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## Book Review

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# Anwar Ibrahim Defends Asia's Colonial Masters

by Mike Billington

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### **The Asian Renaissance**

by Anwar Ibrahim

Kuala Lumpur: Times Books International, 1996  
430 pages, paperbound, \$20

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*The following is a slightly adapted excerpt from a review of Anwar Ibrahim's book, published in EIR, April 26, 2001.*

... This review will serve, first, to demonstrate the hypocrisy of Anwar's current diatribes against the Malaysian government; and, second, to show that Anwar's epistemology comes directly from Malaysia's former British colonial masters—which is, of course, the reason he is so beloved by London and London's allies on Wall Street and in Washington.

### **A Serious Flaw**

This reviewer addressed the issue of Anwar's worldview once before, in 1996, when Anwar published an essay entitled, "Asian Renaissance and the Reconstruction of Civilization," in the May 1996 issue of the Malaysian journal, *JUST Commentary*. In a spirit of constructive friendship toward the then-Deputy Prime Minister, I responded personally with a letter addressed to the director of *JUST*, Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, who is now deputy chairman of the Keadilan Party, the opposition movement founded by Anwar's wife, Datin Wan Azizah Wan Ismail. In my letter, I commended Anwar for approaching Asia's future from the perspective of universal history, and for his condemnation of the moral decay in the West emanating from the Enlightenment. I also applauded his advocacy of a return to the worldview of man as expressed in the Christian idea of *imago viva Dei*, man created in the living image of God, and in the Islamic *khalifatullah fil ardh*, the vice-gerent of God.



Left to right: Anwar Ibrahim, George Soros, and Paul Wolfowitz. Anwar wrote in his 1996 book, about the legacy of colonialism, “When they hector us on issues such as human rights, patronize us on the matter of values, impose conditionalities on trade, we cannot help but suspect a hidden agenda—a new form of domination in place of the old.” Yet today, he has joined the “hecturers,” and counts Soros and Wolfowitz as close friends.

However, I wrote, there was “a serious flaw in the assumptions underlying Anwar’s analysis, a flaw which could lead to severe and deadly consequences in the global financial and social crisis we are now confronting. Stated summarily: In attacking the ideas of the Enlightenment, Anwar has . . . adopted the fundamental, flawed axiom of the Enlightenment itself, as introduced into Europe by the Venetian enemies of the Renaissance—that is, that there exists an unbridgeable gap between reason and faith, between science and religion. While Anwar decries the practitioners of the Enlightenment for exalting reason over religion, he accepts the underlying assumption that man must choose between these supposedly irreconcilable worldviews. In fact, perhaps the most profound contribution of the Renaissance was to make manifest mankind’s unique position in the Creation, that of being in the image of the living God, *by virtue of the divine spark of reason*, and thus [mankind] is capable of discovering and mastering the laws of nature, participating in the continuing creation of the universe.”

I expounded on this point at some length, showing that Anwar was actually *denying* the concept of *imago Dei* by accepting the absolute dichotomy between science and religion, whether or not he favored the latter over the former.

### British Distortion of History

The key to understanding Anwar is understanding the intentional and systematic manner in which the British distorted Western history, especially as presented to its colonial subjects. To justify their colonial policy of imposing backwardness upon the “inferior races,” the British claimed that the wealth and power of the Western powers were the necessary result of the Darwinian character of man as a sensate beast, pitted in a Hobbesian battle of each against all. British

colonial rule, they argued, was the natural consequence of this survival-of-the-fittest law of the jungle applied to the human beast, with the Anglo-Saxon race merely living up to the “white man’s burden” to rule the world. The history of Western thought was presented as commentaries on Aristotle. Totally ignored or distorted was the fierce and continuous battle between the Platonic/Christian worldview of man as a creative participant in God’s unfolding creation, against the contrary Aristotelian view of man as devoid of any innate qualities distinguishing him from the beasts, with some destined by birth to rule, others to be slaves. The Aristotelian view of the mind as no more than a processor of sense perceptions through pre-programmed rules of Aristotelian logic, was expanded upon by the empiricists of the Enlightenment, resulting in the “hedonistic calculus” of Jeremy Bentham and Adam Smith, whereby man has no higher criteria for determining his actions than the principle of maximizing sensual pleasure and minimizing pain.

Absent entirely from the British conception of man was the process of creative discovery, Plato’s method of hypothesis, and the grounding of that creative process in the notion of *agapē* as found in Plato and St. Paul—the passion for truth and the love of mankind as a whole, which motivates the cognitive discoveries of the scientist and the artist alike.

