



Is This the End of Marriage, Capitalism, and God? Finally?

“This is the end of marriage, capitalism and God. Finally!” triumphantly [reads](#) a recent Salon title. It’s not exactly an original sentiment. The sickly but self-deifying Friedrich Nietzsche announced in 1882 already that “God is dead”; of course, now, Nietzsche is dead (perhaps eternally?). God? Not so much.



The Salon author is one Jeff DeGraff, a professor and “Dean of Innovation” at the University of Michigan. His thesis is that the “millennials,” those [born](#) 1982 through 2004 (approximately), are rejecting organized religion, belief in God, marriage, and capitalism and thus may lead us into some brave new world. He writes in his subtitle, “My fellow boomers might mock millennials, but what if the new generation has the big questions absolutely right?”

Now, when discussing this intergenerational eye-rolling, one may want to consider G.K. Chesterton’s observation, “I believe what really happens in history is this: the old man is always wrong; and the young people are always wrong about what is wrong with him. The practical form it takes is this: that, while the old man may stand by some stupid custom, the young man always attacks it with some theory that turns out to be equally stupid.”

In fairness to DeGraff, he’s not standing by any stupid custom (or any smart one). And his title is as much a hook as anything else; he acknowledges that he can’t really know the future. Yet he makes some common mistakes.

We recognize that people are largely products of their upbringing. Despite this, we’ll analyze a given generation as if it’s a breed apart as opposed to what it almost always will be, and is in the millennials’ case: the next iteration in a pattern. Consider marriage. DeGraff points out that “over half of all American women under 30 who give birth are unmarried”; in the general population, the figure is approximately a third. Yet it’s not as if America went from chastity to a Chastity Bono mentality overnight. The Pew Research Center did [report](#) in 2010 that only 22 percent of millennials believe that “more people living together w/o getting married ... is a bad thing for society.” But now consider the percentages in each generation who answer yes (based on Pew classification; ages as of 2010): silent generation (aged 65+), 58 percent; boomers (46-64), 44 percent; generation X (30-45), 31 percent; millennials (18-29), 22 percent.

The pattern is clear. And the greatest disparity is not between millennials and the previous generation, but between the silent generation and DeGraff’s, the boomers. Perhaps self-reflection is in order.

DeGraff also writes that “when adjusted for levels of education and economics, the [illegitimacy]



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numbers skew dramatically higher,” an example being the black community, where approximately 73 percent of children are born out of wedlock. And when discussing this, we readily acknowledge how family breakdown causes a whole host of social ills; as the social scientists in the fine documentary *Demographic Winter* point out, the nuclear family is the gold standard. Nonetheless, DeGraff writes that “the end of marriage may also be a sign of something great” as Scandinavian countries exhibit the same phenomenon and by “most discernible standards, they are prospering.”

But what’s discernible depends on your discernment. One destructive result of family breakdown is more children entering foster care; such youth are generally riddled with problems. And consider Scandinavian nation Sweden, where marriage has been discredited even more than in the United States. The low-population country has [25,000 minors](#) in foster care, twice as many per capita as the United States, which itself is child-seizure happy. This is hardly an argument for marriage’s superfluosity.

DeGraff next discusses “capitalism’s” demise. Now, in reality, we should seek the end of “capitalism” — the *term*. This [word was originated by socialists](#) for the purposes of demonizing “economic freedom,” the latter being the preferable term. Given this dubious pedigree, is it any wonder that millennials [have a negative view](#) of “capitalism” and reckon “socialism” more positively? Again, this is *precisely the result the terms’ authors desired*.

And this really is semantics to a degree. People 18 to 29 just helped vault Senator Bernie Sanders to a resounding New Hampshire primary victory, not at all deterred by his socialist label. But while they view that positively, they *don’t believe* in socialist (in Sanders’) wealth redistribution. In fact, [this research](#) shows that they cotton to it little more than do average Americans and no more than their age group did 20 years ago. In other words, millennials may like the word socialism, but, as with so many others, they don’t understand well what it signifies or the nature of those for whom they vote.

As for those others, we again see a pattern [courtesy](#) of Pew. Here’s the percentage of each generation that views “socialism” positively: age 65+, 13 percent; 50-64, 25 percent; 30-49, 34 percent; 18-29, 49 percent. Evident here isn’t an overnight sea-change, but steadily increasing ignorance.

