least outside Britain).

Rush Limbaugh, Bill O’Reilly, and others on the American right attack Europe, just as the European left hangs the United States out to dry. That is no surprise. The contrast comes in the mainstream press. Where bien pensant European opinion, as expressed in the Guardian, Le Monde, or Der Spiegel, is heavily colored by certain preconceptions of America, their U.S. counterparts—whether the New York Times, Washington Post, or Newsweek—are not analogously inclined. There is no American José Bové, no U.S. equivalent of the European who regards the lowly hamburger as the opening shot of a battle of worldviews that runs the gamut from McDonalds to Monsanto, from globalization to foreign aid, and who can bring the rabble into the street behind him. “The hamburger is a particular source of hatred of America,” readers are assured by Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies. “It is the single most concentrated, or should that be congealed, symbol of the entire complex that is America.”6 There is no American version of Harold Pinter or Margaret Drabble, whose anti-Americanism causes her paroxysms of rage and nausea, her prose practically frothing at the mouth.7 A vast majority of Americans (91%) desire closer relations with Europe. Only about a third of the French (39%) agree, barely more than half the British (51%), though the Germans (74%) and the Spanish (67%) are more friendly.8
Working-class Americans are largely unconcerned with Europe, while working-class Europeans are often quite fond of the United States. They swarm Florida’s beaches and enjoy visiting a country that—less strictly governed by the Bildungsbürgertum—unashamedly caters to popular taste. The main contrasts come higher up the social scale. University-educated Americans are, on the whole, positively inclined toward Europe. If anything, they are deferential. Think only of the cultural cringe of U.S. academics. Yes, American right-wing intellectuals occasionally attack Europe. Yet they do so not to play to their own foot soldiers, who could not care less, but to goad the American liberal elite. Anti-Europeanism is part of the battle between right and left. In contrast, both the European left and right alike are anti-American. Each has its own reasons, whether it is the vulgarism of cultureless populism for the Right or the exploitativeness of untrammeled markets for the Left. But they are united in their dislike, and thus reassured that they have at least a European identity in common. In America, anti-European sentiments divide; in Europe, anti-American opinions unite.

One of the aspects of European criticism of the United States that puzzles Americans is how selective or even ill-informed it often is. It is a venerable tradition for Europeans to portray America without knowing much about it. Karl May was an overwhelmingly popular German author of cowboy (Old Shatterhand) and Indian (Winnetou) stories, loved by everyone from Einstein to Hitler. Travel was difficult in his day. One can perhaps forgive him for spinning his fantasies of the Wild West before ever setting foot in America in 1908, and even then, never further inland than Buffalo in upstate New York, which—despite its name—was certainly not the West of which he wrote. But when an internationally successful film director, Lars von Trier, makes a series of movies (Dancer in the Dark, Dogville, Manderlay) set in and critical of the United States without having ever been there, one begins to suspect something akin to willful ignorance. Not that mere knowledge has ever been a prerequisite for opinions on America. “I did not need to go to the United States to say what I said,” Georges Duhamel, a French writer, assured his readers in 1930. “I could have written most of the chapters of my book without leaving Paris.”

Reading Europe’s popular press pundits, Americans often grope to recognize their country: rapster ghetto chic, laced with urban poverty or trailer park Appalachia, contrasted with gated-community golf links, iced with caloric surfeit and seasoned with prison brutality. The sociological earnestness of it all is interrupted now and then by some head-shaking Vegas weirdness for comic relief.
Equivalent Americans—otherwise well-educated people whose irrepressible desire to pronounce on Europe is matched only by their ignorance of the subject—are simply not to be found. Americans who have made a profession of observing Europe—Jane Kramer, Bill Bryson, and the like—do so affectionately, and from long experience and careful attention. Even Robert Kagan, perhaps America’s most trenchant critic of Europe, lives in Brussels and knows whereof he speaks. Occasionally, conservative tub-thumpers in America criticize Europe. Politicians may strive for effect, as when Mitt Romney attacked French health care during his short-lived primary campaign in late 2007. Sometimes, a blogger or op-ed writer uses Europe’s failures to make a rhetorical point. But it happens quite rarely.

Rush Limbaugh and his ilk are often thought to poison Americans’ minds by contrasting godless, lazy, overregulated Europe to virtuous America. The reality is that Limbaugh and company are too provincial and self-obsessed to look far beyond America’s borders—as a quick drill into the data shows. A left-wing European pendant to Rush Limbaugh is the Berlin Tageszeitung, the venerable mouthpiece of the aging New Left in Germany, where criticism of America is a staple on the menu. If we search Limbaugh’s and the TAZ’s sites for the terms America and Europe, and synonyms, we discover that Limbaugh speaks 13 times as often of America as he does about Europe. The TAZ, in contrast, speaks of Germany only 1.5 times as often as it does of America. Indeed, it mentions America almost as often as does Limbaugh. In other words, while Europe is a peripheral concern for the American Right, America is an obsession of the European Left. American views of Europe can perhaps best be described as indifference served up with lashings of nostalgia. Europe is the world left behind, sometimes under traumatic circumstances, and one which registers only peripherally on the radar. For Europeans, in contrast, opinions have run hot and contradictory from the moment of first contact: admiration for the possibilities of the new, disgust with how it was actually working out. Perhaps Americans are less interested in Europe than Europeans are in America. But if Americans do not wax eloquent about the old world, at least they do not utter much that is inaccurate or distorted.

The dispute between America and Europe does not pose only the two shores of the North Atlantic against each other. The fight is joined equally within the now expanded Europe. The new nations of the EU have often adopted similar policies and strive for much the same social, economic, and political goals as its old members. Yet, reacting to the overweening statism of their own old regimes, they also have favored a more neoliberal economic model. In many
instances they have rejected European models of welfare statism and looked to Anglo-American ideals of a less regulated capitalism. Early in the transition from Communism, Hungarian and Czech reformers were more neoliberal than Reagan and Thatcher. The Baltic states, though admiring Scandinavia, have been radically free-market reformers. True, the new nations have tempered their neoliberalism in recent years. Yet tax policy in, say, Estonia, with its low flat rates and streamlined system of collection, would be the dream of any American conservative. Debates between Europe and America thus do not pit just the United States against Europe. They also frame a struggle at the heart of the enlarging EU itself.

Although such disputes across the Atlantic have been prompted by disagreements over foreign policy, they touch on something more fundamental and enduring. European criticism of America is, after all, as old as the country itself. Arguably, what we see today is a contemporary incarnation of a long-standing controversy that pits two different models of society against each other as a binary choice. Let me count the ways America and Europe are thought to differ: economic, social, political, cultural, ecological, and religious. America believes in the untrammeled market; Europe accepts capitalism but curbs its excesses. Because the market dominates, the environment is run down in the United States, cared for in Europe. “America has always grown by playing out its soils, wasting its oil, and by looking abroad for the people it needed to do its work,” Emmanuel Todd, a French prophet of collapse, assures us, adding that Europeans, as erstwhile peasants, approach nature in a gentle, Gaia-like way.

Americans are competitive and anomic; Europeans are solidaristic. Initiative and merit may be better rewarded in the United States, but those who cannot compete on the open market are more likely to fall to the bottom. In Europe, a safety net prevents such misery, even as it may limit the altitude of high fliers. Because social contrasts are greater in America, crime is more of a problem than in Europe. American society is more violent. Social measures either do not exist in America or are more privatized than in Europe. Education, for example, is often described as stratified and largely privatized, while in Europe it is universally accessible and state-financed. The lack of universal health insurance in America means that average life expectancies are low and the uncared for die in misery. Americans toil relentlessly, while Europeans trade income for leisure. As one book on the subject puts it, if Europeans are lazy, Americans are crazy. Europeans are secular; Americans are much more likely to believe in God and accept a role for religion in public life.
On the occasions when the American Right attacks Europe, it, of course, spins a variant on the same dichotomies: Europeans are lazy and defeatist; Americans are entrepreneurial and optimistic. Europeans are corrupt and irreligious; Americans are honest and pious. Europeans are infected with Islamic fundamentalism because they are ineffective against immigration; Americans are building a fence between themselves and Mexico, or are successfully integrating their immigrants—depending on which conservative position on immigration is being espoused.

The two societies are thus thought to differ radically: competition versus cooperation, individualism versus solidarity, autonomy versus cohesion. As Jeremy Rifkin, an American writer who shares a certain technological pessimism with much European opinion, puts it: “The European Dream emphasizes community relationships over individual autonomy, cultural diversity over assimilation, quality of life over the accumulation of wealth, sustainable development over unlimited material growth, deep play over unrelenting toil, universal human rights and the rights of nature over property rights, and global cooperation over the unilateral exercise of power.”

European criticism of America has been voiced for over two centuries now, and the themes of such attacks have been heard before in different guises. A long tradition of cultural conservatism in Europe has lambasted the supposed attributes and effects of the modern world. During the nineteenth century, both the European Left and Right criticized modernity from its own vantage—whether as cosmopolitan, rootless, and anomic seen from the agrarian romanticism of the Right or as ruthless, exploitative, and mercantile in the opinion of the Left. The new world was forced to be modern whether it wanted to or not. But many Europeans thought they had a choice. Modernity, and the ongoing debate over whether and how Europe might participate in it, has long played a role as a Rorschach test in European culture—something onto which Europeans have displaced their fears and misgivings about the change they faced.

Today, America represents the tea leaves in which Europe reads its fearsome future. When, for example, Germans—citizens of the world’s most dynamic export economy—attack globalization (which is to say, their ability to sell their excellent products everywhere) as a form of Amerikanismus, then clearly America is not being attacked for what it is (a rather sclerotic and half-hearted player in the global economy, which, by virtue of the size of its internal market alone, will never be as interested in globalization as many European nations), but as a proxy for an otherwise inchoate fear of the world
markets. When Europeans criticize America, it is often a shorthand way of expressing worries about the modern world in general. China, India, Japan, and Korea are often the real objects of suspicion. America is the devil they are familiar with, not one of the unknown unknowns. And, in any case, the dispute is really more about what sort of modernity Europe wants and what its identity in a globalized world is to be. Portraying America as the Other against which Europe defines itself is thus part of an ongoing dispute within the continent over the nature of its own society, its role in the world, and the direction of its future.

It is in this light we best interpret the small library of books published over the past few years, debating whether a sociocultural Rubicon separates (continental) Europe from the (Anglo-) American barbarians. America’s unregulated capitalism is a danger to Europe, warns Todd. The notion of a unified West has lost whatever meaning it once had, adds Claus Offe, the German sociologist. A recent letter-writer to the Financial Times agrees, although placing the UK on the side of the Continentals. A common language should not, this writer claims, obscure the distance between the UK and the United States: Americans carry guns, execute prisoners, go bankrupt, drive large cars, and live in even larger houses. Their men are circumcised and their working class is poor. The humanist and secular Europeans, by contrast, enjoy socialist hospitals, schools, and welfare systems. They pay high taxes, live longer, and take the train. “The proposition that there is something hateful in the very nature of America, that its myths present life-threatening danger to the rest of the world, appears quite natural,” Sadar and Davies, our hamburger pundits, conclude. One ponders what unspoken motives inspire such letters, articles, and books. Andrei Markovits, author of one of the most interesting recent books on the subject, suggests that anti-Americanism helps fire the engines of pan-European nationalism. Europeans have less in common than the aspiring empire builders of the EU would like. But at least they can agree on being different from the Americans. Or can they?

Much has been made of transatlantic differences in popular books and in the press. But these outpourings, however heartfelt, are troublingly deficient in fact and substance. Polemic and vituperation abound; caricature, rather than portrait, is the dominant genre. It is time to examine more closely what it is we do know. This book is an essay in numbers. In it, I consider if and how Europe differs from the United States. I present a broad palette of comparative and quantifiable data, a kind of statistical Baedeker juxtaposing the two sides of the Atlantic.
There is an old joke about a man looking for his lost car keys at night under a street lamp. A passing pedestrian helps him search for a while, and then asks whether he is sure that this is where the keys were lost. “Oh, no,” replies the would-be driver, “I lost them over there.” “Then why are we looking here?” asks the pedestrian. “Because this is where the light is.” So, too, the statistical evidence available for both sides of the Atlantic severely restricts where we can probe. Subjects that could be illuminated by quantifiable evidence are often badly served by the data we have. And in any case, quantification only takes us so far. Not all differences can be identified by numbers. But at least statistics allow us a first pass over the terrain and give us the opportunity to compare reliably. Blinkered but demonstrable, quantification releases us from the clutches of anecdote and impression into the realm of fact and verifiability. The point of this book is not to engage in subjective evaluations of qualitative differences or similarities. The world’s bookshelves already groan under the weight of such attempts. It is instead to look dispassionately at the quantitative evidence, such as it is. My ambition is not to settle the debate over transatlantic differences once and for all (as if that could ever be achieved). Instead, I hope to apply a swift and well-aimed karate chop of fact and figure to unsettle the prejudices and dislodge the mistaken assumptions that have become common currency in periodicals, popular books, talk shows, and conversations on both sides of the Atlantic.

Beyond those popular debates, each facet of the alleged contrasts between Europe and America can marshal an army of scholars well-versed in the details: whether social policy experts, criminologists, educational researchers, students of health care, environmentalists, or those who study religion. I cannot possibly hope to do each of these fields justice, nor to keep their practitioners from thinking that their specialty has been mauled. I can only beg their indulgence and plead the difficulty of presenting so broad and synoptic an account of so large a part of the world. My concern is not with the finer details of these specialized fields, but with the popular perceptions of difference across the Atlantic and the way that these perceptions inform the middlebrow press, TV reportage, the blogosphere, and the attitudes of those Americans and Europeans who know enough about each other to form an opinion. It is not just one aspect of the transatlantic relationship or another that I want to examine, but its entire gestalt. There is—if I can put it this way—an ideological totality to the major fault line that has been identified as running down the North Atlantic. Each aspect is seen as reinforcing and affirming the others. To tackle just one or two of these in detail would get us nowhere. A statistical bird’s-eye view may.
To foreshadow my conclusion, the evidence in this book shows two things. First, Europe is not a coherent or unified continent. The spectrum of difference within even Western Europe is much broader than normally appreciated. Second, with a few exceptions, the United States fits into the span of most quantifiable measures that I have been able to find. We may therefore conclude either that there is no coherent European identity, or—if there is one—that the United States is as much a European country as the usual candidates. We might rephrase this by saying that both Europe and the United States are, in fact, parts of a common, big-tent grouping—call it the West, the Atlantic community, the developed world, or what you will. America is not Sweden, for sure. But nor is Italy Sweden, nor France, nor even Germany. And who says that Sweden is Europe, any more than Vermont is America?

Sigmund Freud coined the phrase “the narcissism of minor differences” to account for the intense energy invested in parsing divergences that, to an impartial observer, might seem trivial and inconsequential. The psychological wellspring of such behavior, Freud reasoned, was the hope of affirming internal group solidarities against an outsider who was perhaps not as “other” as his would-be enemies would have liked. His foreignness therefore had to be narcissistically elaborated in lavish detail. Among Freud’s examples of such supposedly minor differences were those between Spaniards and Portuguese, North and South Germans, the English and the Scots. If he had left it at that, we might be able to agree with him that this was but “a convenient and relatively harmless satisfaction of the inclination to aggression.” We could, that is, if we were willing to let, say, the Highland clearances in Scotland and Bismarck’s wars of unification between Prussians and, among others, Bavarians slip into that twilight world where past bloody strife between fierce enemies has faded in memory to become but historical allusion among current allies. But Freud’s other examples of what he considered minor differences are less trivial. They demonstrate the gravity of the issues actually at stake: Communists and their bourgeois opponents in Soviet Russia, and (in a book published in 1930) Christians and Jews. Freud was not a political philosopher, nor did he elaborate this theme at any length. We need not, I think, accept his examples of minor differences as very telling. And yet we stand to benefit from his insight into differences whose objective divergence is so slight that it does not actually justify the ferocious devotion put into elaborating them.25

Not everyone will welcome this book’s conclusion, that unrecognized affinities span the Atlantic. In Europe, it may be read as a neocon apologia for America, one that does not even have the courage of its own convictions,
namely that the United States is, and wants to be, different. It may be seen as arguing that things are not so bad in America, and therefore as a book that cuts corners on the truth. American conservatives may find it unsettling that less separates Europe and America than they think—or want. However, it is above all, I suspect, American liberals who will be troubled by this book. They may be annoyed by what they interpret as support of the status quo. American liberals appreciate having an idealized image of Europe at hand to criticize domestic American policy. If Europeans enjoy having an ugly America to buff the sheen of their own continent’s qualities, liberals in the United States like to have a virtuous Europe—and above all, a Europe that is different from America—as the target to aim for when calculating their own policy ambitions and trajectories.

I would urge my audience to contemplate the possibility that the potential reactions I have sketched out here to this book say more about the reader than the read. I wrote the book in the belief that recent U.S. foreign policy has so poisoned relations between Europe and America that it has affected more general perceptions of what differences actually divide the North Atlantic. The debate has degenerated into ideological posturing, motivated by local politics and tactics. Vast cauldrons of rhetorical soup have been boiled from meager scraps of evidence. It is time to bring some empirical meat to the table. To argue, as this book does, that the differences across the Atlantic are not as great as commonly thought is not to discount European achievements, nor gloss over American shortcomings. It is to aim for an accurate portrayal of the two sides of the Atlantic. And it is to suggest that a clear-eyed view reveals that the commonalities across this divide are greater than the differences. Indeed, it may well be that the cultivation of whatever divergences remain is, as Freud warned us, narcissistic. In any case, it is highly likely that the election of Obama and his new administration in Washington, ameliorating eight years of transatlantic antagonism, will lend plausibility to the arguments put forth here.

Readers may argue that different figures could be found for some of the data presented here, or that the picture I sketch is unbalanced. That the United States profoundly differs from Europe is a “fact” so often stated that it has become just that: part of what we intuitively think we already know. The story of radical difference is too often the conceptual prism through which we view both Europe and America: a philosophical starting point rather than a question to be examined. This book thus aims to start a debate that has not yet taken place, or rather, one that has been held in an atmosphere of too little data.

To the best of my ability, I have collected and examined the available evidence. But my ambition—to write a brief, evidence-based account comparing
the United States and Europe—has proven unexpectedly difficult. Few comparable statistics exist. All too often, the numbers deal with only a small assortment of nations, and rarely do they span the Atlantic. The ones I present here are those that I have found. I am not a statistician. Few of those who engage at a popular level in this debate are. I have therefore not sought to go beyond amassing and presenting the standard available data gathered by reputable organizations. Occasionally, I have created my own comparisons, but only where the data seemed to be robust and comparable. Most of the time, I have ventured only where the statistical light shines, which is far from everywhere.

The book’s data come mostly from a handful of organizations that devote significant effort to presenting internationally comparable figures: the World Health Organization, the United Nations, UNESCO, UNICEF, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, Eurostat, the Sutton Trust, the World Values Survey, the International Labour Organization, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, the International Association for the Study of Obesity, the World Resources Institute, the International Energy Agency, the International Social Survey Program, and, above all, that astounding emporium of facts and figures, the OECD. To their efforts, I owe whatever rigor the following may possess. But unlike the scholars whose acknowledgments are rife with the usual pieties, I’m not going to absolve them of the weaknesses. The flaws, shortcomings, and inadequacies of the data are also theirs. At least, they have taken a significant first step in gathering evidence. But in this ever-globalizing world, we need far better and more comprehensive data to understand differences and similarities across national boundaries.

No doubt, objections can be raised to many of the statistics presented here. But these objections go both ways. For example, American unemployment figures do not include the many young men in prison and are thus understated. In a similar way, Swedish unemployment figures would be higher (and more truthful) if they included many of those who are counted as disabled. (If you believe the raw figures, Swedes are the most disabled people in the industrialized world, with over a fifth of all adults incapable of work.) In America, 0.7% of the population is incarcerated, in Sweden a mere 0.08% (figures from 2005–06). In America, 10.7% of the adult population is disabled (figures from the late 1990s); in Sweden, the figure is twice as high (20.6%). If the United States had Swedish incarceration rates and counted the surplus prisoners as unemployed, the American unemployment rate for 2005 would rise from 5.1% to 5.8%. Alternatively, if we were to assume that Sweden had American levels of disability and counted the other Swedes on disability benefits as unemployed,
the Swedish unemployment rate would rise from 7.4% to 17.3%. In point of fact, McKinsey calculates the actual unemployment rate in Sweden to be around 17%. Different nations cook the books in different ways.

Another example: a substantial fraction (ca. 13% in 2005) of American foreign aid goes to two countries in the Middle East: Egypt and Israel. Though it easily disappears in quantitative comparisons, this observation should be part of any accounting of American foreign aid: it is prompted by geopolitical as well as humanitarian motives. Equally, so should the fact that for historical, strategic, and geopolitical reasons, almost two-thirds of British and French foreign aid goes to their former colonies in sub-Saharan Africa. In comparison, 40% of German aid and 25% of American goes to sub-Saharan Africa. A quarter of French aid returns to its source as funds intended to allow recipient nations to pay back loans extended by France in the first place, and the statistically single best predictor of French aid is whether the recipient country is francophone. One could go on picking holes in the available statistics until no trustworthy figures remained. For better or worse, I have accepted the numbers presented by the international organizations as the best we have and worked with them accordingly. At the end of the day, as many mistakes will have been made in one direction as in the other. The overall trend is what will carry conviction. As is so often the case in scholarship, one can have precision or breadth, but not both at the same time.

The comparisons that follow assume that each country is equally interesting and pertinent, whether a large one, like the United States or Germany, or a small one—Denmark, say, or the Netherlands. The comparisons are not, as a statistician would put it, weighted according to the demographic importance of the country. Norway, with fewer than five million inhabitants, does not vanish against the massive bulk of the United States. Of course, when we look for lessons that can be learned from other nations, size is not always irrelevant. What works in tiny, homogeneous Iceland may not be suitable for more fragmented America—or Switzerland, for that matter. But nor is size everything. Just because one country is smaller, or larger, than another does not automatically eliminate the value of drawing comparisons between them. When economists debate the virtues of deregulation, for example, the sizes of the respective economies do not figure prominently in their considerations. Certainly, the intellectual and social policy importance of the Scandinavian nations can best be understood in this way. Were it not for the implicit assumption that these small countries have something to teach the rest of the world, it would be hard to explain their grip on the imaginations of sociologists, political scientists, and public policy
makers. Small, distant, and obscure, they nonetheless punch above their weight in social policy discussions. They are taken seriously in their own right and not judged just by their geopolitical clout. I make a similar assumption here. When we seek to identify commonalities and weigh differences, we talk about ways of organizing societies, types of nations, or styles of citizenship, not just about the sheer brawn of demography, GDP, and firepower. Small nations may, in this respect, have as much to contribute as their larger peers.

Before plunging into this book, a final methodological caveat is required: the data assembled here are the latest figures I have been able to find that include both Western Europe and the United States. In most cases, I have examined the immediately preceding annual numbers to ensure that the latest year is not just a statistical blip, but represents a stable value of some duration. The vast majority of numbers presented come from the last decade. Occasionally, I have been forced to rely on slightly older ones. This means that the picture sketched here, though as up-to-date as possible, is nonetheless a snapshot of relations between the score of countries under consideration. It is a picture frozen in time, not an account of an ongoing relationship. However much the two shores of the North Atlantic approximate or are distanced from each other right now, the longer story may be one of moving closer together— or farther apart. I argue that Europe and America are closer now than is commonly thought. But it may be that, nonetheless, they are moving away from each other. While others claim that they are far apart, it may be that they are actually coming closer. I will come back to this question later, rather than getting further involved in matters of method before presenting my findings, but the issue should be kept in mind during what follows.

As I now turn to compare Europe and America, I will speak only of Western Europe as it largely overlaps with the 15 states that made up the EU before its recent expansion. When it is available, I include data from a few nonmembers (Norway, Switzerland, Iceland) since my subject is Western Europe, not the EU as such. Limiting the focus to Western Europe is the fairest approach. Were I to include the new members of the EU as well, Europe and the United States would be even less distinguishable and my argument would be won almost by default. The recently arrived EU nations are not only more likely to agree with the United States on foreign policy than is old Europe. The new Europeans also act more like Americans. They are more religious, more skeptical of an interventionist state, and more laissez-faire in their economic practices. As it expands, the new EU is also becoming more heterogeneous, and in that sense, too, more like America.
Let us begin where everything starts, with the economy and the labor market. This is perhaps where contrasts are thought to be sharpest. America—so the proponents of radical differences across the Atlantic argue—worships at the altar of what West German chancellor Helmut Schmidt once called Rauhtierkapitalismus, predatory capitalism, where the market sweeps everything before it and the state exerts no restraint. The result is what another German chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, called amerikanische Verhältnisse, “American conditions,” plucked straight out of a play by Bertolt Brecht: America’s labor market is untrammeled and cruel, jobs are insecure and badly paid. Americans live to work, while Europeans work to live. That is the story. But is it true?

America’s core ideological belief is often thought to be the predominance of the market and the absence of state regulation. “Everything should and must be
pro-market, pro-business, and pro-shareholder,” as Will Hutton, a British columnist, puts it, “a policy platform lubricated by colossal infusions of corporate cash into America’s money-dominated political system….“ Hutton stands in a long line of European critics who have seen nothing but the dominance of the market in America. There is some truth to the American penchant for free markets. But the notion that the Atlantic divides capitalism scarlet in tooth and claw from a more domesticated version in Europe has been overstated. When asked for their preferences, Americans tend to assign the state less of a role than many—though not all—Europeans. Proportionately fewer Americans think that the government should redistribute income to ameliorate inequalities, or that the government should seek to provide jobs for all, or reduce working hours. On the other hand, proportionately more Americans (by a whisker) than Germans and almost exactly as many as the Swedes think that government should control wages, and more want the government to control prices than Germans. Proportionately more Americans believe that the government should act to create new jobs than the Swedes, and about as many as the Germans, Finns, and Swiss. The percentage of Americans that thinks the state should intervene to provide decent housing is low. But it is greater than the percentage of Germans and Swiss. And when it comes to government support for new technologies, Americans are more mercantilist than the British, Italians, Swedes, Dutch, Germans, Danes, Swiss, and even the French. They are more in favor than the Germans, Swiss, Finns, Danes, and Dutch of government helping industry to grow. On support for declining industries to support jobs, they back government support proportionately more than the British, Swiss, Swedes, Norwegians, Dutch, Western Germans, Finns, and Danes. In other words, Americans are more laissez-faire than Europeans. But they are not off the scale of statutory intervention. They do, however, seem to prefer having government play a role in the productive end of things, rather than acting to redistribute the outcome.

Attempts to measure the degree of economic freedom, or what we might call the reign of the market, place the United States only toward the top of the European spectrum, below the UK and Switzerland. But such comparative examinations also show a relatively narrow span between the least free economy (Greece) and the most (Switzerland) (figure 1). The American state directly controls the economy only lightly by European standards. By the OECD’s definition of public ownership, the United States comes in lower than any of our other nations, which is to say somewhat under the UK and Denmark. But it is only fractionally further from the European mean (2.2 standard deviations)
than the high extreme, Italy (2.09 standard deviations). And if one looks at the OECD’s quantification for state control, the United States ranks above Iceland and closer to the European mean (0.57 standard deviations below) than Italy (1.8 standard deviations above) (figure 2). The span within Europe itself is thus greater than that between the United States and Europe. (Standard deviations allow us to measure how dispersed a set of data is, and thus to express how far one data point is from the average relative to the rest of the data.)

Switching from industry to real estate, the American state owns about 30% of all land in the nation. As a landowner, it thus stands as close to the sparsely populated Nordic countries, Sweden, Norway, and Finland, where the state owns almost half of all land, as it does to other European countries, where far less land is held publicly (figure 3). This outcome derives not just from the United States being a late-settled nation. Yes, in Australia and New Zealand, Crown ownership of land is also high (over half and about a third of total land, respectively). But no comparable public ownership of land seems to exist in South America, whose nations were settled under broadly similar circumstances. High public ownership of land in the United States is one of the reasons, as we will see, why America has a comparatively generous percentage of its territory set aside as nature reserves. It is a direct statutory intervention into what would otherwise have been private property to achieve a public good, and thus in spirit similar to Europe’s occasional nationalization of industries. Government land ownership was how much of higher education was...
2. State Control of Enterprises
Public Ownership and Involvement in Business Operations

3. State Ownership of Land
Percent of Total Land that the State Owns
financed in the United States, including arguably the best public university in the world, UC Berkeley. It was also how the Americans built their railroads in the nineteenth century. Ten percent of the total public territory was used to finance four transcontinental rail lines. In total, to finance railroads, government at various levels staked some 180 million acres, an area slightly larger than the combined size of Germany, the UK, Austria, and the Netherlands. This pushed government participation in railway building in the United States to higher proportionate levels than even in Prussia.5

In some respects, the World Bank’s rankings of the ease of doing business put America highish compared with European nations. Among the ones under the glass here, it is the easiest country to start a business in, after Ireland, and to employ workers, and it is the best at protecting creditors.6 On the other hand, in terms of dealing with licenses, it is bested by Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Germany, and France. Registering property is easier in Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. Austria, Finland, Luxembourg, and Iceland are less troublesome places to enforce contracts. Free trade is more widely practiced in Norway, Finland, Sweden, Germany, Iceland, Austria, and the Netherlands. And the difficulties of paying taxes and closing a business put the United States toward the bottom of the European spectrum for business-friendliness. Indeed, in the amount of time businesses have to spend preparing and paying their taxes, the only European countries more onerously bureaucratic are Portugal and Italy.7

An exhaustive study of similar topics came to the same conclusion: although labor is lightly protected in the United States, for other forms of economic regulation, the UK and often Ireland, and sometimes Denmark, score even lower.8 American business executives claim to spend more time dealing with red tape than their colleagues in Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Luxembourg, Ireland, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, the UK, Italy, Norway, Spain, and France.9 America’s regulatory style, sometimes described as “adversarial legalism,” is characterized by dispersed and decentralized authorities, complex legal rules, and heavy participation of courts and lawyers. The impositions set by this regulatory apparatus are similar to those found in Europe. But administrative frictions generated by the American system and its complexity are often much higher.10 All in all, it is fair to conclude that the United States is not quite the streamlined, market-slavish, efficient entrepreneurial fantasy of the stereotypes. Nor, conversely, that Europe is the feather-bedded, hyperregulated, business-hostile, sclerotic mess that American conservatives imagine.
When the World Bank turns its attention to trade logistics (the ability of countries to connect firms, suppliers, and consumers to global supply chains in an effective manner), which presumably is a practical proxy of market thinking, Singapore unsurprisingly tops the heap. More unexpectedly, Germany, the UK, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, Ireland, Belgium, and Denmark, and even Austria, all rank higher than the United States. Only Finland, Norway, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Luxembourg, and Greece are less attuned to international competitiveness. A Pew Research Center report on attitudes to globalization in 2007 found that, although 70% of Americans support free markets, an even higher percentage of Britons, Italians, and Swedes do. Proportionately fewer Americans back expanding international trade than the citizens of all the European nations surveyed. Fewer Americans consider free trade an advantage than Europeans do, except those from Germany, Austria, Norway, France, and Finland. More favor limiting the import of foreign products to protect the national economy than anyone but the Portuguese. Fewer Americans have confidence in business and industry than the Irish, the Norwegians, Swedes, Spaniards, and Danes. In sum, the United States checks in somewhere at the middle of the European pack, even when it comes to something that we are asked to consider as quintessentially and exclusively American as the belief in free trade and free markets. “Devotion to the free market has never been particularly strong in American politics,” John Gray, the English political philosopher, notes, “even on the Right. The idea that it is peculiarly American is belied by American history, in which protectionism and populism have been more enduring traditions, and the power of government has been vigorously used to deal with economic crises.”

In America, the labor market is less regulated than in many European nations, at least outside the English-speaking fringe. But even here there are surprises. Labor is lightly regulated, though only, according to one attempt to quantify matters, a bit less so than in Denmark and the UK (figure 4). In Denmark, in turn, regulation is approximately one-third as onerous as in Portugal. It is hard to quantify such matters—or even to know what is true. Danish, Icelandic, and Swiss bosses, for example, believe that they have more flexibility in hiring and firing than their American colleagues. Countries that, on paper, are flexible may have strict de facto regulation, imposed through union strength, say. Conversely, highly regulated countries may differ significantly in how strictly measures are enforced. The Portuguese labor market, for example, though seemingly akin to the Spanish, has actually been much
more flexible and blessed accordingly with lower unemployment. One system of labor regulation (in the United States and the UK, for example) may permit workers to be easily fired, while another (Germany) allows employers significant leeway in reassigning workers to new tasks, though they can be made redundant only with difficulty. Hours of work, rather than the number of workers, can be adjusted. Core workers can be retained, even in unregulated systems, while peripheral ones are fired. Labor regulations are more complicated and multifarious than commonly appreciated.

When attempts are made to quantify regulation of the labor market, the difference between the United States and the European extremes pales in comparison to the breadth of the internal European spectrum itself. “[V]ariation in the institutional combination of labour market regulation is higher within Europe than between European and non-European countries,” as one of the best surveys of the subject puts it. American bosses can fire workers more easily than their European counterparts, though again, the difference between the United States and the low end of the European spectrum is narrower than between the low and the high end of Europe—with a ratio of over eight to one between Portugal and the UK (figure 5). As for regulations on hiring, the United States is well within the European spectrum, with Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Denmark, and the UK equally good or bad, depending on your point of view (figure 6).
5. Firing Flexibility

Scale of 1 to 100. The Higher the Index, the More Firing Is Regulated

6. Hiring Flexibility

Scale of 1 to 100. The Higher the Index, the More Hiring Is Regulated
Union membership is low in the United States, but within the European span, and higher than in France. Proportionately more American workers report being active in a labor union than is true in France, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, and Germany. Labor relations in America are not scarred by many strikes (figure 7). Proportional to its labor market, Belgium lost over six times as many days in 2003 and 2004 to strikes, and even Norway, exemplar of consensus, sacrificed well over three times as many. Collective bargaining, on the other hand, covers a much higher proportion of workers in Europe than America. A mere 14% of U.S. workers were thus included in 2000, while in the UK, with the lowest rates in Europe, the figure was over twice that. Austria, with the highest numbers, was thrice the English rate.

“A Surel civilization depends on the idea of public space and a duty and responsibility to each other,” argues a Tory tabloid, the Daily Mail. “The American Dream depends on the very opposite: winner takes all.” And yet, American workers have managed to wrest reasonable compensation from the capitalist system. Measured as a percentage of GDP, they are paid better than any European workers except the Swiss (figure 8). Accounting for differences in purchasing power, American employees are beaten only by the Luxembourgeois. If we look at average earnings of production workers, things are more sober. In purchasing power equivalents, the average American makes more than average workers everywhere in Europe other than Germany,
Norway, Switzerland, the UK, and Luxembourg—in other words, Americans are toward the top of the European scale.23

If you look solely at the federal standard, minimum wages in the United States are at the low middle of the European pack. In Greece, Portugal, and Spain, the worst-paid workers receive lower wages (figure 9). These sums are adjusted for purchasing power so that they account for differences in cost of living. Shown here are the figures for 2005, when the U.S. federal minimum wage was $5.15 per hour. In July 2009, however, it will have risen 40% to $7.25.

If we look instead at the state minimum wages in the United States, the picture improves. Well over half the states have higher minimums than the federal standard, and these bear comparison with Europe (figure 10). Indeed, the minimum wages of Washington, Oregon, Connecticut, and Vermont are higher than any European equivalent for which we have figures, other than Luxembourg’s. Moreover, few American workers are paid minimum wages in the first place. Only 1.4% of American employees made do with minimum wages in 2004, compared with 15% of the French and 5% of the Portuguese (figure 11). True, America has a higher percentage of workers who make do on a relative definition of low wages (below 65% of median earnings) than in any Western European nation.24 This follows from the broader spectrum of wage inequality found in the United States. But, to judge by the comparatively few American workers on the minimum wage, that is not the same thing as being at rock bottom. We will return to the question of relative and absolute poverty.
9. Minimum Wages

Real Hourly Minimum Wages in US $ PPP

10. State Minimum Wages
Nor are Americans hired only in part-time McJobs. In fact, fewer Americans work part-time than workers in most European countries (figure 12). Only Finland, Portugal, Spain, and Greece have fewer. (And even McDonald’s and Starbucks offer fringe benefits—health insurance and the like.) According to the OECD’s figures, permanent employment—work contracts of indefinite duration—is more the rule in the United States than in any Western European nation other than Ireland. The average length of Americans’ job tenure (7.4 years) is low by European standards, but only six months shorter than the Danes’ and five months shorter than the British. At the top of the labor market, American CEOs keep their jobs longer than their European peers, for about nine years.

Job creation and job destruction are much the same in the United States as in several European countries, about equal to the Italian and lower than the French and Portuguese figures. Serious work accidents in America’s untrammelled capitalist system are comparable to European figures. The percentage of workers unfortunate enough to be killed on the job is higher in Belgium, Spain, Italy, Greece, and Austria. The Portuguese rate is more than twice as high (figure 13). In terms of years of life lost to injury for the whole population, the U.S. results are not as good, but still better than those for Finland and Luxembourg, the same as Iceland’s, and only a notch worse than France’s.

In terms of leisure, Americans fare badly. Workers in the United States are not guaranteed a minimum vacation time by law. And their holidays are shorter.
12. Part-Time Employment
As Percent of Total Employment

13. Fatal Work Injuries
Rate of Fatal Injuries per 100,000 Workers Employed or Insured
than in Europe, averaging some 10 days annually. That compares unfavorably to 20 in the UK, and even higher figures elsewhere (figure 14). But the number of national holidays Americans are entitled to is comparable (figure 15). Five nations have as many (10), nine have fewer, three have more. Nonetheless, despite the myth of the always-working American, the actual average time put in at the job is only in the upper half of a very flat scale. That holds if you measure it by minutes per day, where the Germans work the same number and the Danes work more. And it holds if you measure it as the hours worked annually per person, where in 2006 the Finns, Italians, Portuguese, Icelanders, and Greeks worked longer (figure 16). Despite its statistical omniscience, even the OECD cannot quite manage consistent figures, so if you look instead at average hours actually worked in 2006, whatever the difference between that and the previous figure may be, the Americans come in high, below only those perennially hardest working Europeans, the Greeks, and at the same level as the Italians. La dolce vita, indeed. The fewer hours put in at the coal face by Europeans is due, in some measure (about one-third), to a preference for leisure. But, to a greater extent, Europeans work less because they have fewer choices: many are unemployed or have been slipped off into early retirement. As one observer puts it, the unemployed 30-year old Italian male who sits at home expecting his mother to cook and wash for him is not expressing his desire for leisure. He (and his mother) are victims of a sclerotic labor (and housing) market.
15. Public Holidays
Days per Year

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16. Working Time
Average Annual Hours per Person

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If we look at time diary studies, Americans work more on weekends than Germans and the Dutch, but the Italians do so even more. Since the Germans and Italians (among the countries looked at in this particular study) work more in household production than do Americans, their total work hours, though still lower than the Americans’, are less distinct than if one looks just at formal working hours. The German lawyer, in other words, has neither maids nor gardeners. Instead, his wife cleans their house and irons his shirts, while he mows the lawn and washes the car. Immigration, both legal and not, has made more and cheaper labor available in Europe, and middle-class Europeans today use hired-in services much more than did their parents. But to judge by these latest and most sophisticated numbers, a difference still persists. Hired help remains comparatively scarce and expensive in Europe. Labor taxes prevent people from working longer at what they were trained to do while employing someone else to do the housework. Not surprisingly, the tradeoff between market and household work affects women especially. If we count both forms of activity together, figures from the 1990s suggest that Europeans and Americans worked almost the same number of hours per week (around 60 in all cases), with a slight edge to the Americans. American men did a little more housework (two hours more) than their European peers, but the big difference was found among the women. Female Europeans on average did almost 10 hours more household labor weekly than American women, who in turn shifted a large number (eight) of the hours of home labor they saved to the market instead. Yes, as is so often noted, Europeans choose leisure over formal work. But one could equally argue that they choose household drudgery over salaried work.

And who are the Stakhanovites? In the United States, they are the wealthy. Men in the top income quintile work, on average, over 20 hours a week more than those at the bottom. America’s poor men work less than the poor in Sweden, France, and Switzerland, about the same as those in Germany, and only half as much as in Italy. It is often argued that Americans’ high GDP output per worker is bought at the expense of the long hours they put in at the job. That may be. But their productivity, in terms of what they put out during each of the hours they toil, lies a bit above the middle of the European spectrum (figure 17). Among others, the Germans, the Danes, and the Swedes are less efficient workers, and the French and the Dutch are about the same. And that is despite the discovery by a recent survey that the typical American
worker spends over two hours a day of work time doing other things than working, mainly Web surfing, writing personal e-mails, socializing, and spacing out.\textsuperscript{37} Perhaps unsurprisingly, when surveyed about the stress of their jobs, proportionately fewer Americans fussed than any Europeans other than the Irish, Spaniards, Portuguese, Danes, and Swiss.\textsuperscript{38} And, in any case, Americans do not appear to be natural Stakhanovites. Fewer of them agreed strongly with the proposition that work should come first, even at the expense of spare time, than any Europeans other than the Swedes, and more disagreed than anyone.\textsuperscript{39}

So what are Americans doing if they are not vacationing, but also not working? We do not know, but their pace of life is quite leisurely, compared with Europeans.\textsuperscript{17} One attempt to quantify this used various measures, like the speed at which the post office sold stamps and the accuracy of clocks in banks. It concluded that only in easygoing (but longer-working) Greece was the pace of life more relaxed than in the United States (figure 18). Another attempt measured the average pace of pedestrians in major cities: New York was less hectic than Stockholm and London, though more rushed than Berlin, Dublin, Madrid, and Copenhagen (figure 19). Whatever the frailty of such attempts to attach numbers to a slippery concept, these studies at least agree in broad terms that Americans are less harried than many Europeans. Vacationing may not be the only thing that matters.
18. Pace of Life
From Slower to Faster

Greece
United States
France
Austria
Netherlands
Sweden
UK (England)
Italy
Germany
Ireland
Switzerland

19. Pace of Life
Time in Seconds to Walk 60 Feet

Denmark (Copenhagen)
Spain (Madrid)
Ireland (Dublin)
Germany (Berlin)
United States (New York)
United Kingdom (London)
Sweden (Stockholm)
And if we broaden our horizons to look beyond mere leisure to true happiness, here, too, the results are possibly unexpected. Happiness, which used to be the province largely of philosophers or psychologists, has increasingly been tackled by economists, perhaps in the hope of dispelling the aura of dismalness attached to their discipline. Until recently, the scholarly consensus (associated with the work of Richard Easterlin) has been that there may be an overall correlation between prosperity and happiness: wealthy nations tend to be happier than impoverished ones, and the rich within countries more content than the poor. But equally, it appears that above a certain threshold of prosperity (about $15,000 GDP per capita), absolute material well-being no longer plays an important role, aspirations increase, and relative position in the hierarchy of affluence now determines subjective well-being. This pessimistic conclusion—which implies that public policy is powerless to deliver lasting increases in happiness—has now been challenged by economists who claim that greater absolute prosperity, measured both within and between nations, in fact produces greater satisfaction and happiness.⁴⁰ That has not prevented cultural critics from finding a worm in the apple. A surfeit of prosperity, they caution, may make us miserable. They argue that the successful capitalist market, with its ever-growing array of choice, far from making us content and satiated, leaves us anxious and unsatisfied.⁴¹

If Americans are not only wealthier than most others in the developed world, but also living beyond their means, going into debt to consume more than is possible on their already ample incomes, are they among the most miserable? Alas for the pessimists, the answer is decidedly not. Whether rightly or not, they are content with their lot. According to the World Database of Happiness, based at Erasmus University in Rotterdam, only the Danes are happier, while the Swedes, Dutch, Luxembourgeois, and Norwegians are approximately as content. All other Europeans are less serene, and the Portuguese are the gloomiest of all.⁴² Some confirmation of the accuracy of this assessment can be found in survey data demonstrating that, while about 6% of Americans think that the world is wholly evil, a full quarter of the Portuguese do. Conversely, while about 13% of Americans regard the world as entirely good, only 2% of the Portuguese have an equally sunny outlook. Four times as many Portuguese (13.2%, the highest number in Europe) as Americans are existential pessimists, convinced that life serves no purpose.⁴³ More Americans feel that they have a great deal of freedom of choice and control than any Europeans other than the Swiss, with the Swedes neck and
That American optimism is not just hot air is suggested by comparative suicide rates. Americans are less prone than most Europeans to kill themselves. If we look at the rates for women, only the Greeks, British, Italians, Spanish, and Luxembourgeois do themselves in less often. The Belgians and the Swiss, at the other end of the spectrum, commit suicide well over twice as often. Mercifully, the Portuguese appear unwilling to back their gloomy outlook with action (figure 20). Suicide rates for men are much higher than for women in all our countries, but the hierarchy among nations remains virtually the same.