The rediscovery and flowering of this Platonic-Christian worldview in the 15th Century gave rise to the Golden Renaissance, with its explosion of scientific and artistic discovery, and the establishment of the nation-state as the necessary sovereign institution to provide for the development of the population as citizens, rather than serfs.

The Enlightenment, contrary to British teaching, and contrary to Anwar’s misperception, was not a further flowering of the Renaissance, but a direct reaction against it, orches-

trated by the Venetian oligarchy and their assets in northern Europe, centered in the “Venetian party” in London. (See, “Lord Palmerston’s Multicultural Human Zoo,” *EIR*, April 15, 1994.) The Enlightenment rejected the Renaissance view of man in the image of God, promoting instead the unbridled liberty of the individual to satisfy his sensual desires. Anwar does, in fact, identify this degenerate character of the Enlightenment, quoting a particularly revealing passage from Bernard de Mandeville’s infamous *Fable of the Bees*, which holds that the unrestrained pursuit of vice by each individual is the best means for achieving the greatest good for society as a whole, and is the true source of wealth and power. . . .

But, although Anwar claims to *oppose* this hedonistic creed of the Enlightenment, he accepts the British lie that such overt pursuit of evil is indeed the source of the West’s wealth and power. To justify this fraud, he also accepts the lie that the Renaissance was based on the same, hedonistic impulse. “In the case of the European (Florentine) Renaissance between the 14th and 16th Centuries,” Anwar writes, “the intense assertion of the power of the individual to determine his own destiny led to the flourishing of secular humanism at the expense of Judeo-Christian religiosity.” Incredibly, Anwar denies *any differences of worldview* in the West, asserting that one-and-all have agreed on the degraded, Enlightenment conception of man. “The West has expressed its identity,” he writes. “Its ideals and moral values have been articulated fully. There is little dispute of its own self-image.”

Against this falsely defined monolithic West, Anwar counterposes his concept of an Asian Renaissance: “The Asian Renaissance . . . differs fundamentally from the European in that it has its foundations in religion and traditions—Islam, Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity being the major ones.”

Having thus defined a religious East versus a pagan West, Anwar has set himself up to adopt in full the British colonial worldview designed for its subject populations. There are three central issues taken up by Anwar which reveal this subservience to the Enlightenment he professes to oppose: the role of the Prometheus myth, the philosophy of John Locke, and the economics of Adam Smith.

### **Prometheus and the Greens**

“European Renaissance thought,” writes Anwar, “resurrected the ancient myth of Prometheus as an agent *independent of the theological and natural order*. This is dramatically opposed to not only the Islamic concept of man as God’s viceroy on Earth, and the Confucian *jen*, but also the Christian concept of man as *imago Dei* or *Pontifex*, the bridge between Heaven and Earth” (emphasis added).

It is not clear from which textbook Anwar derived this particularly perverse formulation (he quotes the third-rate textbook writer Will Durant in other locations). Prometheus did not deny God, nor the “natural order,” as Anwar contends. Rather, he defied the utterly *unnatural* order of the pseudo-

gods of Olympus (the oligarchical elite), in order to teach mankind the divine arts and the technology of fire. The Prometheus myth is, in fact, an early Greek premonition of the very *essence* of the Mosaic concept of *imago Dei*, that mankind is capable of mastering the laws of the universe in order to “have dominion over nature” (Genesis 1:26).

Anwar’s distortion is in keeping with Prince Philip’s demonic environmentalist movement, which insists that mankind must forgo technological progress in order to be in harmony with the environment, and must be the *custodian* of nature rather than its master. Such a “greenie” mentality ignores the fact that billions of people will die if the world reverts to a more primitive stage, as would be inevitable if the current post-industrial, anti-science prejudices of the New Age are not reversed.

Anwar repeatedly expresses his greenie prejudices against progress. He writes: “It is foolhardy to assume that the success of the last thirty years can be repeated over the next thirty,” and he condemns the “obsession with mere economic indices.” He also quotes at length from the UN’s *Human Development Report* from 1996, which constructs multiple justifications for suppressing growth—e.g., capital-intensive growth is “bad” because it doesn’t create enough jobs; so also is “rootless” growth, which “causes the people’s cultural identity to wither”; and, of course, there should be no growth in which “present generations squander the resources needed by future generations.” These are classic cover stories used by the IMF in denying development aid to Third World countries.

