

“Sucking on [America’s] Tit”: Metaphorical Dimensions of the Family in Conservative American Discourses on Europe

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In his essay “The New Deal and the Analogue of War,” historian William E. Leuchtenburg argued “[t]he metaphors a nation employs reveal much about how it perceives reality. The unconscious choice of symbols bares the bedrock of its beliefs [...] the words people use are not neutral artifacts; they shape ideas and behavior [...] the historian finds it rewarding to explore the imagery a particular period has used, consciously or unconsciously, to interpret its experience.”¹ Metaphors are ingrained in the way we think and influence our thoughts and actions. They add to the drama of history and fill lives with meaningful ways of communication and expression. We largely think metaphorically, often even unconsciously.

Perhaps almost organically, a multitude of metaphors has sprung up to designate countries or nations. Nations are often perceived as (rational) actors in a performance that is literally world-class. Many such metaphors can be observed in official transcripts. Ronald Reagan in 1983 famously quipped about the “evil empire,” while George W. Bush in his 2002 State of the Union address denounced the “axis of evil” – Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. The metaphor attributes human capacities to nations that will then be held to behave like humans. We consider them rational or irrational, cerebral or impulsive; they may be friends or foes, while, technically speaking, nations are none of these. Moreover, they have been perceived as “parent” or “child.” This evidently has consequences for the way reality is perceived.

Europeans and Americans have referred to each other in such terms of the family since the very beginning of the transatlantic experience. The metaphor of the parent and child was long employed and exploited on both sides of the Atlantic. For instance, it played into the idea that America was new, young, and vibrant, while Europe, as with so many of its supposed qualities in the American imagination, was its obverse. Alternatively, at least until the twentieth century – and obstinate Europeans and even some Americans believe so up to this day – the impression that the United States supposedly had not produced anything of worth intellectually has been enough to cast it aside as a cultural child.

More surprisingly – and today we read the accounts of eighteenth-century natural history with vicarious shame – America was professed to be a natural child as well. Such eminent and well-established scientists as George Louis LeClerc, Comte de Buffon, Cornelius de Pauw, and Guillaume Thomas Raynal believed nature in the Americas was simply far younger than that found

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¹ William E. Leuchtenburg, “The New Deal and the Analogue of War,” in *Change and Continuity in Twentieth-Century America*, vol. 1, ed. John Braeman et al. (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1964), 81.

in Europe. Besides, it was hardly *cultivated* at that and therefore deemed detrimental to (many) animals and humans alike. People would “degenerate” in America: devolve into children.

The geopolitical analogue to the metaphor may have come almost instinctively. Any colonial experience is defined by an inherent power relation between a center (in this case England or Europe) and a periphery. The idea of a “mother country” to America (and later the United States) was debated with alacrity by Europeans and Americans alike, especially and ultimately so after the United States gained independence and later when – to stay within the metaphor – it was “coming of age.” Whereas in the United States it led to generations of authors ambiguously combining a sense of longing and repulsion toward Europe, Europeans could be infatuated with what would then be called their fruit and “offspring.”

To be sure, there was obvious resistance to the metaphor and, more importantly, its real-life implications. John Adams rhetorically posed the following question in 1765, even before the possibility of independence was discussed: “Is there not something exceedingly fallacious in the common-place images of mother country and children colonies?” Not completely casting it aside, however, he went on to play with the image in a manner the full, Lockean consequences of which could only become apparent with the Declaration of Independence in 1776: “[H]ave not children a right to complain when their parents are attempting to break their limbs[?]”²

Thomas Paine was one of the first to eloquently argue that England had been a fatal attraction for the colonists. In his treatise *Common Sense*, he argued that to cut ties with England would keep the United States out of the former’s wars and open trade with the whole of Europe. And thus he also famously argued that “Europe, and not England, is the parent country of America.”³ Paine recognized that America had been founded on European traditions, not solely on English ones. It first had to become non-English, or *European*, to become exceptional, or *non-European*.

And yet, although officially the United States might have become sovereign after signing the Declaration of Independence and winning the Revolutionary War, metaphorically it would take a far longer time – some argue that America still lacks independence⁴ The United States would truly be considered ‘mature,’ at least in certain respects then, only with the onset of America’s entry into World War II. Perhaps not so surprising, this gestation of America into adulthood, which was as sudden as, at the same time, it may have been anticipated, would render a role reversal of “parent” and “child.” Ultimately effected when the Cold War ended, the United States rose as sole aspirer to superpower fame, exclusive “parent” to Europe and the world at large.

In current, chiefly conservative⁵ American discourses about Europe, the parent-child metaphor has been infused with new life. In this paper, I seek to analyze these metaphors of the family in conservative American discourses on Europe in the twenty-first century. With Leuchtenburg’s proposition in mind, I will explore these images to determine how they reflect the experiences they have, at the same time, sought to produce. These representations suggest a renewed demarcation of center and periphery between America and Europe. To be sure, before the founding of the

² John Adams, “Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law” [1765], in *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States: With a Life of the Author, Notes and Illustrations*, vol. 3, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1851), 461.

³ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* [1776] (New York: Bantam Classic, 2004), 27.

⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, in her travelogue *America Day by Day* (1948), argued “Americans are just big children. Their tragedy is precisely that they are *not* children, that they have adult responsibilities, an adult existence, but they continue to cling to a ready-made, opaque universe, like that of childhood.” See Simone de Beauvoir, *America Day by Day*, trans. Carol Cosman (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 313. It is reminiscent of what André Visson has called Europe’s Athenian complex vis-à-vis the United States.

