

The Day the Earth Stood Still? – Reading Jürgen Habermas’ Essay “February 15” Against Ian McEwan’s Novel *Saturday*

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The third essay in Habermas’ collection *The Divided West* is entitled “February 15, or: What Binds Europeans.”¹ The essay regionalizes the global claims Habermas makes in the longer chapter “Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?”² That is, in “February 15” Habermas makes the case for a European post-national order that he hopes will become the vanguard for the emergence of universal cosmopolitanism.³ Habermas concludes that all that is lacking for the achievement of this beachhead from which Europe can, in its turn, champion a “community of free and equal citizens”⁴ in a “global public sphere,”⁵ is a “European identity.”⁶

For the skeptics Habermas offers February 15, 2003, as proof that a European identity is even possible.⁷ On that day protests against the looming U.S.-led invasion of Iraq were

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¹ JÜRGEN HABERMAS, *February 15, or: What Binds Europeans*, in *THE DIVIDED WEST* 39 (Ciaran Cronin trans. 2006).

² JÜRGEN HABERMAS, *Does the Constitutionalization of International Law Still Have a Chance?*, in *THE DIVIDED WEST* 115 (Ciaran Cronin trans. 2006).

³ “Europe must throw its weight onto the scales at an international level and within the UN in order to counterbalance the hegemonic unilateralism of the United States. At global economic summits and in the institutions of the WTO, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, it should bring its influence to bear in shaping the design of a future global domestic politics.” HABERMAS, *supra* note 1, at 42.

⁴ HABERMAS, *supra* note 2, at 131.

⁵ *Id.* at 142.

⁶ HABERMAS, *supra* note 1, at 42 (Habermas explains that European political unity will require overruled minorities to imagine themselves in solidarity with the majority. “However, that presupposes a feeling of political belonging. The peoples must ‘build,’ so to speak, a new European dimension onto their national identities. The already quite abstract civic solidarity which restricts itself to fellow-nationals must in future be extended to include European citizens of other nations. This poses the question of ‘European identity.’”).

⁷ See, e.g., NEIL FLIGSTEIN, *EUROCLASH: THE EU, EUROPEAN IDENTITY, AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPE* (2008); VIVIEN ANN SCHMIDT, *DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE: THE EU AND NATIONAL POLITICS* (2006); *EUROPEAN IDENTITY: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS* (Ireneusz Pawel Karolewski and Viktoria Kaina eds., 2006); ALEŠ DEBELJAK, *THE HIDDEN HANDSHAKE: NATIONAL IDENTITY AND EUROPE IN THE POST-COMMUNIST WORLD* (2004); *TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITIES: BECOMING EUROPEAN IN THE EU*

staged around the world drawing massive, determined crowds. Millions of people participated in the “Continent’s biggest coordinated peace demonstration in memory,”⁸ what the *New York Times* called a “global daisy chain ... [forming] the largest, most diverse peace protest since the Viet Nam War.”⁹ More than one million demonstrators marched in London in the largest action of its kind on English soil – ever.¹⁰ In Paris the protest became a “human river” that flooded the city’s center and blocked all traffic.¹¹ Organizers estimated that 3 million people marched in Rome.¹² More than 500,000 protesters assembled at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin.¹³ Reacting to this historic one-day civic eruption Habermas enthuses in “February 15” that

[w]e should not forget February 15, 2003, the day on which the masses of demonstrators in London, Rome, Madrid, Barcelona, Berlin, and Paris responded [to the “coup” led by Spain’s Aznar and UK’s Blair, who vowed support of President Bush’s war in Iraq contrary to the wishes of their EU colleagues and their electorates.] The simultaneity of these overpowering demonstrations – the largest since the end of World War II – may go down in future history books as a signal of *the birth of a European public*.¹⁴

(Richard K. Herrmann, et al. eds., 2004); EURO-SKEPTICISM: A READER (Ronald Tiersky ed., 2001). *But see* Armin von Bogdandy, *The European Constitution and European Identity: Text and Subtext of the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe*, 3 INT’L J. CONST. L. 295 (2005).