Returning to the everyday realities of economics, the American tax system is comparable to its European equivalents, with one exception: its overall tax take is low, though the same rate as the Greek. But that is just if we measure it as a percentage of GDP. If, instead, we look at the actual sums the American state collects per citizen, then it does better than seven of our nations, including Switzerland, the UK, and Germany (figure 21). Rates of U.S. income tax, which is usually considered the single most important levy, are at the middle of the European spectrum, measured as a percentage of GDP. They are higher than those in France, the Netherlands, Spain, Germany, Portugal, and Greece (figure 22). The progressivity of taxes in America is quite high by European standards. Income taxes are more progressive in America than in the Nordic nations and in four of our other countries (figure 23). In 2005, the richest 10%...
21. Total Tax Revenue
Per Capita (PPP)

22. Income Tax
Taxes on Income and Profits, % of GDP
### 23. Income Tax Progressivity
**Kakwani Index**

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### 24. Taxation of the Wealthy
**Share of Taxes Paid by the Richest 10%**

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of Americans paid a larger share of total taxes than any of their European peers (figure 24). The United States relies less on regressive consumption taxes, which hit the poor hardest, than any Western European country and more on the income tax than any but Denmark, Iceland and, by the tiniest of margins, Switzerland.45

One difference between the United States and the high-tax nations of northern Europe is this: the American poor are largely exempted from taxes, indeed often given state monies via tax credits, while their Scandinavian peers are granted social benefits, but are taxed on income like everyone else. Hence, the U.S. tax system is at once less demanding and more progressive than the Continental European, while at the same time social benefits are stingier. As a rule of thumb, as income taxes are levied on an ever-larger swath of earners and as their rate increases, their progressivity has to decline. Robin Hood may have helped the poor of Sherwood Forest by taking from the rich. But if governments seek to aid the majority of their citizens in modern circumstances of comparatively equal income distribution, they cannot rely only on what they extract from the best-off. Most redistribution takes place via social spending, largely paid for by taxing the same groups that receive the bulk of benefits.

Property taxes, measured as a percentage of GDP, are higher in the United States than anywhere in Europe other than France, Luxembourg, and the UK (figure 25). In a nation with a relatively high level of property ownership, this
26. Home Ownership

Percent of Households

- Switzerland
- Germany
- Denmark
- Netherlands
- France
- United States
- United Kingdom
- Italy
- Greece
- Spain

27. Corporate Taxes

Effective Tax Rates on Corporate Capital in %

- Ireland
- Denmark
- Greece
- Netherlands
- Portugal
- Switzerland
- Sweden
- Iceland
- Austria
- Luxembourg
- Finland
- Italy
- Norway
- Spain
- United Kingdom
- France
- Germany
- United States
means that most Americans, but especially the more well-off, again pay unexpectedly high taxes (figure 26). U.S. corporate taxes are middle of the pack if measured as a percentage of GDP, but higher than in any European country if judged by their average effective rate (figure 27). American inheritance and gift taxes are middle of the European spectrum, higher, for example, than in Austria, Germany, Spain, and the UK (figure 28). And in 2004, Sweden passed what in the United States would count as a right-wing reform, and abolished inheritance and gift taxes altogether.
The U.S. economy does differ from Europe’s: a less regulated labor market, but also an economy that is more hemmed in than might be expected. By European standards, America has hardish-working people, a state that collects fewer tax dollars, and workers who are paid well even if their holidays are short. In social policy, the contrasts are more moderate. Europeans commonly believe that the United States simply has no social policy—no social security, no unemployment benefits, no state pensions, and no assistance for the poor. As Jean-François Revel, the political philosopher and académicien, summed up French criticism, the United States shows “not the slightest bit of social solidarity.” Will Hutton similarly assures us that “The structures that support ordinary peoples’ lives—free health care, quality education, guarantees of reasonable living standards in old age, sickness or unemployment, housing for the disadvantaged—that Europeans take for granted are conspicuous by their absence.”
And, in fact, the United States is the only developed nation, unless one counts South Africa, without some form of national health insurance, which is to say a system of requiring all its citizens to be insured in one way or another. This lack of universal health insurance is the one fact that every would-be comparativist working across the Atlantic knows, and the first one to be hoisted as the battle is engaged. One of the first attempts to quantify and rank health care performance, by the World Health Organization in 2000, gave the American system its due. Overall, it came in below any of our comparison countries, three notches under Denmark. In various specific aspects of health policy, it did better. For disability-adjusted life expectancy, it came in above Ireland, Denmark, and Portugal; on the responsiveness of the health system, it ranked first; on a composite measure of various indicators summed up as “overall health system attainment,” it ranked above seven Western European countries. Even on the measure of “fairness of financial contribution to health systems,” where we might have expected an abysmal rating, the United States squeaked in above Portugal. That is, of course, damning with faint praise, especially given that in this particular aspect of the ranking—a well-meaning but other-worldly attempt by international bureaucrats to rake the entire globe over the teeth of one comb—Colombia came in first, outpacing its close rivals, Luxembourg and Belgium, while Libya beat out Sweden.3

One of the most corrosive critiques, by the Commonwealth Fund, gives the U.S. system very bad marks in comparison to an eccentric group of peer nations (the English-speaking world plus Germany). Interestingly, from the vantage of the American discussion over how to reform health care, the Canadian system—often held up as the socialized foil to America’s market-driven approach—is as awful, though the Canadians can console themselves that they pay about half as much for equally dismal results.4 What follows is not intended to defend America’s inequitable system, nor to deny that health insurance reform is urgently needed. It is, rather, to look at whatever figures exist and to ask what the outcome is of the vast sums that America spends on health care. The U.S. system, it turns out, is neither equitable nor efficient. But nor is it entirely ineffective.

Although having no national health insurance, America spends large amounts of money on health care. Even if we look only at government spending per capita, the United States ranks comfortably within the span of European nations. Indeed, only Iceland, Norway, and Luxembourg surpass it (figure 29). America’s Medicaid and Medicare organizations, the governmental health care systems for the poorest citizens and for all elderly, together form the largest publicly financed health system in the world. It comes as no surprise that, in terms of private spending
per capita, the United States outstrips Europe. And since that is not instead of public spending, but in addition to it, total health outlays put the United States in the lead, shadowed at some distance by Norway, Switzerland, and Luxembourg (figure 30). On average, European countries spend about half of what the United States does on health care. American spending on drugs, in contrast, is not as off the scale as these figures might suggest. Measured as a percent of GDP, Americans spend less on pharmaceuticals than the Italians, Portuguese, and French.

What does the United States get for its style of health care expenditure—heavy and unequally distributed? First, American health care administration is ponderous, but not top-heavy without compare. It lags in adopting computerized record-keeping, and its fragmented structure generates needless paperwork. But the percentage spent on administration and insurance (7.5%) is only moderately greater than in France (6.9%). Second, for its outlays, the United States gets relatively decent infrastructure. The density of physicians is lower than Western Europe, a fraction below the UK, and comparable to Luxembourg, Ireland, and Finland. The number of hospitals in America is also in the bottom half of the European spectrum, with Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, Spain, and Portugal ranking lower (figure 31). The number of hospital beds per capita is low, but within the European spectrum. Sweden has even fewer. Medical technology, however, is well-supplied. The number of MRI units and CT scanners per capita in America is second to none—well over twice the OECD average for the former.
30. Total Medical Spending
Per Capita Total Expenditure on Health at International Dollar Rate, 2003

31. Hospitals
Per 100,000 Population
routine. More cardiovascular operations are performed in America per capita than anywhere in Europe, and the number of kidney patients in dialysis or with transplants is equally off the European scale. Heart transplants are more routine only in Belgium, liver transplants are more common only in Spain and Belgium, and bone marrow transplants only in Belgium, France, and Italy, though for lung transplants the United States is merely middle of the European pack. Perhaps it is fitting that only Italian women give birth via Caesarian section more often than their American sisters.¹⁰

But what does this style of health care spending not get the United States? The fundamental unfairness, of course, concerns the 15% of citizens—most often from among the lower-middle classes and disproportionately minorities—who are not covered. As one possible result, the nation’s infant mortality rate is high. Six American newborns per thousand die, while in the poorest-performing European nations (the UK, Luxembourg, Ireland, and Austria) only five babies per thousand are lost (figure 32). No doubt, high rates of teenage pregnancy in America and the social problems faced by many young and especially minority mothers are part of the story. But it is hard to believe that the lack of health insurance and, more generally, unequally distributed medical resources are not another part. Some investment in free prenatal care might give dramatically improved results. If infancy is perilous in the United States, the next four years are not good either, but mortality from ages one to five is below levels in Portugal, Ireland, and Belgium, and only fractionally above that of Denmark and Norway.¹¹ Infant mortality, combined with a very high homicide rate, help explain why the United States has worse results for premature mortality than any Western European nation.¹²

In terms of life expectancy, however, the United States stays within the European spectrum for both sexes. Finnish, Irish, and Belgian men can expect to die at the same age (75), the Portuguese a year earlier (figure 33). Danes die on average as early as Americans, even though they enjoy universal health care. Since calculations of life expectancies at birth are affected by infant mortality, the picture changes if we look at life expectancies later on, at 65 for example. At that age, American men can expect to live as long as or longer (16.8 years) than their peers in the UK, Portugal, Spain, Norway, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Italy, Ireland, Greece, Germany, Finland, Denmark, Belgium, and Austria.¹³ If we look at other figures, the picture is also more differentiated than what is revealed by simple figures on life expectancy at birth. Healthy life expectancy at birth for American women is 71.3 years, 8.5 years less than their gross life expectancy, which takes no account of years lost to disability. Dutch women lose the same number of years to ill health and disability, Danish
32. Infant Mortality
Per 1,000 Live Births

33. Male Life Expectancy
Average Age at Death
women only a month and a half less. French, Austrian, and Portuguese women lose more years.\textsuperscript{14} Age-adjusted mortality for men in the United States is lower than in the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Finland, Denmark, Ireland, Portugal, and Belgium.\textsuperscript{15} Measured in terms of so-called amenable deaths (deaths due to treatable conditions) things look worse, however, and have deteriorated in recent years. Amenable mortality in the United States accounts for a bit less than a quarter of all deaths under 75 in men, and a third for women. Ten years ago, in 1997–98, the American amenable death rate for men was lower than that in Ireland, Portugal, Finland, the UK, and Austria. In the meantime, while the death rates from such causes have declined in all nations, they have done so faster in Europe than the United States. The most recent study, from 2002–03, shows that the United States has fallen to the bottom of the pack.\textsuperscript{16}

Not all health spending translates neatly into increased longevity. Cornea and hip replacements may make old age more pleasant without extending it. As we shall see below, health spending outcomes are not exhausted by comparative ages of death. That American hospital stays tend to be short is harder to evaluate. Is this the heartlessness of the market? Or is it efficiency and a desire not to institutionalize patients needlessly? That all the Scandinavian countries and France rank even lower gives hope that the latter is true. Americans seldom go to the doctor (on average four times a year), and no doubt the many who are not insured pushes that figure down. But the Swiss and the Swedes are even less frequent visitors. Americans go to the dentist more often than the British and the Luxembourgeois. Their use of hospitals is low on the European scale, but above that of the Dutch, Spaniards, Irish, and Portuguese.\textsuperscript{17}

For other aspects of health care, the contrasts across the Atlantic are less dramatic, indeed often nonexistent. American vaccination figures are comparable to those in Europe, whether for diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, hepatitis, or measles. All results place the United States in the European middle range.\textsuperscript{18} Everyone knows that Americans are fatter than Europeans. The numbers collected by the International Association for the Study of Obesity show that an additional 10\% of American men are obese compared to the plumpest European nations—Austria, the UK, and Germany (figure 34). But how long will this front-runner status hold? Looking at the figures on those who may become tomorrow’s obese, namely the overweight, we find that there are proportionately more overweight Europeans than Americans. Indeed, the only nation with a lower percentage of overweight men (i.e., those with a BMI between 25 and 30) than the United States is France (figure 35). Possibly, there is no straight march through the ranks from the overweight to the obese. Historical statistics suggest otherwise. Take
34. Adult Male Obesity
Percent with Body Mass Index of 30 or More

Italy
Netherlands
Denmark
France
Spain
Belgium
Switzerland
Portugal
Sweden (Goteborg)
Luxembourg
Iceland
Finland
Greece (Attica)
Ireland
Germany
England
Austria
United States

35. Overweight But Not Obese Men
Percent with Body Mass Index between 25 and 29.9

France
United States
Denmark
Italy
Austria
United Kingdom (England)
Netherlands
Sweden (Goteborg)
Portugal
Spain
Luxembourg
Switzerland (Urban)
Ireland
Iceland
Belgium
Germany
Greece (Attica)
Norway (Limited Area)
the Swedish case. The incidence of overweight adults has risen from 31% in the 1980s to 40% in the late 1990s, peaking at 44% in 2002. Concurrently, the number of obese adults in the population has risen from 5% through the early 1980s to 10% in 2002, the latest year of this particular series. Perhaps these growing numbers—doubling in two decades—of the obese are recruited directly from those of normal weight. More likely, the normal become overweight, the overweight, obese. If so, the implication is that—barring major changes in habit—the Europeans may soon grow as fat as the Americans.

The United States has more McDonald’s restaurants per capita than anywhere else, followed by Sweden. No surprise there. But if that makes Americans fat, it doesn’t seem to have other, equally serious consequences, like stomach cancer. The American incidence for men, in age-adjusted terms for proper comparability, is the lowest of our group and about one quarter of the highest, found in Portugal (figure 36). Diabetes is a disease associated with obesity. But mortality due to it in America is well within the European norm, coming in below the figures for Denmark, Italy, and Portugal (figure 37). Americans’ intake of sugar per capita is high by European standards, about 17% more than the closest competitors, Switzerland and Denmark. Their consumption of fat, however, falls within the European spectrum, below that of Switzerland, Spain, France, Belgium, Austria, and Italy.

Nor do European and American eating habits differ much in the aggregate. The total per capita caloric supply in America is a tad above that of Italy, Greece, and Portugal (figure 38). Americans eat less fish than the Scandinavians
37. Diabetes Mortality

Diabetes Mellitus Deaths per 100,000 Population

38. Calorie Supply

Per Capita (Kilocalories/Person/Day)
and the Mediterraneans, but more than the Germans, Austrians, Swiss, and the Irish (figure 39). They consume a large amount of meat, surpassed only by the Danes.\footnote{Perhaps surprisingly, both the British and the Germans fall toward the bottom half of the carnivorous spectrum. But in terms of their overall consumption of animal products, Americans and the Mediterraneans are proximate in their habits, with only the Greeks and the Italians eating less (figure 40). The protein intake per capita of Americans is below that of the Portuguese, Irish, Icelanders, Greeks, and French. They are beaten in the quantity of fruits and vegetables they eat only by the Mediterraneans, the Danes, and the Dutch.\footnote{In some respects, Americans live more healthily than Europeans. They drink moderately. Only high-tax Scandinavians and Mediterranean wine-drinkers are more abstinent, and far from all of them (figure 41). They smoke sparingly, with about one-third fewer people lighting up than in Greece or Germany (figure 42).}

To the extent that diet, habits, and lifestyle affect the prevalence and consequences of disease, Americans come off relatively healthily, compared to Europeans. For a number of cancers, incidence rates, in age-adjusted terms, are higher in the United States than any European nation: breast, uterine, and prostate cancers, melanoma, Hodgkin’s and Non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma.\footnote{For the rest, they are within the European spectrum, though for some they are worse only in one or two European nations: colon and rectum, kidney, lung,
40. Animal Products
Calorie Supply From (%)

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41. Alcohol Consumption
Pure Alcohol Consumed in Litres per Capita

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pancreatic, multiple myeloma, thyroid, and leukemia. Interestingly, however, in almost all cases where the U.S. incidence rates are high, mortality is substantially lower. Only for nasopharynx cancers, leukemia, and ovarian cancer are the American mortality rates worse within the European rank order than is the case for incidence. For non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, both incidence and mortality are worst. For bladder cancer, in contrast, the United States ranks high, with only five nations having worse incidence rates, but for mortality, it has dropped to the bottom, bettered only by Finland. For breast cancer, the United States has the highest incidence, but in terms of the percentage of women who actually die of the disease, it is in the lower half of the group. Similarly steep drops between incidence and mortality are seen for cancers of the colon, kidney, larynx, oral cavity, pharynx, pancreas, prostate, thyroid, and for Hodgkin’s lymphoma.

Looking at overall cancer rates shows a similar effect. Incidence rates for American men are higher than for any Europeans (figure 43). But mortality rates are quite moderate, with a lower percentage of male cancer deaths to be found only in Finland, Sweden, Iceland, Greece, and Switzerland (figure 44). Either those Americans diagnosed with cancer are dying of other unrelated causes, or the care they receive must be beneficial. Possibly, too, the incidence rates are high because Americans are more accurately diagnosed. For prostate cancer, for example, widespread screening may lead to earlier detection and
43. All Cancers (except Non-Melanoma Skin), Incidence
Per 100,000 Population, Age-Standardized Rates, Males

44. All Cancers (Except Non-Melanoma Skin), Mortality
Per 100,000 Population, Age-Standardized Rates, Males
enhanced five-year survival rates, without actually improving longevity. But for other cancers, that particular effect is much less pronounced. Either way, the American numbers say something encouraging about the quality of U.S. health care, even as it scandalously neglects the many uninsured.

Indeed, the chances of surviving cancer are better in the United States than in many European countries. The American figures include also those who are uninsured, and thus likely to be poorly cared for. If they could be factored out, thus allowing a strict comparison of the effectiveness of medical treatment across the Atlantic, the European figures would doubtless suffer in a comparison. For a variety of cancers, including many of the most common, the United States has the best five-year survival rates: prostate, colon and rectum, bladder, and thyroid. Breast cancer is graphed here (figure 45). Note that this figure is not incidence but the survival rate. For other cancers, the U.S. survival rates are the same as the two or three best-performing European nations: brain, uterine cervix and corpus, esophagus, lung, melanoma, and ovary. For yet other cancers, it is slightly below the three or four best European nations: testicle, Hodgkin’s disease, kidney, larynx, oral cavity, pancreas, and leukemia. Survival rates for liver cancer are at the center of the European spectrum; for stomach cancer and multiple myeloma in the bottom half. The only disease for which survival rates are significantly worse than in Europe is non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, and even here the U.S. figures are equal to the Dutch and above the English and Portuguese.25

The results presented here are from the mid 1990s and merely compare the readily available statistics. But more sophisticated studies of comparative cancer survival rates that have become possible only within the last decade confirm them: survival rates for most cancers are significantly better in the United States than in Europe, despite the absence of national health insurance. For the four major killers (colorectal, lung, breast, and prostate cancer) all European nations have worse survival rates.26

The United States has rates of mortality for heart disease that are in the middle of the European spectrum, less than in six of our countries.27 Correspondingly, years lost in the United States as a result of heart disease are similarly positioned (figure 46). More specifically, only the French, Luxembourgeois, Spanish, and Italians die less often of heart attacks, the Icelanders at about the same rate.28 For strokes, an illness that strongly reduces with preventive medication, the United States has a low mortality. The Swiss are at the same level, while in all other European countries more people die from strokes than in America. The Greeks and Portuguese have stroke rates about three times as high as the United States (figure 47). In no European
45. Breast Cancer Survival Rates
Relative Survival Rate of Women after 5 Years (%)

Portugal
United Kingdom (England)
Austria
Denmark
Germany
Spain
Netherlands
Italy
Switzerland
Finland
France
Sweden
United States

46. Heart Disease
Average Years of Life Lost (%)
nation are fewer years of life lost on average to strokes than in the United States. Deaths due to circulatory diseases are middle of the pack (figure 48).

The incidence of cosmetic surgery in the United States is also low by European standards. Per capita, more people surgically alter their looks in France, Finland, and Sweden than in the United States. That the rate is almost seven times as high in Switzerland is probably related to medical tourism. But even the Spanish figure is over twice the American (figure 49). For diseases of the soul, Americans are also comparatively well-off, though problems of diagnosing and evaluating in readily comparable terms make it hard to find many studies. When the WHO sought to measure the incidence of mental disorders at primary care settings in various cities, people in Seattle (picked as the American venue) were found to become mentally ill at slightly higher rates than northern Italians in Verona, but only about half, or less, as often as those in Paris, Manchester, Mainz, Groningen, Berlin, or Athens. Studies of entire countries (phrased in terms of age-standardized disability-adjusted life years) do not paint as favorable a picture. But the United States remains within the European spectrum. More Americans proportionately suffer from unipolar depressive disorders than any Western Europeans; bipolar disorders are at the same or a lower rate. The United States comes out high for post-traumatic stress disorder, but the same as all European nations for panic disorder and middle of the pack for schizophrenia.
48. Circulatory Disease Mortality
Annual Deaths per 100,000 Population, Standardized Rates

49. Plastic Surgery
Per 100,000 Population
For health care, in summary, we have a mixed bag. Fifteen percent of Americans have no health insurance. This is not only a question of equity and morality, but also one of efficiency. Prevention and timely care are more cost-effective than treatment in an emergency room, which is where many uninsured receive whatever attention they get. The American health care system has often and rightly been criticized for being inefficient and unfair. The uninsured get a raw deal and the poor are most likely to be badly treated. But beyond this, something more is going on. Excepting infant mortality, a trans-Atlantic comparison of health outcomes is not as lopsided as one might expect. Indeed, the American health system delivers impressive results, though it does so at a premium cost. If you were given the outcomes surveyed here in an anonymous form and told that one of these nations did not have a national health insurance system, you would not unhesitatingly pick the United States. Looking at the most consistently poor results, you would be most likely to choose Denmark or the UK.

This may explain why even those who are enthusiastic about European health care sometimes shy away when push comes to shove. The American journalist T. R. Reid, after having expounded on how Europe sets the standard that America must follow, comes to an inadvertently revealing conclusion on his experiences with the British National Health Service: “Looking at the waiting lists at British hospitals for major operations, and the long-term survival rates for cancer and other major diseases, I think I’d rather be in the United States than in Britain if somebody in my family contracted a serious disease,” he admits. He then recovers to damn with faint praise. “But for flu, colds, rashes, intestinal complaints, eye exams, and the occasional broken bone or sprain, the NHS doctors performed on par with any treatment we have had in the United States. And all for free.” In other words, Reid praises the NHS for providing minor care at the expense of the British taxpayer to well-heeled foreigners. He goes on to complain that British doctors would not give him an annual physical exam nor a PSA test for prostate cancer—routine in the United States and elsewhere—because the NHS did not consider it cost-effective. And indeed, the NHS, though a British holy grail, delivers unimpressive care. In the 2007 results of the Euro Health Consumer Index, it ranked 17th out of 29, beating only Greece, Italy, and Portugal in Western Europe and trailing such newcomers as the Czech Republic and Estonia. Critics who want to shame the U.S. health care system are well advised to use more effective systems as benchmarks, like the German, or especially the French, which interestingly shares many assumptions and characteristics with the American.
The American health care system is unjust, expensive, and inefficient. The uninsured suffer. And it spends twice as much as other nations for similar results. One would not want to be born a poor child in the United States, nor would one want to be uninsured. But the overall average outcomes of the American system are surprisingly comparable to those in Europe, especially given that so many Americans remain uninsured. Why are American health outcomes reasonably—or often, very—good, even though not everyone has insurance? Perhaps health care does not matter as much to our eventual fates as the medical establishment would have us believe. Perhaps those with insurance are receiving so much better care than Europeans that their results balance out the sad fates of the uninsured. More likely, even in the absence of universal insurance, most Americans—however unfairly, inefficiently, and circuitously—are receiving at least basic care. That means, in effect, that the American system is—broadly speaking—achieving the sorts of results one might expect from a universal system of health care, but at a far greater price. We will come back to the reasons for this seemingly peculiar social policy choice later.
If we turn to other forms of social policy, how does the United States care for its old, its poor, its unemployed, and its disabled? Here, most outcomes place the United States in the lower half of the spectrum, but within European norms and standards. The primary weakness of American social policy is its reluctance to deal resolutely with poverty. If we measure outcomes before redistribution, the United States starts with an economy that produces less poverty than most European nations. According to one calculation, only Finland and the Netherlands have lower “natural” poverty rates. But after taxes, social benefits, and other mechanisms of redistribution have worked their magic, the American poverty rate (as measured relatively, i.e., as a fraction of median income) is higher than anywhere in Western Europe. We will come back in more detail to the question of poverty and inequality. In what one might call the middle-class entitlement aspects of the welfare state, however, America is less of an anomaly.
As is widely known, the American state is more modest in size and scope than its European peers. Yet as an employer of civil servants, it ranks in the middle of the European scale (figure 50). France and Finland employ proportionately more civil servants, but at least five other countries, including Germany, hire fewer. Correspondingly, the percentage of America’s GDP spent on government employee salaries is higher than in six of the nations we are examining. The size of the American state, as measured by government expenditure as a percentage of GDP, also fits into the European span. Ireland and Switzerland spend less (figure 51). For most social policies and benefits—which together make up what is usually called the welfare state—the picture is analogous: the United States ranks low, but within the bottom half of the European spectrum. All figures given here and elsewhere (unless otherwise indicated) are phrased in internationally comparable terms. Sometimes this means benefits rates are measured as a percentage of median income, allowing a sense of what proportion of a standard of living is maintained. Sometimes they are calculated in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) terms, which means that differences between the cost of living in poorer and richer nations have been factored in.

Social assistance is miserly in the United States, but better than the equivalent benefits in Italy and Greece. Unemployment benefits in America are higher than in some European nations. Greece, the UK, Italy, and Iceland spend
less than the United States on unemployment, measured per capita (figure 52). The amount of salary replaced by initial rates of unemployment benefits puts the United States at the low end of the European range, at the same level as Greece, Italy, and the UK, and above Ireland (figure 53). If measured as the percentage of an average industrial wage for married couples, the American benefit rates fall at the center of the European scale.\(^4\) One recent attempt to quantify benefit generosity places American unemployment payments below Belgium, the Scandinavian nations other than Finland, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, but above all others in Europe.\(^5\)

The duration of unemployment benefits in America is short, but no worse than in the UK or Italy.\(^6\) For long-term unemployment, the American benefit replacement rate drops: only Greece and Italy rank lower (figure 54). But this is comparatively unimportant since for many years now, proportionately fewer American workers have been unemployed compared with many Europeans (figure 55). In 2005, only Denmark, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Britain, and Ireland had fewer people out of work. Even if all the men locked in American prisons were counted instead as unemployed, the United States, with a recalculated unemployment figure for 2005 of 5.76%, would trade places with only one European nation: Austria. Moreover, the American unemployed remain without work for substantially briefer times than their European peers. The average spell of unemployment for American men is less than a third as long as
54. Long-Term Unemployment Benefit Replacement Rate
Average Net Replacement Rates of Work Earnings over 60 Months (%)

55. Unemployment
Rate (%) 2007
that for the Swiss or French (figure 56). Compared with Europeans, far fewer American workers have been out of the labor market for over a year. In all of Europe, only Iceland has better results. Indeed, the number of long-term unemployed Americans is proportionately less than a fifth as large as the equivalent number of Germans (figure 57).

American spending on disability benefits per capita is higher than in Greece and Portugal, and is practically at the same level as France, Italy, Ireland, and Germany (figure 58). Yet, comparatively few Americans are disabled in the first place. Only in Italy are there fewer handicapped per capita (figure 59). Of course, these figures are to some extent an artifact of the welfare system itself and the ability of recipients to game it, or the wish of the authorities to disguise what would otherwise be higher unemployment rates. How else can one explain why the Swedes—otherwise so healthy, robust, and long-lived—should be incapacitated more than anyone else in the industrialized world? The average Swedish woman was ill 46 working days in 2007, the equivalent of nine full weeks. On survivor’s benefits, the United States spends more per head than all European countries other than Italy, France, Belgium, and Luxembourg. Measured as a fraction of GDP, only Portugal is added to this list.

It is commonly known that the American state does not help out much in terms of family provision. Parental leave is not statutory, and there are no guarantees that women can reclaim their jobs after pregnancy. Family allowances
57. Long-Term Unemployment
12 Months or More as % of Total Unemployment

58. Public Spending on Disability Benefits
Per Capita, US$ PPP
as such do not exist. On the other hand, if one counts resources channeled via the tax system as well as outright cash grants and services, and if one measures them as a percentage of GDP, for family benefits the United States ranks higher than Spain, Greece, and Italy, and only marginally below Switzerland.9 Public spending on child care (day care and preprimary education) puts the United States into the middle of the European spectrum (figure 60). Total spending on preprimary care per child is higher in the United States than anywhere but Norway.10 Child-care fees, as a percentage of an average wage, are lower in the United States than in Belgium, the UK, Ireland, France, Portugal, Spain, Luxembourg, and Switzerland. The net costs of child care in the United States are at the center of the European spectrum.11 The percentage of very young children (under three) who are in formal child-care arrangements is higher in the United States than anywhere in Europe other than Denmark. The American figures are in the European middle range for children between three and school age—lower than Scandinavia, but higher than Austria, the UK, Ireland, and Greece.12 The percentage of Americans who work flexible schedules (45%), which may relate to their child-care obligations and is generally taken to be an example of progressive workplace policies, is almost twice the average rate in Europe (25%).13

Pensions offer a mixed picture. For the average percentage of former earnings that state pensions replace for women, the United States is in the lower
half of the European spectrum, though above Ireland and the UK (figure 61) Public spending per head on pensions puts the United States above the UK, Ireland, Iceland, Finland, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands. That accounts only for what the state does for retirement. Many people save for their old age. If you look at the average disposable income of the retired as a percentage of what the still-active receive, only in Austria, Germany, and France do the elderly fare better than in the United States (figure 62). But that does not mean that the American pension system is uniquely privatized. Measured as a percentage of GDP, the holdings of private pension funds are larger in Iceland, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the UK than in the United States.

More broadly, data from the Luxembourg Income Study, the most extensive of its kind, shows that the amount of transfer income received by American households bears comparison with European sums. A smaller percentage of Americans receive social transfers from the state than is the case in Europe, at least outside the Mediterranean. About half of all American households do, which is much the same as in Italy, Spain, and Greece, but substantially lower than the 80-some percent of people who receive social benefits in Sweden and Finland. Average social transfers per household are therefore low, about $5,200 PPP. That puts the United States above only Greece. But if instead we look at the median sums received by those U.S. households that actually get

60. Public Spending on Child Care
Including Pre-Primary Education, as % of GDP
61. Female State Pensions
Mandatory Pensions as % of Pre-Retirement Gross Income, Women

62. Retirement Income as % of Earlier Income
Percentage of Disposable Income of Those 65+ to Those 18-64
social transfers, the outcomes are more presentable, some $8,280 PPP annually. That figure comes in above Greece, Ireland, and the UK, and in the same league as Spain and Finland (figure 63).

As a fraction of the total economy, American public social expenditure narrowly makes it into the European norm, sneaking in above Ireland (figure 64). But because the American GDP is greater than in most European nations, the per capita spending figures are higher than this rank suggests. In terms of how much money is paid out on average for each person, the United States ranks in the lower middle of the European spectrum, above most of the Mediterranean and Iceland and in the same league as the UK, the Netherlands, and Finland (figure 65). The Swedes allot almost twice the American fraction of their GDP to social policy. But the actual spending per citizen in the United States is only about 30% less than in Sweden. A larger fraction of less is not as much more as it seems.

This comparison can be taken further. Public social spending in America—that is, monies channeled through the state—is on the low end of the European spectrum. But that is not the only measure of what the welfare state does. The total social policy effort is larger than cash directly redistributed by the state. For one thing, generous as cash benefits may be in some nations, they are significantly clawed back by Europe's high reliance on indirect taxes, as well as by direct taxes levied on those benefits. In other words, a Swedish mother may
64. Public Social Expenditure
Percent of GDP

Ireland
United States
Spain
Luxembourg
Portugal
Netherlands
United Kingdom
Greece
Italy
Finland
Austria
Switzerland
Belgium
Germany
France
Sweden
Denmark

65. Public Social Expenditure
Per Capita, US$ PPP

Portugal
Greece
Spain
Ireland
Iceland
United States
United Kingdom
Finland
Netherlands
Italy
Switzerland
Germany
Belgium
Austria
France
Denmark
Sweden
Norway
Luxembourg
gratefully use her generous child allowance to buy a stroller. But she is actually paying for much of it herself, as the state collects its 20% value-added tax, as well as other taxes on her income.

Furthermore, much of what government does for its citizens takes the form not of cash, but of services—health care, child care, education, and the like. If we aggregate all the activities of the welfare state, including services as well as cash benefits, and factor in taxation clawbacks (in other words, if we look at net benefits), the results are not what we might expect. In one study, which included fewer nations than our sample, the Netherlands devoted the smallest percentage of GDP to transfers, the United States was tied with Finland in second-to-last place, while the UK was only a smidgen more generous.16

Beyond that, a complete accounting of welfare effort cannot focus only on what the state does through social policy. Other avenues of redistribution are also important: voluntary efforts, private but legally mandated benefits, and taxes. If we include all these, the American welfare state is more extensive than is often realized. By taking account of all these various components of social policy redistribution—public, voluntary, and mandatory—the total social policy effort made in the United States falls, once again, into the middle of the European spectrum.

That is not to say that all forms of social policy are strictly comparable, or that there are no consequences to different ways of distributing resources. Voluntary efforts are often more inequitably distributed than statutory ones, and they may well suffer more than legally mandated social policy during economic downturns. And size isn’t everything. There are clearly differences of emphasis and adequacy between America and the best-developed European welfare states: above all, access to health insurance, but also the employment-based nature of many U.S. benefits (sickness pay, for example) that makes them highly variable in their availability. The lack of much maternity support is equally a major difference. Significant regional variations are also found within the United States, with widely varying benefit rates and few national standards. (Of course, the same holds true for any continent-wide study of European welfare policy.) Nonetheless, it is also the case that a nation’s overall welfare effort cannot be measured simply by cash handouts from the state. If we look at the total net redistribution of income in the United States, the American welfare state looks much like its European peers, at the center of the spectrum, with six countries more generous and half a dozen less so (figure 66). Indeed, if we calculate net total social expenditure in PPP
terms per citizen, as we did in figure 65 for public social expenditure alone, no European country, barring possibly Luxembourg, spends as much as does the United States. Comparing American and European welfare states (as indeed comparing Europe with other developed nations, in Asia, for example) means identifying different styles of policy rather than a simple binary choice between absence and presence.
IT IS COMMONLY CLAIMED that American society is crime-ridden and violent. Horrendous numbers of murders are committed, almost twice the per capita rate in 2004–05 of the nearest competitors, Switzerland, Finland, and Sweden (figure 67). The death-by-assault rates in America are over three times the nearest European comparisons, Finland, followed by Portugal.¹ That is without question. Such mayhem cannot be due simply to gun ownership, since by some accounts the Finns and the Swiss have a higher percentage of armed households than the Americans (figure 68). Firearms ownership, though highest in the United States per capita if measured by individual citizen, is not as far beyond the European numbers as one might expect from the horror stories of South Central or the South Bronx. According to the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, Americans own 97 firearms per hundred people, the Finns 69, the Swiss 61, the Swedes 40.² Another survey, published
67. Murder Rate
Per 100,000 Population

- Norway
- Denmark
- Ireland
- Germany
- Iceland
- Italy
- England and Wales
- France
- Portugal
- Sweden
- Finland
- Switzerland
- United States

68. Gun Ownership
Percent of Households with Firearms

- Netherlands
- United Kingdom
- Germany
- Spain
- Sweden
- Italy
- Belgium
- France
- Switzerland
- Norway
- United States
- Finland
by Tilburg University in the Netherlands, the Dutch Ministry of Justice, and two United Nations Institutes, reveals that percentage-wise there are more firearms in the hands of the residents of Zurich, Vienna, Stockholm, Rome, Reykjavik, Oslo, Madrid, Lisbon, Helsinki, and Athens than in those of New Yorkers. Indeed, the burghers of Helsinki, Berlin, Lisbon, Rome, Vienna, and Zurich own proportionately as many or more handguns as New Yorkers.

To the extent that gun ownership and hunting overlap, the distinctions between the United States and Europe also fade. Svenska Jägarförbundet, the Swedish Hunters Association, has a membership (200,000) that is proportionately almost twice as high as what the National Rifle Association claims (4 million). The Schweizer Schiesssportverband (Swiss Shooting Association) has a membership (85,000) that is relatively as high as the NRA’s. Its arguments against current proposals to regulate gun ownership in Switzerland more strictly sound many of the same themes that are heard in the United States, down to the slogan about people, not guns, doing the actual killing. The smaller Pro-Tell Society defends gun ownership as part of Switzerland’s liberal tradition.

In Switzerland, of course, men often keep their military weapons at home. Arguably, the Swiss firearms associations do not have to be as active as the NRA for the simple reason that they have achieved what American gun enthusiasts can only dream of: not only the right but the obligation for all men to keep firearms. The military obligation does not, however, account for the Finns’ affection for firearms, though three wars with the Russians in a century might. Finland and Switzerland have both the highest murder rates in Europe and the highest gun ownership rates. This suggests some relationship between the two figures. On the other hand, on average, four times as many murders are committed per firearm in America as in Switzerland. Crime is more often committed with a gun in America than in Europe. Six percent of assaults and threats in the United States involve use of a gun, while in Europe only Northern Ireland has numbers as high. The closest other European competitors (at 4%) are Switzerland, the Netherlands, Italy, and France. But Europeans are pretty handy with a blade. Only Luxembourg, Greece, Finland, and Denmark have proportionately fewer knife assaults than the United States.

In the developed world, American murder rates are in a class by themselves. Nor is there any doubt that the United States locks into prison a far higher percentage of its population than any of its peers (figure 69). Indeed, the American figure is well over four times the Luxembourgeois, British, and Spanish rates, which are the highest in Europe. The average length of jail sentences, however, is within the European spectrum, lower than Spain’s and only a tad higher than Portugal’s (figure 70). Policing levels are quite normal by northern European
69. Prison Population
Per 100,000 Population

Iceland  Norway  Ireland  Finland  Denmark  Sweden  Switzerland  France  Greece  Belgium  Germany  Italy  Austria  Portugal  Netherlands  Spain  UK (England and Wales)  Luxembourg  United States

70. Average Prison Time
Average Length of Time Actually Served in Prison after Conviction, in Months

Denmark  Netherlands  Finland  England and Wales  Portugal  United States  Spain
standards, which in turn are half those of some Mediterranean countries like Portugal and Italy (figure 71). And the U.S. police seem to do a reasonable job. The percentage of Americans who consider the police good at controlling crime in their area is higher than in any European country, bar Finland. More Americans feel very safe walking alone after dark than any Europeans other than most of the Scandinavians and the Dutch. The Austrians and Swedes feel as secure as the Americans, the Swiss, and French about as much, the British, Belgians, Germans, Greeks, Italians, Luxembourgeois, Irish, Spanish, and Portuguese quite a bit less so. New Yorkers feel as safe at night as the residents of Vienna, Amsterdam, and the Scandinavian capitals. Proportionately, many fewer New Yorkers worry about being attacked than do the residents of Berlin, Athens, Rome, Madrid, or London. In a recent poll conducted by YouGov and the Economist, Americans ranked crime as the least of their worries, while the British named it as their second-most-pressing concern, after only immigration. Similarly, a smaller percentage of Americans worry about being victims of a burglary during the coming year than anyone but the Danes or the Finns.

The murder rate and the number of prisoners in America are both off the European scale. That is without doubt. Homicide and incarceration, however, affect but a minuscule minority in all nations, and the average citizen’s experience of crime is colored by more mundane offenses. In those terms, America is—despite its reputation—actually a peaceful and quiet place by European standards. As one team of scholars puts it, violence, not crime, is the American problem. Whether American society owes its relatively law-abiding nature to the many criminals locked in jail we do not know. Americans tend to be polite to each other. In Reader’s Digest’s anecdotal survey of polite behavior in different cities, New Yorkers scored better than anyone, a nose ahead even of the residents of Zurich (figure 72). Although they have lots of lawyers, Americans are less litigious than many Europeans, such as the Germans or even the supposedly consensual Swedes, not to mention the Austrians (figure 73).

U.S. property crime rates, as measured by the percentage of the population victimized, are toward the middling high end of the European spectrum (figure 74). The British and the Italians suffer more. Car theft rates are toward the low end, less than one-fifth the Italian rate and higher only than in Austria, Switzerland, Finland, Germany, and the Netherlands (figure 75). American burglary rates are highish, but below the Danish and British. The incidence of theft is the same as or better than in six Western European countries, and pickpocketing is above only the levels in Sweden, Scotland, Finland, and Portugal.
71. Police Personnel
Per 100,000 Population

Finland
Denmark
Netherlands
Switzerland
France
Iceland
United States
Norway
Germany
Spain
Ireland
Portugal
Italy

72. Courtesy
Percent of People Who Passed Reader's Digest's Courtesy Tests

Italy (Milan)
Finland (Helsinki)
Netherlands (Amsterdam)
France (Paris)
Portugal (Lisbon)
United Kingdom (London)
Austria (Vienna)
Spain (Madrid)
Sweden (Stockholm)
Germany (Berlin)
Switzerland (Zurich)
United States (New York)
73. Litigation Rate
Legal Cases per 1,000 Population

- Spain
- Netherlands
- Greece
- Ireland
- France
- Portugal
- Denmark
- United Kingdom
- United States
- Austria
- Sweden
- Germany

74. Property Crime
Population Victimized (%)

- Austria
- Finland
- Switzerland
- Netherlands
- Portugal
- Denmark
- Belgium
- Sweden
- France
- United States
- UK (England and Wales)
- Italy
Robberies are also toward the bottom of the European scale. Readers’ Digest ran an admittedly impressionistic survey of the rate at which apparently lost mobile phones were returned in major cities; New York acquitted itself better than any city other than Stockholm.

Assault is in the middle, on par with the rates in Sweden and Belgium (figure 76). Rape levels are high, but sexual assault rates are low. Only Belgium and Portugal are lower; Austria suffers three times the American rate (figure 77). Such numbers are tricky, however. Obviously, the distinctions between these two crimes are nebulous and likely to be differently interpreted across cultures. In some statistics, rapes may be counted among sexual assaults. A more recent account of sexual assault places the United States at the top of the scale for 2003–04, the same level as Iceland and one notch above Sweden. But the same study’s figures for 1999 put America at the bottom of the scale, above only Portugal and Belgium, at the same level as Denmark, and at about one-third the Swedish rate. Perhaps a more accurate measure is the percentage of women who have been victimized by a criminal sexual incident of some kind or another. By that standard, American women are less often harmed than any European women other than the Belgians, French, and Portuguese.