⁵ I have followed authors’ own identification as conservative.

United States, “Americans,” or more appropriately the colonists, had been mere subjects of England, and only with a wild imagination can one argue that Europe today is subject to America in a similar way. Europeans hardly refer to the transatlantic relationship being that between a parent and its children. Far more often, such metaphors as “lapdog” or “vassal” indicate the subordinate position, or – as an indictment against their governments – how European elites supposedly blindly follow America.⁶

I will be keen to track how “adulthood,” “maturity,” “dependence” and “independence,” and the feminine/masculine function, and how these inform political discussions in the United States. I contend that the metaphor of parent and child is used with such fervor precisely because this one simple image clearly visualizes a panoply of narratives conservatives hold about Europe. The image invokes questions of authority and authorship — who gets to “author” the idea that Europe is a child in the first place? – and makes Europe exist as these Americans “know” it.⁷ This renders America’s superiority both explicit and implicit. Although I believe the metaphor may advance our understanding of current transatlantic relations, I am also aware that through the inherent paradoxes I intend to lay bare, it may complicate and problematize that very understanding.

Europe’s Becoming a “Child”

In a segment from *Special Report with Bret Baier* on April 3, 2009, Charles Krauthammer, a syndicated columnist and widely known political commentator, critiqued President Obama’s speech delivered in Strasbourg that same day. In what was particularly offensive to Krauthammer and many other Americans, Obama explained to his European audience: “In America, there’s a failure to appreciate Europe’s leading role in the world. Instead of celebrating your dynamic union and seeking to partner with you to meet common challenges, there have been times where America has shown arrogance and been dismissive, even derisive.”⁸ It was one of those infamously idiosyncratic yet arguably not really existent apologies for America. Krauthammer’s riposte was as witty as it was scathing: “It’s hard to appreciate an entity’s leading role in the world when it’s been sucking on your tit for sixty years [...] parasitically.”⁹

This one simple sentence connects a variety of seemingly unconnected conservative narratives about Europe – here predominantly, the European Union – that have been gaining ground since the aftermath of the Second World War. In those years, Europe and America have moved in diametrically opposed directions: European countries declined in power so much that, in metaphorical parlance, they became children. An early instance of the metaphor’s use after the Second World War can be observed in the discussion over NATO’s French crisis in the mid-1960s. Clearly hinting that Europeans were in need, and boasting the necessity, of firm American leadership, Assistant Secretary of State Henry D. Owen claimed, “Europeans were like

⁶ Emblematic of a vicious type of this, Jean-Paul Sartre once argued: “We are not your allies. Our governments are your servants, soon our peoples will be your victims.” See Pierre Rigoulot, “American Justice as a Pretext for Anti-Americanism,” *Human Rights Review* 4.3 (2003): 59.

⁷ Adapted from Edward Said: “And authority here means for ‘us’ to deny autonomy to ‘it.’” I do not wish to argue that Said’s *Orientalism* is similar to American perceptions of Europe, but I do see parallels. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 32.

⁸ Barack Obama, “Remarks by President Obama at Strasbourg Town Hall” (speech, Rhenus Sports Arena, Strasbourg, France, April 3, 2009), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/>.

⁹ Charles Krauthammer, *Special Report with Bret Baier*, Fox News, April 3, 2009.

inexperienced teenagers who knew what to do once they were told but were incapable of deciding on their own what was right or necessary.”¹⁰

Associated with this is the idea that Europe is a parasitical freeloader,¹¹ living large on America’s defense spending. In this account, the only reason why Europe is able to spend generous amounts of money on welfare is that America continues to defend the continent without asking anything in return. The American auto-image is one of a benign hegemon, a caring mother who knows what is best. Victor Davis Hanson, a classicist, commentator for *National Review Online* and *Commentary* and one of the most prolific users of the parent-child metaphor, has picked up on this theme: “American power alone is what has permitted [Europeans] to dream that they inhabit a global fairyland of reasonable people.”¹²

It may not be surprising it is especially after September 11, 2001, that the metaphor of parent and child should regain popularity. The first decade of the twenty-first century was a period in which the transatlantic relationship was profoundly tested. Any reading against this backdrop should be informed by the notion that Americans perceive Europe not merely as a child but a contumacious child, a “spiteful teenager.”¹³ Its use can be compared to a simile we all use at times: ‘you behave like a child.’ It is a child who does not do what its parent wants, as in the case of the Iraq imbroglio – granted that many European countries did contribute to this war and that it was therefore far from a unilateral affair. It is reasonable to hypothesize that the ostensibly diverging ways of that period have shaped the metaphor and instilled it with most of its explanatory power.

This also helps explain the oft-seen yet perhaps not completely unfounded condescending tone in American anti-Europeanism and critiques of Europe more generally. Denis Boyles, a long-time American resident in France and writer for *National Review Online*, argued thus: “You know the story: Most of the last century can be described as a series of expensive interventions, from World War I through Kosovo, by the United States to fix problems that Europeans made for themselves.”¹⁴ In this reading, Europeans both expect that the United States will leave them alone, *and* help them as a last resort. Whereas the children continually mess up, the parent has to find a solution. In the last instance, the metaphor inculcates the belief that without this compassionate and generous parent, the children might eventually end up killing each other once again.¹⁵

Europeans are able to live in a post-historical world precisely because there is an American *aegis*. The term “post-historical” (re)gained vogue with Francis Fukuyama’s essay for *The National Interest* “The End of History” (1989), and the subsequent book-length study, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). Fukuyama’s “End of History” that ensued in the aftermath of

¹⁰ See Andreas Wenger, “Crisis and Opportunity: NATO’s Transformation and the Multilateralization of Détente, 1966-1968,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 6.1 (2004): 35.

