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Book Review by Michael Anton

Are the Kids Al(t)right?

*Bronze Age Mindset: An Exhortation*, by Bronze Age Pervert. Independently published, 198 pages, $16.48

A round a year ago, the editors of this august journal asked me to contribute a piece on the “alt-right.” I hesitated, for a number of reasons, at least two of which are relevant here.

First, I did not then—and still do not—quite know what the “alt-right” is. That is to say, I know what the term means to the Left and to the mainstream media (apologies for the redundancy): “anyone to my right whom I can profitably smear as a Nazi.” But so far as I can tell, even many who consider themselves “alt-right” can’t agree on the term’s meaning, or on who or what qualifies. Furthermore, some of those least afraid to accept the label insist that the underlying phenomenon is dead, having immolated itself in Charlottesville in August 2017. Why bother writing about something that no one can define and whose most prominent proponents claim is defunct?

Second, in looking into this a little, I found plenty of books about the alt-right but none by the alt-right. This is perhaps not surprising, since one of the few things that those who talk about it can agree on is that it is, or was, primarily a social media phenomenon. But I was convinced then, and remain so, that a long review of volumes summarizing blogs, tweets, and memes would be as tedious and fruitless to write as to read. So I begged off.

Months later, the tech entrepreneur and anti-democracy blogger Curtis Yarvin brought to a small dinner at my home, in lieu of the more traditional flowers or wine, a book—one I had never heard of, called *Bronze Age Mindset* (hereafter BAM) by a person calling himself “Bronze Age Pervert” (hereafter BAP). A few weeks later, I took it up in a moment of idle curiosity.

In structure and tone, BAM appears at first glance to be a simplified pastiche of Friedrich Nietzsche written by an ESL-middle-school-message-board troll. Words are often misspelled or dropped, verbs misconjugated, punctuation rules ignored. For example, a prototypical BAP sentence reads “Wat means?”—which presumably means: “What does this mean?” Yet the author weaves in clear English amidst the doggerel, showing that he knows how to write. And standard English increasingly takes over as the book proceeds.

But I didn’t notice that at first because I gave up early. Then I happened to mention this strange gift to a young friend and for-
mer White House colleague, Darren Beat-
tie, who urged me to try again and persevere.
The book, he said, has struck a chord with
younger people—especially men—who are
dissatisfied with the way the world is going
and have no faith in mainstream conservativ-
ism's efforts to arrest, much less reverse, the
rot.

Self-published in June 2018, BAM quickly
snatched the top 150 on Amazon—not, mind
you, in some category within Amazon but
on the site as a whole. This for a book with
no publisher and no publicist, whose author
is not even known. Sales have been driven,
one suspects, by BAM's largish (>20K) Twit-
ter following. Legions of eager fans quote
the book and/or post pictures of its cover in
exotic locations and/or lying atop military
uniforms, presumably their own. But I think
this understates BAM's influence. Beyond his
own account, he has scores of imitators who
ape his writing style and amplify his ideas.
Others have imitated him more directly, self-
publishing their own BAPish books, and
BAM returns the compliment through gener-
ous cross-promotion.

S
o I resolved to force myself
through the whole thing. By around
page 40, the effort ceased to be a chore.
Say what you will about Bronze Age Mindset,
it's not boring. BAM takes a flamethrower to
to one contemporary piety after another, left
and right alike (but mostly left). Was there, fin-
ally, a way to satisfy my editors' request? BAM
after all is a book; it is on the right; and
it is "alt," in the sense that it presents sharp
alternatives to much, even most, of what the
establishment Right professes and holds
dear.

It's been evident for a while, at least to me,
that conventional conservatism no longer
holds much purchase with large swaths of
the under 40, and especially under 30, crowd.
Tax cuts, deregulation, trade giveaways, Rus-
sophia, democracy wars, and open borders
are not, to say the least, getting the kids riled
up. What is? The youthful enthusiasm for
BAM suggested a place to start looking.

The young like to shock and be shocked,
and Bronze Age Mindset more than deliv-
ers on this score. Its many provocations
range from the relatively small—teenage
put-downs and crude sexual or scatological
slang—to the more substantive. Many of the
latter are in line with what one would expect
from an "alt-right" book: sweeping general-
izations about women, homosexuals, and, to
a lesser extent, national and ethnic groups.
Still others question or attack conventional
wisdom on science, health, nutrition, and
other topics, often referencing some obscure
figure whom contemporary authorities dis-
miss as a crank. In perhaps the book's most
risible passages, BAM wonders aloud wheth-
er history has been falsified, persons and
events invented from whole cloth, centuries
added to our chronology, entire chapters to
classic texts.

