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Dear Colleague:

Western civilization is rooted in the thinking, primarily, of two peoples--the Jews and the Greeks. The Jews emphasized family, tribe, the law, and transcendent God. The Greeks, by contrast, gave us the polis and the (agnostic) individual, values at odds with family, tribe, and custom. The "birds" in Aristophanes's play Birds were free of the customs (the laws) of place. Two wanderers radically subvert the foundations of society and even of human nature. Onewanderer seeks a place where communism is practiced--a place without any sense of private property. The other wanderer is even more far out. Read on, but hold on to your seat.

I long for a place
Where a father of a boy in the bloom of youth
Will blame me for doing an injustice;
"It's a fine thing that you did to my son,
Meeting him all bathed, leaving the gymnasium,
You did not kiss him, speak to him, embrace him,
Or grab his testicles."

I am, frankly, shocked. But the shock has thrown light on a phenomenon of our day that I've found puzzling, namely, the way the educational establishment and mainstream society support the seemingly radical position of downplaying the classics of Western literature--the "canon"--replacing some of the items with Eastern classics such as the Koran and the Analects of Confucius and contemporary ethnic literature. University administrators willingly accede to student-politician demands for these changes because the changes will actually make society more stable and conformist. My impression of both the Koran and the Analects is that they are mostly PG-13 stuff--full of elevated thoughts and sound moral dicta, in contrast to that Judeo-Greek creation, the Bible, with its vivid portrayals of genocide, sexual passion, and sublime ideals that would destroy society as known and maintained by most of humankind. Again, how much safer and easier it is to invite the young to gambol in the charming exotica of Amy Tan (about as daring as eating spicy Szechuan pork) than demand that they wade through the grim analyses of a Karl Marx or lose themselves in the dizzyingly subversive thoughts of a Nietzsche? I may be wrong, but I think that much of ethnic literature is fundamentally pro-family, pro-kinship, pro group loyalty, pro good guys and against bad guys--all sound, thoroughly conservative values that have undergirded society since time immemorial. As a rather timid mid-American, with a fondness for tradition and the rewards of sound investment, I feel suddenly reassured.

Best wishes,