¹¹ See, e.g., Jonah Goldberg, “Europe, Seriously,” *National Review Online*, January 23, 2003, <http://www.nationalreview.com/>; Goldberg, “If We Europeanize, Europe Is In Trouble,” *National Review Online*, April 9, 2010, <http://www.nationalreview.com/>; Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Albert A. Knopf, 2007), 54, 57-58; Charles Krauthammer, “Who Cares What Europeans Think?” *Jewish World Review*, March 4, 2002, <http://www.jewishworldreview.com/cols/krauthammer030402.asp>; Mark Steyn, *After America: Get Ready for Armageddon* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2010), 119.

¹² Victor Davis Hanson, “Goodbye to Europe? (American-European Relations),” *Commentary*, October 1, 2002, <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/good-bye-to-europe/>; see Mark Steyn, *After America*, 119.

¹³ Victor Davis Hanson, “Lovin’ Europe by Leavin’: It is past time for our 60-year-old European child to move out of the house and get a life,” *National Review Online*, April 2, 2004, <http://www.nationalreview.com/>.

¹⁴ Denis Boyles, “Velveeta-Eating Surrender Buckeyes,” *National Review Online*, November 10, 2006, <http://www.nationalreview.com/>.

¹⁵ For a proponent of this idea, see Hanson, “Lovin’ Europe by Leavin.’”

the Cold War pronounced liberal democracy as the end point, the *telos*, in human social evolution. In a revisit fifteen years after the publication of his book, Fukuyama nuanced some of his ideas but claimed that the European Union corresponded most to the post-historical ‘ideal’ of his thesis.¹⁶ The U.S., on the other hand, remained “mired in history.” American conservatives believe that Europeans have become wont to live in a paradisiacal cocoon. The consequence of such a “paradise achieved” is that Europeans have become complacent, assuming they do not have to take any responsibility in fighting evil in the world; they do not think there is any imperative for spreading the very freedoms Europeans take so much for granted. It can be said that the idea of post-history describes an ideal, but it does have its nasty streak: outside of history there is a complete termination of movement and development. It breeds complacency as no further progress can be achieved anymore.

In short, Europe no longer takes any real responsibility – the reason it transformed into a “child” in the first place – and does, ideally, not worry about any. The American “parent,” on the other hand, firmly believes in its own authority and therefore worries rather much about responsibilities and commitments. In a sense, Europe’s neoteric philosophy may, considering its history, be impressive but at the same time reflect a naïve and feckless worldview. Whereas the Rational Actor Model in International Relations presupposes that all countries act in their self-interest, this runs counter to any conservative assessment of Europe’s shenanigans. If countries choose to *become* “children,” they may be conceived to be outside of the model: they are not rational at all. The infantilization of Europe both describes and prescribes Europe’s behavior in the conservative mind. Once “we” know that Europeans are infantile, there is no longer any need to listen to them. Alternatively, because “we” do not agree with “you,” “you” become disagreeable, an adolescent.¹⁷

It may be remarkable that Krauthammer uses the image of America as a mother, but it makes sense to portray the United States as a caring and concerned individual. In one of his articles, Hanson depicted Europe as a “son.”¹⁸ Yet far more often than not – and I believe the latter’s image is singular in that respect – America is described as simply a genderless parent or as generally masculine, while Europe is more and more perceived as feminine. One may ask whether the auto-image of America as the parent and Europe as the child corresponds to a simultaneous transition in the cultural imagination of America from feminine to masculine in the cultural imagination. I believe it should not come as unexpected that with the parent-child metaphor imbued with new life, the feminine-masculine divide in transatlantic imagery is increasing too. It is as much part of America’s self-perception as of Europeans’ hetero-image of America (the cowboy, or police officer of the world). The feminine and the child share stereotypical features: dependence, weakness, impulsivity, irrationality, and softness. Maybe more important here, the United States is the antipodal opposite of these traits.

Historically, whenever “America” was depicted, it was in the form of a female figure. For instance, in Johannes Stradanus’ painting *America* (c1575-1580), it is in the form of a naked woman easily subdued by the European male figure, Amerigo Vespucci. The painting at once

¹⁶ Francis Fukuyama, “The History at the End of History,” *The Guardian*, April 3, 2007, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk>.

¹⁷ David B. MacDonald has relatedly argued that conservative discourse during the Iraq war represented the transatlantic relationship as “a struggle between a virtuous USA and a morally bankrupt Europe. Through such a lens Europe can contribute little to any serious debate about US foreign policy.” See “Bush’s America and the New Exceptionalism: anti-Americanism, the Holocaust and the transatlantic rift,” *Third World Quarterly* 29.6 (2008): 1103.

¹⁸ Hanson, “Lovin’ Europe by Leavin.’”

offers a glimpse of the power relations between Europe and America in that day and age and functioned as a vehicle that produced them. “America” is being woken up – one may conjecture after an immensely long sleep – an eerie reminder of how the European male, in the moral course of things, knew best how to exploit and civilize the land, whereas the natives did not.¹⁹

From America’s perspective in the painting, one could argue that ‘she’ has waited for and somehow awaited the European male figure. “Her” role is evidently that of a dependent. Nature, the land, and by implication America “herself” – which makes the painting at once highly sexual – are to be kept under control by potent European males. American Indians could not do so. According to the Comte de Buffon, the latter looked immorally much like their women: “He has no hair, no beard,” and, what is worse, “no ardour for the female.” Native women, on the other hand, had “small and feeble [...] organs of generation.”²⁰ Accordingly, America and Americans were feminine and like children.