The book at times reads so outlandishly
that one wonders if any of it could possibly be
meant seriously or if the author is just a kook.
But on reflection I came to believe that some
of the ridiculousness is intended to help the
unscientific and unphilosophic grasp con-
cepts beyond their conceptual framework.
Some is meant to shock and discomfit, as if
BAM were in the reader's ear shouting "I in-
sist you must question everything!" (I note
here that whenever BAM begins a sentence
with the first-person pronoun and ends with
an exclamation point, he is being serious.
One example: "I don't do irony!"

And a great deal of BAM's silly outrageous-
ness seems to be there to provide air cover for
the outrageous things he means in deadly ear-
nest. If so, he might be following Niccolò Ma-
chiavelli, who once wrote "that it is a very wise
thing to simulate craziness at the right time."
The internet pidgin likely serves a similar pur-
pose. It simultaneously attracts the young—
who by nature enjoy slang for its exclusionary
effect on the duffers (which is why, to remain
effective, slang must be constantly reinvent-
ed)—while putting off said duffers, who will
assume that such drivver cannot be serious and
thus is not worth their attention, much less
their worry.

Could it be that BAM's frivolous surface
hides a serious core? Or, to put it in BAPian
terms: Wat means?

B
eginning at the Beginning—the
first paragraph of the Prologue—BAP
explicitly denies that his book is "phi-
losophy"; it is, rather, "exhortation." He thus
in the same breath diminishes and elevates
his intention. The blue-hairs, he hopes, will
take seriously his declaration of unserious-
ness. At the same time, he warns readers who
persevere that this little volume should not be
mistrusted for an education; those who want to
know more must go deeper.

BAP provides guidance for those who so
wish. The book is shot through with refer-
ces to poets, philosophers, historians, scien-
tists, and their theories. His range of knowl-
edge is vast—or at least appears so. I often
found myself willing to give him the benefit of
the doubt on scientific concepts I don't under-
stand because so often when he writes about
something I do understand, he gets it right.
us essentially nowhere in explaining what life is.

Before the religious or classically inclined among us begin thinking that BAP might be a kindred spirit, it must be said that he is a frank agnostic—"I don't talk about if God exists, I don't know this"—and dismissive of conservative attempts to marshal ancient philosophy to support an account of a natural moral order. "Ethics," BAP says in an aside, "is for cows"—snee quotes his. That is not to say he rejects "teleology"—the idea that natural beings have intrinsic ends—per se. For BAP, life is "intelligent" but neither "designed" nor "evolved." It aims at something, but not moral perfection or excellence. Each living being, he says, possesses a nature with inborn characteristics and tendencies that science has not yet begun to penetrate. And if that makes BAP sound like someone who exalts an "ineffable mystery of life" inherently beyond the reach of human intellect, think again. BAP not only doesn't dismiss the possibility that science could penetrate, or at least penetrate further, into the mystery of life; he urges that resources be spent on exactly such an effort—though he doesn't hold out much hope that we'll get anywhere soon. He holds modern biologists and their institutions—really all academics and all the universities—in contempt.

To paraphrase Woody Allen (whom, I hasten to add, BAP does not quote), life wants what it wants. What does it want? At the upper reaches, among the higher animals (BAP is relentlessly hierarchical), what it wants is mastery of "owned space." "Owned space" is the most important concept introduced in Part One and the key to understanding the rest of the "exhortation," if not necessarily the rest of the book. BAP argues that life, fundamentally, is a "struggle for space." All life seeks to develop its powers and master the surrounding matter and space to the maximum extent possible. For the lower species, this simply means mass reproduction and enlarging habitat. For the higher animals, it means controlling terrain, dominating other species, dominating the weaker specimens within your own species, getting first dibs on prey and choice of mates, and so on. BAP sees no fundamental distinction between living in harmony with nature and mastering nature. All animals seek to master their environments to the extent that they can, and the nature of man, or of man at his best—the highest man—is to seek to master nature itself. Not in the Aristotelian sense of understanding the whole, nor in
the Baconian sense of “the relief of man’s estate” via technology and plenty; more to assert and exert his own power. Indeed, BAP posits an inner kinship between the genuine scientist and the warrior; he calls the former “monsters of will.”