American children fared badly in UNICEF’s recent survey of their well-being, though better than the British. They suffer high levels of death and injury from accidents. But in terms of other forms of violence that the young are especially
subject to, they were middle of the pack. They fight less than in any European
countries other than Sweden, Finland, Portugal, Germany, and Switzerland (figure
78). And the likelihood of being bullied is at the center of the European spec-
trum, below France, the UK, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and Portugal.14

American drug use is highish for some drugs. Cannabis and cocaine are
used a bit more often than in the UK, the closest European competitor. But
otherwise American consumption falls within the European spectrum.15
Amphetamine use is lower than in the UK and Ireland, and only a bit higher
than in Spain and Denmark. Ecstasy use is lower than in Ireland, the UK,
Spain, and the Netherlands (figure 79). Opiate abuse is in the center of the
European spectrum (figure 80). As for the precautions taken by citizens to
protect themselves against crime, Americans no more live in barricaded for-
tresses than do Europeans. Proportionately more Americans have watchdogs
than Europeans. But they build high fences less often than the French, British,
and Belgians, have fewer window grilles than the British, have as many burglar
alarms as the Norwegians (and many fewer than the British), and install fewer
special door locks than the Dutch, English, and Germans (and about as many
as the Italians and Austrians).16

“American business ethics are abysmally low and require the toughest of
policing,” Will Hutton warns us.17 Yet the white-collar crime rate is at the
middle to the low end of the European spectrum. The French suffer over six
times the American rate of bribery. Indeed, bribery levels are lower only in
Sweden and the UK (figure 81). Corrupt public officials are as likely to solicit
bribes in Switzerland and Belgium as in the United States, and more so in
Germany, Austria, Denmark, Portugal, France, and Greece.18 France, Ireland,
and Belgium, as well as all the Mediterranean nations, appear more corrupt
than the United States (figure 82). The World Bank estimates the United
States as less troubled by graft than Greece, Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Germany,
France, and Belgium, and the same as Spain.19 According to the UN’s figures,
fraud is over eight times as common in Germany as in America, and over four
times as frequent in England and Wales. Even Denmark has more fraud than
America (figure 83). Consumer fraud is more widespread in Iceland, Denmark,
Sweden, and Greece than America.20

The EU adds another supranational arena for corruption. It also brings
together different national styles of governance, with different tolerances for
crime. The number of prominent European public figures who have recently
been killed—by their own hand or others’—because they were implicated in
corruption within the EU is startling and without compare across the Atlantic:
78. Young People Fighting
Percent of Teens Involved in Fighting during Previous Year

79. Ecstasy
Use within Past Year (%) of Adults
80. Opiates
Annual Percent of Adult Population that has Abused Opiates

81. Bribery
Population Victimized (%)

82. Corruption

Corruption Perceptions Index, 10 = Highly Clean, 0 = Highly Corrupt

83. Fraud

Frauds Committed per 100,000 Inhabitants
Carl Algernon, Gabriele Cagliari, André Cools, Camillo Crociani, Robert Feliciaggi, Raul Giardini, Wolfgang Hüllen, Thierry Imbot, Jacques Lefebvre, Jürgen Möllemann, Antonio Quatraro, Alain van der Biest. American executives judge the domestic business costs of common crime and violence to be no worse than do their colleagues in Belgium, France, Ireland, the UK, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain. For organized crime, they are more sanguine than their peers in the Netherlands, Spain, and—no surprise—Italy. The total American crime figures are in the low middle of the pack. Indeed, only relatively small countries—Finland, Austria, Switzerland, and Portugal—are less crime-ridden than the United States (figure 84).

The robbery rate in America is highish, below only the Portuguese and British figures (figure 85). But the percentage of citizens who are victims is far lower—only Austria has fewer, and Finland’s rate is the same as the United States’ (figure 86). In other words, in the United States there are many robberies but fewer victims. A violent underclass preys on itself, but the average citizen is unlikely to be disturbed. No more than in Europe does American crime saturate society as a whole. It tends to be confined to pockets of misery. And indeed, our comparison here points to what is arguably the main difference between the United States and Europe: the continuing presence in America of an ethnically distinct underclass, as one of the unresolved tragic legacies of slavery.

Take out the black underclass from the statistics, and even American murder rates fall to European levels. America remains a fairly violent society, but no more than some European countries. Its nonblack murder rate is lower than the overall levels of homicide in Switzerland and Finland, and it squeaks in under even the Swedish level (figure 87). It goes without saying that “black” is here a proxy for the poverty, unemployment, and exclusion of big-city ghettos, not a racial marker. If statistics allowed us to factor out the murders committed in America’s worst neighborhoods, the effect would be even more dramatic, since we would be eliminating also those committed by other excluded ghetto minorities. America’s problem is not violence or even murder as a kind of generic issue spread throughout society. What sets the United States apart from European nations are the social pathologies of inner-city ghettos and, of course, the society that has not yet seen fit to solve this problem.

If we were able to adjust our statistics correspondingly for other crimes, American crime rates would descend from the middle of the European spectrum toward the bottom. Conversely, were we to have an analogously dispossessed underclass in European societies—and this is increasingly becoming the
84. Total Crime
Population Victimized by Crime in Total (%)

85. Robbery
Per 100,000 Population
86. Robbery Victims
Population Victimized (%)

- Austria
- United States
- Finland
- Denmark
- Switzerland
- Netherlands
- Sweden
- Belgium
- France
- Portugal
- UK (England and Wales)
- Italy

87. Non-African-American Murder Rate, 2005
Per 100,000 Population

- Norway
- Denmark
- Ireland
- Germany
- Iceland
- Italy
- England and Wales
- France
- Portugal
- United States
- Sweden
- Finland
- Switzerland
case—crime rates would (and depending on European abilities to assimilate outsiders, will) rise significantly. Blacks in America commit seven times the number of homicides as whites. In Sweden, where we have reliable figures, crime is similarly overrepresented among outcast groups. The “new Swedes,” as the foreign-born are called, are twice as likely to commit crimes of any sort, and those from sub-Saharan Africa over four times. Foreigners are over four times more likely to commit attempted murder and murder. As Europe takes in more immigrants, legal and illegal, the danger arises that they might become a dispossessed underclass and that crime rates across the Atlantic might increasingly converge. Already now, while only 6% of inmates in U.S. jails are from abroad, foreigners make up over one-quarter of prisoners in Germany and Sweden, one-third in Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain, a bit under half in Austria, Belgium, and Greece, and over two-thirds in Switzerland and Luxembourg.
Europeans often regard America as a country of bigness: big people, big cars, big houses. People we have already touched on; cars will come. American housing standards do fall in the upper half—but still well within—the European scale. Two rooms per inhabitant is the U.S. average. Residents of Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the UK, and Belgium have more (figure 88) The Irish have a higher percentage of their households occupying at least five rooms, the English and Spanish are very close runners-up. For social or public housing, transatlantic discrepancies pale before even more impressive disparities within Europe itself. Approximately a fifth of all accommodation in England and France is public housing, but those are by far the highest figures in Europe. In Italy, it is only 7%. In Spain, the fraction of the public housing stock of all dwellings is even less than in the United States, namely 1%. According to figures from the OECD, social housing scarcely exists at
all in Portugal, at least to judge from the sums the government spends on it. Sweden, a country with a somewhat smaller population, spends well over 500 times as much. In any case, the range of state spending on housing in those nations with figures high enough to register as a fraction of GDP varies from 0.1% in Austria and Luxembourg to 14 times that in the UK.\textsuperscript{2} It is hard to call a penchant for social housing a defining European characteristic. Moreover, despite the absence of much public housing in the United States, the poorest fifth of tenants in America pay less of their income for housing than their peers in Sweden or Switzerland, and only a bit more than in the UK.\textsuperscript{3}

America is often considered a stingy helper of Third World nations in distress. It is true that American foreign aid, in the form of direct cash grants, is not impressive if measured per capita. Nor is that of Austria or the Mediterranean nations, except France, which are all lower (figure 89). But if we take a broader measure that also includes indirect assistance through tariff and trade policies, investment, ease of migration, security, and technological interchange, the United States helps the Third World more than the Mediterranean nations, more than France, Belgium, and Ireland, and only a smidgen less than the UK (figure 90). In a recent measure of the quality of the job done by governmental agencies distributing aid to the underdeveloped world, America ranked below the best-performing national institutions (the UK, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Portugal, Belgium, and Italy), but above those of Austria, Ireland,
89. Development Assistance
Per Capita (2002 US$)

90. Total Foreign Aid
Scale of Commitment to Development in Poor Nations
the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Germany, and Spain. Unexpectedly, a higher percentage of Americans have a great deal of confidence in the UN than any Europeans other than the Italians and the Luxembourgeois. On the other hand, only the Finns are less likely to agree that international bodies should have the right to enforce solutions for problems like environmental pollution, though the Danes and Spaniards are in the same league.

Americans are often thought to take little interest in the world around them, except perhaps when invading it. The paucity of Americans with passports is often held up as an indication of disinterest. Eighty-five percent of American tourism and travel is domestic. If it follows that 15% is international, Americans join the company of the Greeks, Spaniards, and French, among whom, respectively, only 12%, 13%, and 17% of holidays are taken abroad. And that does not take into consideration the distance needed to travel before the Great Abroad begins. That more than 99% of Luxembourgeois vacations of four nights or more were enjoyed outside the nation’s borders does not surprise; where else could they possibly have been taken? For purely topological reasons, international travel is a different enterprise for residents of big countries. Assuming that for a European to leave Europe is an effort roughly analogous to that of an American exiting the United States, the figures become more comparable. In 2006, 9.7 million Western Europeans visited the United States and 13 million Americans visited Europe. Thus, in the realm of travel, Americans were proportionately more interested in Europeans than the other way around. The same year, significantly more Americans (30 million) traveled overseas (other than to Mexico and Canada) than overseas visitors came to the United States (22 million).

Quantifying the purported American indifference to the rest of the world presents difficulties. But here is a try. Using the online archives of four major newspapers, the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ), the New York Times, the Guardian, and Le Figaro (unfortunately, the search engine of Le Monde does not permit a similar analysis), we used the frequency of the conjunction “but” and its equivalents in the other languages as a proxy for the total number of words in these respective organs. That was our denominator. We then investigated the relative frequency of the following words or their equivalents: “Paris,” “Berlin,” “Washington,” and “Moscow.” The results reveal that the New York Times writes about Paris about as frequently as the Guardian and somewhat less than the EAZ. It is slightly less interested in Berlin than the Guardian and about half as much as Le Figaro. It is about 30% less interested in Moscow than the EAZ, about as interested as Le Figaro, but almost twice as
much so as the Guardian. It is more interested in London than the FAZ but less than Le Figaro. The New York Times writes more frequently about Paris than the FAZ does about Washington, and only a bit less than Le Figaro and the Guardian do. If we look at coverage of two major foreign policy figures, Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Il, the New York Times has been more interested in the Russian president than has the Guardian, but much less so than the FAZ and Le Figaro. It has published articles more frequently about the North Korean leader than any of the other newspapers. Word counts, of course, provide only a rough measure of interest, but given the limitations of the search engines, it was the best possibility on offer. From this sketch, drawn admittedly with a thumbnail, we see approximately equal interest for the outside world among these newspapers.

I can hear the objections already: Maybe the New York Times, and maybe New Yorkers, but what about all those corn-fed provincial Americans who don’t know the difference between Vienne and Vienna? Let us run the same test on a sampling of decent regional newspapers: in the United States, the Dallas Morning News, the Baltimore Sun, the San Francisco Chronicle, and the Atlanta Journal-Constitution; in France, Le Progrès, La Dépêche du Midi, and Lyon Capitale; in Germany, the Aachner Nachrichten and the Stuttgarter Nachrichten. The selection is of necessity limited by the few Web sites that will allow the sort of search we are attempting. We have not included any English newspapers since there is no longer a functioning regional press in that country.

One result is that the German regional press is more interested in the great abroad than the French. No surprise there. The French papers paid a little more attention than the American to Berlin, and somewhat less to London. The German papers bested both the French and Americans in attention devoted to Washington and Paris, respectively. The average attention of the French and Americans to Moscow was almost exactly equal, while the Germans took more notice. The same holds for their respective interest in Putin. On the North Korean leader, in contrast, the American papers were significantly more alert than any of the European ones.

If we compare the American provincial press to Dagens Nyheter (the results for Svenska Dagbladet, the alternative, were eerily similar), the mouthpiece of the Swedish chattering classes, a group that prides itself on its cosmopolitan graces, this is the outcome. Interested in Putin you would be better off reading Dagens Nyheter than any of the U.S. press, and if Kim Jong Il caught your fancy, you would be better off only if you read the San Francisco Chronicle or
the Baltimore Sun. That speaks well of the Swedish paper. On the other hand, if you were more generally interested in the other nations whose capitals we have used as proxies for the amount of coverage they receive, then the advantage lies with the Dallas Morning News or the San Francisco Chronicle if Paris was the concern. If interested in London, you would be better off with the San Francisco Chronicle and the Baltimore Sun. If Moscow, with the Dallas Morning News. But if Berlin is the focus, then the U.S. provincial press cannot compete with Dagens Nyheter. In other words, American regional papers are as interested in the world as their French counterparts, less so than the German, and a nose behind the Swedish national press. As always, the deep ravines we are led to expect turn out to be but gently rolling hills.

Yet so insistent are the European chattering classes on burnishing their own credentials as worldly and sophisticated at the expense of Americans that one wonders about the underlying psychological needs craving fulfillment. When it writes of America, the European press often pulls a Borat: sophisticated Europeans report on American yokels for other sophisticated Europeans. This is, of course, a gratifying trick if no one calls you on it. But it is a mistake to assume that it cannot be repeated in reverse. Sooner or later, we will see an American writer performing a Baudrillard on Europe, publishing a book on European weirdness in all its glorious multifariousness: Schuhplatteln (a relentlessly commercialized form of folk dancing) on prime-time Bavarian or Austrian television; the hermetically sealed holiday resorts that keep Germans or Brits at home even while abroad; the Eurovision Song Contest; Lourdes as the site where the Catholic Church practices medicine; Lederhosen, Trachten and Dirndlen worn by grown-ups; naked weather announcers on Italian TV; the erotic lure of fancy cars in German singles ads; Blackpool; Kurt Waldheim; Padre Pio; Liechtenstein; Armin Meiwes, the cannibal of Rotenburg; reality TV; Europeans’ universal and supremely smug contempt for Roma; Heino; Norway’s dry counties; football hooligans; the Common Agricultural Policy; Butterreisen; the Mediterranean songbird hunt; Hello magazine; Silvio Berlusconi; Appenzell Innerhoden, the Swiss canton forced finally in 1990 to grant women the local vote; Heimatlieder; binge drinking; Page 3 girls; the cult of Diana, and so forth. Hans Magnus Enzensberger’s Europe, Europe is a brilliant portrayal of the sometimes bizarre extremes tucked behind the placid facade of Europe, but—published in 1987—needs updating.
It is generally recognized that higher education in America is in comparatively good shape, with the main competition coming from the UK. With less than 5% of the world's population the United States accounts for 40% of global research and development spending, produces 63% of all highly cited scientific publications, employs 70% of the world’s Nobel Prize winners, and is home to three-quarters of both the top 20 and top 40 universities in the world. Spending figures reveal the reasons why. As a proportion of total outlays on universities, government spending is lower in the United States than in any European nation (figure 91). But, as we have seen when looking at overall social spending, monies channeled through the state do not tell the whole story. Total spending on university education in America, measured as a percentage of GDP, is not merely high by European standards. It is some 60% above the nearest competitors, the Scandinavians, and more than twice
the level of Germany, a country that once boasted universities as good as any (figure 92). It is worth remembering, too, that the U.S. GDP is itself bigger than Europe’s. Americans therefore not only spend proportionately more on universities. In absolute terms, the gap becomes greater. A higher percentage of Americans have graduated from university than in any European nation. America’s adults are, in this sense, better educated than Europe’s (figure 93). Despite this, the amount of continuing education that Americans undertake is above that of the Germans, Swiss, and Belgians, among the narrower range of countries surveyed in this case.²

The United States is in the middle of the European pack for state spending on primary and secondary schools, and for overall state educational spending (figure 94). But total educational spending, public and private, measured as a percentage of GDP, remains higher in the United States than anywhere in Europe (figure 95). Primary and secondary school teachers are reasonably well paid by European standards, in the upper middle of the spectrum (figure 96). And proportionately more Americans have graduated from secondary school than in any European country.³ For primary schools, American average class sizes are in the upper middle half of the European scale, and in the center for secondary schools. (Figure 97)

Contrary to popular belief in both Europe and the United States, American primary and secondary school pupils perform as well academically as many
92. Total Spending on University Education
As a Percent of GDP

93. University Education Attainment
Percent of Adult Population
94. State Spending on Education
As Percent of GDP

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Luxembourg
Greece
Spain
Italy
Germany
Ireland
United States
Netherlands
Portugal
Austria
United Kingdom
France
Switzerland
Belgium
Finland
Sweden
Norway
Iceland
Denmark

95. Total Education Expenditure
Total Public and Private Expenditure on Education as % of GDP

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Greece
Ireland
Italy
Spain
Netherlands
Germany
Austria
Portugal
United Kingdom
Finland
France
Switzerland
Belgium
Sweden
Denmark
United States
96. Primary Teachers’ Salaries
After 15 Years Teaching (US$ PPP)

Iceland
Greece
Italy
Sweden
France
Portugal
Finland
Austria
Norway
Spain
Belgium (French)
Denmark
United States
Netherlands
United Kingdom (England)
Ireland
Germany
Switzerland
Luxembourg

97. Class Size
Lower Secondary Education

Switzerland
Denmark
Iceland
Luxembourg
Ireland
Italy
Belgium (French)
Portugal
United States
Greece
Austria
United Kingdom
France
Spain
Germany
of their European peers, as measured by the 2006 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results. In math, they could do better, ranking only above the Italians, the Portuguese, and the Greeks. In science, however, American pupils also outrank the Norwegians, Spaniards, and the Luxembourgeois. For reading skills, the Austrians, Danes, Icelanders, and Germans have slipped below as well, so that American pupils rank at the center of the European spectrum (figure 98). By way of confirmation, the 2006 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study ranked American fourth graders at the center of the European scale: above the Norwegians, Belgians, Icelanders, Spaniards, French, Austrians, Scots, and English. The 2007 TIMMS comparisons showed much the same for math and science, although for a more limited sample than the PISA studies. Compared to Western Europeans, American fourth graders were bested in their math knowledge only by their English and Dutch peers, eighth graders only by the English. In science, both groups were beaten only by the English. Such mean scores for each country, however, do not tell the whole story. How many students are really good or hopelessly incompetent? In the PISA tests for science, the United States had proportionately more low achievers than any Western European country other than Italy and Portugal, although it ranked only a bit lower than Luxembourg, Norway, Greece, and France. At the opposite end of the scale, America had proportionately more top-scoring pupils than any European nations other than the UK, Germany, Finland, and the Netherlands.

These figures deal with students. If we look at schools and their performance, disparities in the United States are moderate, although Europeans commonly believe that in America good and bad schools are starkly separate. The Independent, for example, warns its British readers against emulating America lest one result be schools “grossly divided along race and class lines.” Yet the figures indicate otherwise. For the 2003 PISA math scores, variations between schools in the United States were moderate. America clustered toward the Nordic end of the spectrum, not with the highly stratified Central European or Mediterranean countries (figure 99). An American pupil from a blue-collar background is slightly more than twice as likely as his peer from a white-collar family to score in the bottom quarter of the PISA science tests. This result is the same as in the UK and Luxembourg. It is lower than the social stratification found in the Netherlands, France, Germany, Belgium, and Austria. For reading, the gap between scores for pupils from occupationally privileged and unprivileged families is wide in the United States. It is wider still in Portugal, the UK, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, and Switzerland. Family cultural
98. Reading Scores
2003 PISA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<td>Greece</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
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<td>Portugal</td>
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<td>Spain</td>
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<td>Germany</td>
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<td>Austria</td>
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<td>Denmark</td>
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<td>Iceland</td>
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<tr>
<td>United States</td>
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<td>France</td>
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<td>Switzerland</td>
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<td>Norway</td>
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<td>Ireland</td>
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<td>Finland</td>
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99. Variance Between Schools
Student Performance, 2003 PISA Math (%)

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<th>Country</th>
<th>Variance</th>
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<td>Iceland</td>
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<td>Norway</td>
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<td>Denmark</td>
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<td>Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
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<td>Luxembourg</td>
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<td>Switzerland</td>
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<td>Germany</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
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<td>Belgium</td>
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attainment (parents with university educations) had a more positive influence on pupils’ math scores in the United States than anywhere in Europe. But parents finishing secondary school had no more effect on math scores in America than in six European countries. And cultural capital, measured in terms of those households with more than 200 books, had less influence in the United States than in seven European nations. In other words, secondary-school students’ results are determined by family cultures in much the same way both in the United States and in Europe.12

Europeans often believe that good U.S. schools are private and serve only an elite. Yet American education is no more privatized than many European systems. This holds for enrollments in primary schools, where the percentage of American students attending private institutions is at the center of the European scale.13 For secondary schools the same is true, though the figures are harder to pin down (figure 100). Data from the World Bank, graphed here, distinguishes only between state and private secondary-school pupils. Belgium and the Netherlands, in this accounting, have a far higher percentage of children attending private schools, many of which are religious. But the bulk of private schools in countries like the Netherlands and most of Scandinavia are, in fact, funded indirectly via government taxes through what Americans call a voucher system, often with a fee supplement. While the American Left resists vouchers as capitulating to the market in an area where the public good should hold sway, many Social-Democratic-minded European nations have introduced them. If we distinguish instead by three categories—what the OECD calls public schools, government-dependent private schools, and independent private schools—the picture looks somewhat different. The United States then has a higher percentage of upper-secondary-school pupils attending public school than any European country other than Switzerland, Italy, Ireland, Greece, and Denmark. On the other hand, it also has a higher percentage of pupils in independent private schools than anywhere in Europe outside of Spain and Portugal, among the countries for which there are figures.14 The percentage of educational expenditure from private sources for primary and secondary education is comparatively modest in the United States, lower than in the UK, Switzerland, and Germany.15

What results emerge from the American educational system? First and foremost, by European standards, a high percentage of young Americans are either in education or employed—their energies, in other words, are gainfully occupied. Only in the Nordic countries (other than Sweden), Ireland, and the Netherlands are more youngsters actively learning or working (figure 101). Proportionately
100. Private Secondary Schools

Children Enrolled in (%)

Ireland
Italy
Greece
Iceland
Norway
Finland
Switzerland
Germany
United States
Austria
Sweden
Denmark
Portugal
Luxembourg
United Kingdom
France
Spain
Belgium
Netherlands

101. Footloose Young

15-29 Year-Olds (%) Not in Education and Unemployed

Netherlands
Iceland
Norway
Denmark
Ireland
United States
Luxembourg
Switzerland
Austria
United Kingdom
Finland
Sweden
Belgium
Portugal
Spain
Germany
France
Italy
Greece
more young people leave secondary school without a qualification in 10 European nations than in the United States. The percentage of illiterate Americans is average by European standards (figure 102). Proportionately more British and Irish, and more than twice as many Italians, cannot read or write. Average literacy rates in the United States are at the middle of the European scale. The American score on prose literacy falls below only the Netherlands, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, though it is also true that the range between good and bad readers in the United States is broad, as is the case also in the UK and Portugal.

Americans do not need to read, Simone de Beauvoir was convinced, because they do not think. Thinking is hard to quantify, reading less so. And read the Americans do. There are more newspapers per head in the United States than anywhere in Europe outside Scandinavia, Switzerland, and Luxembourg (figure 103). The circulation of these newspapers is higher per capita than in most of the Mediterranean and in Ireland and Belgium. Another source, quantifying the copies of newspapers per capita, ranks the United States above all West European countries except the Scandinavian nations, other than Denmark. And more Americans have read one of these papers during the last week than the French or the Spanish. The United States is also well equipped with libraries. With its amply endowed universities, it is no surprise that the supply of books per capita in America’s university libraries is higher than in any European country other than Finland, Denmark, and Iceland.
municipally funded public libraries in the United States means that also average American readers are better supplied with library books than their peers in Germany, Britain, France, Holland, Austria, and all the Mediterranean nations (figure 104). They also make better use of these public library books than most Europeans. Average Americans borrowed 6.4 books each in 2001, more than their peers in Germany, Austria, Norway, Ireland, Luxembourg, France, and throughout the Mediterranean.\(^{23}\) Not content with borrowing, Americans also buy more books per head than any Europeans for whom we have numbers (figure 105). Proportionately more Americans claim to read a book per month than anyone but the Swiss, Swedes, Germans, and Irish.\(^{24}\) And Americans write more books. Per capita, they come in at the high end of the European spectrum as authors, measured in terms of volumes in print (figure 106).

As one might expect, on average Americans watch more television than most Europeans. But not all: the British watch more and the Italians are a hard-running third (figure 107). Proportionately fewer Americans watch more than two hours TV daily than the Portuguese, Norwegians, Danes, Finns, Dutch, Irish, Germans, and British.\(^{25}\) And, yes, Americans go to the movies more often than most—but not all—Europeans.\(^{26}\) The Icelanders are even more devoted cinema buffs.

Comparative snobs may counter that Americans like only popular culture—their books are trash, their films are from Hollywood. This is a long-
104. Public Libraries
Number of Books per Capita

105. Books Sold
Per Person
106. Book Titles in Print
Per 1000 Population

Portugal
France
Spain
Italy
German Speaking Countries
United States
United Kingdom

107. Television Viewing
Per Capita per Week in Hours

Finland
Norway
Sweden
Belgium
Denmark
Netherlands
France
Germany
Ireland
Italy
United States
United Kingdom
standing complaint, shared widely among Europeans of all ilks. A year after
his unprompted declaration of war against the United States in December
1941, when he might have had other reasons to criticize the country, Hitler
lamented America’s paucity of opera houses, even though—as he grudgingly
admitted—its citizens may have had more refrigerators than the Germans.27
Accurate, internationally comparative figures on opera houses are, alas, hard
to come by. But let us take, as a reasonable alternate measure of culture whose
brow does not get much higher, the number of full symphony orchestras good
enough to have won recording contracts with Deutsche Grammophon. Only
the Germans have a higher absolute number than the Americans.28 And, as
for the infrastructure required to produce high culture, only in Switzerland
do more pianos (acoustic, of course, and counting both verticals and grands)
change hands per capita than in the United States, with the Germans in hot
pursuit for third place (figure 108). If we look at only grand pianos, twice as
many are bought per capita by Americans as by the nearest European competi-
tors, the Swiss, with the Germans a distant third.

I turn now to some—admittedly slapdash—indicators of high culture, but
one has to look where the statistical light shines, and that is far from every-
where. Though the Michelin guides started rating New York only a couple
of years ago, it already holds its own in terms of stars awarded its restaurants:
fewer per capita than Paris, of course, but on a par with London (which fanc-
cies itself the current dining mecca) and above Rome and Munich. (Measuring
Germany by impoverished Berlin would have been unfair) (figure 109). Much
the same holds if we move from food to drink. Measured in proportion to out-
put, there are more perfect American wines (Parker ratings of 100) than from
any European country other than France (figure 110).

True, the American state spends less as a percentage of GDP than almost
any European government on what the OECD defines as “recreation and cul-
ture,” though not less than Greece and only a bit less than the UK and Ireland.
These figures, it should be noted, include government payments to Europe’s
established churches. American households spend more on recreation and
culture privately than any Europeans but the Icelanders, the Austrians, and the
English. Add state and private money together, and total American outlays on
the finer things in life fall in the upper half of the European middle ground.29

What do European state subsidies to high culture get the continent’s citi-
zens? Contemplate the cost of admission to the world’s major opera houses
(figure 111). If we look at how often poor but devoted opera buffs can pursue
their passion, there appears to be no dramatic advantage to state subsidies.
**108. Annual World Piano Sales**  
*Per 10,000 population*

- Spain
- United Kingdom
- Greece
- Netherlands
- Italy
- Norway
- France
- Finland
- Germany
- United States
- Switzerland

**109. Total Michelin Restaurant Stars**  
*Per 100,000 Population*

- Lisbon
- Madrid
- Rome
- Vienna
- Amsterdam
- Munich
- New York
- Athens
- London
- Bern
- Helsinki
- Stockholm
- Oslo
- Brussels
- Dublin
- Copenhagen
- Paris
- Luxembourg
110. Perfect Wines
Wines with Perfect (100) Score from eRobertParker.com per Hundred Megaliters of Wine Produced

- Italy
- Spain
- Germany
- Portugal
- United States
- France

111. Ticket Prices in Major Opera Houses
US$ PPP, 2008

- Royal Opera, Stockholm
- Copenhagen Opera House
- Staatsoper Berlin
- Deutsche Oper, Berlin
- Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich
- Opéra Bastille, Paris
- Palais Garnier, Paris
- La Scala, Milan
- Los Angeles Opera
- San Francisco Opera
- Washington National Opera
- Metropolitan Opera, NY
- Royal Opera House, London
The Royal Opera in Stockholm, the Palais Garnier, and the Bastille Opera in Paris are the least expensive. Then comes a group of opera houses in the middle, where the cheapest tickets are priced between 11 and 20 dollars. This includes not only Covent Garden in London, the Copenhagen Opera House, La Scala, and the Bavarian State Opera, but also the Met in New York, and the San Francisco and Los Angeles operas. The most expensive lowest-price tickets are in Washington DC and in Berlin’s two main opera houses. There is some differentiation, in other words, but no yawning chasms, nor any discernable distinctions between subsidized and market-driven institutions. In the boxes and grand tiers, however, prices vary quite a bit more. At the extreme, a seat can cost over a thousand dollars in London. In America, top prices cluster at about a quarter of that. In France and Italy, the best seats go for between 150 and 200 dollars. But the lucky Germans, outside of Munich at least, and the Scandinavians can get into the plush seats for less than a hundred dollars. (All these prices are, of course, in PPP dollar terms.) In other words, whether paid for by the state or the audience, all opera houses make the cheapest tickets relatively affordable, often less costly than the cinema. Bottom prices on the Continent are sometimes slightly lower than those in the English-speaking world, but not by much, and sometimes not at all. At the top end, in contrast, well-heeled opera lovers pay their own way in the English-speaking world. But on the Continent they enjoy discount prices, thanks to heavy subsidies from the average taxpayer. A reversed Robin Hood for *Rigoletto*.

Culture is not just what interests the aesthetes and connoisseurs; science must be considered as much a part of it. The United States also has a highly developed infrastructure of producing scientific knowledge, whether you measure it in terms of the number of researchers or in terms of expenditure on research (figure 112). Only Finland and Sweden spend a higher percentage of their GDP for such purposes. One outcome is a good record of patents—more per capita than any European nation for which we have figures, though Sweden is a close second (figure 113). Per capita, America also has reasonable success in winning Nobel prizes, falling at the center of the European scale, whether you measure it across the population, by the nationality of the winner, as graphed here, or by the nationality of the institution he or she worked at (figure 114).

Let us turn now to women and their rights and achievements. The power granted American women has been a leitmotif of European criticism from the beginning. Even today, some European observers regard the emancipation of women as an unattractive American peculiarity. Emmanuel Todd is preoccupied
112. Research and Development

Expenditure as % of GDP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>5.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

113. Patents

Per Million Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Patents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>550</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

United States
by what he considers the “gynocratization” of America, “the country of castrating women.” How do things stand today with women on both sides of the Atlantic? American women have no claims to paid maternity leave, though that does not seem to dampen their reproductive enthusiasm. Being on average younger, they have more babies than their sisters in any European nation. Many of them work (figure 115). Only in Scandinavia is there a higher proportion of economically active women. And, by European standards, American female workers are paid reasonably well compared with men (figure 116). Only in Scandinavia and Switzerland are their wages higher in relation to their male peers. A larger proportion of American women have been to university than their sisters in Western Europe, outside of Scandinavia, Belgium, France, and Portugal.

In politics, American women perform at the lower end of the European spectrum. As members of parliament or its equivalent, they are worse represented only in Ireland, Greece, France, and Italy (figure 117). There are proportionately fewer female ministers in Greece and Italy, and the same number in Luxembourg and Switzerland. But in the economy, American women do well compared with Europeans. The proportion of female professional and technical workers is higher in the United States than in any European country except Iceland, where there are proportionately as many. So is the percentage of female legislators, senior officials, and managers, taken together (figure 118). American women are less likely to work in temporary positions than anywhere in Europe,
115. Women in the Work Force
Percent of Total

- Italy
- Greece
- Spain
- Ireland
- Luxembourg
- Belgium
- Austria
- Netherlands
- Germany
- France
- Portugal
- Switzerland
- United Kingdom
- United States
- Denmark
- Iceland
- Norway
- Sweden
- Finland

116. Women’s Income
Ratio of Estimated Female to Male Earned Income

- Austria
- Luxembourg
- Ireland
- Spain
- Greece
- Italy
- Netherlands
- Belgium
- Germany
- Portugal
- France
- United Kingdom
- United States
- Sweden
- Finland
- Denmark
- Switzerland
117. Women in Parliaments
Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliaments (%)

- Italy
- France
- Greece
- Ireland
- United States
- United Kingdom
- Portugal
- Luxembourg
- Switzerland
- Germany
- Austria
- Belgium
- Spain
- Netherlands
- Denmark
- Finland
- Sweden

118. Women in Leading Positions
Female Legislators, Senior Officials, and Managers (% of Total)

- Italy
- Denmark
- Greece
- Netherlands
- Austria
- Finland
- Switzerland
- Ireland
- Spain
- Sweden
- Belgium
- Portugal
- United Kingdom
- Germany
- United States
and less likely to work part-time than anywhere other than Portugal, Greece, and Finland. Women in the United States are only half as likely as European women to work in pink-collar, traditionally female jobs. Danish women are most sexually ghettoized in the European labor market, Italians the least. Perhaps part of American women’s professional success is due to the support they receive at home. American husbands do more housework than most European men; only Scandinavian men are as helpful (figure 119).

Americans are often considered puritanical and squeamish when it comes to sex. But the available surveys on the relevant habits and attitudes do not bear this out, at least not compared to Europeans. Legal marriage-like unions for homosexuals are found among some U.S. states, as they are in some European nations (figure 120). Americans are equaled only by the Irish in the percentage that has experimented with homosexual relations (figure 121). They are middle of the European pack when it comes to affairs, one-night stands, the frequency of their lovemaking, and the number of their partners. The proportion of American respondents who admit to having participated in threesomes is bested only in Iceland, though the Norwegians are strong contenders in third place (figure 122). Americans are at the high end of the European scale in kinkiness (bondage, spanking, and other forms of S/M, role-play, dressing up, incorporating pornography in lovemaking, videoing or photographing during sex, and using sex toys). Only the British and the Finns are more likely to experiment (figure 123). The most unadventurous lovemakers are the Germans, followed by the Italians.
120. Gay Marriage–Like Unions

- France
- Germany
- Ireland
- Luxembourg
- California
- Hawaii
- Maine
- Denmark
- Finland
- Sweden
- United Kingdom
- New Jersey
- Vermont
- Belgium
- Netherlands
- Spain
- Connecticut
- Massachusetts

Civil unions or partnerships with lesser rights | Same rights as married heterosexuals | Gay marriage legalized

121. Homosexual Experiences

Percent of Respondents Claiming at Least 1 Homosexual Experience

- Portugal
- Greece
- Spain
- Denmark
- Finland
- Italy
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- Netherlands
- Norway
- Austria
- Belgium
- Germany
- France
- Iceland
- United Kingdom
- Ireland
- United States
122. Three in a Bed during Sex

Percent of Respondents Who Claim to Have Had 3 in a Bed during Sex

123. Non-Engagement in Sexual Indulgence

Percent of Respondents Who Claim No Sexual Indulgences
As for the possible consequences of their lovemaking? Teenage births are very common in the United States by European standards, almost twice the highest European rate, in the UK. But out-of-wedlock births in America are in the middle range, below the UK, Austria, France, and all of Scandinavia.\textsuperscript{36} That, in turn, is to some extent an outcome of the American marriage rate, which is slightly higher than Denmark, Europe’s nuptial leader, and almost twice the Belgian rate, its laggard.\textsuperscript{37} Though abortion remains controversial in the United States—as it does in Europe outside the Anglo-Scandinavian fringe—American women use it as much, or little, as Europeans (figure 12.4). Only in the UK and Sweden are legal abortions more frequent.
If we turn to the environment and its protection, the contrasts between the United States and Europe are less stark than the debates over Kyoto and global warming suggest. Popular attitudes across the Atlantic appear to be quite comparable. A smaller percentage of Americans than any Europeans are fearful that current population trends are unsustainable. The percentage that fears strongly that modern life harms the environment is at the lower end of a very broad European spectrum. But a higher percentage of Americans than anyone other than the gloomy Portuguese are very worried about the environment. Already long before Al Gore and An Inconvenient Truth, proportionately more Americans considered global warming extremely dangerous than do the Dutch, Norwegians, Danes, and Finns. Relatively more Americans than anyone but the Swiss claim to be very willing to pay higher prices to protect the environment. Proportionately more Americans than any
Europeans are prepared to pay higher taxes for the sake of nature. Americans also claim willingness more than anyone other than the Swiss and the Swedes to accept a cut in living standards to achieve such ends. A higher percentage of Americans think that government should pass laws to protect the environment than the British, Swiss, Dutch, Germans, and all Scandinavians other than the Danes. American executives are more convinced that complying with government environmental standards helps their businesses’ long-term competitiveness than their colleagues in Germany, Iceland, Austria, Luxembourg, Greece, Belgium, the Netherlands, Ireland, Italy, Spain, or Portugal.

In a recent comparative ranking of environmental policy conducted by Yale and Columbia universities, the score assigned the United States was not impressive. But that of Belgium, the Netherlands, and Greece was worse. The Achilles’ heel of America’s environmental policy is its energy inefficiency, which is partly related to the size of the country and the extremities of its weather. On most other measures, U.S. rankings are better. American spending (public and private) on pollution abatement and control as a percentage of GDP is bested only in Austria, Denmark, Italy, and the Netherlands. The percentage of the government budget that goes to environmental research is low in the United States, but higher than in Sweden and Switzerland.

Despite the myths of a hyper-motorized nation, Americans own fewer passenger cars per head than the French, Austrians, Swiss, Germans, Luxembourgois, and Italians (figure 125). Even if one takes the figures for all road motor vehicles, the U.S. figures are lower than the Portuguese and in the same league as the Luxembourgois, Icelanders, and Italians. The human damage cars wreak is average at worst (figure 126). Road fatalities, measured per vehicle, are higher in Austria, Spain, Ireland, and Belgium. Greece is by far the most dangerous place to drive, 50% worse than its nearest competitor, Belgium. Per capita, Americans drive much more than Europeans, some 70% more than the closest peers, the Italians (figure 127). Of course, they live in a large and (by the standards of Europe outside of Scandinavia) sparsely settled country. If we adjust for such factors, taking into account the size of the country, automobile usage is lower only in Finland, Sweden, and Greece (figure 128). And the ratio of car travel to the length of paved road is higher in Italy and the UK than America (figure 129). The same goes for the number of vehicles per kilometer of road: lower than all but Sweden, Norway, Iceland, and Ireland.

American public transportation leaves much to be desired, but the country has more rail per head than all European nations except Finland, Sweden, and Ireland (figure 130). Railway per square kilometer is, of course, lower and largely a factor
125. Passenger Cars
Per 1000 Population

Greece
Denmark
Ireland
Netherlands
Portugal
Finland
United Kingdom
Spain
Sweden
Belgium
United States
France
Austria
Switzerland
Germany
Italy

126. Road Fatalities
Per Million Vehicles

Netherlands
Sweden
United Kingdom
Germany
Switzerland
Finland
Luxembourg
Italy
France
Portugal
Denmark
United States
Austria
Spain
Ireland
Belgium
Greece
127. Passenger Transport by Car

Per Capita Passenger Transport in Private Cars (1,000 Passenger Kilometers)

128. Car Passenger Kilometers per Size of Country

100,000 Passenger KM Traveled in Private Cars per Square KM of Country Size
129. Car Passenger Kilometers per Km of Road
100,000 Passenger Kilometers Traveled in Private Cars per KM of Paved Roadways

130. Length of Railways
Railways in Kilometers per 1,000,000 Population
of the size and population density of the country. It is, in any case, higher than in Greece, Finland, Norway, and Iceland, and only a bit lower than in Sweden and Spain, all countries with similar population densities. Americans do not, it is true, themselves travel on this extensive rail network. In 2004, more passenger miles were racked up on American trains than in Italy or Britain. With a bigger country, this still means proportionately far fewer riders. But the U.S. rail network transports Americans’ freight (figure 131). Well over three times as much freight is carried by rail per capita in the United States than the closest European nation, Sweden. The American emphasis on rail over road for freight transport explains why a larger fraction of the nation’s carbon dioxide output from transportation is produced by rail in the United States (2.2%) than in any European nation. And it is why a smaller percentage of transportation-related CO₂ is caused by road travel in the United States (83%) than anywhere other than Norway.

Ecologically speaking, there is no advantage in sending passengers by rail if freight is sent by road. All European nations send a higher percentage of freight by road than America. In the nation with the highest rate (Ireland), the figure is close to four times the American (figure 132). As a result, the number of trucks (goods vehicles) per capita is lower in America than anywhere in Europe—one-third, for example, of the Norwegian, French, or Austrian levels (figure 133). And, contrary to popular belief, Americans do take buses much like Europeans—more so than the French, the English, and the Greeks.
132. Road Freight

As % of Total Inland Freight

United States
Netherlands
Austria
Luxembourg
Denmark
Sweden
Germany
Switzerland
France
Finland
Norway
Belgium
Portugal
Italy
United Kingdom
Spain
Greece
Ireland

133. Goods Vehicles

In Use per 100 Population

United States
Germany
Switzerland
Sweden
United Kingdom
Belgium
Netherlands
Ireland
Finland
Italy
Iceland
Denmark
Luxembourg
Norway
France
Spain
Greece
Austria
Portugal
Despite the size of the country and the importance of air travel for the domestic market, Americans take fewer plane trips per capita than the Swiss, the Irish, and the Luxembourgeois (figure 134). Subway usage in the largest cities puts the United States in the European middle ground. Per capita, New Yorkers travel by subway more often than Athenians, Berliners, and Londoners, as well as the residents of Oslo, Brussels, and Helsinki (figure 135). Looking beyond the singular transit system of New York, the Boston metro system has a higher annual ridership than that of Brussels. More San Franciscans ride the metro than do residents of Amsterdam, and more Philadelphians than those who live in Rotterdam. Chicago’s metro has more passengers than Hamburg’s. About two and a half times as many residents of Atlanta take the metro as do Glaswegians, which (depending on how the city is defined) is proportionately either a higher ridership in Atlanta or about the same. Ridership in Washington DC is only about 20% lower than in Rome. The United States has a lower concentration of its vehicles in urban areas than anywhere else in the OECD, and a higher percentage of them is in rural areas than among any of our comparison countries other than Sweden and Austria. In other words, Americans are more likely than most Europeans to use their cars where driving is required: in rural areas without mass transit.

Americans are not great walkers, clocking less than half as many kilometers per capita annually as the least ambulatory Europeans, the Portuguese. Nor
are they avid bicyclists. But neither are the Spaniards, Greeks, Portuguese, or Luxembourgeois, who cycle equally little on an average daily basis, while the French and British cycle only one-tenth of a kilometer—one hundred meters—farther. If we look at the percentage of all trips taken by bicycle, the Americans are no worse than the British (1%). The Dutch cycle on average nine times as much as the Italians and French, and almost thrice as often as the Swedes and Germans. Bicycling can hardly be said to be a pan-European characteristic.

We all know the stereotype: Americans sit alone in their outlandish SUVs while Europeans virtuously cram into trains. The opposite but more rarely conjured image is equally true: Americans parsimoniously take a local camping trip during their short vacations, while the Germans fly off to Phuket or Goa two or three times a year, and the British jet monthly to their holiday houses on the Costa del Sol. If we try to measure the overall transportation footprint, we are faced with tricky business. American carbon dioxide output is, as we know, high to start with. But, of that output, only a moderate amount is produced by transportation, in the middle of the European range (figure 136). If we calculate energy used for transportation per capita, American figures are high, over twice the level of most European nations (except Luxembourg, where the numbers, in turn, are again twice as high).