⁸ Alan Cowell, *Threats and Responses: Protests; 1.5 Million Demonstrators in Cities Across Europe Oppose a War Against Iraq*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 16, 2003, available at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9E04E4DF113AF935A25751C0A9659C8B63>.

⁹ Robert D. McFadden, *Threats and Responses: Overview; From New York to Melbourne, Cries for Peace*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 16, 2003, available at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9900E7DA113AF935A25751C0A9659C8B63>.

¹⁰ “Police in London, England, said turnout Saturday was 750,000, the largest demonstration ever in the British capital. The organizers put the figure at 2 million.” *Cities Jammed in Worldwide Protest of War in Iraq*, CNN.COM, Feb. 16, 2003, available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2003/US/02/15/sprj.irq.protests.main/>

¹¹ Craig S. Smith, *Threats and Responses: The Scene – Paris; Throwing a Party with a Purpose*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 16, 2003, available at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B0CEEEDB113AF935A25751C0A9659C8B63>.

¹² Barry James, *In Cities Worldwide, Marchers Demand Peaceful Solution: Millions Join Rallies Against a War*, INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE, Feb. 17, 2003, available at http://www.iht.com/articles/2003/02/17/protest_ed3__0.php.

¹³ *Cities Jammed in Worldwide Protest of War in Iraq*, CNN.COM, Feb. 16, 2003, available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2003/US/02/15/sprj.irq.protests.main/>.

¹⁴ HABERMAS, *supra* note 1, at 40.

The remainder of the short essay is given over to mapping the content of the European identity that, to Habermas' way of thinking, came into its own on the streets of Europe that cold winter day. European identity seems chiefly to be defined in the negative; it is "against" America like the February 15 protests themselves. Habermas explains that Europe is a "counterbalance to the hegemonic unilateralism of the United States," serving instead as an example of "government beyond the nation-state" and a defender of international law.¹⁵ Europe, unlike the United States, also is a proponent of a social democracy that rejects "the inevitability of gross social inequalities," like those that exist in America.¹⁶ Finally, Habermas says that the European identity is characterized by a steadfast respect for "personal and bodily integrity"¹⁷ and a low tolerance for the exercise of violence against persons.¹⁸ To underscore this last point Habermas points to the American penchant for the death penalty in the face of its abolition right across Europe.¹⁹ All of these facets of the European identity, Habermas argues, have deep enough roots in shared history and traditions to make Europe a bulwark against America.

If Habermas' claim about the significance of February 15 is exaggerated he might be forgiven. There were widespread claims that opposition to Bush's then-imminent war against Iraq was unifying Europe,²⁰ all seemingly confirmed by the protests staged in Europe's capitals against America's steady march towards war. It was a remarkable display of "consonance in reactions of moral outrage toward egregious human rights violations and manifest acts of aggression."²¹ The fact that a shared revulsion for Bush's war had moved Jacques Derrida, in the last year of his life, to "set aside the differences that may have divided [the two philosophers] in the past" to co-sign the essay must have been

¹⁵ *Id.* at 42-43.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 47.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 48.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ Habermas was not alone in remarking the unifying force of the opposition to the American war. The *New York Times* concluded that "it is almost as if President Bush and his administration have unwittingly brought about a popular unity on [the European] continent that belies the sharp differences among Europe's governments, ..." Richard Bernstein, *Threats and Responses; For Old Friends, Iraq Bares a Deep Rift*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 14, 2003, available at <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=940DE0D7153AF937A25751C0A9659C8B63>. Europe's seeming unified opposition to the war also served as the basis for Robert Kagan's best-selling treatment of the opening transatlantic divide. See ROBERT KAGAN, *OF PARADISE AND POWER* (2003). But see the contributions to the *German Law Journal* special issue "The New Transatlantic Tension and the Kagan Phenomenon," Vol. 4, No. 9 (2003).