Today, these roles have completely turned around. If Americans are as massively masculine in the imagination, Europeans are correspondingly feminine. Yet it is not a completely novel affair. After the Second World War, one-time overly masculine Germany was perceived as “feminized, dependent, and in need of [American] aid and guidance.”²¹ Today’s rhetoric, however, seems harsher. Historian Timothy Garton Ash has pointed out the sexualized imagery used in American perceptions of Europeans: “Americans see ‘the Europeans’ as limp-wristed pansies. The American is a virile, heterosexual male; the European is female, impotent, or castrated. Militarily, Europeans can’t get it up.”²² Europe is Venusian and America Martian, in Robert Kagan’s widely disseminated turn of phrase. Whereas Buffon’s American Indians had been indifferent to their surroundings because they were weak, for Kagan’s Europeans this equally applies.²³

It is their lack of power, constructed as a masculine trait, which has made Europeans into proponents of “soft-power,” negotiation, and cooptation, according to Kagan.²⁴ Europeans like to deliberate endlessly about what is considered the realm of the soft and feminine: challenges to themselves and the world at large – climate change, human rights, and social justice, among others – while Americans see threats, such as terrorism and nuclear weapons that directly need to be dealt with. Conservative Americans assess Europeans’ denial of responsibility and their pusillanimity with contempt. It is no coincidence that “[c]hildren’s issues are seen as ‘soft,’ the province of soft-

¹⁹ It is a sentiment one may also find in Mary Rowlandson’s *A Narrative of Captivity and Restauration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682).

²⁰ Georges Louis LeClerc, Comte de Buffon, “Of Animals Common to Both Continents,” in *Natural History: General and Particular*, trans. William Smellie [1781], vol. 5., Electronic Edition, ed. Fran Moran (*New Jersey City University*, 2004), 130.

²¹ Mary Nolan, “Anti-Americanism and Anti-Europeanism,” in *The New American Empire: A 21st Century Teach-in On U.S. Foreign Policy*, ed. Lloyd C. Gardner and Marilyn B. Young, 113-132 (New York: The New Press, 2005), 122. See Wenger, “Crisis and Opportunity,” 35.

²² Timothy Garton Ash, “The New Anti-Europeanism in America,” in *Beyond Paradise and Power: Europe, America, and the Future of a Troubled Partnership*, ed. Tod Lindberg (New York: Routledge, 2005), 122. Conversely, for an overtly positive assessment of Europe’s “feminine” qualities, see Parag Khanna, “The Metrosexual Superpower,” *Foreign Policy* 143 (2004): 66-8.

²³ Buffon, “Of Animals Common to Both Continents,” 130.

²⁴ Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power*, 9-11. In bizarre mode, former NATO commander John Sheehan claimed that the tactical change to soft-power of the Dutch army, including the “effort to socialize,” that is to say accepting openly gay service members, resulted in the Srebrenica genocide of 1995. See, Ian Traynor, “US General: Gay Dutch Soldiers Caused Srebrenica Massacre,” *The Guardian*, March 19, 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/>.

hearted people (usually women) at the margins of the larger economic and social problems.”²⁵ The soft does not merely apply to foreign policy and military politics but also has to do with the prioritization of “the secondary impulses of society – rights and entitlements from cradle to grave – over all primary ones.”²⁶ In geopolitical terms, the difference translates into American unilateralism and the European post-national ideal of multilateralism, although these notions are more fluid than is often acknowledged. A child may believe it has power, but the only real power it has is persuasion. The metaphor informs our belief that America may grant power to Europe but does not have to.

It must be said here that the United States is certainly far from invincible against feminizing trends in the conservative vision. Europe may be on its way to complete feminization, but, as popular radio host Michael Savage has argued, “America is getting there as well.”²⁷ Feminization’s nefarious quality lies in the fact that it is not an absolute and immediate condition. Rather, as Mark Steyn, a well-known writer and stand-in for Rush Limbaugh, has claimed, “[...] the softening of a state happens incrementally [...] Could America wind up as just another enervated present-tense Western nation? Well it’s halfway there.”²⁸ This feminizing trend is taken as another indication of the “Europeanization” of the United States in the Obama era. Europe is, in so many ways – demographically, morally, politically, economically, and culturally – a harbinger of America’s future, an ostensibly fresh pendant to Europe’s age-long purported Americanization.

The Dependent Child: Live Maturely or Die

It is clear that some conservative Americans may use the parent-child metaphor with mild amusement. They feel a form of *schadenfreude* is long overdue after having been on the receiving end of Europe’s haughtiness for years. It is equally clear, however, that to some extent they care for Europe. The metaphor captures this as it at least implies a close relationship between Europe and America. Nevertheless, conservatives would rather see Europe grow “mature” and become an equal partner. Hanson assesses the relationship between Europe and America as a “pathology”²⁹ that needs fixing. One would expect that with a metaphorical child there is at least the promise of development and growth. However, according to him and others, Europe is a child who does not, or might even be unable, to grow up: Europeans are the “40-something nesters who like staying in the house but not maintaining or repairing it.”³⁰

Hanson suggests that a way to break this lopsided bond, one that induces such a great dependence on the United States, is to bring back American troops from the continent. As Europeans finally have to start paying for their own defense, the result would be their re-entrance into “history.” This idea is far from new. U.S. presidents at least since John F. Kennedy have

²⁵ Hillary Rodham Clinton, *It Takes a Village and Other Lessons Children Teach Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 16.