Nations vary, however, in terms of population density, size, and consequently, the distances their citizens need to cover. The sparsely populated
Scandinavian nations and Ireland rank higher in transport energy usage per capita than more densely settled countries like Denmark, the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands. Transport energy usage measured per square kilometer—in other words, divided over the size of the country—gives American figures that are higher than, but largely in the same league as, the Scandinavian nations, comparable to countries like Austria, Spain, France, Portugal, Greece, and Ireland, and significantly lower than in densely populated Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and the UK. If we combine these factors, taking account of both the consumers who use energy for travel and the distances that they have to surmount, and create a measure of energy (in million-tons-of-oil equivalents) per person per square kilometer, the results are as follows: France is the most efficient nation in Europe. The Scandinavian nations, except Denmark and Iceland, come next. They are joined by a series of more densely populated countries that nonetheless are frugal users: Italy, Spain, Germany, and the UK. Then come the heavily using nations: Belgium, Austria, Denmark, Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. But the United States is lower than any European nation in this measure, using approximately one-sixth as much energy per person per square kilometer as the most efficient European nation (France). In other words, if we account for the demographic and topological circumstances faced by each nation, American transport energy usage compares reasonably well to European rates.16
Needless to say, calculations that take demography, geography, and topology into account work in both directions. Thus, if we look at energy used for household heating, in 1998 the citizens of Germany, France, Finland, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden used more than Americans per capita. But if we correct for the colder climate of Scandinavia, their consumption patterns fall to less wasteful levels, lower than the American. The Germans and French remain, however, more profligate users of heating energy than the Americans.¹⁷

By European standards, Americans are urbanized. A higher percent live in big cities than any Europeans (figure 137). Despite preconceptions of American suburbia, these cities are reasonably densely populated, falling in the lower half of the European scale, on par with those in Scandinavia. Indeed, the major surprise, sprung on us by the impartiality of statistics, is that Los Angeles is among the densest of America’s cities, about a third more thickly settled on average than New York City (figure 138).

Americans produce a lot of waste per head, though the Norwegians are worse, and the Irish and Danes are close competitors (figure 139). But they recycle as well as the Finns and the French, and better than the British, the Greeks, and the Portuguese (figure 140). Since 1990, Americans’ production of waste has scarcely gone up per capita, while in all European nations for which figures are available, there have been dramatic increases—over 70% in Spain,
138. Urban Density
Population Densities of Major Urban Areas in Inhabitants per Square Mile

0 2,000 4,000 6,000 8,000 10,000 12,000 14,000 16,000
Luxembourg
New York
San Francisco - San Jose
Brussels
Helsinki
Reykjavik
Copenhagen
Los Angeles
Oslo
Lisbon
Dublin
Amsterdam
Stockholm
Rome
Vienna
Paris
Zurich
Berlin
London
Madrid
Athens

139. Municipal Waste
Municipal Waste Generation in Kg per Capita

0 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800
Greece
Belgium
Finland
Portugal
Sweden
Iceland
France
Italy
Austria
United Kingdom
Germany
Netherlands
Spain
Switzerland
Luxembourg
Denmark
Ireland
United States
Norway
almost 60% in Italy, for example, over 40% in Norway, almost that much in Denmark and Austria, and well over 30% in Sweden.18

“The old world developed on the basis of a coalition—uneasy but understood—between humanity and its surroundings,” the Guardian reassures its recycling readership. “The settlement of the United States was based on conquest, not just of the indigenous peoples, but also of the terrain.”19 Yet despite such common European conceptions, American conservation efforts are strong by European standards. Jeremy Rifkin insists that Europeans, unlike Americans, have “a love for the intrinsic value of nature. One can see it in Europeans’ regard for the rural countryside and their determination to maintain natural landscapes.”20 Actually, the percentage of national territory protected in the United States is about double that of France, the UK, or even Sweden, despite its vast Arctic parks. Eleven European nations (out of 16) spare a smaller percent of their land than the United States (figure 141). A higher percentage of U.S. waters—marine territory—is set aside as nature reserves than in any European nation other than Denmark.21

The results can be seen by comparing how many species of animals are threatened by extinction in America with the numbers in Europe. Only in Ireland, the UK, Finland, Portugal, and the Netherlands are fewer mammals, measured as a percentage of species known, endangered than in the United States (figure 142). In Germany, which regards itself as in the ecological
141. Conservation, Protected Areas
Major Protected Areas, % of National Territory

142. Threatened Mammals
Percent of Species Known
vanguard, over twice as great a percentage of species is at risk. Similar results hold for fish and birds. Obviously, some such disparities have to do with the length of settlement and population densities, both of which are less intrusive in the United States, though Scandinavia (outside Denmark) is even more lightly peopled. Nonetheless, there is more to the story than that. Why do densely populated nations like Denmark or the Netherlands set aside more of their land as nature reserves than sparsely occupied ones like Ireland and Sweden? Why are proportionately far more mammals threatened in Germany than in the UK, even though Britain is more densely settled? These are the outcomes of choices and policies, not just of geodemographic destiny.

Forest cover in the United States is also proportionately greater than in most European nations. Predictably, Sweden and Finland (countries with, respectively, two-thirds and one-half of the population density of the United States) are the European front-runners, joined by Spain, Austria, Portugal, and Luxembourg (figure 143). The intensity with which forest resources are exploited, measured as the percentage of annual growth harvested, is at the low end of the European spectrum, below that of Belgium, Portugal, Switzerland, the UK, Austria, Greece, Ireland, Finland, Sweden, and Denmark.22

Agricultural land devoted to organic farming in the United States, as a percentage of total cropland, is lower than anywhere in Europe.23 But Americans’
consumption of organic food is comparable to European levels and higher than in the Netherlands, Sweden, Italy, France, and Belgium (figure 144). And conventional American farmers are far less chemicalized than their European colleagues. Thanks partly to their use of genetically modified crops, they use pesticides sparingly (figure 145). Only Finnish, Swedish, and Irish farmers spray less per square kilometer of agricultural land. The Italians use over six times as much, the Belgians even more. Similarly, Dutch farmers use proportionately five times as much nitrogenous fertilizer as Americans. Only the Portuguese use less (figure 146). By European standards of agriculture, American farmers are practically organic to begin with. American water use, as a fraction of available resources, is middle of the pack (figure 147). Measured in relation to production, the results are much the same, with most of the Mediterranean nations coming in above the United States.²⁴

Industrial emissions in the United States are highish, measured as a function of GDP, though off the European scale only for carbon monoxide. For volatile organic compounds, Norway, Portugal, and Greece are worse, Spain is the same, and Sweden a close competitor. For nitrogen oxides, Iceland is worse, while Spain and Greece, followed by Portugal, run close behind. For sulfur oxides, Greece, Portugal, and Spain emit proportionately more, while Iceland is almost as bad (figure 148). These pollutants have been coming down
145. Pesticide Use

Tonnes per Square Kilometer of Agricultural Land

0 0.1 0.2 0.3 0.4 0.5 0.6 0.7 0.8

Ireland Sweden Finland United States Austria Switzerland Denmark Greece Spain Germany United Kingdom France Luxembourg Portugal Netherlands Italy Belgium

146. Nitrogenous Fertilizer Use

Tonnes per Square Kilometer of Agricultural Land

0 2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16

Portugal United States Greece Austria Switzerland Spain Finland Italy Sweden United Kingdom France Denmark Ireland Germany Belgium Netherlands
147. Intensity of Water Use
Abstractions as % of Renewable Resources

148. Sulfur Oxide Emissions
Kg per $1000 GDP
over the last decade or so as quickly in the United States as they have in several European nations. From 1990 to 2002, American sulfur oxide emissions dropped by 34%, a result that puts the United States in the European middle ground, better than Iceland, Greece, Portugal, and Spain. For nitrogen oxides, the improvement in the United States has been more rapid than in Austria, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and Norway.25

By European standards, America’s city dwellers are exposed only moderately to particulate matter (figure 149). And these levels have been dropping faster than in Austria, Norway, Portugal, and Switzerland.26 Take the American city most infamous for its bad air, Los Angeles: according to OECD figures from 1993, although ozone rates were higher than in all European cities, on most other measures of pollution LA was better off than its peers. Average carbon monoxide levels were lower than at least half of measured European cities, nitrogen dioxide rates were approximately the same as London’s, lead rates lower than any European city other than Bergen and the same as Magdeburg, sulfur dioxide rates below any other than Trondheim, suspended particulate levels lower only in Oslo, Gothenburg, and Trondheim.27 In other words, by these other measures, the only European cities with air as clean as LA (a metropolitan area of 13 million inhabitants) were small Scandinavian towns near the Atlantic coast.

By European standards, U.S. water pollution is moderate, at least in terms of organic pollutants emitted daily per worker (figure 150). Comparative data is hard to find. But in more specific measures, the Delaware River appears to be better off in terms of dissolved oxygen content than any river in Europe other than the Elbe, while the Mississippi holds its own above the Seine, the Arno, and the Mersey, and is at about the same level as the Adige and the Clyde. In terms of biochemical oxygen demand, another measure of water quality, the Mississippi is practically pristine, and unrivaled in Europe except by smaller rivers like the Skjern in Denmark and the Douro in Portugal. The Delaware, in turn, holds its position in the middle ground. When it comes to phosphorus content, these two American rivers hold a middle position. They shine in terms of ammonium content and have comparatively low lead, copper, and chromium levels.28

American electricity consumption per year and per capita is on the high end, but lower than all the Nordic nations except Denmark (figure 151). Energy efficiency in the United States, as measured in terms of energy use per unit of GDP, is not brilliant, but it is better than in Iceland, Luxembourg, and Finland and only a bit below the Swedish and Norwegian rates (figure 152). Oil use per capita
149. Airborne Particulate Matter
Particulate Matter 10 in Micrograms per Cubic Meter

- Sweden
- France
- Luxembourg
- United Kingdom
- Iceland
- Ireland
- Finland
- Denmark
- Germany
- Norway
- United States
- Belgium
- Switzerland
- Italy
- Portugal
- Spain
- Austria
- Netherlands
- Greece

150. Organic Water Pollutant Emissions
Kg per Day per Worker

- Austria
- Italy
- United Kingdom
- United States
- Germany
- France
- Portugal
- Spain
- Finland
- Ireland
151. Electricity Consumption per Capita
Kilograms of Oil Equivalent

152. Energy Consumption per Unit of GDP
Tonnes of Oil Equivalent per 1000 US$
is high, though less than the Belgians and the Luxembourgeois (in this case, their figures are reported together), and only a drop higher than the Icelanders and the Dutch (figure 153). Measured as a function of economic output, American oil use remains within European norms, and indeed is lower than Portugal, Greece, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Iceland (figure 154). Total American consumption of energy per capita is high, but less than in Iceland and Luxembourg and only a bit higher than Finland.

Over the last quarter century, energy consumption per unit of GDP has dropped dramatically in the United States, as it has in several European countries, such as Germany, Denmark, Sweden, the UK, and Ireland. Between 1973 and 2000, energy use per unit of GDP sank further in the United States (close to 50%) than in almost all of the OECD. Similarly, American energy consumption measured per person has dropped, if more moderately (7%) since 1980. In the European countries we are looking at, this is true only for Denmark, Sweden, and Germany. In all other Western European nations, per capita energy consumption has risen, sometimes strongly—over 75% in Spain, 55% in Ireland and Greece, 40% in Iceland, 20% in Austria, Belgium, Italy, and Finland.

As everyone knows, until China recently overtook it, the United States was the world’s largest emitter of carbon dioxide. But if measured in relation to production, American output is not wholly off the European scale, though it is slightly higher than its immediate competitors, Luxembourg and Finland. Measuring from 2003, the United States is middle of the pack in terms of how much more, or less, greenhouse gas has been emitted since 1990 (figure 155). Measured in terms of carbon dioxide output per unit of GDP (in PPP terms), the American figures have declined between 1990 and 2002 by 17%. That is a greater reduction of output per production than in nine Western European countries, and then there are two (Portugal and Spain) that have increased theirs. The same calculation done per capita shows a modest (1.5%) increase in American carbon dioxide output: a better performance than 12 of the nations we are examining. American carbon dioxide output per unit of energy used (in other words, the carbon intensity of energy) is below that of Norway, Ireland, Denmark, and Greece.

Rifkin claims that European culture’s connectedness to nature means it has committed more firmly than the United States to shifting from fossil fuel to renewable energy sources. Yet the facts speak otherwise. In its output of renewable energy, the United States is middle of the European spectrum on
153. Per Capita Oil Consumption
Barrels Consumed Daily per 1000 Population

154. Oil Consumption per Unit of GDP
Tonnes per 100,000 US$ PPP GDP

Total Greenhouse Gas Emissions, 1990 = 100

156. Solar Energy

Consumption as a % of Total Energy Consumption
157. Venture Capital Investment in Clean Technology Companies

Per Capita in US$

Greece
Iceland
Ireland
Italy
Luxembourg
Portugal
Spain
Finland
Germany
France
Austria
Switzerland
Belgium
United Kingdom
Norway
Sweden
Netherlands
Denmark
United States

158. Nuclear Waste

Tonnes per One Million Tonnes of Oil Equivalent of Total Primary Energy Supply

Netherlands
United States
Germany
Spain
Belgium
Finland
Switzerland
Sweden
United Kingdom
France
all counts, whether biogas, solid biomass energy, geothermal, or wind. Solar power as a percentage of total energy consumption, for example, is higher only in Portugal, Switzerland, Austria, and Greece (figure 156). The percentage of transport fuels from so-called biological sources (a misnomer, really, since oil in the usual sense is just very old biodiesel) used by Americans was topped only by Germans and Swedes. American investors have ventured proportionately more capital in clean technologies than their European peers (figure 157). Proportional to total energy supply, the country’s nuclear waste levels are moderate (figure 158).
Quantifying the attributes of civil society, in turn, is complicated and slippery, but let us try. Americans are often thought to be unusually anti-government in their political ideology, practically anarchists by European standards. They are supposed to believe in individual reliance, be less inclined than Europeans to have the state help the worst-off, and more likely to regard the poor as having failed.¹ Surveys of attitudes do not, however, uniformly bear out such polarities. Proportionately more Americans than anyone but the Spaniards claim to obey the law without exception.² A higher percentage of Americans trusts their government a great deal than many Europeans, other than the Spaniards, the Swiss and the Finns (figure 159). A Pew Foundation survey in 2007 found that proportionately fewer Americans worried that the government had too much control than did Germans and Italians, with the French at the same level and the British just a percentage point lower.³
percentage of Americans have a great deal of confidence in their civil service than any Europeans other than the Irish. Proportionately, almost five times as many Americans as Swedes say they trust their government bureaucracy (figure 160). But talk is cheap, and such findings may indicate desire as much as reality. The trust of Americans in their state apparatus can be measured more concretely by their willingness to pay taxes. Unlike many Europeans, Americans pay the taxes required of them. Only in Austria and Switzerland are the underground economies as small. In the Mediterranean, the rate of tax avoidance is much higher—over three times the American level in Greece and Italy (figure 161). The Montana survivalist—so beloved by the European media—holed up in his shack, provisioned for a siege, and determined to resist the government’s impositions, is as uncharacteristic of the average American as the Basque or Corsican separatist, ready to kill and maim for his localist aspirations, is of the average European.

The simple polarities voiced by observers like Will Hutton, which place American individualism in binary opposition to European solidarity, have recently begun to give way to more sophisticated analyses. The latest and most intriguing conceptual shift is proposed by Henrik Berggren and Lars Trägårdh. They argue not only that Swedes are more individualistic than Americans, but that the whole point of the Nordic welfare state is not so much to be solidaristic as it is to make citizens independent of each other—aging parents autonomous
160. A Great Deal of Confidence in the Civil Service
Percent of Respondents Who Claim to Have

161. Shadow Economy
Size as % of Official GNP (Cash Approach)
of their children, wives of their husbands, offspring of their parents. What the Swedes seek, in other words, is autonomy through the state.\textsuperscript{5}

Robert Putnam and other social scientists have lamented the decline of civic cooperation and a cohesive civil society that they see as once having defined America.\textsuperscript{6} Perhaps America has become more anomic in the age of TV and the Internet. But it still remains a society that, by European standards, is exceptionally based on trust, cooperation, and voluntary compliance with associational norms. Americans trust each other more than people in almost all European societies outside of Scandinavia (figure 162). They reject antisocial behavior more than all Europeans other than the Scandinavians, except the Danes, the Italians, the Austrians, and the Swiss.\textsuperscript{7} They belong to civic associations more often than all Europeans except the 300,000 Icelanders (figure 163). Only in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Ireland is there a higher percentage of the workforce that is active in civil society organizations, whether paid or volunteer. The Italian level is only slightly more than one-third the U.S. rate; the Austrian is half.\textsuperscript{8} It is sometimes pointed out that such civic participation in the United States is often linked to church membership. But even the most streamlined figures (stripping out church participation, union membership, which is often less than voluntary, and social movements) reveal that Americans are more eager joiners than anyone but the Dutch.\textsuperscript{9}

The view of America as a balkanized stew of multicultural tribes, each arguing their right to separate identities, also turns out to be an exaggeration. While the hopes of wholly superannuating racial dilemmas in U.S. politics that have been encouraged by Obama’s victory are unlikely all to be achieved, certainly the election of a mixed-race president with a background of different cultural experiences speaks of ambitions to transcend inherited polarizations. More mundanely, one attempt to quantify how far subcultural groups are given collective rights places the United States in the European middle ground, along with the UK, Germany, Denmark, and Norway. The United States is more willing to risk a fraying of the social fabric than those nations that aim to homogenize their foreigners, like France, Switzerland, Ireland, and Portugal. But it is less inclined to allow minorities to isolate and govern themselves than the Netherlands and Sweden, with their anything-goes policies.\textsuperscript{10}

America is distinguished by the philanthropy and volunteerism of its citizens. Measured as a fraction of GDP, charitable giving in the United States is greater than in any European country (figure 164). Americans give
162. Trust in Others
Percent of Respondents Who Believe “Most People Can Be Trusted”

163. Civic Organizations
Density of Membership
proportionately over twice as much as their nearest competitors, the British, over seven times as much as the Germans, and almost a dozen times more than the French. No doubt the tax code, with credits for charitable donations, is partly responsible for this happy outcome, though the differences can be easily overstated. Other tax systems—those of the UK and Germany, for example— allow similar credits without prompting similar levels of giving.

Tax codes are unlikely to be implicated in another aspect of altruistic civil society: volunteering. Americans do volunteer work in greater numbers than anyone but the Swedes (figure 165). They donate blood more frequently than any Europeans, though the French are a close second (figure 166). Blood donated privately and voluntarily is safer, as Europeans learned tragically when their unwillingness to donate blood made them dependent on imported and infected plasma products during the early years of the AIDS epidemic. In some accountings, Americans are not only more willing to donate organs than any Europeans other than the Swedes, their actual donation rates are topped only by the Spanish, Austrians, Portuguese, and Belgians. In others, they are more ready organ donors, both live and cadaveric, than any Europeans by far.

A smaller percentage of Americans turn up for parliamentary elections, or their equivalent, than any Europeans other than the Swiss (figure 167).
165. Volunteer Work
Percent of Adult Population Volunteering

166. Blood Donation
Percent of Respondents Who Have Ever Given Blood
better off and more educated Americans are, the more like Europeans their voting behavior is. The poor and ill-educated are least likely to exercise their electoral power. But Americans discuss politics much like anyone else (figure 168). Indeed, a higher fraction of them claims to be very interested in politics than anyone other than the Germans. More claim to be active members of a political party than any Europeans. Americans participate in other political activities more often than many Europeans. Proportionately more have recently contacted a politician or government official than anywhere other than Norway, Finland, and Ireland. They sign petitions and join boycotts more often than anyone but the Swedes. They demonstrate more often than do citizens of seven of the countries we are examining. Americans even occupy buildings or factories more often than any Europeans except the Italians, Dutch, Belgians, French, and Greeks. But then, over a quarter of Greeks say they have occupied buildings in protest. If true, that indicates a chaotic country; if false, a lively imagination.

Many Americans raise their children alone, more even than in the UK, where single parenthood is most prevalent in Europe (figure 169). By European standards, American families rarely eat together; only the Finns do so less frequently (figure 170).

But parents in the United States often talk with their offspring (figure 171). In only five European nations do families discuss things with each other
168. Frequent Discussion of Politics
Percent of Respondents Who Claim They Discuss Politics Frequently with Their Friends

169. Single Parent Households
As a Percent of All Households with Children
170. Eating with Parents

Percent of 15 Year-Olds Who Eat Main Meal with Parents Several Times per Week

- Finland
- United States
- United Kingdom
- Austria
- Greece
- Ireland
- Germany
- Spain
- Sweden
- Denmark
- Portugal
- Norway
- Belgium
- Switzerland
- Netherlands
- France
- Iceland
- Italy

171. Talking with Parents

Percent of 15 Year-Olds Whose Parents Spend Time “Just Talking with Them” Several Times per Week

- Germany
- Iceland
- Austria
- Switzerland
- Sweden
- Belgium
- Greece
- Spain
- United Kingdom
- Ireland
- France
- Norway
- United States
- Portugal
- Netherlands
- Denmark
- Finland
- Italy
more often. By other measures, too, families are strong in the United States. Americans consider their parents worthy of unconditional respect more often than any Europeans other than the Spanish and the Portuguese, and at the same level as the Italians. Many Americans keep their elderly parents at home, rather than bundling them off to an institution (figure 172). The Dutch and the Swedes, for example, are about 50% more likely to send their parents to an old-age home. The Spaniards and Italians do so much less. One would not want to read too much into such figures. It may well be that low use of retirement homes reflects their unaffordability and lack of subsidization by the state, rather than close family ties.

But American families do appear tightly knit. Siblings visit each other on a daily basis more often than anywhere in Europe outside family-oriented Italy and Spain. Adult children receive daily visits from their parents more often than in the UK, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and France, and much the same holds for children’s visits to parents. Friendship circles also seem well-developed. Fewer Americans report having no close friends at their workplace than anyone other than the Italians and the Finns. Proportionately more Americans have at least 10 friends than do the Germans, Austrians, Italians, Spanish, French, Swiss, and Finns. More Americans say they have at least 10 close friends living near them than do the Austrians, Italians, Spanish, French,
Danes, Swiss, and Finns. And more visit these friends on a daily basis than the citizens of most of these countries, too. Only in the Mediterranean, other than France, and in Ireland does a smaller percentage of people live alone than in the United States. Proportionately fewer Americans are socially isolated, with only rare contact to others, than in any European nation outside Ireland and the Netherlands. Americans do not go out to eat or spend the night away as often as the Mediterraneans or the British, but they do so more than the Scandinavians, the Dutch, and the Germans.
AMERICANS ARE PATRIOTIC AND NATIONALIST, but not more than some Europeans (figure 173). Unsurprisingly, Germans are least proud of their nation, and rather unexpectedly and cheerily, the Portuguese—not the Americans—are most proud, with the Irish tied for second place. A 2007 survey reveals that a larger proportion of Italians consider their culture superior than any other nationalities surveyed, including the Americans. Another survey finds that only the Irish feel more uniformly proud to be of their nation. Proportionately more Austrians, Irish, French, and Danes claim they feel very close to their nation than do Americans. Americans are more likely than any Europeans to think that their country is better than most others. But proportionately more Portuguese, Danes, and Spaniards feel that the world would be improved if other people were like them. And any U.S. tendency to boosterism is tempered by the finding that a larger fraction of Americans admits that
certain aspects of their country shame them than do the Germans, Austrians, Spanish, French, Danes, or Finns.²

No country more robustly projects its own nationalist aspirations in the products it sells abroad than the supposedly postnational Swedes. Swedish manufacturers, or at least their advertising agencies, seem convinced that the sheer fact of being Swedish is a selling point. Ikea’s walls are adorned with musings on the preternaturally close relationship between Swedes and nature that allegedly sets them apart from the rest of humanity, as are packets of Wasa crispbread. Asko’s slogan, “Made In Sweden,” is festooned prominently on its products. Though it does not necessarily inspire confidence that the company’s dishwashers are better than the competition, it certainly makes clear Asko’s national origins. Absolut Vodka’s tag—in uncharacteristically unidiomatic English—“Country of Sweden,” does much the same. Saab hawks its cars as “Born from Jets,” an unsubtle allusion to the company’s standing as a pillar of the Swedish military-industrial complex.

“There is a surfeit of national symbols throughout the land,” writes Josef Joffe, a sympathetic observer of America, “whereas no gas station in Europe would ever fly an oversized national flag.”³ That may be true for gas stations. Then again, Americans are not in the habit of painting their faces with the Stars and Stripes and drunkenly crossing the border northward, intent on beating up Canadian soccer fans. And consider the behavior of the supposedly
postnationalist Danes. Their flag, Dannebro, is said to have floated down from heaven as a sign from God during the battle of Tallinn in 1219, part of the Danish Christian crusades against the heathen Estonians. Because of this mystic nationalist attachment to their banner, Danes think nothing of festooning their Christmas trees with flags. In America, only fire-breathing reactionaries would share such decorative instincts. But the Danes find this so unobjectionable that the Danish Cultural Institute cheerily explains to Germans on its Web site that this is a traditional ritual, much beloved by the locals. Indeed, during the nineteenth century, as Danes and Germans fought over the provinces Schleswig and Holstein, the national colors, red and white, became characteristic generally of Danish Christmas decorations.\(^4\) Surveys reveal that the Finns (82%), Danes (83%), Norwegians (87%), and Swedes (85%) are all more willing to fight for their country than the Americans (71%).\(^5\) Perhaps the postnationalism of at least the Scandinavians has been exaggerated. Located uncomfortably between the Russians and the Germans, they appreciate the value of a good army.
Even on religion, there is reason to question the usual stereotypes of an absolute polarity between the United States and Europe. Let us leave aside the extent to which secularizing Europe is the outlier in a religious world, not the United States. There are religious contrasts, to be sure, between America and Europe, but they are neither as stark nor undifferentiated as is often thought. It is frequently said that Americans are more religious than Europeans. These things are hard to quantify, but there is certainly data pointing in that direction. In 1999, a smaller percentage of Americans (1.4%) described themselves as atheists than did Europeans—by a small margin, with the Irish and the Austrians almost indistinguishably close to the Americans (figure 174). But then again, no European country except France (with 14.2%) has more than 8% avowed atheists. The Americans are closer (less than one standard deviation below) to the European mean than are the French, who are more than three standard deviations above it.
A smaller percentage of Americans consider themselves religious than the Portuguese and Italians. Proportionately fewer Americans say they believe in God and always have than the Irish and Portuguese, and only a few more than the Italians. A higher percentage of Americans firmly believes in God than northern Europeans, but the numbers are broadly comparable with the Catholic countries (figure 175). If the qualifier “firm” is removed, the American figures become much the same as the Mediterranean nations and, of course, Ireland (figure 176). Again, the United States is closer to the European mean (1.6 standard deviations above) than is the nonbelieving extreme, Sweden, at 1.9 standard deviations below it. Percentage-wise, more Americans (16.4%) attend church more than once a week than in any European nation (Ireland: 13.3%). But fewer Americans, by far, attend church on a weekly basis than the Irish, and the Portuguese and Italians attend at the same rate. The American figure for weekly church attendance is only about as far above the European mean (1.2 standard deviations) as the Danish result (1.07 standard deviations) is below it (figure 177). Over a quarter of Americans report never attending church, the same as the Finns, compared to only 12% of Italians.

Proportionately more Americans than Europeans believe in a life after death. But, excepting only Denmark, at least half the population of Western Europe believes in a life after death, and in some countries (Italy, Ireland, Portugal, Switzerland) it is well over two-thirds. Proportionately more Americans than
175. Firm Belief in God
Percent of Respondents Who Have No Doubts That God Exists

176. Belief in God
Percent of Respondents Who Claim to Believe in God
any Europeans pray several times a day, but fewer Americans than Portuguese do so daily, and fewer Americans do so weekly than the British, the Italians, the Irish, the Spanish, the Portuguese, and the Swiss. The percentage of Americans who never pray is over twice that of Ireland. More Italians than Americans sampled by the World Values Survey in 2005–2006 thought that the church provided answers to moral problems and more Italians and Finns that it did so for spiritual needs too. More Italians than Americans considered themselves religious.

If we move from what people tell pollsters to what they do, the stark contrasts between American and European religiosity fade further. The number of Christian congregations per capita in the United States is within the European norm, with significantly lower numbers than in Greece and only somewhat higher than in the UK (figure 178). According to the World Values Survey, fewer Americans are members of religious denominations than is the case among the Swedes, Dutch. Luxembourgois, French, and Belgians (figure 179). American Catholics and their European coreligionists attend church in largely equal measure (figure 180). The Spanish and the Irish are there more often. American churches are not unusually well financed, whether per member or per capita, though only the latter is graphed here (figure 181). The churches of six European nations are better off.

Recent analyses claim that churches are more active in the United States than Europe for market-driven reasons: greater competition has led to a richer
178. Christian Congregations
Per Million Population

179. Membership in Religious Denominations
Percent of Respondents Who Claim to Belong to One
180. Catholic Church Attendance
Percent of Catholics over 35 Who Attend Church at Least Once a Month

France
Austria
Italy
Belgium
United Kingdom
Germany (West)
Netherlands
United States
Spain
Ireland

181. Church Income
Per Capita, US$

Greece
Portugal
United Kingdom
Spain
Ireland
Italy
Netherlands
Sweden
France
Finland
United States
Germany
Belgium
Austria
Denmark
Switzerland
Luxembourg
variety and higher quality of offerings, while Europe’s state-monopoly religions have ceased providing for their citizens’ spiritual needs. Put succinctly, European churches suffer from much the same problems as restaurants did in the East Bloc. Indeed, there may be a parallel between spiritual and culinary satiation, perhaps even between religiosity and adiposity. It has often been demonstrated that if a large variety of foods is available, more is eaten. Is something similar true of religions? If Talleyrand could quip in the late eighteenth century that America had thirty-two religions and only one sauce, today the buffet table groans under bountiful offerings of both foods and religions. Americans display a distinct preference for more choice in food than do Europeans, other than the British. Something analogous seems to hold true for religions.

If the issue is thus one of supply and not demand, the implication is that while spiritual longings do not differ much across the Atlantic, their satisfaction does. The only European nations where fewer people claim to think often about the meaning of life than in America are Sweden, Germany, and Spain. The others are pondering the big questions more. The contrast, in other words, is not so much between religious and secular mindsets, but between how—if at all—largely equivalent spiritual needs are fulfilled. It follows that, while spiritual requirements are satisfied by religious organizations in the United States, they may find other expression in Europe. The World Values Survey asks some questions of interest here. For example, except for the Danes and the Dutch, more Europeans say they believe in God than describe themselves as religious (as do the Americans, too). This suggests a gulf between inner belief and external behavior. Moreover, adding together those who believe either in a personal God or in some sort of spirit or life force gives us totals that are higher in some of the most secular nations than the respondents who said merely that they believed in God. This holds for Iceland, Finland, the Netherlands, and Sweden, but only moderately in Germany and not at all in France and Denmark. In more conventionally religious European countries, this gap does not exist. In other words, in the most secular nations there seems to be belief in some higher power that is not captured by a simple question on a survey about faith in God.

Americans do differ religiously from Europeans on several important points. A far higher proportion of them believe in both heaven and hell. That adds grist to the usual mill. But consider the equally telling issue of the balance between the two—believers in heaven and believers in hell. In theory, one might imagine that the two march in lockstep and that you cannot very
consistently believe in one without the other. But that would be to underes-
timate the human spirit’s ability to accommodate itself comfortably in the
world. The first conclusion to draw from a survey of attitudes toward heaven
and hell is that modern humans are incurably optimistic. They may not put as
much faith in an afterlife as their ancestors. But to the extent that they believe
in a life after death, they are more likely to expect it to be heaven than hell.

More pertinent, however, is the relationship between those who believe in
heaven and those who believe in hell and what this tells us about modern secu-
larism. In the United States, the proportion between the two groups is most
equal: five believers in heaven for each four believers in hell. The Italian ratio
is about the same. Then follows a middle cluster of nations where the ratio
between the two groups lies somewhere around 5:3: Germany, the UK, Spain,
and France. Finally, the most secular countries are also those with the highest
ratio of believers in heaven to believers in hell, with proportions around 2:1
in Denmark and Finland and almost 3:1 in Sweden and the Netherlands. The
implication—as best it can be teased from the prosaic stuff of statistics—is
that in the more secular nations, fewer, of course, are concerned with heaven
and hell in the first place. But among those who do ponder such matters, the
more secular the nation, the higher the relative emphasis on heaven over hell.
Secularization may have dulled the fear of hell, but it has not entirely banished
the hope of heaven.

None of this will stop people believing that there is a religious distinction
across the Atlantic. Nor should it. But, as with so many aspects of the transat-
lantic gulf, this particular divide has been overstated. European observers who
remark on the religiosity of Americans are often blind to the commonplace
expressions of Christian sentiment in their own cultures. Indeed, the American
observer of Europe is often puzzled at claims to secularism in the Old World,
since displays of religion here are so frequent, so palpable, and so public, and
yet—apparently—so taken for granted as to pass unnoticed. A tenth-century
depiction of Christ’s crucifixion is part of every Danish passport, regardless of
whether its bearer is, as many nowadays are, a pious Muslim.13 Crucifixes hang
on the walls of Bavarian schools, greetings such as “Grüss Gott,” or “God bless,”
are commonplace, Anglican morning prayers are held in English schools, and
the flags of Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Finland, Britain, and Greece
all depict that central symbol of Christianity, the cross.

“Religion is palpable in U.S. schools, places of work, and public institu-
tions,” writes the Left-liberal English daily the Guardian. “God is invoked by
soldiers and politicians in a way that would seem inappropriate in Britain.”14
Really? Elizabeth II’s title is Defender of the Faith. The Anglican church’s 24 most senior bishops, known as the Lords Spiritual, sit in the House of Lords. In 2006, they helped block laws that would have legalized euthanasia. And they have long influenced film censorship, abortion laws, rules for marriage, pornography licenses, and so forth. It is unimaginable that in Europe a president would begin his daily business with a prayer, claims Jürgen Habermas, the German philosopher. Yet that is precisely what is done in the British Parliament. Jeremy Rifkin considers the fact that some 70% of Americans are said to favor school prayer evidence of their deep religiosity. What, then, is it a sign of that pupils in British state schools are required by law to participate in a daily act of Christian worship? Or that dinner at Oxford and Cambridge colleges starts with a Christian prayer as invariably as, for high table, it ends with port?

In Italy, the Catholic Church regularly meddles in politics, most recently gutting a law on fertility treatments and undermining hopes of extending legal rights to unwed couples, including gays. The Vatican officially advises drivers to pray while behind the wheel. In other countries, they are not even allowed to talk on their mobile phones. The Danish parliament is opened each year with a Christian service. In Holland, politicians from all parties make a point of giving their keynote speeches from church pulpits. Article 139 of the German constitution enshrines Sunday as a day of rest and spiritual recuperation. Both Catholic and Protestant churches in Germany can and have had professors of theology whose opinions differed from official dogma (Hans Küng, Uta Ranke-Heinemann, Gerd Lüdemann, among others) removed from their positions at state universities. Out of the 18 European countries we are looking at, fully 10 have parties represented in parliament with the word “Christian” in their name. The Christian Democrats are by far the largest grouping in the European parliament. For all of these parties, Christian faith helps shape their ideology and programs.

Even though he is now dead, one recent European head of state, John Paul II, is still considered able to cure the ill: a French nun of Parkinson’s disease, a young man of lung cancer. The Isle of Lewis (Outer Hebrides) enforces Sabbatarian legislation so strictly that the golf club and sports center are closed on Sundays, and playgrounds bear signs discouraging children from using them on the day of rest. And let us not forget that Europe is a continent where people were, until a few years ago, still being killed in religious strife between Protestant and Catholic, Muslim and Orthodox. Serious debaters, a large body of public opinion, and several European countries
recently sought to have the EU constitution define Europe as a Christian culture. From their pulpits, Scandinavian pastors hint darkly that the 12 stars of the EU flag are a symbol of covert Marian idolatry foisted on the Protestant north by Brussels. In Greece, Orthodox religious instruction is mandatory in state schools, with exemption possible only for the non-Orthodox, and proselytizing by non-Orthodox religions is forbidden. Battles are currently being fought in Europe between Christians and Muslims over the permissibility of building mosques.

The alleged theological divide across the Atlantic is only partly a contrast between secularism and religiosity. As much, it is one between Catholicism and high-church Protestantism on the European side, and low-church reformed Christianity on the American. What often strikes Europeans as distinctive in America is not the belief in something transcendent as such, but its personal, populist, and emotional expression. It is rarely American Catholics who occupy Europeans’ attention, since they are familiar from at home. Rather, it is the evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants.

Take, by way of contrast, one theological dispute where the pie has been sliced differently: the Anglican Church and its internal disaccord over the ordination of gay bishops. American Episcopalians are as high-church as they come in America. Episcopalianism is religion as Europeans understand it: the province of tolerance, women, gays, minorities—a religion, in other words, striving to make no claims on its adherents that would interfere with their secular lifestyles or embarrass them with the messy emotionality of low-church enthusiasm. Meanwhile, desperate to prevent a schism, the Archbishop of Canterbury, whose quotidian theological worries concern dilemmas like carbon footprints, recycling, and multicultural sensitivity, has vacillated, pandering to the African and Asian congregations—for whom homosexuality is a sin, hell and damnation mundane realities, and brimstone the elixir of their sermons. The religious tail is wagging the dog of genteel Anglican religiosity in secular England, while in bible-thumping America, lifestyle issues have trumped any serious discussion of actual theology in the Episcopal Church, not to mention good and evil.

If Americans are, on the whole, more religious than most Europeans, it does not follow that they have less overall faith in science. The choice between rationality and religion does not seem to be zero-sum. The worldwide evidence suggests that societies with a strong faith in science also have strong religious beliefs, and the transatlantic evidence confirms that. It is true that proportionately fewer Americans firmly agree with the Darwinian theory of
evolution. But, in other respects, Americans believe in the Enlightenment project of human reason’s ability to understand and master nature. They fall in the European middle ground in approving animal testing to save human lives. They understand better than all Europeans (other than the Norwegians) the falsity of the proposition that all manmade chemicals cause cancer if you ingest enough of them, and better than anyone (other than the Norwegians and Swiss) that it is not true that anyone exposed to any degree of radioactivity will certainly die. They are more sanguine about the supposed dangers of genetically modified crops than any Europeans other than the Scandinavians (excluding Sweden).

Proportionately fewer Americans agree with the proposition that science does more harm than good than any Europeans but the Dutch, Norwegians, Swedes, and French (figure 182). More American pupils agree with the statement that science helps them understand the world than students in any European nation other than Italy and Portugal. Confronted with the proposition that humanity depends too much on science and not enough on faith, the percentage of Americans who rejected it entirely in 2006 fell into the European middle ground, while more Italians than Americans embraced it wholeheartedly. Relatively fewer Americans believe in astrology than in three major European countries for which figures are available: France, Germany, and the UK (figure 183). And fewer use homeopathic medicine (figure 184).
183. Belief in Astrology
Percent of People Who Take Astrology Seriously

United States
France
Germany
United Kingdom

184. Homeopathy
Percent of Population Reporting Use of Homeopathy

United States
Sweden
United Kingdom
Denmark
Netherlands
France
Although these questions were not asked of Americans by the International Social Survey Program, it is perhaps worth noting that close to half of Germans and Portuguese, and over a third of the Swiss and Austrians, believe that good luck charms do, in fact, bring good luck. Oddly enough, only a quarter of the Irish agree. About a third of Germans, Austrians, and Irish, and even more French and Swiss, believe that fortune-tellers can foresee the future. Over 40% of the Germans, Austrians, and Swiss (and almost that many French), as well as three quarters of the Irish, believe that faith healers have God-given powers. Over 40% of Germans, Swiss, and the French believe an individual’s horoscope at birth affects his life. Finally, as a last fact to muddy the clarity of the alleged religious divide across the Atlantic: a higher proportion of the Portuguese believe in religious miracles than Americans (79%), followed closely by the Irish (71%), and at a slight remove by the Austrians (65%), Germans (62%), and Swiss (60%).\textsuperscript{30}
Let us move, now, from the otherworldly to the extraterritorial. Until recently, the assimilation of foreigners would not have been considered part of a comparison between Europe and America. America was a land of immigration; Europe was not. That is no longer the case. Overall levels of the foreign-born remain higher in the United States than in all European countries other than Switzerland and Luxembourg (figure 185). The difference is diminishing, however, as increasing numbers of foreigners make Europe their home. But the politics of counting foreigners is curious in Europe. In nations with virulent and powerful anti-foreigner political parties (Denmark, Austria, Norway, the Netherlands, France, and Switzerland) civil servants might wish to downplay the presence of those who could be regarded as an alien element. Bureaucracies in other countries might prefer to upscale the number of foreigners, perhaps to burnish their own multicultural qualifications.
Consider the differences between two sets of OECD accounts of foreigners, from 2005 and 2007. The figures in these reports come respectively from 2003 and 2005, though numbers for a decade earlier, i.e., 1993 and 1995, are given as comparisons. As might be expected, in all European countries the number of foreigners increased between 2003 and 2005. But in some nations, the reported number of foreigners grew so startlingly over a two-year period that it must be due to a rejiggering of the figures rather than to any actual inflow. In many cases, too, the numbers for 1995 given in the later publication are higher than those given for 2003 in the earlier one. For example, the Austrian figures for the foreign part of the population in 1995 presented in 2007 are 11.2%, while those for 2003 presented in 2005 are only 9.4%. Similar discrepancies hold for Belgium, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, and several other nations. The mystery only deepens if we look at what precisely the OECD claims to measure. In 2005, it was Europe’s “foreign population.” Of the nations we are looking at, only the numbers from the United States are for “foreign-born.” In 2007, however, also the European figures are for “foreign-born,” except those for Greece, Italy, and Spain, which are for “foreign.” “Foreign-born” is, of course, a narrower and more precise category than “foreign.” Excepting only lapses of record keeping, “foreign-born” can be determined by standard-issue statistics. Who counts as “foreign,” however, is a more nebulous affair. Karl Lueger, the anti-Semitic mayor of Vienna in the late 1890s, once answered
the question, “Who is Jewish,” by saying, *das bestimme ich*—that is something I decide. Something similar holds true here.

Are second- and third-generation immigrants, with or without citizenship, considered foreigners? Though the later numbers use a more precise categorization (“foreign-born”), they tend to be larger, even for the same period, than the earlier, more nebulous, and presumably more encompassing category (“foreign”). That suggests that the inflation of the numbers has been particularly dramatic, though it does not identify the source of the confusion.

One of the most distinctive cases of reevaluated numbers comes from Sweden, a country with a liberal civil service and no significant populist anti-immigrant party. Let us examine its figures more closely. In 2005, the Swedes claim to have had a “foreign” population of 5.8% in 1993, which then dropped to 5.1% a decade later, in 2003. Two years later, in 2007, however, the Swedes say they had a “foreign-born” population in 2005 of 12.4%. These figures would imply that, ignoring other demographic events (births, deaths, emigration, and the like), during the years 2003 and 2004 an implausible number of some 650,000 foreigners—the equivalent of over 7% of Sweden’s total 2005 population—immigrated to the country. To add to the confusion, the OECD claims that in 1995, foreigners made up 10.5% of the population—that is, almost twice the figure the Swedes had earlier, in 2003, themselves indicated for 1993.

If we instead examine the numbers used in a 2005 Swedish government report on the incidence of crime among foreigners, matters look different. A well-meaning account, this report reveals, but does not play up or exaggerate, the disproportional extent to which foreigners commit crimes in Sweden. The figures presented are for those residents registered in 1996 with the authorities (as are all people on Swedish soil) who were born abroad. According to the report, of such foreigners, there were precisely 574,781, which, out of a population that year of 8,900,954, makes for 6.46%. Of these, in turn, over a quarter were Scandinavian, predominantly Finns, which is to say people about as culturally different from ethnic Swedes as the Welsh are from the English. If we count only non-Europeans but include the Turks, whom the report’s authors have gallantly counted as Europeans, we get a percentage of salient, noticeable foreigners of 2.58%. This is nothing to sneeze at, of course, but nor is it the multicultural paradise that the well-meaning Swedish civil service might like to imagine.

