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Book Review  
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### **Of Paradise and Power**

“Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus.” This statement by Robert Kagan in the very first paragraph of his book *Of Paradise and Power* gives a snapshot into the differences he draws between American and European foreign policy. Not as strikingly, he pulls the distinction between the world powers’ cultures as well, and uses this as fodder for his strongest argument.

Very quickly, Kagan’s thesis is clear: “When it comes to national priorities, determining threats, defining challenges, and fashioning and implementing foreign and defense policies,” he says on page four, “the United States and Europe have parted ways.” He later explains some differences like how Americans see the world as good vs. evil, where Europeans don’t. Or how Americans seek finality in foreign affairs, often acting with unilateralism to eliminate threats. In contrast, Europeans favor peaceful responses using negotiation and diplomacy; they don’t mind long-term plans.

Kagan’s explanation for this starts with a power gap. He goes on to say that now that the United States is a super power, it behaves like one. Conversely, Europe is weaker and without much of a military any more, so it is united, but looks at the rest of the world as a weaker power. Based on our examination of political power structure, we are currently in a hegemonic system right now. Consequently, it’s not surprising this is the case: America act in manners to keep itself where it is, while everyone else looks for ways to move into the hegemonic spot. Since Europe, according to Kagan, is not on the

same power level as the United States, I can definitely agree that it vocalizes foreign policy methods that bring the U.S. down to its level, especially militarily.

I'll acknowledge that my assumption is very much a realist's train for thought. After reading his book, however, I can't help but feel that his argument is from the realist's side of things as well, even more than my determinations. He felt very much like a neo-conservative justifying unilateralism and the way America is currently handling the war in Iraq. For example, on page 61, he says: "[...] leading politicians in Europe really have worried more about how the United States might handle or mishandle the problem of Iraq – by undertaking unilateralism and extralegal military action – than they have ever worried about Iraq itself [...]."

This really disturbed me for two reasons: First, he had no evidence to back this up. The only present backings were anecdotal snippets of European culture, which isn't enough for me to be won over. Second, the tone of the pages surrounding that line tried to, in my opinion, paint a portrait of Europe as being *sissy*, for lack of a better word. Then again, this is the feeling I got throughout the rest of the book.

One part that I did thoroughly enjoy and agree with was the section "The World America Made" starting on page 70. Kagan laid out some brilliant ironies associated with the current political state, starting with how Europe couldn't have been the liberal, peace-seeking unit it is today without America not being so liberal. I love the thought that in order for Europe to greatly dissolve its military and focus on "diplomacy-only" foreign policy, it had to rely on America being the exact opposite. And America has been just that – ironically – for about nine decades. Kagan states: "Europe's evolution into its

current state [...] could not have happened without [the United States security guarantee].”

Although it may be arrogant as an American to think, I do agree that Europe’s rejection of power politics and sway to Kantian ideals have depended greatly on the occupation of American military forces on European soil, as well as American forces fighting Europe’s wars. Again, though, Kagan appears to pick on Europe by following up on page 73 with: “Most Europeans do not see or do not wish to see the great paradox [...]” Regardless, the final ironic post sums up everything in this section up the best: “Because Europe has neither the will nor the ability to guard its own [people] from a world that has yet to accept the rule of ‘moral consciousness,’ it has become dependent on America’s military might to defeat those around the world who still believe in power politics.”

From there, Kagan goes on to comment on the myth of America’s isolationism, the acceleration of America’s economy compared to Europe, and the good intentions of the current administration. All of his finishing points are well-made, although long-winded at times. He did an excellent job of tying those pieces with his thesis of how America and Europe have separated so much recently.

One thing he didn’t effectively address, I thought, was the role of America and Europe with other NGOs / IGOs. There was little-to-no talk about how America’s power (and thus deserving actions) coincides – whether positively or negatively – with United Nations (UN) peace keeping and economic goals. As readers, we can assume what he would say (like America doesn’t necessarily have to worry about following the UN, and

Europe will whine about it), but it would have been helpful to see some discussion from Kagan himself.

In the end, I was compelled by Kagan's argument – but only pieces of it. For example, the history leading up to the current situation of the polar policies was both informative and factual in my mind. Coincidentally, I find myself agreeing with Kagan's analysis of the present because of the past – Europe really does strive for a liberal “paradise” while America focuses on how to maintain orderly “power.” What I disagree with is his realist persuasion that America's demeanor is warranted and acceptable. I'm more European in that regard. Also coincidentally, the future outlook of his thesis is wrong too. America should not be comfortable with military unilateral movements. It should not be satisfied with policing the world its own way just because it has the means to.

Maybe I am from Venus after all, but the last snapshot Kagan portrayed was not as compelling as the first half of his thesis as a whole. Venus is a much warmer and more comfortable place to be than Mars.