²⁶ Mark Steyn, *America Alone: The End of the World as We Know It* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2008/2006), 42.

²⁷ Michael Savage, *Trickle Up Poverty: Stopping Obama’s Attack on Our Borders, Economy, and Security* (New York: William Morrow, 2010), 300.

²⁸ Steyn, *America Alone*, 182.

²⁹ Victor Davis Hanson “Today’s Euro-USA Split Will Persist,” *The American Enterprise*, September 27, 2005, <http://victorhanson.com/wordpress/?p=4261>.

³⁰ Victor Davis Hanson, “Eurospeak: Sorting Out the Teenage Sass,” *The National Review Online*, March 4, 2005, <http://www.nationalreview.com/>.

complained about Europe's niggardly spending on its own protection and security. It is striking that it is only by American action – bringing back the troops – that Europe can de-infantilize. Yet, paradoxically, challenges to the status quo in which Europe takes on a bigger role are not taken seriously either. In self-styled paleoconservative Pat Buchanan's words: "European threats to 'go it alone' are threats of children to run away from home, who never quite succeed because their mothers told them not to cross the street."³¹ This line of thought entered official discourse when Richard Boucher, a spokesman for the U.S. State Department, denounced an upcoming meeting among Germany, France, Luxembourg, and Belgium in 2003 about the plans for a headquarter of an EU military force as the "little bitty summit" of "the chocolate makers."³² Nonetheless, as it stands, the European child can grow up or grow "mature" only if it "gets real" about its commitments to the world. Hanson claims that "[p]recisely because we protect Europe, Europe will need ever more protecting, and will grow ever more weak."³³ It is a conservative notion *par excellence*. In this sense, Krauthammer's view of sucking on the tit is especially apposite as it lays bare the complete dependence of the European child on its American parent. Whereas with Henry D. Owen in the 1960s this might have been deemed desirable, it is readily apparent that this is not the case for conservatives today.

It is a form of dependence that in conservative idiom breeds only more dependence. In fact, one might argue that Europeans are trapped in their dependence. For this reason President Obama's ideological vision for the 2012 elections, "Life of Julia,"³⁴ was thought to be so abhorrent as well. Julia signified a liberal "cult of the child"³⁵ not only in that she, as a twenty-five-year-old "child," could stay on her parents' health insurance but also because her very existence implied a cradle-to-grave dependence on the government and feeling of entitlement. Conservatives have a major problem with the metaphorical supposition that the government is a living organism. Once it is taken as such, they fear that would lead to unrestrained governmental encroachment on public and private affairs.³⁶ In that sense, Julia signified a creeping "Europeanization" of the United States in which adults have become the new children as Europe itself has become a child.

These arguments of government dependence to the utmost, the necessary equivalent of government taking the rights of citizens away, can be extended in fascinatingly bizarre and dangerous ways. On 9/11, for example, a commentator held that there was a supposed distinction between three "European" planes and one that could be considered "American." The first three planes resembled "an airborne European Union, where the rights of the citizens had been appropriated by the FAA's flying nanny state." In the fourth, "American" plane – Flight 93 – passengers "reclaimed those rights and demonstrated that they could exercise them more efficiently than government."³⁷ Notice that "America" does not refer to the planes' country of origin – all were built by Boeing and flown by airlines based in the United States – but instead

³¹ Patrick J. Buchanan, *The Death of the West: How Dying Populations and Immigrant Invasions Imperil Our Country and Civilization* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2002), 109.

³² Richard Boucher, "Daily Press Briefing," September 2, 2003, Washington, D.C., *U.S. Department of State Archive*, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2003/23671.htm>.

³³ Hanson, "Lovin' Europe by Leavin'."

³⁴ See <http://l.barackobama.com/truth-team/entry/the-life-of-julia/>. The interactive website and slideshow behind it, however, are no longer working. The campaign spurred a host of parodies, see, e.g., <http://thelifeofjulia.com/>, <http://reallifeofjulia.tumblr.com>.

³⁵ Jonah Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 354.

³⁶ Mark R. Levin, *Ameritopia: The Unmaking of America* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2012), 191.

³⁷ Steyn, *America Alone*, 185.

signifies an ideational quality easily juxtaposed with “Europe.” The metaphor of Europe as a child is complicated, then, by the fact that it is also, simultaneously, the ultimate nanny state.

President Obama is seen as the great “Europeanizer” of the United States. It is a bit paradoxical that with America being said to move more and more in the direction of Asia,³⁸ and Europe, correspondingly, becoming less relevant (and hence more like a child in that respect too), the continent’s salience in rhetorical discussions may be unprecedented. The Europe metaphor has great clout in U.S. politics, especially during presidential elections – 2012 is a case in point. It is intriguing that the more Obama is perceived as “European,” the more he is perceived as a child. Michael Savage has called him a “destructive adolescent” and a “foolish schoolboy,” while liberals as a whole are deemed by him to have only “teenage sensibilities.”³⁹

As Julia was thought to be a particularly old child, so Europe is “a balding and perpetual adolescent”⁴⁰ or even a “[g]eriatric [t]eenager,”⁴¹ leading to further obfuscation. I will come back to the demographic implications of the statement; here it suffices to say that a permanent child has the luxury of living in a perennial present – again, outside of history – whereas a parent does not. Hanson’s “balding adolescent” is also a reference to the hipster logic of the postmodern era, where the cult of youth meets the cult of the child. It is no longer necessary to grow up: from twenty, life is a continual college experience. People are “being without becoming; process without culmination; journey without end.”⁴² As the “behavioral age” has dropped significantly, the child has become as important as the parent in these conceptions. Needless to say, an unwanted situation.