The Swedes do not seem able to count their own foreigners. The French specifically refuse to do so, believing such knowledge to be discriminatory.
Remembering the old adage that what is not measured is not managed, should one worry that Europe is not facing up to the potentially weightiest issue of domestic politics? How successfully are such newcomers being integrated? On this huge topic, there is little reliable comparative data. It would be fascinating to have numbers giving us crucial insight into Europe's immigrant communities: poverty rates, home ownership, outmarriage, educational achievement, and the like. But such numbers are hard to come by.

We know that American attitudes to foreigners are generally more welcoming than in Europe. The percentage of Americans who believe that unless people share a country's customs and traditions, they cannot become fully part of it, is less than a third of equivalent figures in Austria, France, and Denmark (all nations with strong anti-foreigner parties), and half of what it is in Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and Finland. On the other hand, all nations under the glass here broadly agree that immigrants improve a country by bringing in new ideas and cultures, with the United States in the European middle ground and low figures coming from the UK, France, and Norway.³ America's foreigners appear to be a better-behaved lot, or at least they get into less trouble with the law than their peers in Europe. There are proportionately less than half as many foreigners in America's prisons as in the population as a whole. In contrast, in Sweden, Norway, and Germany, foreigners are over twice as likely to be in prison as the natives. In Switzerland and Denmark, the ratio is almost three times, and in Greece, no less than eight times.⁴ True, many European nations grant citizenship only slowly and grudgingly, or else jailed foreigners might be natives behind bars. But even taking this into account, the contrast is striking.

In the absence of anything better, two comparative figures provide some tentative conclusions on how immigrants assimilate. The gap between the educational achievements of the children of immigrants and those of native-born parents has been measured. In math, this disparity for U.S. students is narrower than anywhere in Europe, and less than a quarter of the gap found in Germany and Belgium (figure 186). For reading, the results are similar, though in this case the Swedes have assimilated foreign pupils better than the Americans (figure 187). But on the whole, being the child of an immigrant, a second-generation citizen, means more of an educational handicap in almost all European nations than it does in the United States. The second measure quantifies the gap between unemployment rates among the native-born and foreign populations. Immigrant men in the United States actually do better than natives (figure 188). This is also true for Italy; and in Greece, being
186. Gap in Math Scores between Native-Born and Immigrants
Point Differences between Native-Born and Second-Generation Immigrant Children, PISA 2003

187. Gap in Reading Scores between Native-Born and Immigrants
Point Differences between Native-Born and Second-Generation Immigrant Children, PISA 2003
foreign is immaterial. But elsewhere in Europe, foreigners are far more likely to be unemployed than locals. In Finland in 2004, for example, while 10% of the indigenous male workforce was out of work, the unemployment rate among foreigners was over twice as high.

Perhaps such results are connected to immigration policies and the kind of immigrant who is admitted. If European nations allowed in only bona fide asylum seekers, while America welcomed the educated elite of the third world, then we could understand why the latter integrated easily and the former did not. But that is far from the case. The majority of immigrants to both America and Europe come in under the guise of family reunification. Only 13% of immigrants entering the United States in 2000 were admitted for economic or employment reasons. The UK alone grants admission to highly skilled foreigners in greater absolute—and therefore, of course, relative—numbers than does the United States. The average immigrant to the United States is more likely to be a peasant from Guatemala than a software engineer from Bangalore. Moreover, in the absence of an economically based immigration policy in many European countries, asylum seekers here are in some measure a self-selected group. They are often economic immigrants who have to convince the authorities at the borders that they deserve asylum status. And it stands to reason that those who have managed to pay for and undertake the arduous and expensive trek to the Schengen borders are not always among
the worst-off at home. To take one measure of this, immigrants to the United States are somewhat less likely than the native-born to have gone to university. In all European countries other than Belgium, Germany, and Finland, the reverse is the case: the new arrivals are better educated than the natives. In Austria, for example, only Yugoslav and Turkish male immigrants are less likely to have university degrees than the natives. All other male foreigners, whether from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, or from elsewhere in the developed world, are over two and three times as likely to have been to university as native Austrians.
It is often said that America is an economically more unequal society than Europe, with greater stratification between rich and poor. On average, the United States is a wealthier society than most European countries. The median American income—that earned by the recipient at the center of the income distribution—is higher than equivalent figures for all European nations other than Luxembourg (figure 189). Americans also earn higher per capita incomes, adjusted for purchasing power variations, than any Europeans other than the Norwegians. That is, of course, easily compatible with widespread poverty and inequality. If incomes are distributed unequally, a high average could hide disproportionate wealth at the top and bitter poverty at the bottom. Americans do appear to tolerate a higher degree of inequality than Europeans. True, proportionately fewer Americans believe that income differences are necessary as an incentive than do Germans, Spaniards, or the
Portuguese. Fewer Americans consider it fair that the rich buy better health care and education than do the British. But a smaller proportion of Americans than any Europeans rejects existing income differences as too large. And Americans do not agree, as many Europeans do, that the government should act to narrow income inequality.2

On a number of measures, high inequality does, in fact, appear to hold true for the United States—though rarely as starkly as is often presumed. For one thing, more billionaires per capita live in America than in any European country except Switzerland, with over twice that rate (figure 190). The American market is not inherently bloodier than the European. By itself, it does not produce more inequality than across the Atlantic. Pretax income inequalities in the United States lie within the European range.3 But after taxes and transfers, American inequalities appear starker. One measure of this defines poverty as 60% of the national median income. By this standard, the United States has a larger percentage of poor citizens than any European country, though the figures are broadly comparable to those of the UK, Ireland, Spain, and Greece (figure 191).

If we look at the opposite end of the spectrum—among the wealthy, where the data are often better—things look much the same. Income concentration among the most prosperous has followed a similar development across western nations until the end of the twentieth century. In the early 1900s, the richest
190. Resident Billionaires
Per Million Population

191. Overall Poverty
Percent of Total Population Under 60% of Median Income
were very wealthy indeed. John Rockefeller counted for a larger proportion of America’s total net worth in 1918 than the three richest Americans (Bill Gates, Lawrence Ellison, and Paul Allen) did in 2000. Incomes, too, were disproportionately distributed. In 1928, the richest 1% of Americans received almost 20% of total income, and the richest one-tenth of a percent took home 8.2%. In the UK during the same year, the figure for the latter group was slightly higher (8.5%). It had come down from over 11% in 1913, whereas 1928 was the high point for wealthy Americans. The Great Depression and, above all, the Second World War, however, destroyed many great fortunes, drastically lowering the richest’s share of total income and shifting the composition of their income from capital and dividends to wages. By the latter decades of the century in the English-speaking nations, it was no longer coupon clippers but well-paid managers who were the wealthiest, and they commanded a far smaller fraction of total income than their peers had earlier.

That was the situation until the 1980s. At that point, the West divided. The wealthiest citizens of the continental nations, among whom capital income continues to play a much larger role, stabilized their share at the comparatively low levels achieved during the 1970s. In the English-speaking world as well as in Sweden, concentration at the top once again began growing. By 1998, the wealthiest Americans took home over 14% of total income—still below their heyday 70 years earlier, but almost double their share in 1973. In the UK, the equivalent figure was much the same, some 12.6% in 1998, up from less than half that in 1978.

Sweden, in turn, hovers between the Anglo-Saxon and continental extremes. If we look only at wage income, Sweden fits the continental model. If we add in realized capital gains, however, the story is another one. Capital gains figure more prominently in the income of the richest Swedes than for their peers elsewhere, in tandem with the twentyfold rise in prices on the Stockholm Stock Exchange between 1980 and 2007 (compared with five or six times in New York, London, or Paris). The progressivity of income taxes has also declined in Sweden, as in the English-speaking world. Factoring this in, high-end incomes in Sweden began increasing again, as in the Anglo-American nations, in the late 1990s. The concentration of income remains less than in the United States or the UK. Including capital gains, the top Swedish percentile received over 10% of total income in 1999, compared to just over 16% for their American peers in 1998. Starting from a more egalitarian base, the tendency has been upward in Sweden, while among the larger continental nations, incomes of the wealthiest have remained flat.
Incomes are one thing, total wealth another. The two are related, but not in a straightforward manner. Depending on whether they spend, save, or give away their money, those with high incomes, may—or may not—become rich. Wealth has different and arguably more socially significant effects than income. It can be inherited, helping create a class of the rich in a way that cannot necessarily be sustained by one cohort’s windfall. The evidence for disparities of income suggests that the United States is at the high end of the European scale. But for inequalities of wealth, the results are less clear-cut. Wealth is generally more concentrated than income, because it can be saved up over a lifetime and—barring death duties and Napoleonic inheritance codes—transmitted to one heir. The share of total wealth owned by the very richest in America has come down substantially over the course of the twentieth century and, in distinction to incomes, has not risen again. For those in the top percentile, it peaked at just over 40% in 1930. It came down to a bit under 21% in 2000. For the top hundredth of a percent, the equivalent figures are 11% in 1919 and 3.9% in 2000.8

The difficulties come when trying to make international comparisons. Some European nations have lower wealth concentrations than the United States. In 1994, for example, those in the top percentile in France owned 21%, and the top tenth of that percentile owned 6% of total wealth. The comparable figures for the United States were 22% and 9%. The Spanish figures are even lower (16% and 5% for 1994).9 Other nations, in contrast, have significantly higher concentrations of wealth. In Switzerland, net worth is concentrated at the top without compare. In 1997, the top 1% of the Swiss owned 35% of all wealth, some 14 percentage points higher than their American peers that year (21%). Only during the Roaring Twenties had the wealthiest Americans captured as large a share of the cake as their Swiss counterparts enjoy today.10 These figures cover only those who actually reside in Switzerland. They ignore the vast fortunes parked in that country by wealthy Europeans who live elsewhere.11 If that much is clear, other comparisons are murkier. In one recent accounting, the share of total wealth owned by the top 10% of Americans is high. But it is lower than in Switzerland as well as Denmark, and it is followed at no great remove by France and Sweden (Figure 192). A compilation of historical wealth distribution data by the UN University’s World Institute for Development Economics Research puts the share of wealth held by the top 1% of Americans in 2000 as lower than the equivalent figures for the UK and Norway, and only slightly greater than Sweden.12

Let us take a closer look at Sweden, since that nation so often plays the foil to inegalitarian America. Wealth concentration at the pinnacle in Sweden,
measured by standard data, already puts that nation on par with American conditions. The top percentile of Swedes was worth 21.9% of total wealth in 2000 (United States: 20.8%) and those in the top one-hundredth of the top percentile had amassed for themselves as much as their American peers, namely 3.9%.

However, these numbers may be an underestimate. First, wealthy Swedish entrepreneurs have over the years taken themselves and their fortunes abroad and thus exited the Swedish tax net. Second, in hope of stemming tax hemorrhaging, the Swedish authorities began giving owners of closely held family firms (who might otherwise have gone into tax exile) significant fiscal exemptions to keep them residents of Sweden.

Here is a back-of-the-envelope calculation of the effects: the richest Swede (Ingvar Kamprad of IKEA, who lives abroad) has a fortune that, expressed as a fraction of Swedish GDP, is 20 times the equivalent fraction of the U.S. GDP enjoyed by Bill Gates. That, of course, is an artifact of being a rich man in a small country. But if we instead take the sum total of all Swedish billionaires, they have a net worth (85 billion dollars) that is twice as large a fraction of their nation’s GDP (18.6%) as that enjoyed by their American peers (9.7%), who are worth 1.35 trillion dollars. Given that these figures do not include the Wallenberg family, whose assets—held in tax-exempt trusts—own controlling stakes in companies that account for 40% of the Swedish stock exchange, they still understate the wealth concentration at the pinnacle of Swedish society.
What do such figures testify to? Where billionaires live is in large measure determined by the tax system. Wealthy Americans have no fiscal incentive to move abroad, since their tax authorities consider them fair game regardless of where they live. Only 2% of the American billionaires listed by Forbes live outside the United States. Conversely, one-third of Swedish billionaires have gone into exile. Indeed, if we calculate the fraction of Swedish GDP owned by Swedish billionaires who live in Sweden, it is comparable to the relatively egalitarian American figure, namely 7%. One-third of Sweden’s richest families, who own two-thirds of its largest fortunes, live abroad. In this manner, the Swedish tax authorities have arguably made their country more egalitarian. Not richer, of course, since the wealth has been exported, not redistributed, but more equal. In the European taxome, tax exiles disappear from national accounts into the Swiss, Liechtensteinian, or Caymanian fiscal havens. The percentage of wealth held offshore by wealthy Europeans is over two and a half times higher than by their American peers. By going off the books, Europe’s tax exiles lower wealth disparities for all European nations. They do not just shift fortunes from one country to another.

Given this, and returning to our Swedish example, if we add in the wealth moved from Sweden and factor in the tax breaks for closely held family firms granted by the Swedish tax authorities, the net worth of the richest percentile of Swedes increases by 50%. A similar calculation for the top percentile of Americans ups its net worth a mere 3% (figures for 2004). This brings the overall share of wealth held by those in the top Swedish percentile to 42% for 2000. That is twice as intense a concentration of wealth as is found in America for the same year.

Having looked at the bottom and then the top of the income scales, we come to the relationship between the two, or the measure of inequality. The latest wave of figures from the Luxembourg Income Study, from between 1999 and 2004, marks out the United States as the most unequal of our countries, in this case as measured by Gini coefficients, a standard gauge of inequality (figure 193). As we have seen, inequalities have sharpened in the English-speaking world in recent years. It was not always so. Other comparisons based on aggregate data over several decades, from the 1970s through the mid-1990s, moderate this outlier status. One comparison—of the ratio of the richest quintile’s income to the poorest fifth of the population’s share—puts the United States within the European spectrum, lower than Ireland, and above Norway and Portugal. Another, measuring average Gini coefficients, ranks the United States as more equal than France, Ireland, and Portugal (figure 194). A revised data set reveals
193. Income Inequality
Most Recent Gini Coefficients

194. Income Inequality
Average Gini Coefficients, 1970s-1990s
that those nations with higher Gini coefficients than the United States include all the Mediterranean countries other than France, as well as Ireland. An even more recent measure of Gini coefficients for household net worth, using data from the new Luxembourg Wealth Study, ranks Sweden as less equal than the United States—in large measure because one-third of Swedes have a negative net worth and owe more than they own. Germany, in this accounting, is only slightly more egalitarian than the United States (figure 195).

Income and wealth disparities are certainly high in the United States compared with Europe, and have become more so in recent years, though the current crisis promises to temper that. Inequality and poverty are not, however, the same thing. Does a broad distribution of income mean that many Americans are poor? Since the United States has a median income ($24,119 PPP in 2000) that is over 40% higher than Europe’s ($16,735 for the original six nations of the EU), and since incomes are more widely dispersed than in Europe, it is likely that proportionately more Americans fall below a relative definition of poverty—60% of median incomes, for example. But since the median is high in the first place, that does not necessarily mean that all those who do are destitute. If we compare the numbers of those who are actually, and not just relatively, poor on both sides of the Atlantic, results differ.
The definition of poverty used by most European governments is relative: half, or sometimes 60%, of median income is a common one. If the dispersion of incomes is compressed, as it tends to be in many European nations, the number of those falling below a relative standard of poverty will be lower. But that does not necessarily mean that they are well-off, except in relation to those above them in the hierarchy of incomes. If we take as an absolute poverty line the cash sum equivalent to half of median income for the original six nations of the EU (EU-6), Western Europe turns out to have a higher percentage of poor citizens than the United States. In the accounting graphed here, which is calculated using figures from 1993, about 10% of the U.S. population is poor, while in the countries of the original six members of the EU, the figure is about 12%. For the EU-15, the group of countries that comprise the bulk of Western Europe, almost 20% of the population falls under this absolute poverty level (figure 196). Similar results are found when we break out the numbers for each Western European nation, using more current data. Taking as an absolute poverty level a cash equivalent set at 60% of the median income of the EU-6 in 2000, not only do the Mediterranean countries have a higher percentage of poor citizens than the United States, but so do the UK and Ireland, as well as France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland, and Sweden (figure 197).

The other way around, things look much the same. In the United States, an absolute poverty measure is used, a certain amount of money per head. For various technical reasons, it is hard to compare these American and European figures. The European figures are recorded as disposable income (income plus transfers minus taxes), while the American figures are pretax and posttransfer income. If we take instead as a reasonable proxy of the absolute poverty level in the United States the equivalent sum we used above for Europe, but now from America, the results are comparable across the Atlantic. If poverty means to live on less than the cash equivalent of 60% of the median American income (for 2000), then the only countries that have proportionately fewer poor people than the United States are two Nordic nations (Norway and Denmark) and the wealthiest European countries, Luxembourg and Switzerland (figure 198).

It seems likely that if we could find comparable European figures for the official absolute poverty limits in America, the results would be analogous. When UNICEF measured child poverty, the results were similar. Using a relative definition of poverty, proportionately more American children were poor than European: 22%, compared to 21% in Italy and 20% in the UK, the
196. Low Income Population
Percent of Population that Is below 50% of EU-6 Median Income

197. Absolute Poverty, European Scale
Percent of Population Below 60% of EU-6 Median Income, 2000
nearest comparisons. But applying the U.S. definition of poverty across the Atlantic revealed a higher percentage of poor children in Spain, Italy, the UK, and Ireland than in America. Germany and the Netherlands performed only slightly better.\textsuperscript{18} In summary, whether you use an American or a European yardstick, the percentage of poor Americans (measured by an absolute level of poverty, and not just in relation to others within the same country) is within the European spectrum.

Needless to say, these figures are calculated in terms of purchasing power parity, which means that they account for cost-of-living differences, at least between the United States and the nations of Western Europe. They may not, however, account for them among the U.S. states. Even a look at the bleakest calculations of incomes, crunched on numbers from the mid-1990s, broadly corresponds with the point we are making here. The poorest 10% in America had higher incomes than the lowest decile in the UK, and almost the same as those in Sweden and Finland. Even poor American children, who fare perhaps worst of all social groups in America, did better than poor British children.\textsuperscript{19}

When Will Hutton assures us that “notwithstanding [America’s] higher overall per capita incomes, its poor are absolutely worse off than their counterparts in Europe,” he is simply wrong.\textsuperscript{20}

This raises a broader issue of comparability between Europe and the United States. The United States is not just a nation, but also a continent—or at least
a large part of one. That is not the case for each European country. And yet, comparisons tend to be drawn between the United States as a nation and any individual European country, or set of them, and not the European continent as a whole. This, too, may affect the outcomes of comparisons across the Atlantic. A large area like North America encompasses a broad spectrum of living costs, and therefore wage levels, while a small country, like Denmark or the Netherlands, does not, or at least not to the same extent. In other words, the distribution of incomes within the United States is not just a measure of the socio-economic distance from Bill Gates to a single mother on welfare. It spans equally a geographical and cost-of-living differential between the average Manhattanite and the typical resident of Tupelo, Mississippi.

But income distributions in Europe are measured as the distance separating, say, the Oslo lawyer from the Bergen fisherman, not the Swiss pharmaceutical CEO from the Sicilian peasant (not to mention the Slovakian Roma). Given that the gross national income per capita of Luxembourg is over three times the Portuguese, or that the per capita GDP of central London is over five times that of northern Portugal, the pan-European income and wealth differentials are likely to be quite a bit wider than those within any given European nation. Indeed, one team of economists has described Europe of today as being much like the United States in the 1930s, when it contained regions of extreme poverty, above all the Deep South, within a continent that was otherwise homogenizing in economic terms. The same team has shown that inequalities of manufacturing earnings are some 30% greater within the European continent (EU-15) than within the United States. Regional pay disparities are about 40% greater within Europe than across America.

Regional disparities in GDP per capita are wide in the United States, as one might expect from a continent-sized country. They range from 65% to 332% of the national average. But in the UK alone, they are wider (a span between 60% and 446%) and in France they are almost as broad (77% to 316%). That means, of course, that within Western Europe as a whole, the span is at least as great as within the United States. The Gini index for regional GDP disparities is the same or higher than the American figures in the UK, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Germany, Denmark, Belgium, and Austria. On the other hand, regional disparities in labor productivity are larger in the United States than in most of Europe, while in unemployment, the United States ranks in the middle of the field. Comparatively little work has been done on such trans-European differentials. But two sociologists, Olli Kangas and Veli-Matti Ritakallio, have recently demonstrated the largely ignored but very wide geographical income
differentials within Europe. Such differentials exist also within European countries. In Italy, the richest region (Milan) has a relative poverty line over twice as high as the poorest (Sicily). They are also found between the richest regions of Europe and the poorest. The national poverty line for Luxembourg is 2.7 times greater than that of Spain.25

Europe is not yet as integrated an economic unit as the United States. Cultural and linguistic barriers prevent workers from moving as freely among the EU states as they do within America. Indeed, mobility within the EU is surprisingly low. By far, the largest number of foreign residents in most European nations come from outside the EU, not from other nations within the Union.26 With some Western European countries welcoming citizens of the former East Bloc, however, that may be changing. The migration of 600,000 Poles to the UK over the past couple of years may herald a new era, compressing wage differentials. Comparing the U.S.-as-continent to Europe-as-continent is still difficult. At the same time, it is no more distorting than to compare the United States to, say, Denmark.

The upshot is that, to compare like with like, one should differentiate the social from the geographic span of income and wealth differentials. Little if any work has been done on such comparisons. What is offered here is, at best, a preliminary and tentative step. If one interpolates the ratios of top to bottom quintiles of income between a sampling of U.S. states and most of the European nations we are examining, the results may surprise (figure 199). Income differentials appear much more nuanced than is revealed by a comparison between the U.S.-as-continent, on the one hand, with any one European country, on the other. The average income of the top quintile is a smaller multiple of the average of the bottom quintile in Wisconsin than in France and a smaller one in Utah than Spain. That is perhaps not surprising. But that this multiple is smaller in Alabama than the UK and smaller in Ohio than in Italy seems to be news worth reporting.

If we look at the percentages of the poor, measured in absolute terms, the results are similar. If we take the PPP cash figure for 60% of the EU-6 median income in 2000 as the top end of poverty, the outcomes are again unexpected (figure 200). No state in this sample, not even Arkansas, the poorest place in the United States by this measure, has proportionately as many absolutely poor citizens as Greece, Spain, Italy, and Ireland. Alabama, Tennessee, Texas, and Oklahoma have fewer poor than the UK. Mississippi has the same percentage of the impoverished as France. Idaho and South Carolina have fewer. New York and California, as well as half a dozen other states, including Georgia, have fewer
199. Mean Income Ratios of Top and Bottom Quintiles, 2000-2003

200. Population (%) under 60% of EU-6 Median Income, 2000
than Finland. Florida, Oregon, Kansas, and North Dakota have fewer poor than Sweden. Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Nebraska, South Dakota, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Wisconsin, as well as eight other states, all have proportionately fewer poor than Germany. Iowa, Maryland, and Missouri have fewer poor than Austria. Connecticut and Minnesota are better off than the Netherlands. New Hampshire, the American state with the lowest percentage of the poor, has fewer than Denmark, Norway, and Switzerland, though not Luxembourg.

The complexity of comparing a continent with nations arises in other respects, as well. If one unpacks the U.S. figures by state and interpolates them among the European numbers by nation, one gets a different comparison than if one compares only averages for each continent, or if one compares the United States with the span of European nations. It follows that observers who argue for a radical difference between the United States and Europe do not, in effect, take the concept of Europe seriously. They cherry-pick the countries and the results they need to make their arguments. That is why, in transatlantic comparisons, Scandinavia, Germany, and sometimes the UK make consistent and regular appearances, while the major Mediterranean nations are routinely ignored, and the minor ones are almost never mentioned.

Jeremy Rifkin, for example, claims to have demonstrated a yawning secularity chasm spanning the Atlantic. He does so by selectively quoting the church-going statistics for Scandinavia alone, ignoring the Mediterranean. Meanwhile, serious analysis shows that the United States is not obviously more exceptional in terms of its quantifiable religiosity than are Italy and Ireland. Everyone is delighted to cite Finland as an exemplar of European achievement when it tops the education tables in the PISA studies, along with other outperformers like Korea, Hong Kong, Canada, and New Zealand. But, if so, then one has to take note of Finland’s other—presumably equally European—characteristics that may help explain this, such as the exclusionary immigration policy that keeps the Finnish population (and thus its school children) more ethnically homogeneous than any industrialized nation outside Asia or the East Bloc. If Europe as a concept is to mean anything, then it has to include all its members, prosperous and poor, Protestant and Catholic, Nordic and Mediterranean. No one would allow the numbers from the United States to be similarly cherry-picked, including Connecticut but not Alabama, Minnesota but not Missouri, and so forth.

To demonstrate the effect of such a state-by-state unpacking, consider a graph that shows an undeniably stark difference: incarceration rates (figure 201). Even the lowest American figure (Maine) is slightly higher than the highest European
figure (Portugal). But take the only other quantifiable set of figures that starkly differentiates the United States from Europe, namely murder rates. Even here, the outcome is not as polarized as usually thought, once we break out the local geographical units. If we unpack the numbers, localizing them geographically both in the United States and Europe, we see an unexpected juxtaposition of murder rates (figure 202). Of course, there are still dramatic differences. Most U.S. states continue to have higher murder rates than most European nations. But the picture is now more nuanced. Some U.S. states (North Dakota, New Hampshire, Maine, and Wisconsin are ones graphed here) are “European” in their murder rates. If to have a European murder rate means to come in below Switzerland then, in addition to the states already mentioned, the following states also qualify: Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, South Dakota, Idaho, Utah, Wyoming, Hawaii, and Oregon. Conversely, some European nations, like Switzerland and Finland, edge toward the “American” end of things.

An analysis of union membership gives similar results (figure 203). California is more unionized than Spain; New Hampshire and Wisconsin more than France, and Washington more than Switzerland. These results perhaps do not startle. But New York State turns out to have a higher union membership rate than those powerhouses of organized labor, Germany and the Netherlands. Given that New York State’s economy is larger than all but five of Western Europe’s countries, this is not a trivial result.
We get analogous results if we analyze life expectancies in the same fashion (figure 204). Only the lucky inhabitants of Hawaii live longer than the Swedes. But the residents of New Hampshire, Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, and Utah live as long, or longer, as the Norwegians. In Wisconsin, Vermont, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Colorado, Nebraska, California, and Washington, they live at least as long as in Holland. In Oregon, Idaho, South Dakota, and New York, they live longer than in Germany. In Virginia, Maine, Texas, Pennsylvania, Ohio, New Mexico, New Jersey, Michigan, Illinois, Maryland, Wyoming, Kansas, Montana, Florida, Delaware, Arizona, and Alaska, life expectancies are longer than in Denmark, and in Missouri and Indiana, just as long. Generally speaking, it is only the residents of poor Southern states like Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Oklahoma who live shorter lives than any Europeans, at least as measured at the national level.

Subnational figures would, no doubt, bring to light similar nuances in Europe. Thus, for example, Scotland’s life expectancy at birth for men in 2000 (73.6) puts it in the same league as states like Illinois, Indiana, and Missouri. But the Clydeside conurbation (the greater Glasgow area, where men can expect only to become 71.3) is on par with Alabama, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Glasgow itself (69.2) is only the slightest notch above the statistically worst place in America, Washington DC (68.5), which is a capital with
a huge ghetto and no hinterland. Drilling down further, we discover that in the Calton neighborhood of Glasgow, men can hope to live only to the age of 54. The most ravaged group of American males, by comparison, are the residents of various South Dakota counties (Shannon, Bennett, and others) in and around the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, who can hope to become 62. Black males in Washington DC make it on average to 63.

If we look at amenable mortality rates (needless deaths that good health care would have prevented), we see that no American state bests the European winner, France. But Minnesota and Utah do better than the next-best nations, Spain and Italy. Sweden and the Netherlands are outpaced by Alaska, Colorado, Montana, Maine, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Washington, Vermont, and Wyoming. Germany is trumped by Connecticut, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, and Wisconsin. Denmark is outpaced by Arizona, California, Florida, Kansas, New Jersey, and Rhode Island. The UK and New York State run neck and neck.

As we have seen earlier (figure 10) similarly interpolated results hold for minimum wages. Washington, Connecticut, Oregon, and Vermont have higher minimum wages than France, Ohio higher than the Netherlands, Maine higher than Belgium, Wisconsin higher than the UK, Minnesota higher than Ireland, and the Dakotas and New Hampshire higher than Portugal, Spain, and Greece. In other words, it is misleading to say that American minimum wages are lower than their European counterparts. Unpacking the statistics for a feature—unemployment—on which the United States, as a whole, has come off relatively well compared to Europe reveals a similar regional interpolation. Some European nations (mainly the Scandinavian and the English-speaking, along with the Netherlands) have “American” levels of unemployment, while some American states, like Mississippi, have “European” ones (figure 205).

Before leaving the issue of how to compare a continent-sized country to a continent of smaller nations, it is worth alluding to the proverbial oversized gorilla in the corner. That creature’s name is Geopolitical Clout. The fact of the sheer size difference across the Atlantic influences all comparisons between the United States and Europe. In recent decades, America’s military brawn has grown even more disproportional to Europe’s. Its economic power is being equaled, but as a more seamlessly single market it remains a formidable competitor even to the EU, and in political and ideological terms, too, size matters. In other words, as societies these nations spanning the Atlantic may not be as different as often believed, but considered as states the disparity among
them remains glaring. This geopolitical imbalance colors the European view of America most obviously, but no doubt also has effects the other way around. In the twentieth century, Europe has both needed and resented, both sought and resisted, American intervention and influence. The humiliation suffered by Europe as a geopolitical supplicant to America as a state has influenced Europe’s views of America as a society. Many of European anti-Americanism’s tropes spring as much from this imbalanced relationship as they do from any actual empirical observations: big, pushy, brash, crude, violent, dangerous, and so forth. Hence the marked difference between the tempestuous passion that inflames Europeans both when they despise and when they adore America and the indifference with which they regard the other neo-Englands: kissing cousins, not the slatternly seductress.
A MEETING OF THE TWAIN?

SO WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE US? There are, of course, differences between America and Europe. But in almost all cases, they are no greater, and often smaller, than the differences among European nations. The span of European circumstance is such that the United States tends to fall comfortably within it. Therefore, either no coherent Europe exists, or the United States is a European nation. Formulated in a more sensible way, the similarities across the North Atlantic are at least as salient as the divergences. Yes, there are differences between Europe and America: murder and incarceration rates, as well as gun ownership and, more arguably, relative poverty rates on the one hand; the strength of civil society, assimilatory abilities, and some aspects of religious belief on the other. Other differences are ones of degree rather than kind: social policy, taxation, labor regulation, inequality, environmental policies.
Other much-remarked Atlantic divides can easily be exaggerated—the death penalty, for example. Popular opinion probably does not diverge across the Atlantic as much as official policy. A joint YouGov/Economist poll found almost identical responses between Americans and the British, with about one-fifth of respondents always in favor of death for murder and about the same number always opposed. The United States still enforces the death penalty, and most Americans support it under some circumstances. Yet, 12 states do not have it, and another five have not carried it out for the last 30 years. If we add those states that have executed only five or fewer people since 1976, we find that over half the states, in effect, do not have capital punishment.

It could, in theory, be revoked tomorrow. Would America then be radically different? Did France change profoundly when it abolished the death penalty in 1981? Did the UK in 1998, Belgium in 1996, Spain in 1995, Italy in 1994, or Greece in 2004? Did they only then become truly European?

For the large majority of social, economic, policy, and environmental indicators for which comparative data exists, the United States lies within the European spectrum. For a few, it lies slightly beyond its low or high end. But it tends to be closer to the nearest European outlier than to the other end of the spectrum. Often, too, the United States lies closer to the European mean than does the extreme European example at the other end of the spectrum. Labor regulation is light in the United States. But it is not that much lighter than in the UK or Denmark. The public sector is smallish in the United States. But the difference between America and Switzerland, Ireland, or Spain is less than between those nations and Sweden. Proportionately more Americans believe in God than do Europe’s Protestants, but not many more than the Mediterranean’s Catholics or the Irish, and—depending on the question—often no more at all. Doubtless, U.S. military might and spending is without compare. But even America’s role as the only remaining superpower does not propel its military effort entirely out of the European spectrum. Military spending fits in, though admittedly just barely. (The Greeks spend a higher proportion of GNP on defense [figure 206].) Per capita spending on the military is about 44% higher in the United States ($1,275 in 2003) than its closest competitor, Norway ($884 in 2005), and about 70% above the French and British levels. The size of the United States armed forces, however, is modest (figure 207). As a proportion of the population, it ranks below seven European nations, including Scandinavia, Greece, Switzerland, and Spain.

Would the snapshot picture presented here be different if we looked at change over time? Even if it is true, as I have argued here, that the United
206. Defense Spending
Military Spending as % of GDP

207. Armed Forces
Members of Active or Reserve Armed Forces per 1,000 Population
States and Europe are less different than is thought, might it be that they are growing apart? Or might Europe and the United States be approximating each other? It is difficult finding statistics that can be compared across the Atlantic, even for one moment in time. It is much harder to find viable series over a longer period. Only for some of the subjects covered here can we hope to answer such questions. Jens Alber, the distinguished scholar of social policy, has examined this question in detail. He concludes (his results apply to the expanded EU, not the narrower Western Europe used here) that over the last decade or so, divergences within Europe remain as large as, if not greater than, those between the United States and Europe. To the extent that there is convergence, it is not so much within Europe as between America and certain parts of Europe, above all the Anglo-Saxon nations and Scandinavia. One example concerns employment rates. At its meeting in 2000 in Lisbon, the European Council decided to increase the percentage of the working-age population employed in the EU to 70% by 2010. According to Alber’s calculations, the United States has long surpassed this goal. Within Europe, the Anglo-Saxon countries, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia have approximated the American rates. The larger Continental and Mediterranean nations have not. We have convergence, in other words. But it is between part of Europe and the United States. (And possibly, if we decomposed the U.S. figures by state, we would find that the convergence was with some American regions and not others.) Convergence has taken place neither within Europe, nor between Europe as a whole and the United States.

A few more examples will illustrate the issues at stake in a comparison over time. The lack of universal health care in the United States is rightly seen as clearly signaling how different social policy systems are across the Atlantic. Of course, the divergence is not that European nations universally have public and state-financed health care on the model of the British NHS and that the United States does not. Some European nations do. Others have a mix of public and private, as does the United States. In the Netherlands, for example, 36% of the population (2005 figures) is covered by private health insurance, and 62% by public. (The equivalent figures in the United States are 59% and 27%.) Even 10% of Germans are covered privately, and in many European nations, private, supplemental top-up insurance helps fill lacks in public coverage: 28% of Danes, 9% of Germans, 64% of the Dutch, 86% of the French, a third of the Austrians and Swiss, and 10% of even the British buy add-on coverage. Such supplemental insurance often meets the significant out-of-pocket expenses faced even by those covered by national insurance. Out-of-pocket expenses range from roughly 10%
of total health expenditure in France and Germany through approximately 20% in countries like Finland, Austria, Italy, and Spain to over 30% in Switzerland. (By comparison, it is 15% in the United States.)

The main transatlantic difference in health care is this: while even those European countries without a state-financed universal NHS-style system require their citizens to have coverage, the United States still allows its people to remain uninsured. Nonetheless, increasing numbers of Americans have either been insuring themselves privately or belong to groups (the poor and the elderly) that are covered by public programs. In 1940, 9% of Americans had health insurance. By 1960, that figure had risen to 73%. Two decades later, in 1987, it stood at 87%, lapsing slightly to 84% by 2005 (figure 208).

What does this say about convergence? First and foremost, much depends on the time frame. During the last two decades, the percentage of insured Americans has fluctuated moderately, with about 85% covered by one form of health insurance or another. Any downturn in insurance levels could, of course, be construed as the start of a divergence from Europe’s largely universal coverage, just as any uptick could be seen as convergence. More plausibly, these fluctuations are minor variations in a system that has achieved what it can via voluntary membership and now needs to legislate to achieve universality. In a longer perspective, however, taking as the starting point any date between 1960 and 2005, the trend between the United States and Europe is
one of convergence, just as the trend has been convergent for those European
countries that came more lately to universal coverage than the Scandinavian
and British pioneers (Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, Greece, Austria, Belgium,
France, and so forth).

Or take an example of a policy where convergence runs the other way across
the Atlantic. The number of young people who attend postsecondary educa-
tion rose to high levels earlier in the United States than in most European
nations. But all developed nations have tended in this direction during the
postwar period. Enrollment rates in tertiary education in America grew from
47% in 1970 to 81% in 1995 (figure 209). In Scandinavia, which began from a
much lower position, the approximate 1970 U.S. rate was reached by 1995. In
Sweden, which we have graphed here, enrollments increased from 22% to 48%
between 1970 and 1995. In Denmark, Britain, and France, the increases were
very similar. The Mediterranean nations followed closely. Italy and Greece
rose to 42% by 1995, Spain made it to 48%, and Portugal to 39%. Between 1995
and 2005, the gap across the Atlantic narrowed, but more so in some European
nations than others. If we take UNESCO’s figures, by 2005, 82% of young
Americans went on to postsecondary schooling. The Scandinavian countries
approximated the U.S. level: Iceland at 70%, Sweden at 82%, Norway at 78%,
and Denmark at 81%. The European continent, in contrast, stabilized at a lower
level. France was at 56%, and though we do not have figures for Germany, it
is likely to have been similar to Austria at 49% or Switzerland at 45%. The Anglo-Saxon, the small continental nations, and the Mediterranean countries held a middle position (the UK and Netherlands at 59%, Spain and Italy at 65%). Much as we saw with employment rates, some parts of Europe and the United States almost completely converged (Scandinavia). Others (Central Europe, the English-speaking nations, parts of the Mediterranean) did not.

As a final example, take working hours. If we look at the long sweep from the late nineteenth century to the present, we see that average working times have fallen overall in the countries graphed here, from very high levels in 1870 to about half that today (figure 210). This time series does not shake our confidence in the conclusion we came to earlier, from looking only at the figures for one moment in time. The hours put in by Americans, though highish on the scale, are within the European spectrum. Danes and Finns work even harder on average. The convergence, in other words, does not separate the United States from Europe. The same goes for the slight recent variation from the overall trend toward shorter working hours. Between 1990 and 1998, the average worker in some nations began putting in longer hours: not just Americans, but also the Swedes, the Dutch, the Danes, and the Italians. This may, of course, be a statistical blip, given the short interval from the previous data point in 1990. Or it may be a new trend encouraged by globalization and its attendant
competition. Either way, the conclusion about convergence remains broadly the same as for working hours overall.

Time-series statistics mostly do not exist for the many and diverse variables we have looked at. But if they did, would they add much to the snapshot image presented here? It would be difficult, if not impossible, to say anything that would hold true for all of Europe. Trends—convergent or otherwise—describe only particular fields of activity, whether social policy, education, health outcomes, employment, or the growth of government. Convergence or divergence has generally taken place not between the United States and an abstract Europe as a whole, but with parts of it: Scandinavia, the English-speaking fringe, the Continentals, the Low Countries, or the Mediterranean. Each of these, in turn, stands in similarly vacillating relationships to the other parts of Europe and also, of course, to the various regions of the United States. There is often as much difference within Europe as between various parts of it and America. And that, of course, is one of the central points we have been making. Our snapshot picture of the relationship between Europe and America of the late 1990s and early 2000s is not significantly altered, but only complicated, by looking also at time-series statistics.

The direction of movement in any convergence or divergence depends largely on the time frame chosen. In some respects, the United States and Europe are diverging. In others, they—or parts of them—are converging. Economic inequality, for example, has been increasing in the United States during the past decade, as it has in English-speaking Europe and Sweden. For the other continental nations, inequality appears to have leveled off. But during the 1980s, inequality in the UK grew at a more rapid pace than in the United States. The same holds true for Sweden from about 1983 to 1991, and for the Netherlands from about 1985 to 1990. And if one looks at a really long time series, in this case, measuring wealth shares of the top ventile (5%) of the population from 1740 to 2003, what impresses above all is the congruence of the seven countries studied (the United States and six European nations). Indeed, according to one compilation of long-term historical data, the wealth share of those in the bottom four percentage points of the top ventile of Americans was lower well into the 1990s than the equivalent figures for Switzerland, Sweden, France, and Denmark, and approximately equal to Norway. The longer the time span, the greater the appearance of convergence. In any case, by shifting the time frame, one can easily alter the import of the figures and thus the argument. For the point we are making here, there is no virtue to using time-series statistics instead of a snapshot. Just as one could, if
one wanted, cook the books for a snapshot, the same could be done for a time series. A time series (at least one of five or ten years, which is usually the best on offer) is, in that sense, just a bigger snapshot.

This brings us to a final methodological issue. Some scholars believe that even developed and otherwise similar nations are qualitatively different from each other and can be sorted into political and institutional categories that are distinct in kind and not just degree. Of course, the United States and Europe systematically differ organizationally and institutionally on many counts. America has a presidential and two-party political system with majority voting. It is highly federalized and decentralized. It has no European-style system of national collective bargaining and has never brought forth a successful or influential labor party. On the other hand, Europe is politically hugely diverse: it has the last remaining theocracy in the world, the Vatican, and the only absolute monarchy, Liechtenstein, outside of Swaziland. Even Bhutan has become a constitutional monarchy, although one could argue about North Korea’s god ruler.

Consider Italy’s hyperparliamentarianism, with its endless carousel of governments. It is surely as different from Sweden’s 75-year Social Democratic all-but-monopoly (or Bavaria’s half-century rule by the Christian Socialists) as the more-or-less two-party systems of Britain, Ireland, France, Greece, and Spain are from America. France has a powerful, directly elected president, much like America. So does Finland and to a lesser extent Iceland, though parliamentary supremacy reigns elsewhere in Europe. The Germans, Belgians, Spanish, and Austrians, not to mention the Swiss, know as much about federalism as the Americans. The English and French have majority voting systems. Collective bargaining covers 98% of all workers in Austria, but only 34% in the UK. Harold Wilensky, whose magisterial comparison of developed nations stresses the crucial role of institutional differences, points out that the United States shares many of its supposed peculiarities with the English, Irish, and the Swiss.10

The United States has never had a successful labor party. This absence was the core of the first sustained formulation of American exceptionalism, Werner Sombart’s classic query from 1906: Why Is There No Socialism in the United States? The latest attempt to answer that question casts its comparative wing not over Europe, but rather Australia, another neo-England which, unlike the United States, did develop a labor party.11 But this comparison raises the question of how important major structural differences are. Australia has had more socialism than the United States. Yet for all the statistical indicators we have
looked at here, excepting universal health insurance, there is scarcely any (least of all those related to social policy) on which Australia is not closer to the United States than it is to Europe. The question, then, is whether even political institutions ultimately separate Europe from other developed nations. Does the important dividing line run down the Atlantic? Or do the distinctions of politics crosscut Europe as much as they unite it?

A look at the historiography of the welfare state will demonstrate what I mean. The “welfare state” used to be a classic concept illustrating the gap that separated the United States from Europe. Early accounts divided the world into a small elect of the solidaristic welfare states, of the sort found in Beveridge’s Britain and in Scandinavia, and a large mass of what were then called residual welfare states. Gøsta Esping-Andersen’s *Politics Against Markets*, from 1985, was perhaps the classic formulation of this binary typology. Already in his next book, however, Esping-Andersen moved from a Manichaean duality to a New Testament trinity. Rather than envisioning a single axis with two end poles along which welfare states were positioned at different removes from the ideal, he came to conceive of three separate routes of welfare state development: Social Democratic (Scandinavia), liberal (the United States, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Japan), or conservative (Germany, France, Italy, and Belgium). These forms of welfare state were qualitatively different, corresponding to different social, political, and historical circumstances—not simply different points along the same path. Important from our point of view is that, in Esping-Andersen’s tripartite typology, European countries ended up spread across all three categories. There was no one group into which all European nations fell.