BAP rejects the Darwinian claim that the fundamental imperative of life is reproduction. The highest animals, he notes, reproduce relatively slowly and infrequently, with great danger to the distaff side of the species. Indeed, BAP’s objections to Charles Darwin are among the most original thoughts in the book. He doesn’t so much dismiss him—and certainly not in the name of creationism—as diminish him. Darwin, he argues, was right about the circumstance with which he was most familiar—crowded England, where all the space was already “owned”—but mistakenly thought he could extrapolate that narrow insight across all life.

For BAP, space is owned when it is mastered or controlled. This can either be accomplished by you—or your herd or pride or clan or tribe or nation—or by others. In the latter case, life—especially for the higher beings—is at best unsatisfying and often miserable. Nature—life—has been thwarted.

Part Two is BAP’s account of our contemporary malaise. In his telling, today all the space is, and has been for some time, owned by a degraded elite, reducing the majority of men to “bugmen” and thwarting the innate will of the higher specimens. “Bugman” at first glance appears to be BAP’s term for Nietzsche’s Last Man, the analysis of which BAP endorses in toto, even instructing any reader who needs a refresher to put down BAM and go read the prologue to Thus Spoke Zarathustra.

BAP does not—as some might expect—blame this degradation of man on modernity. He rather asserts that lower life or mere life or “yeastlife”—which he analogizes to something like Aristotle’s analysis of Eastern despotism—is, if not the default state of man, then common throughout history. In most of the world, most of the time, he claims, the naturally lower human types rule—typically by brute force of numbers, led by a hostile elite—for naturally lower human types rule—typically by brute force of numbers, led by a hostile elite—for naturally low ends. To do so they must thwart the innate drives of higher men, in former times via castration or ostracization, today by debilitating “education” meant to render potentially spirited youth listless, hopeless and/or easily satisfied. Early modernity actually offered the higher types vast opportunities to explore and conquer new space. Thus bugdom is not caused or defined by science and technology. To the contrary: science and tech at their best can form a kind of frontier that allows for man’s higher motives to find vent when and where space is constrained. For BAP, science in modern times is, or should be, a manifestation of the will to conquer space.

In the Iron Prison, space is constrained for everyone but the rulers—or, variously, the “owners;” “wardens;” and “lords of lies.” It is important to understand that those whom BAP means by “rulers” are not always, or necessarily, those whom the people believe to be their rulers. In his telling, many of these are just managers, frontmen, slightly higher paid than average to be sure, but in the final analysis slaves to the system no less than the bugmen they ostensibly rule. In one of many ideas BAP appears to take from Machiavelli, he posits a hidden or indirect government in which real power is shadowy but firmly in control—except that Machiavelli meant this as a recommendation whereas BAP means it as a warning and rallying cry.

Roughly speaking, BAP seems to divide the human race into three types: natural bugmen, who will always be the majority but who can be led in positive directions by the right kind of man; naturally superior specimens who “desire one thing above all, ever-flowing eternal fame among mortals” (BAP quoting Heraclitus); and a sort of middle category who in good times manage the natural aristocracy but in bad times become regime apparatchiks and enforcers of the “Leviathan” (BAP borrowing from Thomas Hobbes). It gradually becomes clear, then, that BAP’s bugman is not strictly analogous to the Last Man: the latter is much worse but also not always present. He is, however, ascendant at the moment and one aim of his rule is to degrade and multiply the natural bugmen.

In Part Three BAP finally turns to his promised exhortation. He begins in exultation of youth and vitality generally, with ancient champions, Iberian explorers, and other, more execrable heroes (Clearchus? Agathocles?) held up as examples of the higher man. BAP’s praise of the conquistadors points to another BAPian innovation: he sees no necessary conflict between Christianity and warlike excellence. This is one of the many ways BAP extends a hand to Christianity “interpreted according to virtue,” which is to say, by BAP. But the model throughout remains the classical man of action; all others are judged according to how well they measure up to that standard. In unquestionably the book’s most hilarious passage, BAP imagines Mitt Romney as…Alcibiades. I cannot do it justice; you just have to read it. The moral is clear, however: Alcibiades and his ilk, not Socrates and his, represent the peak of antiquity and perhaps of humanity.