Mark Steyn has impressively cemented together the cult of youth and the cult of the child to observe an ever-greater form of European dependence. To him, the *bamboccioni* are the quintessential examples of the cockeyed European sense of responsibility. The word “translates, roughly, as ‘big bab[ies]’ – the term for the ever-growing number of Italian adults still living at home, in the same bedroom they’ve slept in since they were in diapers.”⁴³ Yet what Steyn fails to mention is that adults continuing to live with their parents has – granted with a less derogatory name – been part of a long religious tradition in Southern European countries and has been exacerbated by the financial and economic crises that have emerged since 2007. For Hanson, all Europeans are *bamboccioni* of sorts: they are “sixty-year-old sons” who finally need to “move out.”⁴⁴

Europeans, and Americans to a lesser degree, do not have any children anymore because they stay children. Steyn has argued that whereas in earlier times at age thirteen one became a (working) adult, these days “you’re a child until twelve, eleven, nine – or whenever enlightened jurisdictions think you’re entitled to go on the pill without parental notification. Then you’re an “adolescent,” an ever more elastic term of art now stretching lazily across the decades. Then you work, after a fashion. Then you quit at sixty-five, sixty, fifty-five in France, fifty in Greece, whatever you can

³⁸ Forty-five percent of American respondents described Asia (“countries...such as China, Japan, and South Korea”) as more important to U.S. interests than Europe in the German Marshall’s Fund *Transatlantic Trends* findings of 2013; forty-four percent believed Europe was more important.

³⁹ Michael Savage, *Trickle Down Tyranny: Crushing Obama’s Dream of the Socialist States of America* (New York: William Morrow, 2012), 37, 194, 154.

⁴⁰ Hanson, “Lovin’ Europe by Leavin’”; Hanson, “Welcome Back.”

⁴¹ Victor Davis Hanson, “Geriatric Teenagers,” *National Review Online*, May 2, 2003, <http://www.nationalreview.com/>.

⁴² Diana West, *The Death of the Grown-Up: How America’s Arrested Development Is Bringing Down Western Civilization* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008/2007), 6.

⁴³ Steyn, *After America*, 112.

⁴⁴ Hanson, “Lovin’ Europe by Leavin’.”

get away with, and enjoy a three-decade retirement at public expense. The tedious business of being a grown-up is that ever-shrinking space between adolescence and retirement.”⁴⁵ Indeed, the less time a person is allowed to be an adult, the more dependent he or she will be. The problem may be found not just in Europe but also in the United States, as Diana West’s *The Death of the Grown-up: How America’s Arrested Development Is Bringing Down Western Civilization* (2007) tried to illustrate.

It is worth illuminating what connotations maturity has in these discourses or what adulthood implies. A chapter in a book by Claire Berlinski, *Menace in Europe: Why the Continent’s Crisis is America’s Too* – a reflection that the impending doom, which threatens Europe, could easily cross the Atlantic – is called “We Surrender.” Aptly positioned against Winston Churchill’s illustrious “Never Surrender” speech of 1940, Berlinski takes it as the current battle cry of Europe – or rather the complete lack thereof. Having observed the Spanish election results in the wake of the Madrid terror attacks in 2004, she asks how it is “possible that Europeans could fail to see in Spain’s flight, to hear in the rhetoric of its leaders, the echo of Neville Chamberlain?”⁴⁶ Berlinski finds the answer in the notion that Europeans “cannot imagine fighting for a cause because they no longer believe a cause may be worth a fight.”⁴⁷ It is, again, the complete dependence on the United States, and an almost religious faith in the government, that has created this European albatross. For West such a type of self-censorship is inherent to a child, and the corresponding mode of multiculturalism she deems “juvenile.”⁴⁸ Europe has rid itself of ‘adult’ responsibilities by turning into a child. What Europeans – and Americans increasingly too – lack is a vision of “virtue.” What they remain stuck with are mere “values.” That, then, is what distinguishes the mature from the immature: “Grown-ups are more likely to recognize the singular nature of Western civilization; perpetual adolescents remain ‘open’ to the relative values of multiculturalism.”⁴⁹

Chamberlain has become synonymous with appeasement, whose meaning has altered from pacifying to not standing up for oneself, caving in to others, and consequently losing everything in the process. “Appeasement,” Mark Steyn has argued, “is a vote to live in the present tense, to hold the comforts of the moment”⁵⁰ rather than to fight for the future. This again neatly fits the post-historical paradise narrative, in which threats are cast aside as extra-European. No wonder, then, that it is part of a vast and increasing American literature on Europe, which almost without exception includes mention of European intransigence over the Iraq War.⁵¹ Maturity, on the other hand, is directly juxtaposed with appeasement. It demands a more forceful foreign policy that takes

⁴⁵ Steyn, *After America*, 171-72; see Patrick J. Buchanan, *Suicide of a Superpower: Will America Survive to 2025?* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2011), 188.