Once the possibility of opening up the inherited dualistic typology had been broached, difficulties arose. In the first, dualistic, model, nations were either among the solidaristic elect or they were consigned to the portmanteau of the residual category. There was little argument about which countries fit where. But as soon as more subtle categorizations were elaborated, typological disagreement arose. The Australians were aghast at being consigned to the outer darkness, placed as they were in the same liberal category as the United States. Unable to argue that Australia was a Social Democratic welfare state and unwilling to fit it into the conservative model, they invented a new category: the radical welfare state.

Over time, ever more categorizations of welfare states arose. Richard Rose compared their spending and wealth and classified welfare states into four categories. He included two European nations, Finland and Switzerland, in
the same group (rich, not-so-big government) as the United States, Canada, Japan, and Australia. He, too, mixed European and other developed nations together. More recently, the idea of a Christian Democratic welfare state, long broached by adherents of such parties in Germany, France, and the Low Countries, but not taken very seriously by welfare state theorists, has begun to command more respect. Maurizio Ferrera has proposed the concept of a Mediterranean or south European welfare state model to describe the (unsus- tainable) high-spend, low-tax systems of social provision that have evolved in Italy, Spain, and Portugal. The radical welfare state has come to include not only Australia, New Zealand, and Great Britain (who at least are kissing cousins), but also (in an act of heroic conceptual exogamy) Finland.

Other recent scholarship also uses four categories, with the European welfare states spread over at least three. One reexamination of Esping-Anderson’s work argues for five rather than three categories. Another recent study, Timothy Smith’s book on French social policy, shows how, in terms of labor market policies, Scandinavia and the Low Countries share as much with Canada and the United States as they do with France. Francis Castles and his collaborators have helped break up the early categories in a series of studies where each country is treated in a remarkably untypologizing fashion. No one nation is typecast as representative or emblematic of any broader category. Each is treated according to its own peculiarities. Increasingly, the act of typologizing welfare states seems ever more cumbersome and at odds with empirical reality. Fritz Scharpf’s conclusions on the ability of certain nations (Denmark, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Australia: together at last!) to preserve labor market and social policy protections in the face of economic globalization, sit uncomfortably with his invocation of Esping-Andersen’s classic trinity of liberal, conservative, and Social Democratic welfare states, since his countries are obviously spread across all three. Most dramatically, Esping-Andersen has thrown in the typologizing towel altogether, predicting no less than 18 distinct worlds of welfare capitalism.

We could doubtless find as many different welfare states as the Americans have religions or the French sauces. But at least scholars agree that the European states do not fit together in one. Welfare state typologizing has fallen victim to its own success. As categories became increasingly numerous, supple, and sophisticated, they began to approximate the individual historical reality of each national development. They become more truthful, but also less useful as ideal types. In the most recent and sophisticated work, any categories still in use do not neatly box together all European, or even only European, nations.
A similar crosscutting can be found in scholarly typologies of capitalism. A very influential study of the subject, by Peter Hall and David Soskice, groups various types of capitalist systems so as to span the Atlantic: Germany, Scandinavia, and the Netherlands are coordinated market economies; the Mediterranean countries are possibly another type of capitalism altogether, and Britain, Ireland, and the United States are liberal market economies. Jonas Pontusson’s book on liberal and social market economies has the suggestive subtitle “Social Europe vs. Liberal America.” But, in fact, his typology categorizes in a way that does not cut down the middle of the Atlantic: Ireland and the UK join the United States as liberal market economies, while only northern European countries qualify as social market economies, and the Mediterranean nations are relegated to their own separate typological purgatory. So much for the transatlantic divide.

But enough typologizing! Our point has been made. Once typologies are extended to cover the developed world and not just Europe, they begin to package non-European nations—whether Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Japan, or the United States—together with various regions of Europe. Rarely, if ever, do important categories distinguish between Europe as a whole on the one hand, and other nations, including the United States, on the other. As I have been arguing in this book, the main line of distinction almost never runs down the North Atlantic.
TO RETURN TO THE BULK of our material in this book, what absolute differences separate the United States from Europe? The United States is a nation where proportionately more people are murdered each year, more are jailed, and more own guns than anywhere in Europe. The death penalty is still law. Religious belief is more fervent and widespread. A smaller percentage of citizens vote. Collective bargaining covers relatively fewer workers, and the state’s tax take is lower. Inequality is somewhat more pronounced. That is about it. In almost every other respect, differences are ones of degree, rather than kind. Often, they do not exist, or if they do, no more so than the same disparities hold true within Western Europe itself. At the very least, this suggests that far-reaching claims to radical differences across the Atlantic have been overstated.

Even on violence—a salient difference that leaps unprompted from the evidence, both statistical and anecdotal—the contrast depends on how it is framed.
Without question, murder rates are dramatically different across the Atlantic. And, of course, murder is the most shocking form of sudden, unexpected death, unsettling communities, leaving survivors bereaved and mourning. But consider a wider definition of unanticipated, immediate, and profoundly disrupting death. Suicide is often thought of as the exit option for old, sick men anticipating the inevitable, and therefore not something that changes the world around them. But, in fact, the distribution of suicide over the lifespan is broadly uniform. In Iceland, Ireland, the UK, and the United States, more young men (below forty-five) than old do themselves in. In Finland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Norway, the figures are almost equal. Elsewhere, the older have a slight edge. But overall, the ratio between young and old suicides approximates 1:1.¹ Broadly speaking, and sticking with the sex that most often kills itself, men do away with themselves as often when they are younger and possibly still husbands, fathers, and sons as they do when they are older and when their actions are perhaps fraught with less consequence for others. Suicide is as unsettling, and often even more so, for survivors as murder. Equally, fatal accidents are self-evidently life-altering, shattering events of a similar magnitude. All three—murder, suicide, and fatal accidents—are unpredictable, unexpected, and avoidable deaths. Their shock is profound. If we measure their combined incidence, the results place the United States in the European middle ground, below Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Norway, and Luxembourg (figure 211).
Yes, there are differences between Europe and America. The United States has more guns, more jails, more religion, fewer taxes, less of a state. But equally, you could formulate an exceptionalist argument for almost any Western European nation, depending on the subject. Each graph presented here has extremes. But those extremes are not always the United States. Sometimes they are the English-speaking fringe (on the low end of many aspects of social policy, on the high in terms of poverty, inequality, and crimes other than murder). Often, they are from the Mediterranean nations (on the high end of religion, energy use, tax avoidance, voter turnout, family cohesion; on the low end of foreign aid, educational spending and attainment, gender equality, environmental affairs, civil society). Sometimes, they are the Scandinavian nations (on the high end of social spending and gender issues, civil society cohesion, and volunteering). But despite many disparities within Europe, no one gets embroiled in principled discussions of whether there is Dutch, Swedish, Greek, or Irish exceptionalism—except all the Dutch, Swedish, Greek, or Irish tub-thumpers at home, who, by definition, are unknown elsewhere. No one formulates an argument about the exceptionalism of any single European nation intended for broader consumption because no one cares enough to bother. The case for American exceptionalism does not spring spontaneously from the evidence. Instead, the evidence is laboriously marshaled to support a position adopted for other reasons. Something more than mere difference is at work.

In quantitative comparisons, America often lands toward the Mediterranean end of the European spectrum. That comes as a surprise mainly to northern Europeans. Americans know that their country is as influenced by the Mediterranean as by northern Europe. It could be argued that the Mediterranean nations are the poorest in Western Europe, that some have been dictatorships until recently, and that all are striving to become more prosperous and more like their northern brethren. Consequently, so the argument proceeds, it is illegitimate to consider the Mediterranean as representative of Europe, or at least of Europe’s aspirations, and it is argumentative sleight of hand to suggest that an American placement at this end of the table somehow positions it, too, within a European framework.

There are two answers to this view. First, perhaps Italy aspires to become like Sweden, but surely no more than Mississippi hopes to be like Massachusetts. As the area south of the butter/oil divide grows wealthier and more like the north, so, too, does the region south of the Mason-Dixon line. Secondly, the evidence of convergence to a northern European norm is inconclusive and,
SEPARATED AT BIRTH?

if anything, points in the opposite direction. GDP per head does not determine political culture. Despite both being wealthy democracies, America and Sweden remain different—just as Japan, too, is a prosperous, developed nation yet has not developed a European-style welfare state. But if this is true, then it holds within Europe as well. There is no reason to suspect that Italy, even as it grows richer, will become more like Sweden either. As we have seen, a veritable garden of flowers blooms in the scholarly literature on models of social policy. Since they differ so markedly from what is found in northern Europe, the welfare states and the economies of the Mediterranean are safely quarantined in typologies of their own. The convergences, if any, occur as often between America and parts of northern Europe as they do between north and south within Europe itself.

America is often seen by Europeans as a land of extremes: sometimes the smallest this, but most often the biggest that. Bernard-Henri Lévy, who considers himself a sympathetic observer, pronounces gargantuanism of everything from parking lots and airports to campaign budgets and public deficits as one of America’s essential characteristics. Such perceptions are governed by relative sizes: a badger marveling at the sheer incoherence of an animal so large and ungainly as an elephant. A nation that is also a continent will likely embrace more extremes than any one part of another continent. As this book has suggested, however, the spread is often as wide within Europe as it is within America. The span of per capita income, for example, is slightly wider between the poorest European country (Portugal) and the richest (Norway) than between the most impoverished U.S. state (Mississippi) and the wealthiest (Connecticut). Life expectancies for men are wider (6.7 years) between the longest living state (Hawaii) and the shortest (Mississippi) than the 4.8 years that separate the best-performing European nation (Iceland) and the worst (Portugal). Add any one of the new EU arrivals, however, other than Slovenia, and the balance tips the other way. Or take as basic an indicator of modern economies as the rate of female participation in the labor force. The United States spans less of an extreme than Europe: a difference of 20 percentage points between West Virginia and South Dakota, compared to one of 31 percentage points between Italy and Iceland.

Perhaps the only consistent rule of transatlantic difference might be that the American state is, on the whole, less interventionist than its European counterparts and that Americans want and expect it to play a lesser role in their lives. And yet, is even that true? By European standards, the American state is laissez-faire in some respects, like employment law and the overall rate
of taxation. But, even by European standards, it is quite meddlesome in others. True, state spending is low. But the state’s activities are not exhausted just by redistribution, nor are they measured only by the level of its outlays. Many state activities are highly interventionist even though they are largely cost-free, compared to redistributive measures. (Or, rather, the costs they impose are not paid directly by taxes.)

The American state has long micromanaged its citizens’ bad habits, regulating alcohol and smoking, for example, in ways more similar to Scandinavia than the Mediterranean. Here, Europe has followed the American lead, with even the Germans, Italians, and French outlawing smoking in bars and restaurants. In On Liberty (1859), John Stuart Mill drew his examples of governmental policing of morality from America, not from Europe: laws enforcing the Sabbath, liquor regulation, and persecution of the Mormons. Though widely assumed, the idea that the American state has always been laissez-faire in inclination and vestigial in construction has been undermined by recent historical work. Even in the nineteenth century, as we now know, the American state was strong, ambitious, and interventionist. A sophisticated future history of the American state will reveal not that it was weak or small across the board. Instead, it will examine why it chose to dig into some aspects of its citizens’ lives rather than others. European states, too, have varied widely in what they have focused on, as well as in how much their subjects have tolerated their intrusions. The notion that one single style of European state covers everything between the anarchic Mediterranean and Germanic Kadavergehorsamkeit is simply a myth.

America has long mandated extraordinary rights and protections for the handicapped, in excess of what has been attempted in most European countries. The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act remains the international standard. In Europe, the handicapped occasionally still have to make do with quaintly corporatist measures, like those reserving—at least until recently—certain professions: elevator and parking lot attendant positions for the disabled in the UK, jobs as switchboard operators for the blind in Greece, and as masseurs in Italy.

In public health, the United States has been draconian compared to many European nations, imposing harsh sanctions on the contagiously ill. In combating the AIDS epidemic, America employed similarly stringent measures as the Swedes, Austrians, and Bavarians, while other European nations were more laissez-faire. U.S. authorities enforce vaccination of children more rigorously than many European nations, and they insist on fluoridating water and pasteurizing milk and cheese in a way that is without compare among at least the
No fiscal authorities are more powerful and perseverant than America’s Internal Revenue Service, which taxes its citizens regardless of where in the world they live and on everything they earn throughout it. Indeed, the IRS makes it almost impossible ever to cease being an American citizen from a tax point of view. Antitrust or anticompetition regulations were implemented earlier and are stricter and more punctiliously enforced in the United States than the EU. On testing and regulating medicines, the United States has long been more stringent than many other developed nations. The federal aviation authorities in America enforce the most effective safety structures in the world. As the banking and credit crisis has shown, the U.S. government does not shy away from intervening in the economy when it seems necessary. Generally, white-collar crime is more harshly controlled and punished in the United States than elsewhere in the world.

U.S. courts mete out heavy punishments to producers and providers of services, holding them to strict standards of liability. Europeans often regard American consumer protection laws as burdensome evidence of a nanny state—not a concept one hears often applied to the United States. “To European eyes,” John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge report, “it sometimes looks as if Americans are determined to criminalize, pathologize, regulate or legislate out of existence almost every hazard.” In environmental legislation, the United States was an early and strict intervener. Having once itself been a copyright rogue state, the United States is now among the most ferocious enforcers of intellectual property rights. Americans may be allowed to buy guns in a way that surprises many Europeans. But they meekly drive at prescribed speeds that would infuriate the Italians, not to mention the Germans. In Germany, speed limits on the highways are considered a restriction of citizen’s rights, and no political party has supported a proposed curb of 80 miles per hour. Freie Fahrt für mündige Bürger—freely translated as “Pedal to the metal: Every citizen’s right!”—is as bizarrely incomprehensible a slogan to Americans as the citizen’s right to bear arms is to Germans. And, of course, a far higher percentage of Americans than Europeans suffer the state’s most direct impositions, as prisoners in its jails. Incarceration is the ultimate interventionism. Indeed, if we take account of the very high percentage of European inmates who are foreigners, the contrast across the Atlantic is even more startling: America locks up its young and especially its black and Hispanic men; Europe jails its foreigners.

The American state is low-spending on some things—unemployment benefits, or the statutory part of pensions. But on others, and not just the military,
it is more generous: on research and development or education. The American state’s and U.S. businesses’ vast spending on biomedical research, reflected also in the large fraction of GDP spent on health care, allows significant free riding by the rest of the world. On public-financed health care for those Americans lucky enough to receive it, the United States is positively profligate. Not all Americans are generously covered, of course. But so much is spent on the comparatively few who are that the per-recipient sums are almost 50% greater than those of the next highest country (Luxembourg), twice or thrice most of the rest of Europe, and six times the Greek level. Needless to say, that is not desirable—any more than are large amounts spent on unemployment benefits, whether because many are out of work or because so much is given to those who are without jobs that they become insulated from the labor market. Not necessarily high but effective spending is what the welfare state seeks. If the authorities can convince their citizens to eat lots of fish, they can save on installing defibrillators in public places. Public spending alone does not guarantee ideal results. Sometimes, the same (or an equivalent) result can be had by other means. Outcomes should concern us more than process.

That is what this book has been looking at: outcomes, more than how they are achieved. Full employment is better than having many out of work, even if the redundant are treated generously. Health and safety regulations, sensibly enforced, are better than disability pensions. Prevention beats cure. Usually, a similar result can be arrived at by various routes, but outcomes cannot be the only thing. One cannot reach them by any means possible. A Ministry of Happiness that puts LSD in the drinking water, as in *Wild in the Streets*, the 1968 film depiction of the American counterculture, would generally be thought to have cut one corner too many. Nor is sending the out-of-work into exile in order to spruce up unemployment figures the done thing, though enrolling them as students or pensioning them off as disabled are standard tactics. But in many respects, similar goals can be achieved by different means. Sometimes, certain means may be better than alternatives. At other times, the choice among them may not matter much. Nowhere is it inscribed that there is only one way of solving the problems of modern society, or that the optimal solution of one era will remain so forever.

Consider the problem of providing communications outside the home: pay phones are a public solution, mobile phones a private one. In this case, the public solution has largely been eclipsed by the private one. In the developed world, mobile phone penetration is almost total, and the use of public pay phones has steadily declined. In the third world, mobile phones are
a classic instance of the advantages of backwardness, as they allow skipping
cell line technology with its massive infrastructure. In poor and rich countries
alike, the private solution has trumped the public one. Ever fewer people are
excluded from using mobile phones. Public pay phones will eventually disap-
tear altogether, possibly with a residual network, propped up by public subsi-
dies, remaining in rich countries for emergencies and for the destitute.

One canonical answer does not solve a problem once and for all. Nor is
there an argument to be made sub specie aeternitatis for either a public or
private solution. The best feasible answer at one moment may change under
different technological and social circumstances. Computers can be made
accessible, both via public stations or in private Internet cafes, as well as by
developing cheap laptops even the poor can afford. Analogously, if the goal is
to have a well-educated population, must that be achieved by state-financed
and state-run educational systems at every level? Or can it be done in myriad
ways, some of which are private? Does it matter so long as the outcomes are
similar? Does a nation have to achieve a goal in a certain way? Or is it enough
that it has achieved the goal? If our aim is education for all up to the level they
are able to benefit from, and if we agree that it does not have to be achieved in
one particular way, then surely Europe and the United States are fundamen-
tally similar.

What about the other outcomes we have been looking at? If different routes
to the same goal are legitimate, then the contrasts usually drawn across the
Atlantic in terms of social policy are moderated. Old age and disability are
dealt with in a largely comparable fashion in the United States and in Europe.
American unemployment benefits are what the Grimm brothers would have
called stepmotherly. But proportionately fewer Americans in recent years have
been unemployed than Europeans, in some measure thanks to flexible labor
regulation. Is this an allowable trade-off, where labor-market and social policy
in the United States provides a total package that can be compared to Europe’s
more exclusively social-policy solution? That is ultimately a political question
that cannot be answered here. But would we want to make this the litmus test
that separates the United States from Europe? Or are we willing to let more
than one flower bloom?

There is an obvious gap in health policies across the Atlantic: 100% cover-
age versus 85% coverage. In this instance, we would not want to be blinded
by outcomes only. As already noted, infant mortality in the United States is
off the European scale. No one would want to come into the world as a poor
American child if he could instead be born in Europe. Being uninsured in the
United States does not mean that one is also untreated. There are medical opportunities (not least hospital emergency rooms) even for those without insurance. But it certainly means that one is not treated to the state of the art. The uninsured in America are more likely, for example, to be diagnosed for cancer at an advanced, and less curable, stage than those who are covered. But does getting a raw deal in a technologically sophisticated system make you worse off than getting a fair deal in a less effective health care system? To judge by health outcomes alone, the answer is not so obvious, though receiving worse care than your fellow citizens must be at once humiliating, saddening, and infuriating.

We do not have five-year cancer survival rates for the uninsured, but we do have them for black Americans. Of course, being black and being uninsured are not the same thing. While some 12% of white Americans have no coverage, 20% of African Americans do not. There are social and genetic reasons why disease profiles vary between blacks and whites. Access to high-quality medical care is far from the only factor that explains why blacks die younger than whites. Indeed, given that amenable mortality is over twice as high for blacks as for whites, it may well be that being white and uninsured is a better fate than black and covered. With all these caveats in mind, let us assume that, for the purpose of discussion, being black is a reasonably accurate proxy for being maltreated by the American health care system.

If so, then the brutal fact remains that for the four main cancer killers, only an African American woman with breast cancer is worse off than most Europeans, and even she is as likely to survive for five years as her Welsh and Portuguese sisters. African Americans with lung cancer have a better chance of surviving five years than Danes, the English, Finns, Norwegians and Swedes, and the same chance as Icelanders and Italians. African Americans with colon cancer have better chances than the Danes, English, Welsh, Scots, and Portuguese, and are one percentage point off the same rates as Icelanders, Italians, Norwegians, and Swedes. Black American men with prostate cancer are better off than any Europeans other than the Austrians. In other words, a rational actor deciding behind a Rawlsian veil of ignorance whether it is preferable to risk being afflicted with cancer in America or Europe would not have a clear and persuasive reason to choose against America, even given a 10% chance of being born an African American and belonging to one of the least fairly treated groups for whom we have numbers. After all, you also risk being born a Dane. Of the 24 cancers for which we have five-year survival rates for both Danes and African Americans, for 13 the Danes die proportionately
earlier, for 3 the results are equal or within 3 percentage points of each other, leaving only 8 for which you would rather have ended up in Denmark.

Please don’t let me be misunderstood: this is not an argument against universal health care, a reform that America desperately needs for both moral and practical reasons. Here, obviously, outcomes are not all that matters. The individual’s chance of being uninsured in America is profoundly unfair, however functionally inconsequential the actual result may be on a macro level of population well-being. It is, however, to suggest that fairness is not the only thing that counts. Ensuring equal access to less than brilliant results—a commonplace in Europe—may be fair, but it is not optimal.

This takes us close to the heart of where an Atlantic divide may exist, namely fairness. Is America a less fair society than Europe? Some observers admit that this is true, adding that Americans believe in the market and competition and embrace incentives that encourage self-help. In this logic, inequality of incomes spurs workers to greater efforts. Make things too equal, and lethargy results. With this argument, America’s less-regulated labor market helps explain its higher per capita GDP. Americans choose liberty and the chance of prosperity over equality; European preferences are reversed. Rich people show what one can aim for. Hence America’s love affair with ostentatious display.

America’s preference for inequality is coupled to the belief that the United States is more socially mobile than Europe and in that sense more fair. Present inequality, in this logic, is unimportant since people can better themselves in the long run. Unequal at any given moment, American society offers chances to its citizens over their lifespans. Those born poor have a fair chance to rise. Perhaps this is the moment to correct this widespread American misperception. Evidence is mounting that social mobility in America is not higher than in Europe. It is lower than in Scandinavia especially, though it remains above that in the UK.18

Other observers also admit that America is a less fair society than Europe, but explain this as a historical imperative, not as a conscious choice. One of the tragic legacies of slavery has been to divide the nation by race. Add to that the hard work of assimilating successive waves of immigrants. The resulting ethnic, religious, and social lumpiness of American society has hampered the putting in place of the mechanisms of social solidarity that were easier to achieve in the more homogeneous societies of Western Europe.19 It is no secret that the welfare state began earlier and flourished more luxuriantly in those nations that were most ethnically, religiously, and socially uniform—in agrarian, Protestant Scandinavia.20
In America, the continuing presence of an ethnically distinct underclass, even as other outsiders have successfully assimilated, has limited the ability of reformers to strive for universalist social policy that includes all citizens. As we have seen, take out black homicide and the American murder rate falls to European levels. Child poverty rates, which are scandalously high in the United States, fall to below British, Italian, and Spanish levels if we look at the figures for whites only. Look only at the white population and the amenable mortality rate in the United States rises from worst place among our nations to the same level as Finland's and better than Portugal, the UK, Denmark and Ireland. PISA scores for American whites (for combined science literacy, 2006) rank above every European nation other than Finland and the Netherlands, rather than—as is otherwise the case—two-thirds of the way down the hierarchy.

If we could strip out the urban underclass from the numbers, it seems a fair bet that the United States would be even less statistically distinguishable from Western Europe than I have shown that it already is. It might not be Sweden. But it would be like the Netherlands, France, or Germany, and more than hold its own vis-à-vis the Mediterranean or the UK and Ireland. This is not in any sense to excuse the atrocious negligence with which the problems of racism have been dealt. It is to point out how much of the divergence between the United States and Europe, to the extent it exists, can be pinpointed as the outcome of specific and changeable causes. If anything significant does distinguish America from Europe, it is not a grand opposition of worldviews or ideologies of the sort espoused by the mouthpieces of transatlantic difference, whichever side of the ocean they hail from. It is the still unresolved legacy of slavery and its tragic modern consequence of a ghettoized and racially identifiable underclass. Whether Obama's election will mark a turning point in this respect remains to be seen.

The question of ethnic heterogeneity and social isolation in ghettos should interest Europeans since their societies are rapidly becoming more like America's in this respect. Europe's birthrates have plummeted, and immigration continues unabated. It is a demographic certainty that an ethnically and religiously distinct lower class in Europe will grow in decades to come. Perhaps Europe will turn out to have been lucky. Having instituted universalist social measures, highly regulated labor markets, and redistributive fiscal policy at a time when such choices could still be made in the belief that it was all being kept in the family, so to speak, Europe may weather the expansion of its social community to include distinct outsiders. On the other hand, it may be that the social fabric will fray in Europe as it grows more ethnically and religiously plural. The jury is still out.
Some critics of America turn out to be bean counters. They admit that the American outcomes in certain fields are comparable to what is found in Europe, only to point out that the cost has been higher. The fundamental premise of the recently published *American Human Development Report* is not so much that the United States is doing poorly in comparison with other nations, though of course some outcomes are nothing short of shameful. More annoying to the authors is that the United States is being inefficient and has not been able to parlay its front-running GDP status into an equivalently primary position in other respects. Tony Judt argues that, “for every dollar the United States spends on education it gets worse results than any other industrial nation.” Indeed, the United States spends more per pupil than anyone else, but gets results that are only in the middle of the European spectrum. From a cost-benefit analysis, America should be getting better value for its
money. The same is often said of health care, where the United States spends disproportionately even more, yet gets only moderately good results.

On three out of four of the fundamental activities of modern government—education, health, social insurance, and defense—America turns out to be a big spender. For education and health, the U.S. state spends as much as any country in Europe, for defense much more so, but for social insurance, it is at the bottom of the European scale. If we look at how American society as a whole—privately and publicly—allocates its resources, however, by European standards it spends lavishly on health, education, and defense, and at about the European average for social insurance. Perhaps there is a pattern here.

Consider high spending for a moment, not from the bookkeeper’s vantage, but from the political theorist’s. A nation with a high GDP per head has more wiggle room than poorer countries. It may be that America’s choice to spend freely is in fact a tactical political decision rather than a slothful financial one—to be generous, rather than profligate. For one thing, as James Galbraith has argued, high levels of American spending on education, health care, the military, and even domestic security translate ultimately into high employment. What may seem inefficient from the circumscribed vantage of education or health care looks more defensible from a broader view, as refracted through a concern for labor markets.

The high levels of spending in the United States also benefit humanity at large. America’s massive health care outlays admittedly pay for a bureaucracy that is more deadweight than even the French or German. They also fund a biomedical research machine without compare. When, for ideological reasons, the U.S. federal government under the Bush administration clamped down on stem cell research, the voters of California mortgaged their children’s future to foot the bill for research for all mankind. Proposition 71 in 2004 set aside three billion dollars of taxpayers’ money over 10 years, making the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine the largest source of funding for embryonic and pluripotent stem cell research in the world. By comparison, the UK, which is considered liberal in its approach to stem cell research and keen to be a contender in the field, was projected in 2005 to be spending about thirty million pounds sterling (or a bit over fifty million dollars at the PPP exchange rate) annually over the upcoming decade. The British government subsequently agreed to double its share for two years. But that still leaves the UK—a country almost twice the size of California—far behind that state. Other European nations, like Germany, heavily restrict research and funding into such topics. In the same fashion, America’s generous educational outlays
go not only to urban sink schools, but also to superlative institutions of higher education whose research ranks highest in the world and whose students come from around the globe. In other words, America’s combined private- and public-sector spending fuels global research in medicine, technology, and science.

More broadly, the ability of America to spend disproportionately on crucial policy areas lubricates the gears of choice, whose grinding would otherwise signal the engagement of difficult political choices. Generally, there is a trade-off between pre facto and post facto approaches to solving problems. If you have a population thoroughly imbued with a Protestant work ethic, perhaps you do not have to worry as much about the moral hazard of unemployment insurance as you would with a variety of cultural traditions coloring attitudes to the workplace. If your citizens have an internalized belief in the sanctity of the state and a common attitude of deference toward authority, perhaps you can get away with skeleton-crew policing. If your country’s children are taught at home to respect both their parents and schools, you could well make do without an entire infrastructure of remediation.

Heading a problem off at the pass is more efficient and certainly more effective than patching up the consequences after the fact. But taking a pre facto approach assumes that everyone is agreed on what the problems are and how they should be dealt with since, by definition, the issue does not yet exist. You need a high degree of social cohesion and a consensus on social values. Pre facto interventions work when you can take harmony and agreement for granted. In contrast, a post facto approach has the problem thrust upon it. It requires much less discussion of whether something must be done. Humpty Dumpty must now be put back together again. But the act of returning an omelet to its pristine ovumnal state is harder than making sure in the first place that Humpty does not sit on walls, tempting gravity.

A society with a reasonable degree of social, ethnic, and religious homogeneity can more easily head off coming problems than one bereft of such communalities. Lacking the informal socialization of a broadly unified civil society, a fragmented and heterogeneous nation is obliged to fall back on the overt and after-the-fact exertions of formal authority. Europeans often consider officious user instructions on consumer products and overly literal health-and-safety warnings as an American bad habit that is slowly spreading across the Atlantic. Smirks greet the warnings on packages of peanuts that declare “May contain traces of nut products.” We feel our intelligence insulted by Kit Kat wrappers instructing us to “Open here,” as though we could not figure that out. But such punctiliousness is perhaps motivated as much by a
decreasing ability to take for granted much common knowledge of any sort and the consequent need to spell things out. How many youngsters from modest backgrounds have not been shamed by making a false move when first encountering an artichoke at a fancy dinner party? How much more humane if artichokes came with preprinted instructions. Every intersection in America without a light brandishes stop signs to indicate who has the right of way. In Germany, there are no stop signs, because drivers know that the car approaching from the right has priority. One system spells it out, assuming nothing; the other relies on implicit knowledge.

If the informal habits of civil society still dictate what is eaten and when, if mother still prepares the nightly dinner and children are not yet allowed to indulge in the independence of the culinary Noah’s ark at the mall food court, then obesity may take longer to gain a hold. Absent such consensual and informal regulation, the authorities could—as they have in America—instead legislate to ban trans fats from restaurants and soda from schools, regulate the number of fast-food outlets in poor neighborhoods, and require restaurants to post the caloric counts of their meals on the menus. Can this be the supposedly laissez-faire American state in fact micromanaging the bad habits of its citizens, much as absolutist Prussia banned smoking in the eighteenth century? Or should this be understood as the post facto state drawing the truest arrows it has in its quiver?

In Germany and Scandinavia, access to mass transit, especially subways, is controlled informally, by voluntary compliance, enforced occasionally by spot-checks of tickets. Elsewhere in the world, even in allegedly groupthink Japan, access is gained by passing a ticket barrier, after which the passenger need fear no control. Those who have experienced the nerve-jangling surprise controls in Germany or the Nordic nations—as fellow passengers morph into ID-flashing transit police, demanding tickets and hauling off miscreants while a smug sense of communal recognition settles over the dutiful—know how powerful an enforcement mechanism this system of honor-cum-surprise-checks is. In comparison, the control-at-entrance (and sometimes exit) mechanism bares its fangs up front, but leaves the transit network itself blessedly free. The honor system is based on communal groupthink, a mass transit superego that avoids the free-rider problem in its most literal sense by keeping passengers in line with an unspoken but firmly ingrained cultural ethos.

As the first nation of immigrants in the West, the United States was also the first forced to deal with the trade-offs between informal socialization, on which its systems of authority could stake very little, and the more overt
controls required of its motley citizenry. The American state has relied more on a post facto system of authority than has, until recently, proved necessary in Europe. Post facto controls have suited American circumstances in that they take no knowledge or behavior for granted and require few commonly shared and implicit assumptions. It is, however, likely that they are less efficient, since they cannot rely much on prevention. Steering a Noah’s ark of a society is more costly, complicated, and circuitous than herding a flock of merinos.

Ethnic fragmentation may have left Americans unwilling to support explicit public spending whose benefits were reaped by others of a different skin color. But that has not eliminated the need to spend to solve problems. In fact, it may lead to even more spending, or at least inefficient spending. An obvious example of a highly dysfunctional post facto approach is the way emergency rooms are used in the United States for routine but otherwise unavailable medical care, rather than treating illnesses as they first arise. With their many uninsured patients, Americans are more likely than Europeans to seek care at emergency rooms. The uninsured are treated, but they receive too little care too late, and at a high cost: a bad outcome for all. A study of homeless alcoholics in San Diego, for example, found that they consumed an inordinate amount of medical resources (over $8,000 worth per person annually). By enrolling them in a program of regular health care, the costs generated by these formerly uninsured patients were cut in half.

In other instances, the dysfunctionality of a post facto approach is less blatant, and its advantages as a means of dealing with the hybridity of U.S. society more evident. Why the American preoccupation with biomedical research and its potential spin-offs? It would be nice to think that it was just altruism, or even national prestige, that inspired America to lead the world in biomedicine. That may be part of the story. But there are political benefits as well. At its borders and in its immigrant neighborhoods, the American state has deployed the full armamentarium of overt disease control: quarantines, sequestration, fumigation, vaccination, and the like. For American citizens, in contrast, such drastic interventions have been harder to impose.

During the early years of the AIDS epidemic, for example, the Swedish authorities happily assumed the power to lock up those whose behavior threatened to spread the disease, whether prostitutes, gays, or just average seropositive citizens who refused to obey official strictures. To Swedes, the good of the community, without question, trumped the rights of the individual. The American authorities, in contrast, had been issued no equivalent ideological blank check. Instead, they had to tread delicately around the
prickly sensibilities of sexual and ethnic minorities who feared being the first victims of any drastic impositions. A technological breakthrough (a vaccine or a cure) thus promised much greater political payoffs in America than in Sweden, where old-fashioned public health tactics—however draconian they seemed to the outside world—were considered both necessary and sufficient to deal with the epidemic. By intervening in nature, the American authorities hoped to be able to avoid imposing on society. It was no coincidence that the American state poured vastly greater sums into research on HIV than all other nations put together, some 90% of global government research funding. “Medical research,” as then-congressman Melvin Laird put it in 1960, extrapolating the argument made here to its most general level, “is the best kind of health insurance” the American people could have.

Take education as another example of a problem that can be dealt with via different approaches. A good schoolwork ethic, inculcated by parents intent on getting their children into the best universities and insistent on the normality of hours of nightly homework, does wonders. Asian Americans made up 12% of California’s population in 2006; they supplied 36% of all students at the University of California the following year. Ponder what it is that unites the five top scorers in the 2006 PISA science study (Finland, Hong Kong, Canada, Taiwan, and Estonia). It cannot be educational philosophy or approach. Finland’s is a product of the 1960s. Children of all abilities are put together in the same classes. No marks are given until ninth grade, and lots of work is done in small groups. Taiwan, in contrast, has a strictly structured system, with school uniforms and rigorous, lengthy classroom work. Teaching is geared to a set of national exams in ninth grade. More notable is how the top scorers—a apart from Canada—are homogeneous societies with few foreigners, modest social stratification, and therefore little need to bring cultural and social outsiders into the mainstream. Finland has a lower proportion of foreigners, by far, than any Western European nation, barely half as many as the next most homogeneous nation, Italy. There is, admittedly, a large (5.5%) Swedish-speaking minority, but it settled in the Middle Ages and constitutes a prosperous bourgeoisie. These are countries where the informal socialization of civil society can do the heavy lifting, and little post facto intervention is required from the state. Canada is admittedly an exception to this distinctive trend. Can the high percentage of Asians (almost 9% in 2001, compared with 4% in the United States) be part of the explanation?

To gauge the educational effect of an only moderately undulating social landscape of this nature, consider a study that compares school performance
of the federal states in America with other nations. As we have seen above, in the 2003 TIMMS study of math and science performance, the United States as a whole cut quite a smart figure in international comparison. The TIMMS results for eighth graders have been rendered statistically comparable with the National Assessment of Educational Progress results achieved within each American state. Barring the unlikely possibility that the various federal states have quite differing educational philosophies and practices, we are led to conclude that the moderation of extreme social stratification and the paucity of ethnic minorities that characterizes some American states, but holds less true in others, is impressively correlated with higher scores. Thus, in a complicated and heterogeneous place like California, eighth-grade science pupils scored above their peers in Italy and Norway, but below England, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Flemish Belgium. But a state like Minnesota, with an ethnic makeup and a civic spirit akin to that of its Scandinavian roots, beat out every West European nation, bar none.

The same holds (again for science) for Montana, New Hampshire, North and South Dakota, Massachusetts, Vermont, and Wisconsin. In turn, Colorado, Connecticut, New Jersey, Ohio, Virginia, Idaho, Maine, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming, and, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Michigan and Missouri, were beaten only by England, the top West European scorer. When the 2007 TIMMS tests included Massachusetts and Minnesota separately as benchmarks, both fourth and eighth graders in each state ranked higher in math than their peers in any West European nation. For science, the results were the same for fourth graders, though eighth graders in Minnesota ranked just a tad below their English peers. As the West sinks collectively into educational mediocrity, it is worth remembering that all American states, and all European nations studied (Finland was not part of this particular project), were roundly bested by a collection of Asian entities, including Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Japan.12

The main point here is that the relationship between civil society and the state that governs it is a reciprocal one. The authorities of the state do not act on civil society in the abstract. States face dilemmas and issues that vary according to the civil societies they rule. A state like that of unfortunate Albania, which has to keep grips on a society where blood feuds are fought out over generations, will have different tasks set for it than one faced with a citizenry that is content to stand in the pouring rain on a dark night, waiting for the traffic light to turn green. Enver Hoxha, Albania's former Communist dictator, sought to stamp out blood feuding by punishing those who fought vendettas
by burying them alive in their victims’ coffins. Jaywalkers rarely require quite as much arm-twisting to be brought to heel.

The contrast between pre facto and post facto approaches, as well as how much they are embodied in the policy styles of European and American governments, should not be exaggerated. On the American side, the strength of civil society in even an ethnically mixed and stratified nation has been one of its surprising successes. Informal socialization of arriving immigrants helped turn them into Americans, lessening the need for authorities to crack the whip of official stricture. That, in the spirit of the title of one book, is *How the Irish Became White*. On the European side, the assimilation of outsiders has been a long and continuous process for all the continent’s nations. Turning regional minorities into national citizens and *Peasants into Frenchmen*, as the title of another classic work puts it, has been part of the endeavor. Europe has also digested waves of immigrants before, whether Poles into France or Jews into every nation. However big these differences across the Atlantic may have been in the past, they are rapidly diminishing.

If America was the first post facto state in the developed world, it is no longer alone in facing such trade-offs between informal socialization and overt control. In the era of globalization and mass peregrinations, things are changing in Europe, as well. To return to the example of mass transit, in Berlin, *Schwarzfahrer* caught without a ticket nowadays give false identities and cause fines to be levied on innocents (usually friends or family, whose names and addresses the culprits know offhand). In a time when communalities have eroded, the failure of informal processes of control leads to major problems of formal authority. The era of the turnstile awaits a culture that can no longer take for granted the ethos of voluntarily paying the price of admission. Municipal regulations in large German cities now limit the size of the animals that may be grilled on sunny weekend afternoons in pits dug into the otherwise manicured lawns of public parks. Needless to say, these stipulations would not have been necessary 30 years ago. Multiculturalism brings with it the need to spell out what once was taken for granted.

Of course, it is not just immigrants who bring different standards. Standards can and do change by themselves, and informal socialization may be eroded, for example, by economic incentives at odds with commonly held values. What if you are rewarded over and above your take-home pay for calling in sick? Generous sick leave with no waiting days and no stipulated doctor’s note assumes that the healthy will not abuse the system by shirking. But pain thresholds, a sense of what is required and reasonable, as well as a notion of
what one is entitled to from the state, and, most generally, the prevalent work ethic—these all vary, both among cultures and over time within one. Sweden’s rate of sick days is now one of the highest in the world and about four times the Dutch. This is not, we hope, due to a chronic weakening of the Swedes’ constitutions. In all seriousness, the Swedes themselves attribute it to the massive stress they are subjected to. More likely, it reflects a changing sense of what is tolerable and expected—as well, of course, as what the system permits in the way of abuse. However strong it remains in Holland, the informal socialization that discourages malingering appears to be evaporating in Sweden. It will be interesting to see how long the conscientious and dutiful will continue to allow such massive, if unspoken, redistribution to the lazy and feckless before more formalized post facto controls are imposed. When Italy recently introduced stricter controls for sick leave on civil servants, absences from work dropped 37%. As a Financial Times headline tartly commented: “New labour laws greatly improve health of Italy’s state workers.”
When Americans compare their country to others, it is almost invariably to find fault with it. Of course, there are tub-thumpers on the right wing, for whom the United States is the greatest nation and comparisons are drawn merely to underline that preeminence. But they are a predictable lot, and intellectually of no consequence. Comparisons with abroad are of little use when preaching to the choir if the choir does not care. Most conservative Americans are too uninterested in Europe to sit still for comparative explanations of U.S. superiority. Mitt Romney got very little traction from attacking French health care and other things Gallic during his abortive run for the Republican nomination in 2007. The vast majority of Americans’ comparisons are undertaken by social scientists with liberal leanings who hope that the United States will some day approximate Europe when it comes to family allowances, universal health insurance, parental leave, and the like. For them,
Europe means northern Europe. They either ignore the south or see it too as aspiring to north European status. Stockholm is the mecca toward which the social science faithful pray. Because of their political reform agenda—fervent but unfulfilled—the tone they strike is wistful.

Take as a recent example the *American Human Development Report*, published by a preeminent institution, the Social Science Research Council, and prefaced by multiple well-wishes from the great and the good. It is modeled on the UN’s attempt to sum up economic and human well-being in a single number, to compare nations and progress over time.¹ Its wealth of information lays bare the sometimes dramatic disparities within the United States and shows where it is lagging in relation to peer comparison countries. That is all well and good, and who could fault it? It is when sight is lost of the larger picture that worries begin. Thus, the report presents a chart (Figure 1.2) showing an apparently precipitous decline in America’s human development ranking. The United States stood in second place, after Switzerland, in 1980. This held steady until 1995, when it plummeted over the next 15 years to land at the 12th spot in 2005. America’s numerical score has increased steadily, we are reassured. But the scores of other countries have risen even faster. As a result, the United States has fallen behind its more efficient competitors. What this ignores, however, is that in 1975, the earliest year for which the Human Development Index was calculated, the United States ranked sixth among developed nations, behind Denmark, Canada, Sweden, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, and on par with Norway. Only after this did it rise to the second position. In 2000, it had fallen to the ninth spot. It revived briefly in 2004, moving to the eighth, only to fall four places the following year.² There may, of course, be a larger secular decline here. But it may equally be a question of the inevitable oscillations of finely calibrated measurements.

Let us look more exactly at the range of differentiation. The UN’s Human Development Index ranks 177 countries, from poor Sierra Leone in last place at 0.336 up through happy Iceland (and Norway) at the peak, clocking in at 0.968. Among those nations the UN classifies as having high human development, the spectrum bottoms out with Brazil at 0.800. America and Western Europe cluster in the top 10% range. Only Portugal (0.897) falls below that. The United States (0.951) is at the bottom of the top 5% range, with seven of our countries above it. Between the United States and Iceland lies a span of 17 points on a scale of 1,000. In other words, the jockeying for position takes place at the very pinnacle of the totem pole, within a section that is less than 2% of its overall length.
My point is not that Americans should break out the champagne to congratulate themselves. Of course, there is room for improvement, and serious deficiencies can be revealed by such comparisons. But there is a curiously hubristic quality to American social scientists’ self-flagellation. If America is not number one, or very close to it, then—so seems to be the attitude—it is nothing. The idea that the United States might be just another country, muddling through somewhere along the bulge of the bell curve, is rarely entertained as an acceptable possibility. In this sense, liberal American social scientists pay an inverted homage to the idea of American exceptionalism. They are disappointed when the United States is not, in fact, exceptional, and indeed refuse to accept it as just one of the pack. Godfrey Hodgson has recently argued that the idea of American exceptionalism is a myth and that the United States has always been much more like the nations of its European roots than many patriotic Americans and their historians will admit. I agree entirely and have sought to hold the mirror to his story, hoping to convince European skeptics that the similarities are greater than they too may think.