²¹ HABERMAS, *supra* note 2, at 143.

intoxicating further evidence for Habermas of European accord.²² Breathlessly Habermas exclaims: “No doubt about it, the power of emotions brought the united citizenry of Europe to its feet.”²³

Yet Habermas, and certainly Derrida,²⁴ knew better than to elide as they do in the essay all the diverse and nuanced potential meanings implicated by a day in the life of complex, pluralistic societies.²⁵ Thus, Habermas must acknowledge, albeit begrudgingly, European fault lines like “[t]he gulf between the continental and the Anglo-Saxon countries, on the one hand, and between ‘old Europe’ and the Eastern European accession countries, on the other.”²⁶ But these differences, Habermas concludes, will be resolved by the inevitable European constitution!²⁷ Or, if necessary, a small cadre of States willing to move aggressively forward to deepen the European project will go ahead of the others in a “Europe of different speeds.” “This,” Habermas explains, “will generate momentum that the other members ... will not be able to resist in the long term.”²⁸ Habermas is as prescient about the horrors and injustices of the Iraq war as he is blind to Europe’s halting, uncertain future. Besides granting the UK’s “special relationship” with America as an important wrinkle in the European identity,²⁹ Habermas hints at only one other alternative perspective of the European meaning of the February 15 protests. There was at least a chance, perhaps even acknowledged by some in Europe who were sobered by the chill February air, that toppling Saddam’s horrible regime might be morally (even legally) justifiable. Habermas grants that “many in Europe [will] welcome Saddam’s fall as a liberation.”³⁰

²² HABERMAS, *supra* note 1, at 39. The title of the essay is footnoted and the note explains that “[t]his essay was published jointly with Jacques Derrida as part of an initiative in which Umberto Eco, Adolf Muschg, Richard Rorty, Fernando Savater, and Gianni Vattimo participated simultaneously in a number of European newspapers.” *Id.* at 39 n.1.

²³ *Id.* at 40.

²⁴ JACQUES DERRIDA, *WRITING AND DIFFERENCE* (Alan Bass trans., 1978); JACQUES DERRIDA, *DECONSTRUCTION ENGAGED: THE SYDNEY SEMINARS* (Paul Patton and Terry Smith eds., 2001).

²⁵ “The more societal complexity increases and originally ethnocentric perspectives widen, the more there develops a pluralization of forms of life accompanied by an individualization of life histories, while the zones of overlapping lifeworlds and shared background assumptions shrink... [P]rocesses of social differentiation necessitate a multiplication and variation of functionally specified tasks, social roles, and interest positions... Such a situation intensifies the problem: how can disenchanted, internally differentiated and pluralized lifeworlds be socially integrated...?” JÜRGEN HABERMAS, *BETWEEN FACTS AND NORMS* 25-26 (William Rehg trans., 1996).

²⁶ HABERMAS, *supra* note 1, at 40-41.

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.* at 41-42.

²⁹ HABERMAS, *supra* note 1, at 41.

³⁰ *Id.* at 45.

Habermas does not make more than these narrow concessions to a more nuanced reading of the events of February 15. His neglect of a whole spectrum of possible meanings in the course of asserting an objective reality as regards the protests is at odds with a core feature of his philosophy; he generally exercises a disciplined awareness of the perils inherent in overgeneralizations like these. Habermas has argued that law conceptualized in concrete and instrumental terms while nonetheless operating in a heterogeneous context is the failure that necessitates his proceduralism. In the article "Paradigms of Law" Habermas uses the complex biological and contextually constructed notion of another identity, namely gender, to make this point:

From a juridic point of view, one reason for this reflexively generated discrimination [operating against women in welfare-state paternalism] lies in the *overgeneralized classifications* used to label disadvantaging situations and disadvantaged groups of persons. What is meant to promote the equal status of women in general often benefits only one category of (already privileged) women at the cost of another category, because gender-specific-inequalities are correlated in a complex and obscure manner... However, an important role is played by the fact that legislation and adjudication arrive at "false" classifications, not because they are altogether blind to contexts, but because their perception of context and gender is guided by an outmoded paradigmatic understanding of law.³¹