⁴⁶ Claire Berlinski, *Menace in Europe: Why the Continent’s Crisis is America’s, Too* (New York: Crown Forum, 2006), 128.

⁴⁷ Ibid; Rick Santorum agreed. Western Europeans “have nothing to fight for. They have nothing to live for.” See, Rick Santorum, PA Leadership Conference, PCNTV, May 30, 2006. Pat Buchanan finds the answer to West’s question in a “new hedonism.” See, Buchanan, *The Death of the West*, 9.

⁴⁸ Diana West, “We’re All Children Now?” *National Review Online*, July 2, 2008, <http://www.nationalreview.com/>.

⁴⁹ West, *The Death of the Grown-Up*, 216-217.

⁵⁰ Mark Steyn, *After America*, 37.

⁵¹ See, in addition to the sources mentioned throughout this paper, e.g., Bruce Bawer, *While Europe Slept: How Radical Islam is Destroying the West from Within* (New York: Doubleday, 2006); Tony Blankley, *The West’s Last Chance: Will We Win the Clash of Civilization?* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2005); Christopher Caldwell, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: Immigration, Islam, and the West* (New York: Doubleday, 2009); Clive Crook, “Think Again: Europe,” *Foreign Policy* 161 (2007): 22-24, 26-27; George Weigel, *The Cube and the Cathedral: Europe, America, and Politics without God* (Leonminster, UK: Gracewing, 2005).

into account those well-known ‘lessons of Munich.’ What Europe needs is a Churchillian answer – Hanson calls it “Churchillian maturity”⁵² – over Chamberlainian appeasement.

In terms of economics, maturity can simply be equated with a policy of austerity. Mark Landsbaum has claimed that when euro-zone countries discussed how to implement fiscal discipline, “[a]t last, *grown-ups* seemed to be taking charge.”⁵³ Austerity would be the means to “ward off future crises.” Note again the use of the word “future,” a concept whose meaning Europeans seem unable to grasp. Landsbaum further claimed that it “requires an adult approach, not adolescent insistence on instant gratification,”⁵⁴ another instance where present and future are equated with child and parent. In fact, it was a staple of the 2012 U.S. elections that conservatives pronounced the Obama administration’s excessive Keynesian spending “European,” while progressives, with almost equal fervor, warned of a kind of austerity-Europeanization,⁵⁵ inaugurating a new high tide of anti-Europeanism in the United States.

A Paradoxical Metaphor: The Senescent Child

What may or may not be surprising – it is one of the great paradoxes of the metaphor – is that Europe’s being depicted as a child has never translated into the concomitant vitality it meant for America. Whereas the latter may, historically, have been presumed to be a cultural and natural child, it was also new, energetic, and vigorous. This was particularly part of Europeans’ image of the United States in the nineteenth century. Europe, of course, is far from young. In fact, demographically, it is getting older and older. “Old Europe” may rightfully have been a reference to Europe’s increasing age, as Europeans hardly have children anymore. The demographical demise of Europe is another favorite pastime of conservative American authors. The only way to counter this trend is by ‘importing’ people from other regions. As conservatives warn for the Hispanicization of the United States, Europe may become Islamized within this century, which only equals the death of “Europe” by other means.

Europe is “old” and “young” at the same time. Hanson uses a term such as “adolescent” just as easily as “40-something nesters,” “sixty-year old sons” and, in the final stage, “[g]eriatric [t]eenagers.” In another article, he likens Europeans to the Ents in *The Lord of the Rings*.⁵⁶ These human-cum-troll-like figures have become treified, and are hardly able to move anymore, but they are suddenly awoken as imminent danger faces Middle Earth. Read against this backdrop, Hanson questions whether Europeans are able to wake up from their Kantian dream in time. They are not only content to dwell in a perpetual present, a post-historical quality; they like to live on their own history and remain stuck in the past as well. A child, depending on its age, in a conventional turn of events, does not have children (at least in any modern Western vision of the matter) or is physiologically unable to have children, and therefore Europe, at the same time, is old. The problem is aggravated by the belief that the “Julia” child never really becomes an adult anymore or merely a puerile one.

⁵² Victor Davis Hanson, “What Will Europe Really Do?” *Real Clear Politics*, February 19, 2006, <http://realclearpolitics.com/>.

⁵³ Mark Landsbaum, “Après France, California?” *The Orange County Register*. May 11, 2012, <http://www.ocregister.com/>, emphasis mine.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Paul Krugman, “Pain Without Gain,” *New York Times* February 20, 2012, late ed: A19.

⁵⁶ Victor Davis Hanson, “The Ents of Europe: Strange Rumbblings on the Continent,” *National Review Online*, December 10, 2004, <http://www.nationalreview.com/>.

Mark Steyn has also commented on the increasing age of Europeans. He perceives America as the “one grown-up presiding over a brood of whiny teenagers – albeit (demographically) the world’s wrinkliest teenagers.”⁵⁷ These wrinkled teenagers are at once a means to signify Europe’s disobedience at a deeper metaphorical level – the cantankerous teenager – as well as an indication of Europeans’ age. It is in being cantankerous where one may perceive Europe’s ultimate source of power. However, whether Europe is old or very young, the implication is the same: Europe is bound to fall into ever more insignificance and live its “last days.”⁵⁸ it will slip into being a great museum at best. One may counter that logically speaking an old child implies an even older parent, but that never seems to be the case in these accounts. Demographically, America continues to be younger and more dynamic. Whereas children are said to be the future, this European child has no future in any demographic sense of the word, leading to an even greater power gap, and soon an economic gap, between America and Europe.