From this vantage of American exceptionalism, the rise of other nations—whether Europe in the postwar era, Russia during the cold war, now China, and perhaps India—appears as a threat that scales back America’s relative preeminence, demoting the nation from its self-anointed position at the pinnacle of everything. This is the zero-sum mentality of Olympic medal ratings. When swimmers win gold by reaching the end of the pool one-hundredth of a second sooner than their closest competitor, we are not, of course, calculating any practical payoff—shorter aquatic commutes, speedier lifeguards, zippier pearl divers. We are in a world where the law of diminishing returns exacts an excruciating price. The jockeying for position and the acclaim that goes to the top few competitors hinges on microscopic differences discernable only with the help of highly specialized technology. Insofar as comparisons with our competitors spur us to greater efforts, they are welcome. But if they prompt us to lose sight of the larger picture while obsessing over ever-finer distinctions among those at the top, then we are again dangerously close to parsing minor differences narcissistically.

What do Americans lose by not being number one? The answer depends on whom they are competing with. If laggards are overtaking them and they are no longer improving, or not improving as fast as others, there may be a problem. If, however, their peers are inching past them in an ever-tighter race where the distinctions among competitors are rapidly diminishing, then in practical terms it may not matter. Like the Olympic swimmers, they are
jockeying for position in an ever more crowded and splendidly endowed field. In 1975, the span in the Human Development Index between the lowest of our nations (Portugal) and highest (Switzerland) was 0.09. In 2005, the equivalent figure, now with Iceland at the top, was 0.071. In other words, the playing field on which our countries compete has shrunk by over a fifth, and the average score has risen almost a full 10 percentage points, from 0.852 to 0.947. The competition is fiercer, the game has improved, the distinctions are diminishing. In sum, there is ever tighter clustering ever further toward the top. That is, of course, precisely what we would hope for. But it should also serve to shift our attention away from the relative rankings of the nations competing within this ever smaller sphere of excellence, which become less and less meaningful. Instead, we should look at the increasing concentration of these nations around the top of the scale. What we see here is not a picture of relative loss of position, but of convergence at the top (figure 212).

In other words, Americans should welcome, not fret about, the relative slippage (if such it is) that the United States has suffered. Better to be but one in a field of thoroughbreds than top dog of a pack of mongrels. The United States does not become poorer in a tangible sense just because China is now growing faster than America is—any more than the British were impoverished by the Italian sorpasso, that brief moment in 1987 when the Italian economy
appeared (the black market was suddenly factored into the statistics) to be larger than the British, or the Italians are now by the Spanish *sobrepaso*. The only quality being discounted is *amour propre*. Nor has America’s educational system been gutted because other nations now send almost as many, and in some cases more, of their eighteen-year-olds to university.

Yes, there are some disparities—revealed by such comparisons—that should worry Americans. Life expectancies, and what they divulge about health care, lifestyles, and social conditions, may be one. When I was born, in 1956, an American male could hope statistically speaking to make it to about 66. My son, were he to be born this year, could expect to live almost a full decade longer. My Japanese peer would have looked forward at birth to about one less year of life than me. But his son would expect to live four years longer than my baby. Those are four years that I would wish my son to have, too, of course. But is it possible, even if Americans adopt universal health care, eat more fish, slim down, and so forth? In Japan, females can expect to live to become 86. In America, Asian females live almost three years longer than that (88.8). Latino females in the United States, who are unlikely to be among the best treated by America’s health care system, live more than four years longer than white females, Latino males three and a half years longer than their white peers. These statistical snippets suggest that there are issues beyond health care, and even lifestyle, that may influence longevity. Short of turning Japanese, there may be little my son can do to achieve a Japanese lifespan.

My point is not that Americans should ignore the warning signals that comparative surveys send out. It is that the message is not one of unrelieved gloom. Thus, to stick with the *American Human Development Report* as the state of the art, we are told that homicide and suicide “are significant contributors to premature death nationwide.” For homicide, that is undeniably the case. But it is surely worth pointing out that, comparatively, of all the problems the United States has to worry about, suicide is not one of them. The United States ranks either eleventh or eighth (the report cannot quite make up its mind), well below most European nations outside the Mediterranean.

We are told that the differentiation of income levels between the richest and poorest congressional districts is three to one (Table 2.4). But to evaluate the significance of that fact surely we need to know that comparable disparities within Western Europe as a whole are similarly great. The disparities between New York’s 14th and 16th congressional districts are recounted: the Upper East Side and the South Bronx. Only two miles apart, they are yet so different that average life expectancies vary by four years. We are not told that between
the Calton and Lenzie neighborhoods of Glasgow, eight miles apart, the mortality differential for men is 28 years. Or that in Hampstead in north London, men live on average 11 years longer than in St Pancras, five stops down the Northern Line tube.\

We are told that American public schools segregate pupils into two systems, for whites and for minorities. But we are not told that in test outcomes, American public schools are less stratified than in most of Europe, outside Scandinavia (figure 99, above). A graph is presented in the Report (Figure 3.8) as though it shows that in Germany, 99% of 18-year-olds graduate from high school, while in the United States only 75% do. But we are not told that the United States (along with New Zealand, which also has a 75% graduation rate) uniquely does not differentiate between general and vocational streams of secondary education. In Germany, only 38% of pupils attend an academic, university-preparatory secondary school. The remaining 62% are in vocational tracks that generally end in 10th grade. The 25% of U.S. pupils who do not finish high school leave for manual jobs between 15 and 18, depending on when they are legally allowed to end their schooling. Their peers in Germany exit at around the same age for the same goal. The only difference is that they take with them a 10th-grade completion certificate that registers them—however misleadingly—in the OECD’s statistics as having completed secondary education.

The reality is that more 18-year-old Americans than Germans earn the qualification that, in theory at least, allows them to attend university (73% in the United States, 35% in Germany). In tandem, more of them actually enter higher education (64% in the United States, 35% in Germany). As we have seen (figure 101, above), twice as many young Germans as their American peers are neither in education nor gainfully employed. In other words, the chart purporting to show the comparative failure of U.S. secondary education does nothing of the sort. In effect, it manufactures a problem that—for all the difficulties of American public high schools—is equally shared by much of Europe.

We need to know that America has problems, of course. But to understand how big and pressing those issues are, we also need to put them into perspective. Which of America’s problems are off the scale compared to its peers and which are common—if regrettable—parts of being a modern nation? When one is used to being the biggest and best at everything, even the problems have to be jumbo-size. And when one compares a continent-size country to the rarefied, dollhouse atmosphere of, say, a Norway, or even a Netherlands,
obviously many issues—above all, of disparities and divergence—will seem larger. Take Western Europe as a whole, rather than salami-slicing it, and the range and scope of problems appear much more comparable to those faced by the United States. To point this out is not to minimize anything. It is, however, to insist that comparisons have to put things into context and perspective.

It is instructive, for example, to discover that the income differential within New York City is starker than within London. There is a ratio of 2.7 in median incomes between the 16th and 14th New York congressional districts. The most abrupt median income disparity between London parliamentary constituencies, in contrast, is 1.7, the span separating West Ham from Richmond Park. It is less illuminating to be told that the maximum span of median U.S. incomes varies threefold from California’s 20th congressional district (Fresno) to New York’s 14th (Upper East Side). In the UK, a much smaller country, the span is smaller but still significant, at 2.5 between Blackpool South and Richmond Park. I have been unable to find figures on median incomes by unit of political representation elsewhere in Europe. But the range of median annual income between Luxembourg and the Greek mainland (in equivalent currency terms) is three and a half. The range of disposable income (in Euro terms) between Hamburg and northern Portugal is three (and would be larger if we could statistically isolate Blankenese or another of Hamburg’s tony neighborhoods). And the range between central London and Greece’s Ionian Islands is close to four. We now begin to get a comparable sense of the disparities. Stark income differentials within one city are a disgrace. Large variances within a huge continent are more to be expected. Not all differences are fractal.
To parse the subtle distinctions between Europe and America must strike observers from other parts of the globe as an exercise in the narcissism of minor differences. Like twins keen to differentiate themselves, some nations eagerly distinguish among countries that are, seen globally, much of a muchness.

During the cold war, the unity of the North Atlantic nations against the Soviet empire was obvious. But after the fall of the Berlin Wall, new antagonisms emerged. Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Afghanistan, Israel: these are the immediate bones of contention. The larger issue has been the role of the United States, the one remaining superpower, as its regnum is tested by Middle Eastern wars, Russian saber rattling, and Chinese aspirations to great power status. Perhaps, as some Europeans argue, the United States has become a rogue state, unilaterally exempting itself from the strictures of mutual dependence in an
increasingly interwoven world. Perhaps, as some Americans reply, Europeans live in a cloud-cuckoo land where conflict is considered ultimately to be based on misunderstandings, not real differences, and talk can therefore replace guns. These are geopolitical debates we need not enter into here.¹

We are concerned, however, with the geopoliticians’ frequent and facile elisions between internal and external politics. Because Americans own guns, they like to go to war. Because they drive big cars, they need to secure oil supplies in the Middle East. Because they are religious, they see themselves as crusaders. Because continental Europeans do not have functioning armies and refuse to pay for any, they turn foreign policy into a talking shop. Because they spend their money on social benefits, they cannot afford to defend themselves and must therefore appease the aggressors. Because of their own traumatic past, they refuse to acknowledge the continuing reality of evil in the world.

In this book, I have shown that, in almost every quantifiable respect, the United States and Western Europe approximate each other. Earlier, I have accounted for some of the ways that social scientists have tried, and failed, to typologize differences between Europe and America. Here, in contrast, I am interested in another question. Not how is America different, but why would one ask this question in the first place? Why assume that America is different? Is it the sheer fact of novelty? Of starting at a historically definable moment? Of geographical distance? Of the geopolitical patrimony of cheap and plentiful land and scarce and well-rewarded labor? Or is it that America’s political culture defined itself from the start as a reaction to its European origins?

Look at the other neo-Europeans. They reveal that the notion of American exceptionalism cannot stem simply from the United States being a new society. European visitors to New Zealand nostalgically enthuse: “It’s just like England was 30 years ago.” Canada is considered to be more “European” than the United States. And the French recognize the Québécois as closer soul mates than les anglo-saxons. All the other neo-Europeans enjoyed the peculiarities that were America’s: cheap land, expensive labor, few or comprehensively defeated first nations, the absence of feudal elites, vast distances from the mother continent. And yet, they are not regarded as inherently different from Europe. That was the implicit conclusion of Seymour Martin Lipset’s ingenious thought experiment, when he compared Canada and the United States to show that, despite similar geographical circumstances, they possessed distinct political cultures.²

If the United States and Europe are perceived as different, the reasons should be sought in political culture, not geopolitics. Perhaps it is because
the United States was founded as a reaction to its European past that it seems more different from its origin than it really is. We do not have to be Hegelians or psychoanalysts to appreciate that reactions to something depend on that against which they react, and that they are symbiotically related to it. The narcissism of small differences has worked both ways across the Atlantic. American exceptionalists claim that the United States is more different from its European origins than is in fact the case; European exceptionalists insist on having found more novel circumstances in the New World than their anecdotes actually sustain.

Most of the American literature on American exceptionalism focuses on themes like how the United States avoided Europe’s battles with the old regime, how liberalism became the entrenched and dominant ideology, how socialism never took hold, how the middle-class ethos of America’s founders set the tone for centuries thereafter, how disestablished religion became more important than in Europe, and so forth. American exceptionalists do not argue that America is radically different from Europe. Rather, they examine how the United States picked and chose from its many European legacies, fortuitously sidestepping some of the nastier ones. The United States was the lucky heir, not the rebel that threw it all over. Amerika, du hast es besser, “you are better off,” as the German national poet Goethe put it in 1827, not, Amerika, du bist ganz anders, “you are totally different.”

More recently, the historiography of the American past has begun to deemphasize the idea of exceptionalism. Historians today portray the American state and social policy as heavily influenced by European examples, and often quite akin to the Old World. Even the welfare state, which used to be a locus classicus of American exceptionalism, is increasingly written through a broad North Atlantic focus that sees as many commonalities as differences. Thus, Matthieu Leimgruber’s recent history of the Swiss welfare state analyzes this under-studied European system through the historiography of U.S. social policy precisely because it is more comprehensible in American than in European terms. The onset of world history also works to diminish differences within the industrialized world. It has relativized, if not vanquished, a sense of historical difference across the Atlantic.

If one takes a pan-European view, even some of the classic differences so often alleged between Europe and America become effaced. Immigration no longer distinguishes the two in any binary sense. Norway never had an aristocracy, nor did Iceland or the northern half of Sweden. But arguably, the American South did. Even open frontiers and supposedly sparsely settled
circumstances—commonly taken to be constituent elements of America’s founding myth—existed also in the Germanizing east. Breslau is arguably the mirror pendant to Milwaukee: each a Germanized town with breweries, a Rathaus, and beclocked church steeples. Its nightmarish variant was Hitler’s vision—long after the closing of the American frontier—of a Germanic yeomanry settled across the depopulated steppes. The closing of the eastern frontier came only with Stalingrad, in the winter of 1942–1943. And did the European colonies not play much the same role as the American West?

The arguments for radical differences across the Atlantic are mainly of European origin. America did not break with its European past nearly as sharply as Europeans often claim. The French revolutionaries, as later their Russian comrades, were far more radical than the American founding fathers: beheading their masters, murdering real and imagined opponents, attempting to refashion human nature, even rejigging time itself. Compare that to the glorified tax revolt of the prudent and bourgeois American colonists. European observers have a penchant for portraying America as far more “other” than it actually is. Tocqueville, Weber, Adorno, and Heidegger, as well as their more excitable epigones, Jean Baudrillard, Emmanuel Todd, and the like: these are the writers who have informed the ideas of radical American exceptionalism that are now bien pensant thinking across Europe. As Josef Joffe has rightly noted, Europeans treat the United States less as a country, considered soberly in its own right, than as a canvas—a continent-sized Rorschach blot—on which to project their own preoccupations.

Of course, there are differences. Las Vegas is not Baden-Baden. But neither is Bergen Bergamo. Are differences across the Atlantic any greater than those between Spitzbergen and Sardinia? Yes, Paris and London are more alike than Paris, France and Paris, Texas. But Oslo and Palermo are much more different than Santa Monica and Notting Hill. To take another example: Swedish expats in London (of whom there are some 50,000, an impressive number that corresponds proportionately to a million and a half Americans living in the city) like sending their children to American-style schools in the UK, rather than to English public schools. They find the informal egalitarianism of U.S. education so like the schools of their own social democracy and more culturally familiar than the British system, with its sex segregation, religious instruction, compulsory Latin, frequent testing, Saturday classes, and obligatory uniforms.

Of course, regions, nations, and continents invariably differ. But why assume that variations across the Atlantic are of kind and not just degree? Surely, the
founding of the United States as an offshoot of Europe implies that its culture was transplanted. The acorn never falls far from the oak. Louis Hartz once proposed that the new societies emanating from Europe each continued the course of the mother society as it was at the moment of their birth. Thus, South America became feudal, America capitalist, and Australia socialist. Whatever gripe one may have with the specifics of this theory, Hartz’s main point stands: a new society arises by asexual reproduction, becoming first a copy, then an extension of the parent. And indeed, recent social science work indicates that the political and social attitudes of immigrants’ native land tend to remain with them, coloring their behavior in the new home country. Who would dare explain the politics of Minnesota (or Saskatchewan) without reference to Scandinavia, of New York City or Boston without mention of Ireland or Italy, of Cincinnati without Germany, of Appalachia without Scotland?

But unlike New Zealand, for example, where the seeds were fairly few and from the same highly specialized subspecies (Victorian missionaries and civil servants), America was seeded not by just one original acorn, the Ur-Eichel, but by many. Europeans often find it hard to grasp America’s unexpected multiplicity of facets and local cultures, masked as they are by the apparent gloss of a unified nation and a single language. But what a European reads as American exoticism is often only a transplanted aspect of another part of Europe that he encounters with fresh eyes, or possibly for the first time, when in the United States. Hans Magnus Enzensberger provided a brilliant riff on such internal European exoticism when he transposed perfectly true news items from Italian newspapers into the rather more sober milieus of Bonn, Amsterdam, and Scandinavia. Imagine thirty thousand Dutch pensioners storming and destroying the main office of the state retirement fund. Or the German president involved in an international alcohol smuggling ring. Or the Swedes running out of postage stamps because the printing presses had rusted. Or over a hundred thousand Danes drawing disability pensions for alleged blindness while also possessing drivers’ licenses and cars.

In a sense, America does something similar, holding up the mirror for visiting Europeans to unfamiliar facets of their own continent. Thus, northern Europeans assume that America’s mechanisms of public authority will be much like what they are accustomed to from home. They are then horrified to discover that American habits of public order are at least as Mediterranean as they are northern European. As has often been remarked about traffic in Boston: what do you expect from a city populated by Italians and the Irish? Hannover it is not. But what a Hannoverian finds charming and exotic when
on vacation in Rome, he considers anarchic and unexpected when navigating his way out of the tunnel from Logan Airport.

Conversely, what Mediterraneans mock as American puritanism is often a variant of regulatory styles that the United States has learned from, or at least shares with, Scandinavians and other northern Europeans. Prohibition, for example, was imposed in the United States during the early years of the twentieth century, as it was in Norway, Iceland, and Finland, not to mention the Soviet Union. The state-run alcohol monopolies of Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, and 16 other U.S. states mimic those still found in all Scandinavian countries other than Denmark. Prohibition and the strict control of alcohol sales is, in other words, as European a phenomenon as it is American, however unaware of this Mediterranean visitors may be.

Nor is controlling drugs by bans and jail more of an American peculiarity than it is a Scandinavian one. The same goes for the regulation of commercial sex work. Prohibition and police enforcement are used as much in Sweden and Finland (where prostitution—going against the grain elsewhere in Europe—has recently been recriminalized) as in some American states. Or take those American gender discrimination policies that Mediterraneans or, for that matter, many British, love to mock: quotas in the workplace and in politics, the policing of official language, the regulation of behavior in schools, factories, and offices, and the attendant and heavy-handed apparatus to enforce all of this. All these aspects of modern gender relations, laughed at by many Europeans as another example of the gynocratization of American society and its politically correct excesses, have been, of course, practiced earlier and more vigorously in Scandinavia, the heartland of modern feminism.

But then, well-educated Frenchmen or Italians—and surprisingly many Germans and British—know a great deal more about America than they do about their northern neighbors, and are therefore innocently unaware of what they are up to. The reverse is less true, since northern Europeans enjoy comparing themselves favorably to the supposedly less orderly and productive southerners. Indeed, one of the dirty little secrets of the EU is the vast and pervasive contempt the Protestant north feels for the Catholic south—rarely acknowledged, except perhaps in discussions of corruption in Brussels, and scarcely registered in the Mediterranean.12 America’s foreignness to Europeans is often the exoticism of one part of Europe itself to another.

As we have seen, there are few quantifiable measures of socioeconomic reality where the span within Europe is not as great as the divergence between Europe and the United States. Hand on heart, which cities more resemble
each other: Stockholm and Minneapolis or Helsinki and Thessaloniki? And as the European Union widens eastward—possibly even to the point of taking in Turkey, a Muslim country mostly in Asia—the most recent newcomers (many from regions once called European Turkey and part of the Ottoman Empire) efface many of the issues that do distinguish the United States from Europe. These new arrivals, as indeed Europe’s many recent immigrants from Asia and Africa, are very religious, skeptical of a strong state, unenthusiastic about voting, and allergic to high taxes. From the vantage of old Europe, they are, in other words, more like Americans. How odd, really, that Europeans seek to identify an enemy in a culture with which they have so much in common, just at the moment they are being joined by ones with whom they actually share even less. How odd of them to turn their backs on a country which, like their own continent, espouses the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, democracy, liberalism, free but appropriately regulated markets, and religious toleration.

Even a few minutes watching the Eurovision Song Contest strengthens both a belief in the continued vitality of relations that span the Atlantic and one in a hugely variegated Europe, diverse to the point of incoherence. This must be the nightmare that keeps the empire-builders in Brussels awake at night: a vastly expanded Europe, stretching from Kamchatka to the Azores, from the North Pole (now festooned with Danish flags and Russian submarines) to the Dead Sea, with its pidgin English lingua franca and droning, generic Europop, ritually incanting “Hello Europe” even as the voting descends into unabashed tribalism. Imagine now that Europe’s voters were given a choice also between the Australians and the Serbs. With whom will, say, the Norwegians cast their lot? Place your bets, ladies and gentlemen.

Of course, this choice will never be on offer. The world is too complicated a place for the binary blimpishness of all-or-nothing alternatives between America and Europe. Both sides of this particular divide would do well to consider how proximate and similar the two slopes of their supposed conceptual chasm in fact are. Whether American conservatives or Europeans across the board, each enamored of their own reflection, unless we break this spell of self-enchantment, we risk suffering the fate of Narcissus. Readers will recall that Ovid’s ill-fated hero dies of thirst, for fear that kissing the water’s surface will disrupt the image that has so enthralled him.
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A NOTE ON SOURCES

Working with Internet sources is to enter a Borgesian universe of ever-shifting reality. A URL that works one day delivers you to a blank screen the next, or—almost more frustrating—to a new version of the Web site that you had earlier worked with for hours without problem, but which now, its administrators cheerily announce, is new and improved and therefore—from your point of view—unnavigable, at least without starting from scratch.

The usual conventions of scholarly footnoting, which presume a stable referent, are largely undone. I have attempted to be as precise about where I have found data as I could without turning this book into a vast mass of footnotes preceded by a smidgen of text. Often I have supplied URLs. They may work. Some URLs are so long and complicated that you are unlikely to transfer them accurately from these pages to your browser. That frustration will then be compounded when—even when correctly transcribed—the Web site they lead to turns out to have changed in the meantime. In such cases, you are better off following the instructions I also supply on how to find the information, detailed below. Or you may find it easier simply to Google the name or description of the document in question.

Some Web sites have ever-changing URLs, depending on how they are accessed. Source-OECD is one such. Some Web sites are freely accessible from anywhere. Some require a subscription that is often available to those who have institutional affiliations with major research universities, but which can also often be gotten at through terminals at public libraries. Some require various formalities of registration. And some, but almost none used here, require money to be paid for access.

Some Web sites are ones that must be navigated once you are in. In those and similar cases, I have tried to supply a thread to follow. Thus, for example, a reference such as “Eurostat. Statistics, Regions and Cities, Main Tables, Regional Statistics, Regional Economic Accounts—ESA95, Disposable Income of Private Households” means that, from the Eurostat home page, you should click on the subsequent links indicated and will—with luck—eventually make it to the table that gives Disposable Income of Private Households.

The information used here was consulted mainly in 2008. It may well have changed several times in the interim. I have forewarned the usual pseudo-scholarly piety of indicating in each case the precise date on which I last consulted an Internet source. That would be merely
another bit of information you would have to take on faith, and what is the point of knowing
when the URL worked if it no longer does? I have thought it more useful to supply explanations of how to find the information, as mentioned above.

OECD materials are, except in the few cases otherwise noted, available through SourceOECD.

ABBREVIATIONS

CDACS: Center for Democracy and Civil Society, Georgetown University,
IARC: International Agency for Research on Cancer
ISSP: International Social Survey Programme. From the GESIS—Leibniz-Institut für
Sozialwissenschaften Web page (http://zacat.gesis.org/webview/index.jsp), select ISSP, By
Module Topic, then topic and study. Having chosen the study, click Variable Description,
Archive and ID variables, click on the Table tab, select Country, select Add to column, enter
your ID and password. Select Substantial Variables, select variable in question, select Add to
row.

WDI Online: World Bank, World Development Indicators Online
WHOSIS: World Health Organization, Statistical Information System
WRI: World Resources Institute
WVS: World Values Survey. There are two sets of WVS surveys, the Four Wave Aggregate and
the 2005 survey. If not otherwise noted, the data comes from the most recent results of the
Four Wave surveys, which for our countries means from between 1996 and 2001. When data
comes from the 2005 Wave that is noted as WVS 2005. Available at: http://www.worldvalues-
survey.com/
NOTES

10. The numbers were run on whatever period each site allows, unclear in the case of Limbaugh’s. Compared to some 3,500 references to America and the United States, Limbaugh makes only 261 to Europe, and only 162 to the supposed archenemy of U.S. conservatives, France.
26. I am assuming that the population described by unemployment (ages 15 to 74) is sufficiently like that used for the numbers on the disabled (20 to 64) that we can simply shift
them from one statistic to the other, and that the incarcerated population falls in the main between the ages used for unemployment statistics.


**CHAPTER ONE**


3. ISSP, Role of Government III 1996, Variables 16, 18, 24, 17, 20, 44, 22, 40, 23. Role of Government IV 2006, Variables 25, 26, 31, 33, 14, 29, 15. Most results are the sum of the first two responses and are taken from one or the other of the surveys. Germany means western Germany in those cases where the surveys distinguish.


8. Giuseppe Nicoletti et al., “Summary Indicators of Product Market Regulation with an Extension to Employment Protection Legislation,” OECD Economics Department Working Papers 226, December 1999, Table 6, p. 23; Figure 4, p. 31; Figure 5, p. 34; Figure 10, p. 46. Available at http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=201668#PaperDownload.


29. WHOSIS, Core Health Indicators, Mortality, Years of Life Lost to Injury (%). Figures for 2002. Available at http://www.who.int/whosis/database/core/core_select.cfm?strISO3_select=ALL&strIndicator_select=ALL&intYear_select=latest&language=english.


33. Michael Burda, Daniel S. Hamermesh, Philippe Weil, “The Distribution of Total Work in the EU and the US,” in Tito Boeri, et al., eds., *Working Hours and Job-Sharing in the EU and USA* (New York, 2008), Table 1.4 M, p. 38; Table 1.1, p. 25. Data from 2003.


43. ISSP, Religion II, 1998, Variables 73, 47, sum of the first two responses.


**CHAPTER TWO**


7. OECD Health Data 2008, Health Care Resources, Health Employment, Physicians, Practicing Physicians, Density per 1,000 population. Most figures from 2006. In contrast, the UN reports much higher figures for physician density in the United States. UN, Human Development Report 2005, Table 6, p. 236. But since the World Bank agrees with the lower figures, I have gone with them. WDI Online, Social Indicators, Health, Physicians (per 1,000 people).


20. NationMaster, Food Statistics, McDonalds Restaurants (per Capita) by Country, Number of McDonalds Restaurants per 10,000 Population. Available at http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/food_mcd_res_per_capita.


24. IARC, Globocan 2002. Enter By cancer, choose disease and then countries you are interested in, Incidence, ASR(W), age-standardized world rate. Per 100,000. Available at http://www-dep.iarc.fr/.


26. WHOSIS, Core Health Indicators, Age-standardized mortality rate for cardiovascular diseases (per 100,000 population). Data from 2002. Available at http://www.who.int/whosis/database/core/core_select.cfm.


CHAPTER THREE

1. Timothy Smeeding, “Poor People in Rich Nations: The United States in Comparative Perspective,” Journal of Economic Perspectives, 20, 1 (2006), Table 4, p. 79. The OECD’s figures show the U.S. economy as more equal than that of Sweden, the UK, France, Italy, and Belgium before taxes and public transfers. OECD, Sustainable Development: Critical Issues (2001), Figure 3.A.12, p. 91. Data from late 1990s.


6. OECD Employment Outlook 2006, Table 3.2, p. 60. I have followed the OECD’s figures here, though it must be added that, in Italy, there is also a system, the Cassa Integrazione Guadagni, for workers in certain economic sectors facing major economic difficulties, like inclement weather in the building trade. In theory, benefits here can last up to a year, but can be prolonged extraordinarily by the government. In reality, 90% of recipients use it for only three or four months. Giuseppe Bonazzi, “Italian ‘Cassa Integrazione’ and Post Redundancy,” Work, Employment and Society, 4, 4 (1990), p. 578.


10. OECD, Starting Strong: Early Childhood Education and Care (2001), Figure 3.5, p. 88. Data from 1998 in PPP terms.


### CHAPTER FOUR

6. Van Dijk et al., *Criminal Victimisation in International Perspective*, Table 22a, p. 284. Figures from 2004–05.
10. Van Dijk et al., Criminal Victimisation in International Perspective, Table 8, p. 65; Table 9, p. 71; Table 10, p. 72; Table 11, p. 74. Figures for 2003–04.
12. Van Dijk et al., Criminal Victimisation in International Perspective, Table 12, p. 78.
16. Van Kesteren et al., Criminal Victimisation in Seventeen Industrialized Nations, Appendix 4, Table 26, p. 216. Van Dijk et al., Criminal Victimisation in International Perspective, Table 16, p. 275.
18. Van Dijk et al., Criminal Victimisation in International Perspective, Table 16, p. 90. Figures for 2003–04. The ISSP reveals more French and about the same number of Germans as Americans reporting public officials seeking bribes quite or very often. ISSP, Role of Government IV 2006, Variable 62.
20. Van Dijk et al., Criminal Victimisation in International Perspective, Table 14, p. 87. Figures for 2003–04.
CHAPTER 5

1. Euromonitor International, Global Market Information Database, Countries, Households and homes, Household profiles, Number of households, Households by number of rooms [5+], Historic number per ‘000 Households. The data come from 2007 and were converted to percentages. Available at http://www.portal.euromonitor.com/portal/server.pt?space=Login&control=RedirectHome.


5. WVS, Politics and Society, Confidence: The United Nations. This has dropped significantly, however, in WVS 2005.


9. Use of the definite article instead is complicated especially in German, with its many variations, and skews the results against the FAZ, while the search engines of the French papers do not allow searches for their equivalents in that language. Search engines often do not allow searches for “and,” which was another possibility.
CHAPTER SIX

2. OECD, *Literacy in the Information Age: Final Report of the International Adult Literacy Survey* (2000), Figure 3.11, p. 42.
5. OECD, *PISA 2006*, v. 2, Table 2.1c, p. 27.
8. For math, the countries with more students at the bottom were Italy, Portugal, and Greece, and at the top those with fewer were Spain, Portugal, and Greece, with Italy at the same level. OECD, *PISA 2006*, v. 2, Table 2.1a, p. 24; Table 6.2a, p. 227. Level 1 and below for the lowest categories. Level 6 for the highest.
10. OECD, *PISA 2006*, v. 2, Table 4.8a, p. 146.
17. OECD, *Literacy in the Information Age*, Figure 2.1, p. 14; Figure 2.3, p. 19.


22. UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Libraries of institutions of tertiary education, Collections, Books: Number of Volumes. Data from 1997 to 2000. Available at http://stats UIS.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=209. To calculate books per capita, population figures were used from the OECD.


24. OECD, *Literacy in the Information Age*, Figure 3.16A, p. 48. Figures for 1994–98. Though in the last week only about as many Americans had read a book as had the French. WVS 2005, Information Source: Books.

25. OECD, *Literacy in the Information Age*, Figure 3.16B, p. 48. Figures for 1994–98.


35. OECD, *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life* (2007), Table 3.1, p. 45; Chart 3.4, p. 58.

36. OECD, *Babies and Bosses*, Table 2.2, p. 31.


**CHAPTER SEVEN**

1. ISSP, Environment II 2000, Variables 17 (sum of first two responses), 11, 38, 12, 19, 20, 21. Relatively sanguine American opinions on global warming are found here, however: World Public Opinion.org, *International Polling on Climate Change*, December 6, 2007,
6. OECD, Sustainable Development, Table 6.1, p. 161. Figures for 1998. The Swedish figure may be underestimated, since it has fallen from previous years.
11. OECD in Figures 2005, pp. 34–35. To calculate figures per person, population figures were used from OECD for 2003.
17. International Energy Agency (IEA), Oil Crises and Climate Challenges: Thirty Years of Energy Use in IEA Countries (2004), Figure 5–4, p. 90. Figures for 1998. Available through SourceOECD.
21. WDI Online, Environment, Fresh Water and Protected Areas. Figures from 2004. The UK has almost the same percent set aside.
29. IEA, *Oil Crises and Climate Challenges*, Figure 3–8, p. 43.

**CHAPTER EIGHT**

8. Lester M. Salamon et al., _Global Civil Society: An Overview_ (Baltimore, 2003), Figure 3, p. 17. Available at http://www.jhu.edu/ftc_css/publications/pdf/globalciv.pdf.

15. WVS 2005, Active/Inactive Membership of a Political Party.


17. WVS, Politics and Society, Political Action. Similar results in WVS 2005, though the number participating in demonstrations appears to have dropped.

18. WVS, Perceptions of Life, Respect and Love for Parents.

19. ISSP, Social Networks II 2001, Variables 6, 10, 12, 14, 25r, 23r, 24r, 27.


CHAPTER 9


2. ISSP, National Identity II 2003, Variables 63 (sum of first two responses), 9, 22, 21 (sum of first two), 20 (first two).


5. WVS, Politics and Society, War, Willingness to Fight for Country. Percentages are the highest levels for each country in surveys done from 1990 to 2000. In the WVS 2005, these results were duplicated with the Swiss now also joining the more belligerent nations, and the French and British at practically the same level as the now lower American result (63.1%).

CHAPTER TEN

1. Although I have made it a point to stick to the available comparable numbers, without spiking them with additions, it is perhaps worth pointing out that a more recent Gallup poll from May 2007 found 6% of American respondents did not believe in God (up from 4% in 2004). Available at Polling Report.com, http://www.pollingreport.com/religion.htm. The YouGov/Economist poll from 2008 found 9% of Americans did not believe in God. Anglo-Saxon Attitudes: A Survey of British and American Views of the World. Available at http://www.economist.com/media/pdf/FullPollData.pdf. In the WVS 2005, 5.3% of Americans declared God not at all important in their lives, compared to 2% of Italians and significantly higher figures for the other nations sampled there.

2. WVS, Religion and Morale, FO 34.
4. WVS, Religion and Morale, F028.
5. WVS 2005, How Often Do You Attend Religious Services?
11. WVS 2005, Thinking About Meaning and Purpose of Life.
12. WVS, Religion and Morale. FO50, FO34, FO62.
18. When one head teacher recently tried to change this, he was told that bishops in the House of Lords and ministers would block his plans. Observer, September 23, 2007, p. 7.
22. Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland.
28. ISSP, Environment II 2000, Variables 15 (sum of first two responses), 29 (Definitely untrue), 30, 39 (sum of last two responses).
29. OECD, *PISA 2006*, Figure 3.4, p. 132. WVS 2005. Significantly more Americans also agreed that the world is better off because of science and technology than all Europeans, though the Swiss and Germans were close.

30. ISSP, Religion II, 1998, Variables 69, 70, 71, 72, 42. Sum of first two responses.

**CHAPTER 11**


6. OECD, *A Profile of Immigrant Populations in the 21st Century: Data from OECD Countries* (2008), Table 3.1, p. 82.


**CHAPTER TWELVE**


Europe?” *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 37, 1 (2007), p. 16, makes a similar claim, though it is unclear whether this refers to the enlarged EU.


6. Top income tax rates have gone down in America from 70% to 35% since 1981, and in Sweden from 50% to 36% since 1975. Declining tax rates levied on those in the top percentile in Sweden are documented in Björn Gustafsson and Birgitta Jansson, “Top Incomes in Sweden During Three-Quarters of a Century: A Micro Data Approach,” IZA DP No 2672, March 2007, Table 3, p. 25. In the United States: Kopczuk and Saez, “Top Wealth Shares,” p. 484.


8. Kopczuk and Saez, “Top Wealth Shares in the United States,” Table 3, pp. 454–55. The apparent date for the wealth peak of the top one-hundredth of 1923 is a typo.


10. Fabien Dell, “Top Incomes in Germany and Switzerland over the Twentieth Century,” *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 3, 2–3 (2005), Figure 6, p. 420; Thomas Piketty and Emmanuel Saez, “The Evolution of Top Incomes: A Historical and International Approach,” *American Economic Review*, 92, 2 (2006), Figure 4, p. 203.

11. F. Dell et al., “Income and Wealth Concentration in Switzerland over the Twentieth Century,” in Atkinson and Piketty, eds., *Top Incomes over the Twentieth Century*, claims that few of Europe’s wealthy relocate to Switzerland to escape high taxation in their native countries. But the sums that it calculates (and can calculate on the basis of Swiss tax figures) cover only a small fraction of the wealth parked in Switzerland, but outside the Swiss tax net. The 35% advance flat tax at source, for example, has been finely calibrated by the Swiss to keep the EU off their backs while being so easy to evade that only the occasional widow without benefit of tax advice would actually pay it.


18. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, A League Table of Child Poverty in Rich Nations, Innocenti Report Card 1 (June 2000), Figure 1, p. 4; Figure 2, p. 7. Available at http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/repcard1e.pdf. Similar confirmation comes from figures that measure absolute poverty defined as a percentage of U.S. posttax/posttransfer income (1991 PPP numbers). By this measure, at a 50% poverty line, France, Ireland, Italy, and the UK had higher percentages of the population in poverty, and the Netherlands only slightly below. Lane Kenworthy, “Do Social-Welfare Policies Reduce Poverty? A Cross-National Assessment,” Social Forces, 77, 3 (1999), Table 1, p. 1,126. There is a version of this covering fewer countries in Lane Kenworthy, Egalitarian Capitalism: Jobs, Incomes, and Growth in Affluent Countries (New York, 2004), chapter 6. Similar figures can be found in Lyle Scruggs and James P. Allan, “The Material Consequences of Welfare States,” Comparative Political Studies, 39, 7 (2006), Table 1, p. 884.

19. Timothy M. Smeeding and Lee Rainwater, “Comparing Living Standards Across Nations: Real Incomes at the Top, the Bottom and the Middle,” in Edward N. Wolff, ed., What Has Happened to the Quality of Life in the Advanced Industrialized Nations? (Cheltenham, 2004), Figure 6.2, p. 170; Figure 6.6, p. 176. (Also, Luxembourg Income Study Working Paper No. 266).


NOTES

30. U.S. figures from U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Interim State Population Pro-
jections, 2005, Table 2. Scottish figures from Alastair H. Leyland et al., *Inequalities in Mort-
tality in Scotland 1981-2001*, Medical Research Council, Social and Public Health Sciences

31. WHO, Commission on Social Determinants of Health, *Closing the Gap in a Generation:
Health Equity through Action on the Social Determinants of Health*, 2008, Table 2.1, p. 32;
Races, Counties and Race-Counties in the United States,” *PLOS Medicine*, 3, 9 (2006),
Dataset St. Life Expectancy at Birth by County.

Results from a State Scorecard on Health System Performance*, The Commonwealth Fund

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

1. *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes: A Survey of British and American Views of the World*. Available at

2. Death Penalty Information Center, April 2, 2007. Available at http://www.deathpenalty-
info.org/FactSheet.pdf.

2007/2008*, Table 27, p. 322.

from OECD. Figures for 2003.

(2006), pp. 398–399. Strong support for this approach in Francis G. Castles, “Patterns of State

ance, Primary Private Health Insurance Coverage, and Duplicate Private Health Insurance
Coverage. Figures for UK come from the latter and are for 2006. Mannheim Research
Institute for the Economics of Aging, Axel Börsch-Supan et al., eds., *Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe* (April 2005), Table 1, p 127. Available at http://www.share-project.

7. *OECD Health Project, Private Health Insurance in OECD Countries* (2004), Table 2.4, p.
41. Figures from 2000. These are percentages of spending, and since health spending in the
United States is high, that could mean higher actual costs per capita. And that is, indeed,


10. Harold L. Wilensky, *Rich Democracies: Political Economy, Public Policy and Performance* (Berkeley, 2002), pp. 681–682. Arend Lijphart, Bernard Grofman and Matthew Shugart will be publishing a book that makes a strong case for American exceptionalism in terms of political institutions. See Arend Lijphart, “The United States: A Different Democracy,” in Gary King et al. eds., *The Future of Political Science* (New York, 2009). It is hard to believe, however, that one could not, if one were willing to go to this level of detail, do something similar for, say, Italy or Switzerland. And in any case, the larger issue is what sort of typologizing one wants to be doing. A generation of scholars was lost in the trenches typologizing fascism until the entire endeavor was finally abandoned, and something similar has been the case for the welfare state, as I argue below. Rather than typologizing in a Platonic vein, looking for a never-to-be-found overlapping commonality of essences, we would be better off applying the insights of Ludwig Wittgenstein and searching out family resemblances that cluster things cheek by jowl.


CHAPTER FOURTEEN


13. To calculate the rough figure of public health spending per person covered publicly in the United States, the sum of spending on Medicare, Medicaid, and veterans’ public hospital
and medical care in 2005 was divided by the sum of enrollees in Medicare and Medicaid as well as all American veterans in 2005. Medicare expenditure and expenditure on veterans’ public hospital and medical care, as well as the numbers of Medicare enrollees, of people covered by Medicaid and the number of American veterans all come from the U.S. Census Bureau, *2008 Statistical Abstract*. Medicaid expenditure comes from James Marton and David E. Wildasin, “Medicaid expenditures and state budgets: past, present, and future,” *National Tax Journal* (June 2007), p. 1. Available at http://www.entrepreneur.com/trade-journals/article/167976828.html. European total public health spending figures were taken from *OECD Health Data 2007*, Total expenditure on health, Public expenditure on health, Million US$, purchasing power parity, 2005. Public health spending per person was determined by taking the percentages of European populations covered by public health insurance from, *OECD Health Data 2007, October 2007*, Government/social health insurance, In-patient and acute care, % of total population. The percentages of European populations with public health coverage were multiplied by the countries’ total populations to get figures of people covered by public health insurance. These figures were used to divide the total public health spending numbers to determine the amounts of public spending per person covered by public health insurance.


20. That the agrarian nature of these societies in the nineteenth century was a crucial element of their styles of social policy is one of the arguments put forth in Peter Baldwin, The Politics of Social Solidarity: Class Bases of the European Welfare State, 1875–1975 (Cambridge, 1990).

21. Figures for late 1990s in Lee Rainwater and Timothy M. Smeeding, Poor Kids in a Rich Country: America’s Children in Comparative Perspective (New York, 2003), Figure 1.1, p. 21, Table 1.4, p. 31.


CHAPTER FIFTEEN


6. Giovanni di Stefano is a bad-boy Anglo-Italian lawyer, a discount version of Jacques Vergès, whose client list includes mass murderers and ex-dictators. He has moved into politics, founding the Radical Party of Great Britain. Apparently, in the absence of any more elaborated platform, its first target is what it considers the insanity of such needless instructions,
15. Financial Times August 16/17, 2008, p. 6. The Dutch and Swedish figures are from Rigmor Osterkamp and Oliver Röhn, “Being on Sick Leave: Possible Explanations for Differences of Sick-leave Days Across Countries,” CESifo Economic Studies, 53, 1 (2007), Figure 1, p. 98.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN
4. Burd-Sharps, Measure of America, Table 3.1, p. 53.
5. Burd-Sharps, Measure of America, pp. 4, 190, 195.
6. WHO, Commission on Social Determinants of Health, Closing the Gap in a Generation: Health Equity through Action on the Social Determinants of Health (2008), Table 2.1, p. 32.
The Hampstead/St Pancras figures are attributed to the WHO Commission, but are not in the report itself. *Financial Times*, August 29, 2008, p. 2.


**CHAPTER SEVENTEEN**

1. The two sides emblematically represented by Will Hutton and Robert Kagan.


12. Some expression of this can be found in Derk-Jan Eppink, *Life of a European Mandarin: Inside the Commission* (Tielt, Belgium, 2007).
This page intentionally left blank
1. Economic Freedom

2. State Control of Enterprises

3. State Ownership of Land
Kevin Cahill, *Who Owns the World: The Hidden Facts Behind Landownership* (Edinburgh, 2006). Some figures were taken directly from the book, and others had to be calculated from other figures, i.e., taking the state-owned acreage and dividing it by the total acreage. Norway’s figure is an approximation. Just under half of the land in Sweden is owned by the state and large companies.

4. Labor Regulation

5. Firing Flexibility

6. Hiring Flexibility

7. Strike Days
International Labour Office (ILO), *2007 Yearbook of Labour Statistics*. The statistics were created with the use of Table 1A starting on p. 15 and Table 9C starting on p. 1,510. Most data from 2006.
8. Wages

9. Minimum Wages

10. State Minimum Wages

11. Minimum Wage Workers

12. Part-Time Employment

13. Fatal Work Injuries
ILO, LABORSTA Internet, Yearly Statistics, 8B: Rates of occupational injuries, by economic activity. Data comes from 2002–05. The statistics are given either in terms of 100,000 workers employed or in terms of 100,000 workers insured. Available at http://laborsta.ilo.org/.

