

Earth. . . . The struggle between the English and Napoleon was the struggle between the forces of globalization and those opposed to it." We might say the French live under the eye of the Anglo.

The question, then, is what the left-nationalism Zemmour represents needs in order to defeat the Anglo-American progressivism that is swallowing up the globe: merely History on its side, or also men on horseback—a new “Bonapartist resolution to the problem of political power,” as Pinkoski phrases it? The answer will tell if Zemmour’s faction, as much as the French right he accused, is “not really serious” in its counterrevolutionary aims.

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Nathan Pinkoski replies:

THE LETTERS PAGE of FIRST THINGS is always worth exploring for its treasures, but this epistolary triad is particularly rich. I am especially grateful to Michel Gurfinkiel for his generous remarks on my essay. He is one of France’s best political commentators and has spent his adult life writing on (and sometimes redirecting!) the course of the Fifth Republic. So I shall gladly take up his exhortation to write more on the enigmatic interaction of the left and right.

Our two American writers correctly see the Zemmour phenomenon as an occasion to reflect upon the situation in the United States and consider political possibilities

on the home front. Both understand that the crisis of legitimacy exacerbated by progressivism is transforming America’s political landscape; both understand that the Europeans are ahead of us in many things. For if nothing else, they provide the examples for how to reshape the Earth. Much more could be said about Gurfinkiel’s ruminations on Zemmour’s political prospects and its paradoxes, Desmond’s analysis on the demise of American left-nationalism, or Meadowcroft’s cunning X-ray of my intentions. I hope their reflections will be as graciously received by our readers as they were imparted.

Bach and God

I TAKE ISSUE with Dan Moller’s assessment of the Pythagoreans’ error (“Bach and Pythagoras,” August/September). He writes: “Their mistake was to suppose that the order was out there in the world and not a rational construction of our making.”

My background is physics, and it is difficult to study the last two centuries of physics and deny that mathematical order is “out there in the world,” from galaxies to subatomic particles. A classic exposition of this is Eugene Wigner’s “The Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences.”

And yet, creation always defies our attempts to describe it completely. The most successful theories in science are inconsistent with one another, and “random-seeming constants” are everywhere. The most serious twentieth-century attempt at the Pythagorean dream was Arthur Eddington’s idealism, which failed miserably at explaining fundamental constants.

One response to this failure is to find fault with “unruly nature,” like Moller does. An alternate response is to find fault with ourselves. After all, we are finite beings, limited in intellect and knowledge. How can we hope to describe the handiwork of an infinite, omniscient creator except by incomplete and inconsistent “rational constructions”? From this perspective, the Pythagorean error is not the belief that order is “out there in the world,” but the conceit that our interior sense of order is ultimate. God’s order is much more subtle, beautiful, and spectacular than our own. Therefore, when we find irrational numbers, Pythagorean commas, or Heisenberg uncertainty, the proper response is to fall on our knees in humility and awe.

And then we imitate the order. Like all great art, Bach’s music reflects true reality, not a myopic Pythagorean version. The imitation, whether through composing music or building a scientific theory, brings us nearer the divine. We can draw close, but never fully understand.

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