He concludes that the overgeneralizations on which the traditional liberal and welfare-state paradigms of law rely render them incapable of satisfactorily responding to the complex matrix of interests encapsulated by gender identity. "Therefore, competing views about the identity of the sexes and their relation to each other must be open to public discussion."³² And then Habermas turns a phrase that simply tears at the fabric of the essay "February 15." "Even the feminist avant-garde does not have a monopoly on definition."³³ But in "February 15," a meditation on the equally complex construction of a European identity, Habermas does not hesitate to assume the role of public intellectual to assert his discrete, instrumental notion of what it means to be European. Habermas seems

³¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Paradigms of Law*, 17 *CARDOZO L. REV.* 771, 781 (1996)

³² *Id.* at 783.

³³ *Id.* at 783-84.

to let his visceral opposition to the war cloud the critical faculty that characterizes his work as a philosopher.

English writer Ian McEwan does not make the same mistake in his acclaimed novel *Saturday*, in which he does a much better job capturing the varied meanings of February 15, 2003.³⁴ His novel based on events that unfold on that day argues convincingly for a counterfactual of Habermas' asserted "European identity," which, for McEwan, is characterized instead by conflict, critique and complexity.

Saturday tells the story of Henry Perowne's February 15, 2003. Perowne is an accomplished and very comfortable mid-40s neurosurgeon living and practicing in London. The city is described in just enough detail to establish the book's credibility but it doesn't assert a controlling force on the novel's narrative or aesthetic. The novel's real setting is Perowne's psyche, which, if the third person narrator is to be trusted, is marked by an uncanny (unbelievable?) self-awareness.³⁵ Appropriately, at least for the purposes of my consideration of the novel alongside Habermas' claims about February 15, the most prominent external influence on the narrative is the unprecedented, massive anti-war protest, which is documented as a backdrop. Perowne remarks the early morning build up to the march on Trafalgar Square.³⁶ The protest march itself triggers a chain of events that drive the story's dramatic tension. The protest echoes across to the book's conclusion at the dawn of February 16, when we are told that Perowne observes the street sweepers' efforts to clean up of the protest's detritus.³⁷ But unfolding as it does in Perowne's thoughts, the novel is not a report of the "London protest" or even a distinctly English engagement with it. McEwan rightly has literary aspirations for Perowne and his experience stirs a human, universal understanding of February 15. That is, the report we receive of Perowne's reaction to the protest has an equal claim to being described as European and is, to my mind, not limitable as parochial or Anglo-centric.

Perowne's fictitious experience has the advantage of being first-hand. He moves amongst the protesters and along the very streets on which the protest unfolds. What he sees and, more importantly feels, turns out to be infinitely more complex than Habermas' narrow caricature of the day. Diversity and pluralism, generally so central to Habermas' work and regrettably absent from his "February 15" essay, are Perowne's profound reality. This is captured in a number of ways but perhaps most fundamentally by Perowne's stubborn insistence on going about his usual Saturday business. Perowne is not alone. He witnesses

³⁴ IAN MCEWAN, *SATURDY* (2005).

³⁵ "An habitual observer of his own moods." *Id.* at 5.

³⁶ *Id.* at 71.