14. Vacation Time Actually Taken

15. Public Holidays

16. Working Time
OECD, Statistics, Labour Productivity, Labour Productivity Levels, Average Hours Worked per Person. Figures are for 2006. Available at http://www.oecd.org/topicstatsportal/0,3398,ecn_2825_30453906_1_1_1_1_1_100.html.
17. GDP per Hour Worked

18. Pace of Life

19. Pace of Life

20. Female Suicide
WHO, Mental health, Suicide prevention and special programmes, Suicide rates per 100,000 by country, year and sex, Females. The data come from the most recent year available as of 2008. Available at http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide_rates/en/index.html.

21. Total Tax Revenue

22. Income Tax

23. Income Tax Progressivity

24. Taxation of the Wealthy
25. Property Tax

26. Home Ownership

27. Corporate Taxes

28. Inheritance and Gift Taxes

29. Governmental Medical Spending

30. Total Medical Spending

31. Hospitals

32. Infant Mortality

33. Male Life Expectancy
WHOSIS, World Health Statistics 2006, Health Status, Mortality, Life expectancy at birth (years), Males. Figures are for 2004.

34. Adult Male Obesity
35. Overweight but Not Obese Men
International Association for the Study of Obesity, Prevalence of Adult Obesity, Males, Overweight, % BMI 25–29.9. Figures from the mid-1990s through 2006. OECD figures are similar. The percentage of the overweight is greater in the UK, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Italy, Iceland, Greece, Germany and Austria and at almost the same rate in Ireland and Norway. *OECD Factbook 2008*, Quality of Life, Health, Obesity.

36. Stomach Cancer Incidence

37. Diabetes Mortality

38. Calorie Supply

39. Fish and Fishery Products Consumption
WRI, Earth Trends Environmental Information, Energy and Resources, Data Tables, Resource Consumption 2005, Annual per Capita Consumption (kg per person), Fish and Fishery Products, 2002.

40. Animal Products

41. Alcohol Consumption

42. Smokers
43. All Cancers (except Non-Melanoma Skin), Incidence
IARC, Globocan 2002. Enter By cancer, choose All Sites but Non-Melanoma Skin Cancer, Incidence and then countries, Incidence, ASR(W), age-standardized world rate. Per 100,000. Data is on males. Available at http://www-dep.iarc.fr/.

44. All Cancers, Mortality
IARC, Globocan 2002. Enter By cancer, choose All Sites but Non-Melanoma Skin Cancer, Mortality and then countries, Incidence, ASR(W), age-standardized world rate. Per 100,000. Data is on males. Available at http://www-dep.iarc.fr/. Figures with similar results at: OECD Health Data 2007, Health Status, Mortality, Causes of mortality, Malignant neoplasms, Deaths per 100,000 population (standardised rates). Figures here are from 2001–05.

45. Breast Cancer Survival Rates

46. Heart Disease
WHOSIS, Mortality Data, Mortality Profiles, choose the country, then look for Causes of Death, Ischaemic heart disease, Years of Life Lost (%). Data comes from 2002. Available at http://www.who.int/whosis/mort/profiles/en/index.html.

47. Stroke Mortality

48. Circulatory Disease Mortality
OECD Health Data 2007, October 2007, Health Status, Mortality, Causes of mortality, Diseases of the circulatory system, Deaths per 100,000 population (standardised rates). Data comes from 2001–05.

49. Plastic Surgery

50. Public Employment

51. Total Government Expenditure
52. Public Spending on Unemployment Benefits

53. Unemployment Benefit Replacement Rate

54. Long-Term Unemployment Benefit Replacement Rate
*OECD Employment Outlook 2006*, Table 3.2, p. 60.

55. Unemployment

56. Male Unemployment

57. Long-Term Unemployment

58. Public Spending on Disability Benefits

59. Disabled People

60. Public Spending on Child Care

61. Female State Pensions

62. Retirement Income as a % of Earlier Income

63. Median Social Transfer Income
Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) Micro database, (2000); harmonization of original surveys conducted by the Luxembourg Income Study, Asbl. Luxembourg, periodic updating. Survey data is for year 2000 for all countries except for the Netherlands and the United Kingdom,
which are based on survey data from 1999. Social transfers recorded as missing or negative were dropped from the analysis. Social transfers expressed in PPP dollars for households. EU countries’ local currencies converted into equivalent Euros at the time of data collection and then converted into PPP dollars based on conversion factors provided by the OECD. PPP conversions can be accessed at http://www.oecd.org/document/47/0,3343,en_2649_34357_36202863_1_1_1_1_1,00.html. Mean household social transfer income, percent of households receiving social transfers, and median household social transfer income of those receiving social transfers all calculated using survey sampling weights for households. Calculations by Jamie Barron.

64. Public Social Expenditure

65. Public Social Expenditure, Per Capita

66. Total Social Spending

67. Murder Rate

68. Gun Ownership
Martin Killias, “Gun Ownership, Suicide and Homicide: An International Perspective.” Available at http://www.unicri.it/wwk/publications/books/series/understanding/19_GUN_OWNERSHIP.pdf. Wendy Cukier, “Firearms Regulation: Canada in the International Context,” Chronic Diseases in Canada, 19, 1 (1998), p. 28, Table 2. When the sources had different figures for the same country, the higher figure was chosen. The figures for more Swiss households owning firearms than American, though not graphed here, are in Vladeta Adjacic-Gross et al., “Changing Times: A Longitudinal Analysis of International Firearm Suicide Data,” American Journal of Public Health, 96, 10 (2006), Table 1, p. 1753. Figures from 2000.
69. Prison Population

70. Average Prison Time

71. Police Personnel
UN, Office on Drugs and Crime, *Seventh United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems*. Police 1.01: Total police personnel, Rate per 100,000 inhabitants.

72. Courtesy

73. Litigation Rate

74. Property Crime

75. Car Theft

76. Assault

77. Sexual Assault
UN, *Human Development Report 2005*, Table 2.4, p. 297, Table 2.4. Figures are for 1999.
78. Young People Fighting

79. Ecstasy

80. Opiates

81. Bribery

82. Corruption

83. Fraud

84. Total Crime
UN, Human Development Report 2005, Table 24, p. 297. Figures for 2005 put the U.S. rates for 10 different crimes lower than the UK, Switzerland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Iceland, Denmark, and Belgium. Van Dijk et al., Criminal Victimisation in International Perspective, Table 1, p. 237.

85. Robbery

86. Robbery Victims

87. Non-African American Murder Rate, 2005
In 2005, with 6,379 known African American murderers out of 12,130 known offenders in the United States, 52.59% of the known murderers were African American. If we assume that the racial identity of the unknown murderers was similarly divided as the known ones, then 52.59% of the 4,899 unknown offenders gives a total of 2,576 African American murderers out of the unknown ones. That gives a total of 8,955 African American murderers out of 17,029 total murderers, which means that 53% of murderers were African American.
and 47% were not. If we assume that each murderer killed the same number of victims, of the 14,860 murder victims in 2005, 6984 were killed by non-African American murderers. Using the FBI’s population statistic of 296,410,404, that gives a non-African American murder rate of 2.36 per 100,000 population. Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States 2005*, Expanded Homicide Data Table 1. Available at http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/05cius/offenses/expanded_information/data/shrtable_01.html. FBI, Expanded Homicide Data Table 3. Available at http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/05cius/offenses/expanded_information/data/shrtable_03.html. European figures come from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, *Ninth United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems*, Police, 2. Crimes recorded in criminal (police) statistics, by type of crime including attempts to commit crimes, 2.2. Total recorded intentional homicide, completed, Rate per 100,000 total population, 2004, pp. 3, 5, 7. Available at http://data360.org/pdf/20070531091045.Crime%20Trends.pdf.

88. Living Space

89. Development Assistance

90. Total Foreign Aid
Center for Global Development, *Commitment to Development Index 2006*, Overall (Average), select 2006 spreadsheet (original 2006 methodology). The higher the number, the better the score. Available at http://www.cgdev.org/section/initiatives/_active/cdi/data_graphs.

91. Public Spending on University Education

92. Total Spending on University Education

93. University Education Attainment

94. State Spending on Education
Eurostat, Data, Education and training, Education, Indicators on education finance, Expenditure on education as % of GDP or public expenditure, Total public expenditure on education as % of GDP, for all levels of education combined. Data come from 2005. Available
at http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?_pageid=1090,30070682,1090_33076576&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL.

95. Total Education Expenditure

96. Primary Teachers’ Salaries
OECD, Education at a Glance, 2006, Table D3.1.

97. Class Size

98. Reading Scores
OECD, PISA, Learning for Tomorrow’s World: First Results from PISA 2003, Figure 6.3, p. 281. Available at http://www.pisa.oecd.org/dataoecd/1/60/34002216.pdf. Reading scores for PISA 2006 were not available for the United States.

99. Variance Between Schools
OECD, Education at a Glance 2005, Table A6.1, p. 87.

100. Private Secondary Schools
World Bank, EdStats, Country Profiles, Education Trends and Comparisons, Private sector enrollment share (%), Secondary level. The figures come from 2006. The World Bank provides the most comprehensive figures, but does not distinguish between independent and government-dependent private schools. The OECD’s figures, in contrast, are spottier in terms of which countries they cover, but make this distinction. On the other hand, while the World Bank’s figures of 25% enrollment in private secondary schooling in the UK seems high, the OECD’s claim of over 70% of government-dependent private schooling for upper secondary education in this country seems even further from the truth. OECD, Education at a Glance: 2005, Table D5.1, p. 392. Figures for 2003.

101. Footloose Young

102. Illiteracy

103. Daily Newspaper Titles

104. Public Libraries
UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Public Libraries, Collections, Books: Number of Volumes. Data from the late 1990s. Available at http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/tableViewer.aspx?ReportId=207. To calculate books per capita, population figures were used from the OECD. The American statistic comes from the National Center for Education Statis-

105. Books Sold

106. Book Titles in Print
The American figure of 3,106,189 book titles in print comes from *Subject Guide to Books in Print 2007–2008* (New Providence, N.J., 2007), v. 1, p. vii. The British figure of 1,110,000 book titles in print comes from *Whitaker’s Books in Print 2003*, (Surrey, UK, 2003), v. 1, p. 5. The figure of 992,042 book titles in print for Germany, Austria, and Switzerland comes from *Verzeichnis Lieferbarer Bücher 2004/2005*, (Frankfurt am Main, 2004), v. 1, General Editorial Policies/Directions for Users. The French figure of 489,337 book titles in print comes from *Livres disponibles 2004, Sujets*, (Paris, 2003), v. 1, p. xiii. The Italian figure of 510,131 book titles in print comes from *Catalogo dei libri in commercio 2006, Autori e Titoli*, (Milan, 2006), Avvertenze introduttive. The number of Spanish book titles in print was estimated at 323,125 using *Libros españoles en venta, 1991* (Madrid, 1990). The Portuguese figure of 59,705 book titles in print comes from *Livros Disponíveis 1999: Títulos* (Lisbon, 1999), Introduction. To calculate the figures of book titles in print per 1,000 population, population figures were used from OECD, as close as possible to the years of the book titles in print figures. It is worth noting that the UK figures are given a major boost by the fact that a very large fraction of U.S.-published books are also published in the UK. Also, these figures assume that the books in print are written by nationals of the country in question. The often-heard complaint that U.S. publishers do not publish translations from other languages, if true, would therefore boost the proportional authorship of Americans.

107. Television Viewing

108. Annual World Piano Sales
U.S. International Trade Commission, David Lundy et. al., *Pianos: Economic and Competitive Conditions Affecting the U.S. Industry*, May 1999, Table 5–1, p. 5–2. Figures from 1997. Available at http://hotdocs.usitc.gov/docs/pubs/332/pub3196.pdf. To calculate the figures of annual world piano sales per 10,000 population, population figures were used from the OECD.

109. Total Michelin Restaurant Stars
The total Michelin restaurant stars were counted for major cities for 2008. Most figures come from *Michelin: Main Cities of Europe 2008*. Dublin’s and London’s figures come from Michelin, Complete_2008.doc, “Michelin Stars 2008.” The information was provided directly by Michelin, which can be contacted at: http://www.michelin.com/portail/home/home.jsp?lang=EN. Lisbon’s and Madrid’s figures come from Michelin, Spain_Portugal_2008.pdf, “LISTADO DE
298


110. Perfect Wines


111. Ticket Prices in Major Opera Houses

Ticket prices from the Web sites of the various opera houses

112. Research and Development


113. Patents


114. Nobel Prizes by Nationality


115. Women in the Work Force


116. Women’s Income


117. Women in Parliaments

WDI Online, Social Indicators, Other, Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament (%). Figures from 2005.

118. Women in Leading Positions

UN, Human Development Report 2005, Table 26, p. 303. The figure on technical and professional workers comes from here, too.
119. Gender Division of Housework
Jeanne A. Batalova and Philip N. Cohen, “Premarital Cohabitation and Housework: Couples in Cross-National Perspective,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 64, 3 (2002), Table 2, p. 748. The Average Division of Labor scale ranges from 1 (female does all) to 5 (male does all). The data come from 1994. Data that suggests another story is presented in Janet C. Gornick and Marcia K. Meyers, *Families that Work: Policies for Reconciling Parenthood and Employment* (New York, 2003), pp. 70–72. This, however, deals with a vaguer category of unpaid work and does not address the specific question of who does the traditional female housework activities, as do Batalova and Cohen. The latter are broadly supported by the data in Janeen Baxter, “Gender Equality and Participation in Housework: A Cross-National Perspective,” *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 28, 3 (1997). The UN’s figures has American men doing more nonmarket activities than their peers in the UK, Norway, the Netherlands, Italy, Finland, Denmark and Austria. UN *Human Development Report* 2006, Table 28, p. 379.

120. Gay Marriage-like Unions

121. Homosexual Experiences

122. Three in a Bed during Sex
Durex, *Global Sex Survey 2005*, Sexual experiences you’ve had, Three in a bed.

123. Nonengagement in Sexual Indulgence

124. Legal Abortions

125. Passenger Cars

126. Road Fatalities
*OECD Factbook 2006*, Quality of Life, Transport, Road Motor Vehicles and Road Fatalities, Road Fatalities, Per Million Vehicles, 2004.

127. Passenger Transport by Car
128. Car Passenger Kilometers per Size of Country

129. Car Passenger Kilometers per Km of Road

130. Length of Railways
CIA, World Factbook, data created with use of country statistics, Railways: Total (km), and Population (2006). The following information on railway per square kilometer is also derived from this source.

131. Rail Freight

132. Road Freight

133. Goods Vehicles

134. Aircraft Departures

135. Subway Passengers

136. CO₂ Emissions from Transport
OECD in Figures 2007, Environment, CO₂ emissions, 2005, By sector, Million tonnes of CO₂, Transport, pp. 48, 49. The transport CO₂ total was divided by total CO₂ emissions from fuel combustion to get the percentage from transport.

137. Urbanized Population
WDI Online, Social Indicators, Population, Population in Urban Agglomerations over 1 million (% of total population).
138. Urban Density
*Demographia World Urban Areas (World Agglomerations)*, March 2007, Table 6. Figures from 2000–2005. Available at: http://www.demographia.com/db-worldua.pdf. Needless to say, one can argue about how to define city sizes and thus densities, and I have done so with the compilers of the information on this Web site. Whatever the shortcomings, at least they have thought about the issues and appear to be applying their criteria consistently across the cities they study, thus making their data more reliable than more slapdash measures available elsewhere.

139. Municipal Waste

140. Recycling

141. Conservation, Protected Areas

142. Threatened Mammals

143. Forest Cover

144. Organic Food

145. Pesticide Use

146. Nitrogenous Fertilizer Use
The more precise measure of fertilizer consumption per hectare of arable land bears out these disparities. American farmers are significantly more sparing users than anyone but the Swedes and the Danes. WDI Online, Environment, Agricultural Production, Fertilizer consumption (100 grams per hectare of arable land). Figures from 2005.

147. Intensity of Water Use
OECD Environmental Data: Compendium 2004 Edition, Table 2A, p. 65. Data from the latest available year.

148. Sulfur Oxide Emissions

149. Airborne Particulate Matter
WDI Online, Environment, Pollution, PM10, country level (micrograms per cubic meter). The data come from 2005.

150. Organic Water Pollutant Emissions
WDI Online, Environment, Pollution, Organic water pollutant (BOD) emissions (kg per day per worker). The data come from 2002 and 2003.

151. Electricity Consumption per Capita

152. Energy Consumption per Unit of GDP

153. Per Capita Oil Consumption

154. Oil Consumption per Unit of GDP

155. Rise or Decline of Greenhouse Gas Emissions

156. Solar Energy

157. Venture Capital Investment in Clean Technology Companies
Figures for venture capital investment in clean technology companies in 2006 came directly from Cleantech Network upon written request. The ratios were calculated with 2005 population statistics.

158. Nuclear Waste

159. A Great Deal of Confidence in the Government

160. A Great Deal of Confidence in the Civil Service
WVS, Politics and Society, E076. Less dramatic results are found in other surveys, though again the Swedes are most distrustful, after the Italians. ISSP, Role of Government III 1996, Variable 54, sum of first two results. In 2006, the Swedes were still the most distrustful, along with the French. ISSP, Role of Government IV 2006, Variable 50.

161. Shadow Economy

162. Trust in Others

163. Civic Organizations

164. Charity

165. Volunteer Work
166. Blood Donation

167. Voter Turnout
International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Voter Turnout, Parliamentary Elections, Vote/VAP. Figures from the last available election, usually in the 1990s or early 2000s. Available at http://www.idea.int/vt/.

168. Frequent Discussion of Politics
WVS, Perceptions of Life, A062. Similar results in ISSP, Citizenship 2004, Variable 47.

169. Single Parent Households
OECD, Table 2.1: childreninhoushold[1].xls, Composition of Households, 2005, Single Parent Households as a Percentage of all Households with Children. Data received directly from OECD. Data can be requested at stat.contact@oecd.org. The information will become part of OECD Family Database, which will be available at www.oecd.org/els/social/family.

170. Eating with Parents
UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Report Card 7, *Child poverty in perspective*, Figure 4.2a, p. 2.4. Statistics are approximations based on the bar graphs in the figure.

171. Talking with Parents
UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Report Card 7, *Child poverty in perspective*, Figure 4.2b, p. 25. Statistics are approximations based on the bar graphs in the figures.

172. Elderly Living in Institutions
OECD, *Society at a Glance 2002*, Annex HE: Health Indicators, Table HE10.3. Figures from the mid-1990s. Available at http://www.oecd.org/document/24/0,3343,en_2649_34637_2671576_1_1_1_1,00.html#previous.

173. Very Proud of Own Nationality
WVS, National Identity, Citizenship, G006. The ISSP found the Austrians with most general national pride in 1995–96, the Americans in 2003–04. For domain-specific national pride, the Irish came out on top in the earlier survey, the Americans in the later one. Tom W. Smith and Seokho Kim, “National Pride in Comparative Perspective: 1995/96 and 2003/04,” *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 18, 1 (2006), Tables 1, 2, pp. 129–30. In the WVS 2005, the Americans were less proud than the Spaniards and the Finns and at almost the same level as the British. How Proud of Nationality, sum of the first two results.

174. Convinced Atheists
WVS, Religion and Morale, F034.
175. Firm Belief in God  

176. Belief in God  
WVS, Religion and Morale, F050.

177. Weekly Church Attendance  
WVS, Religion and Morale, F028.

178. Christian Congregations  

179. Membership in Religious Denominations  
WVS, Religion and Morale, F024. On the other hand, more Americans are active members of church or religious organizations than any Europeans. WVS 2005.

180. Catholic Church Attendance  

181. Church Income  

182. Science Does More Harm than Good  
ISSP, Religion II, 1998, Variable 27. Sum of first two responses. When the same question was repeated in 2000, in the context of a questionnaire on environmental matters, the countries where more people think science does harm than in the U.S. were the UK, Austria, Ireland, Spain, Portugal and Switzerland. The French were not included. ISSP, Environment II 2000, Variable 9. Sum of the first two responses.

183. Belief in Astrology  

184. Homeopathy  

185. Foreign-Born Population  
186. Gap in Math Scores between Native-Born and Immigrants

187. Gap in Reading Scores between Native-Born and Immigrants

188. Increased Unemployment
OECD Factbook 2007, Migration, Labour Force and Remittances, Unemployment rates of the foreign- and the native-born, Tables, Unemployment rates of foreign- and native-born populations, Unemployment rates of foreign- and native-born populations, As a percentage of total labour force. The figures were calculated by subtracting Men, Native, 2004 from Men, Foreign born, 2004.

189. Median Income
Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) Key Figures, accessed at http://www.lisproject.org/keyfigures.htm (June 2008). LIS median income figures converted into PPP dollars. Figures are for 2000 for all countries except for the Netherlands and United Kingdom, which are for 1999. For EU members, local currencies were converted to euros at the time of data collection and then these figures were converted to PPP dollars using a conversion table provided by the OECD at http://www.oecd.org/document/47/0,3343,en_2649_34357_36202863_1_1_1_1,00.html. Calculations by Jamie Barron.

190. Resident Billionaires

191. Overall Poverty

192. Richest

193. Income Inequality
194. Income Inequality

195. Distribution of Household Net Worth

196. Low Income Population
Carles Boix, “The Institutional Accommodation of an Enlarged Europe,” Table 3, p. 7. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. It is unclear from which date the figures are, but apparently 1993. Available at http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/02103.pdf.

197. Absolute Poverty, European Scale
Median EU-6 equivalized income calculated using LIS Wave 5 (release 2) data. LIS Micro database, (2000); harmonization of original surveys conducted by the Luxembourg Income Study, Asbl. Luxembourg, periodic updating. Survey data is for year 2000 for all countries except for the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, which are based on survey data from 1999. Households with disposable income recorded as missing, zero, or negative were dropped from the analysis. Equivalized incomes were derived using household net disposable income and dividing by the square root of the total household size (LIS equivalization procedure). Incomes expressed in PPP dollars. EU countries’ local currencies were converted into equivalent Euros at the time of data collection and then converted into PPP dollars based on conversion factors provided by the OECD. PPP conversions can be accessed at http://www.oecd.org/document/47/0,3343,EN_2649_34357_36202863_1_1_1_1,00.html. Median EU-6 income calculated in terms of PPP dollars, with a weighting procedure that took into account the survey sampling weights and the population sizes of each of the six countries. Percent below 60% EU-6 equivalized median income calculated using appropriate survey sampling weights (weights for equivalized incomes equal household weight, multiplied by household size). Calculations by Jamie Barron.

198. Absolute Poverty, U.S. Scale
Median equivalized income in the United States calculated using LIS Wave 5 (release 2) data from year 2000. LIS Micro database, (2000); harmonization of original surveys conducted by the Luxembourg Income Study, Asbl. Luxembourg, periodic updating. Survey data is for year 2000 except for the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, which are based on survey data from 1999. Households with disposable income recorded as missing, zero, or negative were dropped from the analysis. Equivalized incomes were derived using household net disposable income and dividing by the square root of the total household size (LIS equivalization procedure). Incomes expressed in PPP dollars. EU countries’ local currencies were converted into equivalent Euros at the time of data collection and then converted into PPP dollars based on
conversion factors provided by the OECD. PPP conversions can be accessed at http://www.oecd.org/document/47/0,3343,en_2649_34357_36202863_1_1_1_1,00.html. U.S. median equivalized income and the percentage below 60% U.S. median equivalized income were calculated using appropriate survey sampling weights (weights for equivalized incomes equal household weight, multiplied by household size). Calculations by Jamie Barron.

199. Mean Income Ratios of Top and Bottom Quintiles

200. Population (%) under 60% of EU-6 Median Income
Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) Micro database, (2000); harmonization of original surveys conducted by the Luxembourg Income Study, Asbl. Luxembourg, periodic updating. Survey data is for year 2000 for all U.S. states and European countries except for the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, which are based on survey data from 1999. Samples for all U.S. states are representative of their respective populations, but sample sizes for smaller U.S. states can be relatively small. Calculation procedures used in for Figure 197 (Absolute Poverty, European Scale) applied here for U.S. states and European countries. Calculations by Jamie Barron.

201. Prisoners per 100,000 of Population

202. Murders per 100,000 Population

203. Percent of Workers Who Are Union Members
204. Life Expectancy at Birth in Years
tsTable2.xls.

205. Unemployment Rate

206. Defense Spending

207. Armed Forces

208. Percent of Population with Health Care Coverage
This graph is only broadly illustrative. Data for the U.S. is sketchy and available only for the years indicated at the data points where the connector line changes direction. No data is implied for the points in between. Nor was data available for the same years for all countries. *Source Book of Health Insurance Data 1963* (New York, 1963), Percentage of United States Population With Some Form of Health Insurance Protection, Percent, p. 10. U.S. Census Bureau, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2005* (August 2006), Table C-1, p. 60. Available at http://www.census.gov/prod/2006pubs/p60–231.pdf. *OECD Health Data 2007*, Social Protection, Health care coverage, Government/social health insurance, In-patient and acute care, % of total population; and Social Protection, Health care coverage, Private health insurance, Primary private health insurance coverage, % of total population. Germany’s figure was added to its Government/social health insurance figure to get the percentage of people covered by health insurance.

209. Enrollment in Tertiary-Level Education

210. Annual Hours Worked per Person Employed
211. Catastrophic Death

212. Human Development Index Trends
INDEX

Aachner Nachrichten, 95
Abortion, 121, 171
Absolut vodka, 161
Accidents
fatal, 217
road, 123–124
work, 26–27
years of life lost, 26
Adorno, Theodor, 246
Adversarial legalism, 19
Africa, 13
African Americans
cancer survival rates, 224–225
murder rates, 87, 89
Afterlife, 164, 170
AIDS epidemic, 220, 231–232
Aircraft, 129
Air pollution, 137, 140–141
Albania, 233
Alber, Jens, 207
Alcohol consumption, 50–51
Algernon, Carl, 87
Allen, Paul, 186
American dream, 23
American Human Development Report, 227, 237, 240
American people, 3
Americans with Disabilities Act, 220
Amerikanische Verhältnisse, 15
Amerikanismus, 7
Anglican Church, 171, 172
Animal
products consumption, 51
testing, 173
Animals, threatened with extinction, 134–35
Anomie, social, 151
Anti-Americanism, 2, 3, 4, 6
and European nationalism, 8
Anti-Europeanism, 2, 4
Antisocial behavior, 151
Appenzell Innerrhoden, 96
Archbishop of Canterbury, 172
Aristocracy, 245
Armed forces, 205–206
Artichokes, 230
Ash, Timothy Garton, 1
Asian Americans, 232
Askö, 161
Assault, 74, 81–82
knife, 76
sexual, 81–82
Astrology, 173–174
Atheists, 163–164
Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 95
Atlantic community, 10
Australia, 17, 212–214, 247
Baltic states, 6
Baltimore Sun, 95
Baudrillard, Jean, 96, 246
Bavaria, 10
Berggren, Henrik, 149
Berlusconi, Silvio, 96
Berman, Russell, 2
Beveridge, William, 213
Bicycling, 130
Bildungsbürgertum, 4
Billionaires, 184–185, 188
Births, 121
Bismarck, Otto von, 10
Blackpool, 96
Blood donation, 153–154
BMW, 2
Books, 107–109
Borat, 96
Bové, José, 3
Brecht, Bertolt, 15
Bribery, 83, 85
Brussels, 5
Bryson, Bill, 5
Burglary, 78
Buses, 127
Business, ease of doing, 19

Butterreisen, 96

Cagliari, Gabriele, 87
California Institute for Regenerative Medicine, 228
Caloric supply, 48–49
Canada, 41, 94, 232, 244
Cancer, 48–50, 52–55, 173, 224
Capital, 186
cultural, 104
gains, 186
Capitalism, 6, 15
Car
numbers owned, 123–124
rural areas, 129
theft, 78, 81
usage, 123, 125–126
carbon dioxide output, 127, 130–131, 143, 145, 172
Castles, Francis, 214
Catholic
church, 96, 166–167, 171, 172
nations, 164, 205
Censorship, 171
CEOs, 26
Charity. See philanthropy
Child care, 67–68
Children, and violence, 81, 83–84
China, 8, 238, 239
Christian Democratic Party, 171, 214

Christians, 10
Churches, 110
attendance, 164, 166
financing, 166, 168
membership, 151
Circulatory diseases, 56, 57
Cities. See urbanization
Civic associations, 151–152
Civil service
confidence in, 149–150
size of, 61
Civil society, 233–234
Class sizes, 101
Collective bargaining, 23, 212, 216
Colombia, 41
Columbia University, 123
Common Agricultural Policy, 96
Commonwealth Fund, 41
Communism, 6
Competition, 2
Computers, 223
Confidence in business and industry, 20
Congregations, religious, 166–167
Conservatives
American, 2, 3, 11
anti-Europeanism, 7
European, 4
intellectuals, 4
and tax policy, 6
Constitution,
EU, 172
German, 171
Consumer protection laws, 221
Contagious disease, 220
Convergence, 205–211
Cools, André, 87
Cooperation, 151
Corruption, 83, 86
Cosmetic surgery, 56–57
Costa del Sol, 130
Creditors, protection of, 19
Crime, 78
deterrents, 83
foreigners, 178
organized, 87
total rate, 88
white-collar, 83, 85–86, 221
Crociani, Camillo, 87
Evil, 33
Evolution, 172
Exceptionalism
 American, 238, 245
 other, 218, 245

Fairness, 225
Faith healers, 175
Family
 benefits, 65, 67
eating together, 155, 157
reunification, 181
 strong, 158
talking together, 155, 157
Fatalities, road, 123–124
Fat consumption, 48
Federalism, 212
Feliciaggi, Robert, 87
Feminism, 248
Ferrera, Maurizio, 214
Fertilizer, 137–138
Figaro, Le, 94
Financial Times, 8, 235
Firing, of workers, 21–22
Fish consumption, 50
Flags, 161–162, 170
Food preferences, 169
Forbes, 189
Foreign aid, 3, 13, 92–93
Foreigners
 admission of, 181
 assimilation of, 225
 attitudes towards, 179
 definition of, 177–178
 educational achievements, 179–182
 percentages of 176–177
 in prison, 90, 179
 in Sweden, 178
 unemployment, 179–181
Foreign policy
 disagreements over, 2
 new EU nations, 14
 U.S., 11
Forests, 136
Fortune tellers, 175
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 94
Fraud, 83, 86
Freedom of choice, 33
Free markets, 20
Free trade, 19, 20
Freight transportation, 127–128
French fries, 3
Freud, Sigmund, 10, 11
Friends, 158–159
Fringe benefits, 26
Fruit and vegetable consumption, 50
Galbraith, James, 228
Gargantuism, 219
Gates, Bill, 186, 188, 195
G.D.P., 70, 228
carbon dioxide output, 143
charitable giving, 151, 153
education, 98
energy, 143
family benefits, 67
government employee salaries, 61
government expenditure, 61
and happiness, 33
health care, 222
housing, 92
income tax as percentage of, 34
industrial emissions, 137
military, 205–206
output per worker, 30–31
per capita, 195
political culture, 219
private pension funds, 68
pollution, 123
recreation and culture, 110
regional disparities, 195
scientific research, 113
universities, 97
wages as a percentage of, 23
wealthy, 188–189
Gender discrimination, 248
Giardini, Raul, 87
Gini coefficients, 189–191, 195
Globalization, 3, 7, 20, 210
Global warming, 122
G.M. crops, 173
God, belief in, 164–165, 169, 205
Goethe, 2.45
Good luck charms, 175
Gore, Al, 122
Government
Injury. See accidents
Integration, economic, 196
Intellectual property rights, 221
Internal Revenue Service, 221
International Agency for Research on Cancer, 12
International Association for the Study of Obesity, 12, 46
International Energy Agency, 12
International Labour Organization, 12
International Monetary Fund, 12
International Social Survey Programme, 12, 175
International trade, 20
Internet, 151
Iran, 2
Iraq, 2
Islamic fundamentalism, 7
Isle of Lewis, 171
Israel, 2, 13

Jail sentences, 76–77
Japan, 8, 214, 219, 240
Jews, 10, 234
Job creation and destruction, 26
Joffe, Josef, 161, 246
John Paul II, 171
Judt, Tony, 227

Kagan, Robert, 2, 5
Kamprad, Ingvar, 188
Kangas, Olli, 195
Kim Jong II, 95
Korea, 8
Kramer, Jane, 5
Küng, Hans, 171
Kyoto, 122

Labor
  markets, 15, 20
  party, 212
  productivity, 195
  protection, 19
Laird, Melvin, 232
Laissez-faire, 16
Land ownership, 17, 18
Latinos, 240
Lederhosen, 96
Lefebvre, Jacques, 87
Left, European, 3, 4
Leimgruber, Matthieu, 245
Leisure, 26–50, 94
Lévy, Bernard-Henri, 219
Liability laws, 221
Liberals, American, 4, 11, 104
Libraries, 106–08
Libya, 41
Licenses, 19
Liechtenstein, 96, 212
Lif expectancy, 41, 44–45, 201–202, 219, 240
meaning of, 169
Limbaugh, Rush, 3, 5
Lipset, Seymour Martin, 244
Litigation, 78, 80
Living space, 91–92
Lords Spiritual, 171
Los Angeles, 132–133, 140
Lourdes, 96
Lüdemann, Gerd, 171
Lueger, Karl, 177
Luxembourg Income Study, 68, 189
Luxembourg Wealth Study, 191
Lyon Capitale, 95

Manderlay, 4
Market, predominance of, 15–16
Markovits, Andrei, 8
Marriage, 171
Mass transit. See transportation, public
Maternity leave, 115
May, Karl, 4
McDonalds, 3, 26, 48
McKinsey, 13
Meat consumption, 50
Medicaid, 41
Medicare, 41
Meiwes, Armin, 96
Mental illness, 56
Metro system ridership, 129
Mexico, 7, 94
Michelin Guide, 110–111
Micklethwaith, John, 221
Middle East, 243, 244
Military spending, 205–206, 228
Mill, John Stuart, 220
Minimum wages, 24–26, 202
Ministry of Justice, Holland, 76
Miracles, 175
Mobility
    labor, 196
    social, 225
Modernity, 7
Möllemann, Jürgen, 87
*Monde, Le*, 3, 94
Monsanto, 3
Mormons, 220
Mortality, 46
    amenable, 46, 202, 226
    infant, 223
    premature, 44
Mosques, 172
Movies, 107
M.R.I. units, 42
Multiculturalism, 151, 172, 178, 234
Murder rate, 44, 74–75, 199–200, 217, 240
    African American, 87, 89
    Muslims, 3, 170, 171, 172
Narcissism of minor differences, 10, 238
National Assessment of Educational Progress, 233
National Health Service, 58, 207
Nationalism, 8, 160–161
Nationalization of industry, 17
National Rifle Association, 76
Nature conservation, 17, 134–136
Neo-fascist parties, 3
Neo-liberal economics, 5
*New York Times*, 3, 94
Newspapers. See press
*Newsweek*, 3
New York City, 129–130, 132–133
New Zealand, 17, 244, 247
Nobel Prizes, 97, 113, 115
North Korea, 2
North/south divide, 218, 248
Nuclear waste, 146

Obama, Barack, 11, 151, 226
Obesity, 46–47, 230
OECD, 12, 28, 42, 129, 143, 177, 178, 241
Offé, Claus, 8
Oil use, 143–144
Old Shatterhand, 4
Opera, 110, 112
Opiates, 85
Optimism, 34
Orchestras, 110
O’Reilly, Bill, 3
Organ donation, 153
Organic
    farming, 136
    food, 137
Orthodox Christianity, 171, 172
Oxbridge colleges, 171
Pace of life, 31–32
Page 3 girls, 96
Parenting, single, 155–156
Parents, at home, 158
Parker wine ratings, 110, 112
Parliament
    Danish, 171
    European, 171
Passports, 94
Patents, 113–114
Patriotism. See nationalism
Pay. See earnings
Pensions, 67–69
Perle, Richard, 3
Pessimism, 33
Pesticides, 137–138
Pew Research Center, 20, 148
Philanthropy, 151, 153
Phones, mobile, 171, 222–223
Physician density, 42
Pianos, 110–111
Pickpocketing, 78
Pinter, Harold, 3
Pio, Padre, 96
P.I.S.A. tests, 102, 103, 198, 226, 232
Poles, 196, 234
Policing, 76, 78–79
Politeness, 78–79
Political
    activities, 155
    culture, 244–245
    systems, 212
Political parties
- membership, 155
- xenophobic, 176, 179
Politics, discussion of, 155–156
Pollution, 94
- abatement spending, 123
Pontusson, Jonas, 215
Poor
- and taxes, 37
- working hours, 30
Population
- trends, 122
- density, 136
Populism, 20
Pornography, 171
Poverty, 24, 60
- absolute, 191–194, 196–198
- child, 192, 194, 226
- and inequality, 191
- lines, 196
- relative, 184–185, 191–193
Prayer, 166
- school, 171
Prenatal care, 44
Press
- newspapers, 106–107
- regional, 95
Prisons, 62, 76–77, 198–199
- European, 90
- and foreigners, 179, 221
Progrès, Le, 95
Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, 102
Prohibition, 248
Property,
- crime, 78, 80
- ownership, 37–38
- registering, 19
Proposition 71, California, 228
Proselytizing, 172
Prostitution, 248
Protectionism, 20
Protein consumption, 50
Pro-Tell Society, 76
Protestantism, 171, 172
- work ethic, 229
Prussia, 10, 19, 230
P.S.A. test, 58
Public
- employment, 61
- health, 220–221, 231–232
- ownership of business, 18
- ownership of economy, 16
- transportation, 123, 127, 230, 234
Purchasing Power Parity, 61, 194
Putin, Vladimir, 95
Putnam, Robert, 151
Quatraro, Antonio, 87
Racism, 226
Radioactivity, 173
Railroads, 19, 123, 126–127
Ranke-Heinemann, Ute, 171
Rape, 81
Raubtierkapitalismus, 15
Reader’s Digest, 78, 81
Reading, 106
Reality TV, 96
Recycling, 132, 134, 172
Redistribution, 16, 37, 60, 72
Red tape, 19
Regional variations, 72, 194–196, 219
Regulation
- antitrust, 221
- aviation, 221
- eating habits, 230
- economic, 19
- labor, 20, 21, 205
- of medicine, 221
- municipal, 234
- public health, 231
- styles of, 19, 248
Reid, T. R., 58
Research
- biomedical, 231–232
- and development, 97, 113–114, 222, 228
- environmental, 123
Revel, Jean-François, 40
Rifkin, Jeremy, 7, 134, 143, 171, 198
Right wing. See Conservatives
Ritakallio, Veli-Matti, 195
Roaring Twenties, 187
Robbery, 87–89
INDEX

Rockefeller, John, 186
Roma, 96
Romney, Mitt, 5, 236
Rorschach test, 7, 246
Rose, Richard, 213
Rotenburg, 96
Russia, 76, 238, 243

Saab, 161
Sabbatarian legislation, 171
Safety, feelings of, 78
San Francisco Chronicle, 95
Sardar, Ziauddin, 3, 8
Scharpf, Fritz, 214
Schengen, 181
Schleswig-Holstein, 162
Schmidt, Helmut, 15
Schröder, Gerhard, 15
Schuhplatteln, 96
Schweizer Schiesssportverband, 76
Science, faith in, 172–173
Scientific research. See research and development
Schools
secondary, 98
Swedes and, 246
vouchers, 104
Secularism, 169, 170, 172, 198
Sex, 118–120
Shadow economy, 149–150
Sick leave, 234–235
Simpsons, 3
Singapore, 20
Slavery, 225
Smith, Timothy, 214
Smoking, 50, 52, 220
Sobrepaso, 240
Social assistance, 61
Social benefits, 68–70
in form of services, 72
total amounts, 73
Social expenditure
public, 70–71
private and other, 72–73
Social insurance, 228
Social isolation, 159
Socialization, 230–232, 234
Social Science Research Council, 237
Social stratification, 232–233
solidarity, 149, 225
Sombart, Werner, 212
Songbird hunt, 96
Sorpasso, 239
Soskice, David, 215
South America, 17
South Bronx, 74
South Central, 74
Soviet Union, 10
Speed limits, 221
Spiegel, Der, 3
Spiritual longings, 169
Stakhanovites, 30, 31
Stalingrad, 246
Standard deviations, 17
Starbucks, 26
State
intervention, 219–220
regulation, 15–16
Stem cell research, 228
Stockholm Stock Exchange, 186
Stop signs, 230
Stress, job related, 31, 235
 Strikes, 23
Strokes, 54, 56
Stuttgarter Nachrichten, 95
Subways, 129–30
Sugar consumption, 48
Suicide, 34, 217, 240
Sunday, 171
Surgical procedures, 44
Survivor’s benefits, 65
Sutton Trust, 12
Svenska Dagbladet, 95
Svenska Jägarförbundet, 76

Tageszeitung, Die 5
Talleyrand, Charles-Maurice de, 169
Tallinn, battle of, 162
Tax
avoidance, 149–150
charity and, 153
consumption, 34
corporate, 37–38
environment and, 123
Tax (continued)
havens, 189
income, 34–35, 37
indirect, 70, 72
inheritance and gift, 39
labor, 30
policy, 6
paying, 19
progressivity of, 34, 36, 186
system, 34
total revenues from, 35
and wealthy, 34, 36, 189
Teachers’ salaries, 98, 101
Technology,
clean, 146
state support for, 16
Teenage pregnancy, 44
Television, 96, 107, 109, 151
Theft, 78, 81
Third Way, 1
Third World, 92
Tillburg University, 76
Time-series statistics, 211
TIMMS test, 102, 233
Toqueville, Alexis de, 246
Todd, Emmanuel, 6, 8, 113, 246
Tory party, 23
Tourism, 94
Trachten, 96
Trägårdh, Lars, 149
Transfer income. See social benefits
Transportation, 130–131
Travel, 94
Trier, Lars von, 4
Trucks, 127–128
Trust, 151–152
Turks, 178, 182
Two-party systems, 212

Underclass, 87
American, 226
European, 90, 226
Sweden, 90
Unemployment, 62–64
figures, 12, 202–203
foreigners, 179–181
insurance, 62–64
long-term, 65–66
regional, 195, 202–203
Spanish and Portuguese, 21
Sweden, 12
U.S., 12
UNESCO, 12, 209
UNICEF, 12, 81, 192
Uninsured Americans, 44, 46, 54, 58, 223–224
Union membership, 23, 151, 199–200
United Nations, 12, 76, 83, 94, 187, 237
Universities, 17, 97
graduation from, 98–99
public spending on, 98–99
University of California, 232
Berkeley, 19
Urbanization, 132–133
U.S. power, 2, 202–203, 205

Vacations. See leisure
Vaccination, 46, 220
Van der Biest, Alain, 87
Vatican, 171, 212
Violence, 216–217
Volunteering, 151, 153–154
Voting, 153, 155
Vuitton, Louis, 2

Waldheim, Kurt, 96
Wallenberg family, 188
Wage control, 16
Wages. See earnings
Walking, 129–130
Washington Post, 3
Waste, 132–133
Water
pollution, 140–141
use, 137, 139
Wealthy, 184–187
off-shore holdings, 189
share of total taxes paid, 34
Web, 31
Weber, Max, 246
Welfare state, 2, 213–215, 245
Wild in the Streets, 222
Wild West, 4
Wilensky, Harold, 212
Winnetou, 4
Women
disabled, 65
education, 115
income, 116
part-time work, 118
politics, 115, 117
workforce, 115–117, 219
Wooldridge, Adrian, 221
Working classes, 4
Working hours, 28–29, 210
Work schedules, flexible, 67
World Bank, 12, 19, 20, 83, 104
World Database of Happiness, 33
World Health Organization, 12, 41, 46
World Institute for Development Economics Research, 187
World Resources Institute, 12
World Values Survey, 12, 166, 169
World War II, 186
Yale University, 123
YouGov, 205
Yugoslavs, 182