

See Gracious God, Before Thy Throne

Anne Steele (1717–1778)

See gracious God, before Thy throne
Thy mourning people bend!
'Tis on thy sovereign grace alone
Our humble hopes depend.

Tremendous judgments from Thy hand
Thy dreadful power display;
Yet mercy spares this guilty land,
And still we live to pray.

What land so favored of the skies
As these apostate States!
Our numerous crimes increasing rise,
Yet still Thy vengeance waits.

How changed, alas! are truths divine
For error, guilt, and shame!
What impious numbers, bold in sin,
Disgrace the Christian name!

Regardless of Thy smile or frown,
Their pleasures they require;
And sink with gay indifference down
To everlasting fire.

Oh turn us, turn us, mighty Lord,
By Thy unboundless grace;
Then shall our hearts obey Thy word,
And humbly seek Thy face.

Then, should insulting foes invade,
We shall not sink in fear;
Secure of never-failing aid,
If God, our God is near.

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

No Going Back?

Kevin T. Bauder

“You’re on the wrong side of history.” It’s a cute phrase, but it’s not an argument. We are in the middle of history, not at its end. Unless we admit some element of supernatural revelation, none of us can claim to know the end of history. Apart from revelation, we don’t know how it turns out. So we don’t know what either the right side or the wrong side might be.

Those who accuse others of being on the “wrong side of history” are presupposing a vision of history. They are reading this assumption into their conclusion. They can tell you (they believe) which is the wrong side of history because they have already decided what the right side is. They are committing the logical fallacy of begging the question. They are unreasonable people.

Furthermore, they are arrogant people. They can offer no greater evidence for the “right side” of history than their own say-so. When they charge, “You’re on the wrong side of history,” what they mean is, “You disagree with me, and I’m right.” But they cannot demonstrate their rightness, or they wouldn’t resort to the cliché. They would point to demonstrable truth, and they would show where their opponents were out of line with it.

In some cases, such people try to buttress their position by appealing to the number of others who agree with them (band wagoning). Now their appeal is “You disagree with me and my friends, and we’re right.” In other cases, they trot out supposed experts whose ultimate right to speak rests not on the evidence they present but on their supposed expertise. Now the appeal is, “You disagree with me and my friends, and these experts say we are right.” Can anyone forget Anthony Fauci claiming to *be* the science?

Unreasonable and arrogant people also seek to buttress their assertions by making their opponents look silly. They misrepresent their opponents’ views and subject them to straw-man refutations. They attack their opponents’ willingness or competence to tell the truth (*ad hominem abusive* and *circumstantial*). They are willing to demonize people who disagree with them. If they can reduce their opponents to a cute meme, so much the better.



In the Nick of Time is published by Central Baptist Theological Seminary.

Permission is granted to duplicate for personal and church use.

www.centalseminary.edu | info@centalseminary.edu
900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

Sadly, we live in an age when memes can be mistaken for arguments. How well one can defend one's assertions matters less than the imagery and irony with which one expresses them. But the situation is even worse than that.

The Marxist Left began with the assumption that action is more effective than argument. For a hundred years, the Left has relied on a sustained appeal to force, the *argumentum ad baculum*. You don't have to be convinced; you must be forced to comply. As Mao put it, "Power grows out of the barrel of a gun."

We encounter a form of the *argumentum ad baculum* whenever people break a just law to protest what they see as an unjust one. Perhaps they trespass on private property. Perhaps they bar access to a public building. Perhaps they block a street or highway. Perhaps they burn a police precinct headquarters. Perhaps they loot a store. Perhaps they assault and threaten their opponents or the officers of the law. Perhaps they plant an explosive device. The difference between these tactics is merely one of degree, not one of kind. None of them qualifies as even a "mostly peaceful" protest.

People use these tactics for one of two reasons. First, they either don't have an argument to make or they don't see the need to make it. Second, they really don't care what you think or whether you can be persuaded. They are not interested in winning you over. All they want is for you to sit down and shut up.

As I say, these tactics were formally legitimated by Marx and Engels. They have been widespread on the Left for a century or more. Who can question that they have been effective in silencing opposition?

But now the same tactics are being adopted by the Right. One reason I was drawn to conservatism is that it preferred reason to hysteria. For example, William F. Buckley's *Firing Line* debates brought representatives of divergent views together to argue about important controversies. Those debates were more about understanding opposed viewpoints than they were about owning one's opponents.

Those days are past. Now rudeness often substitutes for reason and insult substitutes for argument. We see the same shabby fallacies that dominate the Left appearing on the Right. It's all there: the smug assertion of one's opinion without reasons, the band wagoning, the *ad hominem* attacks and demonization of opponents, the appeals to questionable authority.

If you want a test of the growing irrationality of the Right, look at the rise of Antisemitism. Public voices on the Right are now willing to entertain and even advocate Holocaust denial, Jewish conspiracy, and sometimes even pro-Nazi sentiment. The conservative statesmanship of Richard Weaver, Russel Kirk, and William F. Buckley has become unrecognizable. It has given way to the sloppy reporting and slobbering screeds of Tucker Carlson,

Candace Owens, and Nick Fuentes. None of these figures offers a reasoned and restrained—a Reaganesque—conservatism.

The sad thing is that I see no way back. Our national discourse seems to have moved past the point at which we can trade arguments. We are shut up in our own echo chambers lobbing memes over the walls. Rather than arguing, we are exchanging verbal blows, and the tendency is for verbal blows to become real physical violence.

I can understand the frustration of the Right. The Left stopped arguing long ago. The Left has been resorting to propaganda techniques and physical violence for decades. But as surely as conservatives adopt those tactics, they will lose the very things they most prize. The permanent things cannot be conserved by a propaganda war. If we are Christian conservatives (and every Christian should be), then one of our most important duties is to let our reasonableness be known to all people (Phil 4:5).



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