³⁷ *Id.* at 243.

an airplane's fiery emergency landing at the pre-dawn start of the day.³⁸ Minions of the round-the-clock television news industry produce and broadcast reports of these events and later provide coverage of the protest.³⁹ The pilots are arrested and then released by English authorities.⁴⁰ Perowne and his wife make love before she rushes away to participate in complex, day-long legal proceedings on behalf of her client, a leading newspaper publisher.⁴¹ Her secretary is at work to answer Perowne's calls.⁴² Perowne speaks with the nurses and wards who are monitoring his patients.⁴³ He plays squash with his close friend and medical colleague Jay Strauss.⁴⁴ Perowne buys fish.⁴⁵ He visits his mother in a nursing home.⁴⁶ He slips into an afternoon rehearsal of his son's respected blues band.⁴⁷ "This is the fair embodiment of an inner city..." Perowne reflects as he surveys the greater part of London untouched by the protest, "diverse, self-confident, obscure."⁴⁸

In this painstaking manner McEwan makes the case that February 15, although marked by the protest, is also utterly ordinary. To pursue this agenda McEwan must frame the narrative tightly⁴⁹ and endow Perowne with a consciousness of physical and emotional detail that gives the impression that his day might have more than 24 hours. The point seems to be that whatever conclusion one wants to reach about the meaning of the protest, the one or two million marchers cannot be made to speak for the six million or more who did not take to the streets that day in London. Extrapolate that across the 490 million odd Europeans who did not join the February 15 protests and it makes it hard to regard the day as a definitive expression of a settled European identity. What role do Perowne and his fishmonger and the street sweeper play in Habermas' Europe? Is

³⁸ *Id.* at 13-19.

³⁹ *Id.* at 35, 69, 107-108.

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 126.

⁴¹ *Id.* at 50-51.

⁴² *Id.* at 122.

⁴³ *Id.* at 70-71.

⁴⁴ *Id.* at 99-117.

⁴⁵ *Id.* at 126-128.

⁴⁶ *Id.* at 152-167.

⁴⁷ *Id.* at 169-172.

⁴⁸ *Id.* at 76.

⁴⁹ This is a device McEwan deploys in much of his work. The novel *On Chesil Beach* (2007), which followed *Saturday*, focuses on newlyweds' stumbling sexual encounter on their wedding night.

Habermas guilty here of the persistent, elite-driven nearsightedness and determination that some say continues to undermine the European project?⁵⁰

Even among the protesters, McEwan sees meaningful diversity where Habermas wants to see a single European identity. It is not possible to attribute to the crowd Habermas' narrow slate of "European values," especially the European distaste for violence, after reading the following report of what Perowne sees: "A placard of one of the organizing groups goes by – the British Association of Muslims. [Perowne] remembers that outfit well. It explained recently in its newspaper that apostasy from Islam was an offence punishable by death."⁵¹ McEwan drives home his point about the diversity of the protesters by having the narrator continue: "Behind [them] comes a banner proclaiming the Swaffham Women's Choir, and then, Jews Against the War."⁵²

McEwan is also comfortable with moral and, perhaps, legal subjectivity. There is a lengthy scene detailing Perowne's squash match with his friend Jay Strauss. As the decisive final game of the match unfolds both men become disturbingly aggressive. They "raise their games," the narrator reports, "[e]very point is now a drama, a playlet of sudden reversals" filled with seriousness and fury.⁵³ "Every point," we are told, "is wrested, bludgeoned from the other ... [until] ... there's only the irreducible urge to win, as biological as thirst."⁵⁴ The game seemingly comes to a crashing end with Perowne forcing the ball into the corner for the victory, a shot that caused him to collide with Strauss. But Strauss refuses to yield the point, arguing that Perowne has committed a foul by crashing into him. The inter-subjective debate that follows exemplifies the circumstances that necessitate Habermas'