If hedonism and a lack of moral vision were found to be major reasons that Europe has stopped defending itself, the same can be said for its demographic decline. Having no children is emblematic for the self-contented Europeans. The new “Euroconsensus” determines the shrinkage of both population and economy.⁵⁹ “Socialism, the beatific vision of European intellectuals for generations,” Pat Buchanan has claimed, “is one reason” why Europe has stopped having children. Yet another reason for Europe’s old age is again found in its feminization or emasculation. Historian Mary Nolan has observed in American critiques that “the low European birth rate is certain proof that Europeans lack virility.”⁶⁰ In addition, Europeans are known in some circles as EU-nuchs these days.⁶¹

Conclusion: Child and Parent in the Early Twenty-First Century

I have attempted to show how use is made of the parent-child metaphor in current conservative American discourses and how it offers a great way of visualizing a number of American critiques on Europe. Mind that Europe in these depictions is never a cultural child, although arguably hardly anything of cultural worth is produced there anymore. It is also never a natural child: it is a geopolitical and sometimes an economic child. Returning to Leuchtenburg’s words, these metaphors may tell us a great deal about how the transatlantic relationship in the early twenty-first century is perceived and constructed by a considerable segment of American society. It has long been understood in the field of image studies that what people say about others might tell us more about those who say it than about the group they talk about. The use of the parent-child metaphor tells us much about these conservative opinion makers, their worldview, and the way in which they think the United States’ geopolitical position should develop in the early twenty-first century.

To be sure, the metaphor reflects very real relations in world politics, yet, at the same time, by using the metaphor consciously and unconsciously, conservative commentators attempt to shape the world they seek to analyze. If the problem of the European child is a self-complacency of sorts – the post-historical condition – then the problem of the parent may be quite similar. The metaphor

⁵⁷ Steyn, *America Alone*, xxxix; British Harvard-historian Niall Ferguson coined the locution “senescent Europe,” see, “Eurabia,” *New York Times* April 4, 2004.

⁵⁸ Walter Laqueur, *The Last Days of Europe: Epitaph for an Old Continent* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2007).

⁵⁹ Steyn, *America Alone*, 174.

⁶⁰ Nolan, “Anti-Americanism and Anti-Europeanism,” 122.

⁶¹ Garton Ash, “The New Anti-Europeanism in America,” 123.

enforces the notion that what the United States does – not just vis-à-vis Europe but in general – is inherently good and therefore needs no serious reflection. It moves attention away from and decontextualizes policies undertaken by the U.S. government. In fact, the metaphor seeks to obfuscate any critical reflection of them. In that sense, it can be taken as a mere extension of that Manichean dualism that comprised the Hobson's choice Europeans were offered in the Bush era: "You're either with us or against us."

The metaphor of parent and child has us believe that America is an all-knowing, ultimately benevolent and caring state actor, whereas the conservatives' Europe is an obstinate, defiant, and irrational child. In terms of power relations, America signifies an obvious center of power, and Europe is perhaps no longer even on the periphery. It may have been otherwise, but Europe has absolved itself of 'adult' responsibilities by turning into a child. It should be said here that the metaphor can evidently be decoded in numerous other ways, leading to a whole array of different and sometimes even conflicting meanings.

Thus, the metaphor opens the possibility of subversive readings in which a child has much power – any parent will agree about how powerful the act of crying is – but it should be noted that the authors I have analyzed use a very specific reading of parent-child relations. Its use is, indeed, far removed from any Romantic notion of a parent-child relationship. The roles of the child and the parent are clearly defined and to such a degree that it can lead to circular arguments: Europeans are whiny because they behave like children, and they behave like children because they are whiny.

The metaphor also informs an understanding that America, in a paternalistic fashion, knows Europe better than Europe could know itself, and additionally knows what is best for Europe. I touched upon the paradoxical quality that conservative Americans infantilize Europe – there is at least a scintilla of the Orientalist mode at work here – through language, yet de-infantilization would either have to mean that the United States listen to Europeans' concerns more or that Europeans become more 'agreeable,' the meaning of which can be filled in only by Americans.

The parent-child metaphor is part of a long-standing discourse that has been constructed in such a way as to distance Europe from the U.S. and present them as antipodal opposites. This is beneficial both on a political level – in any myopic domestic debate – and as an identity marker. Thus, Victor Davis Hanson may misread a transatlantic history in which "[t]he 'natural condition' – as if such a thing ever existed in international relations – 'is one of tension.'"⁶² The metaphor ensures a continued juxtaposition between Europe and America as different.

It is difficult to assess the future of the metaphor, but I conjecture we will see a continuance of the metaphor of parent and child for the near future. President Obama's supposed ideational proximity to "Europe" and the latter's decline could ensure the continuance of its use. On the other hand, the many different views on how to handle Syria in 2013 and especially the reluctance of Obama to take, and the public's widespread opposition to, any action show that the notion of the (American) parent is highly fragile. Perhaps it is as easily shattered as Europe's one-time claim to it. That, then, may yet be another reason why it is so particularly appealing to hold on to.⁶³

⁶² Hanson, "Today's Euro-USA Split."; Hanson, "Goodbye Europe."; Hanson "Let Europe." Here he mentions that the Atlantic world returned to its "natural tensions" after the Cold War.

⁶³ I wish to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions and input.