BAP asserts an inherent connection between physical health, good looks, and human worth. No “eye of the beholder” clichés here! I suppose this is the place to note that one constant in BAP’s Twitter feed is pictures of muscle, shirtless beefcake. This has caused many to wonder—and some to insist they know—what the true point of Bronze Age Mindset really is. Since it does not seem that I can let this point pass without comment, I note, first, that this is a review of the book, not the Twitter feed, and the book is not illustrated. BAP certainly exhorts young men to exert themselves and become as fit as they can. He is an insistent advocate of weightlifting. However, it may also be relevant that in a long chapter entitled “Greek friendship,” BAP praises the coming together of men to perform great and difficult feats and lightly brushes off as “exaggeration” the assumption that such friendships in Greek antiquity were sexual. On the other hand, that Twitter feed also frequently features photos of beautiful young ladies. BAP seems to want to draw attention to beauty qua beauty.

This book speaks directly to young men dissatisfied with a hectoring, vindictive equality that punishes excellence.

In the only mention of Socrates in BAM, BAP accuses Plato of falsely presenting Socrates’ rejection of Alcibiades (the story is told at the end of the Symposium) as the exact reverse of what really happened. (But how could he know that?) CRB readers may recall, in Book V of the Republic, Socrates’ redefinition of kalos (the beautiful, fine, noble, good) as the “useful,” severing the connection between the beautiful and the good (for the good is surely useful, but the beautiful, not necessarily). BAP’s amazing ambition extends to overturning that downgrade in favor of the older Greek notion that form and value, aesthetics and excellence, the beautiful, the good and the noble are one and indivisible. The early Greeks meant this literally; he insists—and further insists that they were right. It is a necessary characteristic of bugman—the ugly master of an ugly regime—to try to sunder the connection.
between the beautiful and the good, to denigrate the former and exalt ugliness.

BAP defines his title only once, calling the “Bronze Age mindset” the secret desire...to be worshiped as a god!” Three further possibilities suggest themselves, probably all intended by the author. The first and most obvious is a reference to the eponymous historic epoch. And BAP does claim that men were stronger, faster, tougher, more manly—just better—in the old days. Second, it is a parody of Gorilla Mindset, another self-published book by an “alt-right” figure. Third, it brings to mind the third of Hesiod’s “five ages of man” (golden, silver, bronze, heroic, and iron) from the Works and Days, though Hesiod’s “Bronze Age” did not end well for its bronze men. Is BAP trying to tell us something? Still, BAP’s “iron prison” is clearly meant to be reminiscent of Hesiod’s dark and dismal “Iron Age,” in which men are virtual slaves, life is miserable, and everything higher is quashed.

Now, if for Hesiod—and homoer—the highest type of man is the warrior; for Plato, the philosopher; for Augustine and Aquinas, the monk; and for Machiavelli, the founder; for BAP it is...the pirate! Pirates, says BAP, are free—the freest, perhaps the only truly free, men. Pirates being especially prone to violating the “owned space” of others means they are especially disinclined to being hemmed in by custom, law, tradition, religion, or anything else—including a stultifying and unjust regime. The pirate has the spirit to violate the owned space of the Leviathan and to own his own.

That sounds something like the revolutionary—and, human nature remaining constant, the revolutionary may yet again become a necessary actor on the political stage. But is revolution really what pirates do?

Strictly speaking, a pirate is a violent outlaw, a thief. He may be a talented, charismatic, skilled, and strong thief, but at the end of the day, he’s still a thief. We can’t help but think of the difference between courage, strength, and daring marshaled in a just cause versus private selfishness or will-to-power cruelty. BAP seems not to admit any such distinction. Yet he also seems to hold out the pirate as a sort of necessary figure, the one who will bring cleansing fire to a rotten superstructure. For BAP, a fundamental fact of nature is that the higher man is always present and his patience is not unlimited. The cycle of regimes predicts that the Leviathan will decay—indeed, BAP insists that the rot is already quite advanced—and the warrior-pirate’s time will come again.

Near the end of the book, surfing this wave of BAPian optimism, and immediately after saying he will not advise anyone how to live, BAP tells young readers to join the military and/or state security or intelligence services, learn vital skills, make lasting friendships, and wait for the opportunity to do great things for their countries. Perhaps BAP’s praise is less for piracy itself than for those virtues or qualities present in, and necessary to, the pirate—as well as those who will one day topple the Leviathan—but conspicuously lacking in bugman and suppressed by the Leviathan.

This rhetorical reversal reminds one of Machiavelli, who frequently tempers his most outrageous statements with sensible and moderate teachings; or to say better, who obscures his sensible and moderate teachings with outrageous statements that appeal to the impetuosity, zeal, and bravado of the young. Machiavelli intimates that the primary purpose of his Discourses on Livy is to prepare a certain subset of the youth to act, when the time is ripe, to overthrow a corrupt sect and restore ancient virtue. It is my impression that Bronze Age Mindset was written with the same intent.