⁵⁰ This accusation was repeated in the popular media (some of which is decidedly Euro-skeptical) following the French and Irish "no" votes on, respectively, the EU Constitution and the Lisbon Treaty. See, e.g., Richard Bernstein, *News Analysis: Europeans in Revolt Against EU's Elites*, INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE, June 3, 2005, available at <http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/06/02/news/eu.php>; Margo MacDonald, *Irish Sunk Elite EU Power Grab*, EDINBURGH EVENING NEWS, June 18, 2008, available at <http://edinburghnews.scotsman.com/margomacdonald/Irish-sunk-elite-EU-powergrab.4195215.jp>; *The Future of the Europe After the French and Dutch Referendums*, THE ECONOMIST, June 2, 2005, available at http://www.economist.com/displayStory.cfm?Story_ID=E1_QDPPPDR; Charlemagne, *Going Dutch*, THE ECONOMIST, May, 2008, available at http://www.economist.com/PrinterFriendly.cfm?story_id=11293544. The question of the role played by European elites in the EU project was given more serious scholarly treatment at a conference at the University of Bremen in 2005 entitled "Elites and EU Enlargement." The conference program is available at <http://www.iaw.uni-bremen.de/~jtholen/tagungen/EuEnlargementPapers.html>. For an interesting survey of European elites' reactions to the European Union's struggles since 2005, see George Ross, *What Do European Think? Analysis of the European Union's Current Crisis by European Elites*, 46 JOURNAL OF COMMON MARKET STUDIES 389 (2008).

⁵¹ McEWAN, *supra* note 34, at 72.

⁵² *Id.* at 72.

⁵³ *Id.* at 113.

⁵⁴ *Id.* at 113.

procedural discourse, namely, the participants' conviction that their positions are right, moral and true. No obvious, objective truth reveals itself in the situation. "[H]ow can they possibly resolve this," Perowne wonders, "with no referee, no common power?"⁵⁵

McEwan does not leave the ambiguity of things, and particularly the varied potential of the protests, to such symbolic treatments. Difference of opinion with respect to the imminent war and the significance of the protest abounds. Perowne, whose character seems to prefer and whose professional identity depends upon emotionless empiricism, wants to weigh all the possibilities of the invasion of Iraq and wants to let the scenario unfold like one of his intricate brain operations before making his prognosis. The narrator reports that "Perowne has had ambivalent or confused and shifting ideas about this coming invasion."⁵⁶ His ambivalence largely is animated by the fact that he is acquainted with a former victim of Saddam's brutal tyranny, an Iraqi immigrant who recounts for Perowne his arbitrary arrest and subsequent torture under the dictator. These conditions define the regime. The Iraqi immigrant explains that

he was not particularly surprised by his arrest, ... everyone knew ... someone who'd been taken in, held for a while, tortured perhaps, and then released... Some came back in sealed coffins – it was strictly forbidden to open them. It was common to hear of friends and acquaintances making the rounds of the hospitals, police stations and government offices hoping for news of relatives... The torture was routine... Beatings, electrocution, anal rape, near drowning, thrashing the soles of the feet. Everyone, from top officials to street sweepers, lived in a state of anxiety, constant fear.⁵⁷

Perowne also has done some reading of his own, familiarizing himself "with the sickly details of [Saddam's] genocides in the north and south of [Iraq], the ethnic cleansing, the vast system of informers, the bizarre tortures, ... the brandings and amputations."⁵⁸ So, just as Habermas conceded it would be possible to do,⁵⁹ McEwan builds the case for a humanitarian justification for the war. Perowne doesn't have to be right about this, of

⁵⁵ *Id.* at 115.

⁵⁶ *Id.* at 62.

⁵⁷ *Id.* at 63.

⁵⁸ *Id.* at 72-73.

⁵⁹ HABERMAS, *supra* note 1, at 45.

course. It is only that his uncertainty does not fit neatly with Habermas' convinced, European understanding of February 15.⁶⁰ Perowne agonizes where Habermas does not:

For or against the war on terror, or the war in Iraq; for the termination of an odious tyrant and his crime family, for the ultimate weapons inspection, the opening of the torture prisons, locating the mass graves, the chance of liberty and prosperity, and a warning to other despots; or against the bombing of civilians, the inevitable refugees and famine, illegal international action, the wrath of Arab nations and the swelling of Al-Qaeda's ranks... [H]e's becoming dim with contradictory opinion, he isn't thinking clearly.⁶¹