Of course, in a representative republic, you don’t get what you want — you get what you vote for. So DeGraff is correct in saying that the millennial generation is helping extinguish economic freedom. Yet this is not, as he suggests, the result of some enlightened “anti-commercialism” epitomized by “shared houses and cars, urban farm collectives,” disdain for “intellectual property rights,” and “a much larger percentage of recent college graduates now seek[ing] work in the nonprofit sector.” Note that the communally oriented ’60s hippies often became the “vulture capitalists” of the ’90s.

Doing the Nietzsche, DeGraff ends with “The End of God,” writing, “25 percent of millennials don’t affiliate with a faith-based tradition and almost twice as many don’t belong to a church. More so, a Pew Research study suggests that an astonishingly low number of youth believe in the existence of a God.” But the generational pattern again tells the tale. The religiously unaffiliated [according](#) to Pew: silent generation, 11 percent; boomers, 17 percent; generation X, 23 percent; older millennials, 34 percent; younger millennials, 36 percent. The millennials have simply taken the baton from previous generations. And while they’re running faster than their predecessors, they didn’t start the race to the bottom.

What explains this phenomenon? DeGraff mentions “a push away from church dogma regarding same-sex marriage and reproductive rights and a pull toward science and personal development, ... abuses by



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clergy,” and social media-savvy millennials who “are increasingly rejecting the hierarchy of the church.” Of course, though, science is nothing new; and insofar as “reproductive rights” means pre-natal infanticide, note that the pro-life position has gained support in recent decades, not lost it. More significantly, however, these issues and developments of the day don’t explain patterns predating even yesterday. In fact, it appears faith in the West has been declining since the Renaissance.

Truly understanding a cultural phenomenon requires grasping its deepest causes — philosophical ones. As to the issue at hand, consider: Imagine you believed there were no rules governing human nutrition, that what was good or bad was all relative, mere preference. Would you spend money on nutritional books or listen to self-appointed experts in the health-trade hierarchy? With no rules to learn and be governed by, the best yardstick you’d have to go by is your palate. Your credo would then become “If it tastes good, eat it.”

Now, what if you supposed there were no rules governing man’s behavior? This is what most Americans essentially believe, mind you. As the Barna Group [reported](#) in 2002, 64 percent of Americans are “moral relativists,” fancying that what we call “truth is always relative to the person and their situation.” And the pattern of generational degeneration was evident, with 83 percent of teenagers (millennials) believing so — strikingly, only six percent of them believed in Truth (by definition absolute).

This renders Christianity seemingly irrelevant. After all, the faith teaches that Jesus died for our sins. But if everything is relative, there is no sin, only preference. There then was no reason for Jesus to die; no sin means no need for salvation. So don’t wonder why modern people are leaving the church. From the relativistic perspective, it makes no sense to do otherwise.

More generally speaking, if everything is relative, mere preference, why should I subject myself to the moral constraints of any religion? I should rather be a hedonist. For without Truth as a yardstick for behavior, the best guide we have left is emotion. Our credo then becomes “If it feels good, do it.” And, no surprise, Barna found that among Americans “the most common basis for moral decision-making was doing whatever feels right.”

This is implicit in DeGraff’s commentary; he writes that millennials “might well be creating their own personalized spiritual playlist,” and rather “than furthering a greater good ... millennials are furthering a greater *personal* good. This isn’t to say that young people are selfish.” Actually, it appears the very definition of selfishness. Of course, everything will be “personal” to persons who, not believing in God (the Truth), have only their own feelings to help them negotiate reality — to those believing in nothing greater than the Self, Self is everything.

The good news, if one can call it that, is that the phenomenon DeGraff explores is a Western one. Most of the world rejects or is indifferent to our social libertinism and faux-marriage agenda. The world in general is [becoming](#) *more religious*, with not just Islam but even Catholicism gaining adherents (slightly in excess of the rate of population growth), and the religiously unaffiliated and atheistic are [projected](#) to become a smaller percentage of world population.

How could this be? Because the West is putting itself out of business. DeGraff says that our social innovations are “a source of vast possibility” and that he’s “excited for it,” apparently oblivious to a simple fact: The godlessness, self-centeredness, eschewal of marriage, and other manifestations of modernism he welcomes lead to declining fertility rates. And the peoples who birthed Western civilization all have rates below replacement level (2.1 children per woman). DeGraff naïvely wonders how well Western Man 7.0 will operate, not realizing that he’s poised to become a discontinued model.



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Worse than an older generation reflexively condemning the next is mindlessly encouraging its movement toward an abyss, convincing its members they're some great new evolution in the family of man — when all they're doing is continuing very, very old mistakes.





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