The ruthless counsels given throughout the Prince are addressed less to princes, who would hardly need them, than to “the young” who are concerned with understanding the nature of society. Those true addressess of the Prince have been brought up in teachings which, in the light of Machiavelli’s wholly new teaching, reveal themselves to be much too confident of human goodness, if not of the goodness of creation, and hence too gentle or effeminate. Just as a man who is timorous by training or nature cannot acquire courage, which is the mean between cowardice and foolhardiness, unless he drags himself in the direction of foolhardiness, so Machiavelli’s pupils must go through a process of brutalization in order to be freed from effeminacy.

Reading BAM is certainly, on one level, to undergo a “process of brutalization.” Indeed, it will be all too easy for interns to comb through the book, find offensive statements (they are legion), and pass them up the chain for their bosses to hold out for two-minute-hates. The only reason this hasn’t happened
yet is because the commissars haven't taken any notice. If and when BAP's identity should ever be revealed, the denunciation storm will follow instantly.

The strongest and easiest objections to make to Bronze Age Mindset are that it is "racist," "anti-Semitic," "anti-democratic," "misogynistic," and "homophobic." And indeed, BAP delights in generalizing. The fact that he generalizes in neutral or positive ways at least as much as in negative ones won't matter. In the current year, saying good things about good groups is good; saying bad things about bad groups is good; saying anything else about anyone else is bad. And yet very little—if anything—BAP says is more outrageous than the mid-level outrages of Machiavelli or Nietzsche, and most is quite a bit gentler than what one finds in Marx, Lenin, Mao, Sayyid Qurb, Guevara, Alinsky, Foucault, or any number of fanatics whose screeds are taught in elite universities.

Rather than anticipate and litigate each individual charge, we can save time by bumping up a level, since all of BAP’s offenses fall under one broad heading, about which there can be no question he is sincere. BAP is, as noted, relentlessly hierarchical and this emphatically extends to human beings: the highest theme of Bronze Age Mindset is a sustained diatribe against the idea of human equality.

The disclaimer that he is writing exhortation, not philosophy, allows BAP to skip past hard questions that have bedeviled the greatest thinkers and statesmen for centuries. Everyone who has wrestled with the nature of man knows the myriad ways in which human beings are unequal—in talent, intellect, virtue, character, size, strength, and so many others. The key political questions arising from this natural inequality are, first, how justly to apportion scarce goods among unequal claims to merit but equal claims to common citizenship; and, second, who gets to rule?

The latter seems easier to answer. Figures from Plato to Thomas Jefferson affirm what common sense suggests: it’s best to be governed by the best. But who, exactly, are the best? The bravest? The smartest? The strongest? Before we can even contemplate a means to facilitate (in Jefferson’s words) the “natural aristoi into the offices of government” we have to agree on who the natural aristoi are. The easiest way to answer this question would be “those most adept at ruling.” But how do we identify them? Many who self-identify as adept at ruling have no business doing so but are simply out for themselves—pirates without ships. Indeed, one problem with BAP’s effusive praise for strength and daring—untempered by corresponding gestures to wisdom and moderation—is that it encourages such men to think they deserve a high place they have not earned, may not be fit for, and which they may very well abuse.

To this I suppose BAP would reply: in bugtimes, it is folly to praise that which is easily appropriated by bugman and used to strengthen and lengthen the Leviathan’s rule. In such times, preparation for the noble and just assault on the Leviathan becomes the highest rhetorical necessity.

Perhaps, at any rate, let us stipulate for the sake of argument that BAP is right that the natural aristoi are defined not in Jefferson’s terms—“virtue and talents”—but rather more or less as Machiavelli says: strength of mind, will, or temper combined with physical prowess and endurance. There is much overlap here to be sure. But there is in Jefferson’s writings—and in the works of those who informed and inspired him—a much more serious concern for the status of morality, and for those virtues conducive to stability, prosperity, technical innovation, and the arts and sciences. Yet however we define virtue, we immediately recognize that such qualities are possessed by degrees. Some people have none; many have at least a little; and a few have a great deal. What counts as “enough” to qualify one as superior? Even if we can establish the cut-off line, how do we measure the amount? How do we convince those—there’s bound to be a lot of them—certain they have the right stuff, but
who fall short according to our metric, to accept their inferior status with good grace?