Perowne's ambivalence leads to a final "set piece" argument with his beloved daughter Daisy, who has returned home from Paris where she lives as an emerging successful poet. Her youth, even the cynical training she's received at the university,⁶² mean that she is a staunch opponent of the war. She personifies Habermas' European identity. The struggle between her convictions and Perowne's uncertainty is made all the more real and painful by the narrator's clear expression of Perowne's affection for and admiration of his daughter.⁶³ Their dialogue consumes several pages in the book. Perowne explains his failure to join the protest by saying "I don't know. Playing squash, visiting Granny, cooking the dinner, lack of certainty. That sort of thing."⁶⁴ To which Daisy responds "But it's completely barbaric, what they're about to do. Everyone knows that."⁶⁵ Perowne replies "It might be. So might doing nothing. I honestly don't know.... It's all about outcomes, and no one knows what they'll be. That's why I can't imagine marching in the streets."⁶⁶ The two descend into muted vitriol, with Daisy calling Perowne's position "pro-war" and "crap." Perowne returns in kind: "Why is it among those two million idealists today I didn't see one banner, one fist or voice raised against Saddam? ... The genocide and

⁶⁰ Perowne asks "[a]nd now what days are these?" MCEWAN, *supra* note 34, at 4.

⁶¹ *Id.* at 180-181.

⁶² *Id.* at 77.

⁶³ *Id.* at 182.

⁶⁴ *Id.* at 185.

⁶⁵ *Id.* at 185.

⁶⁶ *Id.* at 187.

torture, the mass graves, the security apparatus, the criminal totalitarian state – the iPod generation doesn't want to know."⁶⁷

The book's narrative flows through Perowne's *Saturday* towards its climax, a series of harrowing events that McEwan uses to build his closing argument for the plurality of perspectives on the protest, and life in general. Early in the day Perowne is involved in a car accident with Baxter, a young thug who is humanized by the fact that Perowne detects in him the symptoms of Huntington's Disease.⁶⁸ Baxter's initial attempt to violently extort money from Perowne to compensate for the damage to his car is thwarted in part because Perowne is able to distract him with the false promise of a new medical treatment for Huntington's Disease. But Baxter returns at the book's end, breaking into Perowne's home and holding the family at knife-point.⁶⁹ This horrible scene is defused only when Daisy tames Baxter by reciting Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach."⁷⁰ The distraction created by Daisy's recitation is enough to let Perowne and his son Theo move on Baxter who is sent tumbling down the home's stairwell and is knocked unconscious.⁷¹ Here it would seem that art, optimism, dignity and clarity of purpose prevail. Except that Perowne is called to the emergency room to attend a newly arrived patient with a severe head injury; he must perform a life-saving brain operation on Baxter. Perowne's empirical restraint and studied indecision are given their equal due.

Art and science. Right and wrong. Protest and indifference. War and peace. Europe and America. McEwan refuses to take a singular path through all the complex life that unfolds on February 15. Where Habermas sees a European identity marked by nonviolence, equality and cosmopolitanism, McEwan instead surveys and fairly presents the broader possibilities. McEwan's February 15 contains glimpses of those traits and values but has room for Baxter's violence, not to mention outrage at Saddam's. There is room for the inequality in Baxter's or the immigrant street sweeper's poverty, set hard against Perowne's excessive luxury. These complexities, it seems, are a fairer and more accurate image of a European identity, which might be insurmountably plural and diverse. Thus, as a matter of fact Matthew Arnold tells us that the world lies before the poem's lovers "like a land of dreams, so *various*, so beautiful, so new."⁷² Arnold says the world lacks love and

⁶⁷ *Id.* at 191.

⁶⁸ *Id.* at 81-99.

⁶⁹ *Id.* at 207-233.

⁷⁰ *Id.* at 220-222.

⁷¹ *Id.* at 227-228.

⁷² Matthew Arnold, *Dover Beach*, available at <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/arnold/writings/doverbeach.html> (emphasis added).

joy and light – and “certitude.”⁷³ I leave it to poets and philosophers to decide if, for Europe, it is normatively better that it is so.

⁷³ *Id.*