But suppose all that could be figured out; we still face the problem of how to get the natural aristoi into positions of power. Lord knows, mankind has tried a variety of means: divine appointment, trials and labors, single combat, service to the state, heredity, competitive examinations, “meritocracy.” None of them has quite worked. Yet it’s fair to ask whether these modes, warts and all, are better or worse than that of the pirate, who simply takes what he wants. In politics, that’s called tyranny.

One cannot find in BAM any principled reason—or any reason at all—to reject or object to tyranny. Or to slavery, serfdom, perpetual peasantry, might-makes-right, warlordism, gangsterism, bullying, or other forms of what the religious and philosophic traditions call “injustice.” The only injustice BAP seems concerned with is the suppression of the higher by the lower. But the lower—or, let’s be more charitable than BAP and say “the common man”—will always be around. God must love the common people, Abraham Lincoln is said to have said; He made so many of them. What is their place in BAP’s moral universe? He seems to reject out of hand the existence of a common good shared by the ordinary and the exceptional, and the possibility of a regime in which the just claims of both can be, if not fully honored, at least balanced and reconciled.

Yet one can accept the most reasonable of BAP’s premises—that natural inequalities exist, that strength and courage are real virtues, and that certain men are naturally more fit to rule than others—without accepting his apparent conclusion: that (to twist Jefferson’s words) the mass of mankind has been born with saddles on their backs, and a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately.

We may phrase the central question raised by Bronze Age Mindset as this: must equality always and everywhere be the enemy of excellence, or vice versa? BAP’s answer is an emphatic “Yes!” But the American Founders didn’t think so. At the same time that they declared all men to be created equal, they also affirmed not merely the necessity but the nobility of the manly virtues. They sought to build a regime that honors strength, virtue, and justice simultaneously, recognizing some tension among those ends but seeing no inherent incompatibility. Nor can we dismiss this goal as merely aspirational on their part, as examples from George Washington to Andrew Jackson, Teddy Roosevelt, and Dwight Eisenhower show.

BAP at any rate cannot be unaware that the practical questions raised above—and others—form insurmountable barriers to any stable, just, and lasting regime based on equality. I suspect he would say: nothing lasts, much less anything great; your silly regime based on “equality” didn’t last either and gave us bugrulerule to boot; better a short period of rule by the highest men than centuries of bugdom; wouldn’t you rather have some greatness rather than none? One day as a lion and all that.

BAP says that “life appears at its peak...in the military state” and calls military rule inevitable in the West. But he nowhere clarifies how it will work—how, or whether, it will be distinguishable from the exploitation of the weak by the strong. The classics no less than Machiavelli affirm that every aristocracy hitherto known either was from the beginning, or quickly devolved into, oligarchy. Indeed, I find myself wondering whether BAP would dispute what seems so plainly obvious to me: namely that an indispensable foundation—and means of perpetuation—of the contemporary world he so despises is precisely a forced and false inequality under the guise of “meritocracy.” How much different—better—would our country look, feel, and operate if all human beings were treated equally before the law? How much more freedom to excel would BAP’s higher specimens enjoy?

Which brings us back to the kids. The reason this book is important is because it speaks directly to a youthful dissatisfaction (especially among white males) with equality as propagandized and imposed in our day: a hectoring, vindictive, resentful, levelling, hypocritical equality that punishes excellence and publicly denies all difference while at the same time elevating and enriching a decadent, incompetent, and corrupt elite.

BAP would say—indeed does say—that this is where the logic of equality inherently and inevitably leads. He even goes so far as to deny that the American Founders meant a word of their rhetoric. I think this is impossible to sustain as a historical matter, but on the larger philosophical question it is possible that the founders meant every word but were still wrong. It’s fair to say, however, that BAP’s followers take for granted that the idea of equality is false. They even have a derisive term for it: “egalism.” They dismiss the language of the founders, of rights, of the American political tradition as “Enlightenment,”—rest assured—they don’t mean as a compliment.

And I have more bad news for my fellow conservatives: the talented kids who’ve found this book aren’t listening to us. It doesn’t matter whether they aren’t listening because they found the book, or they found the book because they aren’t listening. The fact remains that all our earnest explanations of the true meaning of equality, how it comports with nature, how it can answer their dissatisfaction, and how it’s been corrupted—none of that has made a dent.

This—of course—doesn’t mean that we should abandon our understanding. Truth is truth, and if were right, we’re right. But it does mean that we need to acknowledge a serious rhetorical deficiency that we’ve not even begun to learn how to overcome. In the spiritual war for the hearts and minds of the disaffected youth on the right, conservatism is losing. BAPism is winning.

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