Even worse, Anwar praises the oligarchical Club of Rome and its 1972 publication, *Limits to Growth*. While he admits that this book, which purports to discover natural limits on the capacity of the Earth to sustain population growth, has been exposed as a witting fraud, Anwar nonetheless states approvingly that “the report contributed immensely to the consciousness of the harmful effects of the growth mania on the environment.”

### **Locke vs. Leibniz**

Anwar also weighs in on the fundamental issue of the historic conflict between the American System of physical economy and the British model of free trade—and, again, Anwar is on the side of the British. The American Republic was founded as a continuation of the European Renaissance conception of the sovereign nation-state, a conception which was under lethal attack within Europe by the Enlightenment forces of Empire, centered in England and the Netherlands. The American Founding Fathers were particularly inspired by G.W. Leibniz, the greatest Renaissance mind of his age. The American System, created by Alexander Hamilton and his followers, was based directly on Leibniz’s development of the science of physical economy, locating economic progress in the discovery of new physical principles, which become, in turn, the basis for the design of heat-powered ma-

chines to enhance man's mastery over nature. It was Leibniz also who contributed to the Founding Fathers the concept of man's inalienable right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Leibniz wrote fierce polemics against John Locke, who had formulated the ideology used by the emerging financial oligarchy, based on property rights, free trade, and inheritance (which Locke had the audacity to describe as "natural law"). Even more audacious is Anwar Ibrahim's claim that Locke "launched a revolution in political thought to emancipate man from political tyranny, [with] the idea of the inviolability of human life and property." Anwar quotes Locke claiming that the two rights natural to all men are "the right to freedom of his person . . . and a right before any other man, to inherit, with his brethren, his father's goods." This defense of oligarchical family rights over the general welfare of the citizenry was entirely rejected by those who led a true "revolution in political thought to emancipate man from political tyranny"—the framers of the American Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.

It is of note, however, that the Constitution of the British-inspired slavocracy of the Confederate States of America included no "general welfare" clause, and replaced the Founding Fathers' Leibnizian concept of "the pursuit of happiness" with Locke's right to "property."

Anwar also acknowledges his (and Locke's) debt to Aris-

totle on this count, praising Aristotle's view of justice as "the bond of men in states, for the administration of justice, which is the determination of what is just, the principle of order in a political community." This notion of a "social contract" is the core of British common law, ignoring the higher, constitutional question of the true meaning of Justice. In his embrace of Aristotle, Anwar never even mentions Plato, let alone his masterpiece, *The Republic*, which is in its entirety a refutation of Aristotelian notions of positive law, in favor of a quest for true Justice conceived in terms of the general welfare of the citizenry, as the necessary basis of a Republic.

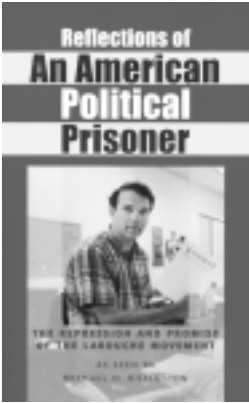
### Adam Smith, the 'Moralist'

Given Anwar's adherence to the free-trade dogma of the IMF, it is not surprising that he embraces the spokesman for British 18th-Century free-trade imperialism, Adam Smith. But it is doubly disturbing that he attempts to portray Smith as a misunderstood paradigm of moral virtue. Anwar claims that a supposed recent renewal of concern over ethics in economics derives from "a rediscovery of the moral philosophy of Adam Smith in its more integral form." Anwar continues: "While the founder of the discipline of economics has been largely credited with the discovery of self-interest as the engine of wealth accumulation, he himself considered 'wisdom and virtue' more worthy of admiration than material riches."

Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, written in 1776 as a direct attack on the emerging republican revolution in the American colonies, was viewed by the first century of American System economists as the most evil book of its age, justifying slavery, drugs, and the subjugation of "lesser races," all in the name of "free trade." Smith's moral depravity should have been clear to Anwar even from the passage which he himself quotes from his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*: "The disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and the powerful, and to despise, or at least to neglect persons of poor and mean condition, *though necessary both to establish and maintain the distinction of rank and order of society*, is, at the same time, the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments" (emphasis added).

Indeed, such evil is *necessary*, says Smith, regardless of the offense to our moral sentiments, in order to maintain the oligarchical order. This is no different than Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*, which Anwar claims to despise.

It must be noted, that if Anwar read the entirety of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, he'd have come across the following infamous passage which demonstrates Smith's (and the Enlightenment's) satanic view. Smith argues that man should simply follow his "original and immediate instincts," without resort to cognitive functions. "Hunger, thirst, the passion which unites the two sexes, love of pleasure, and dread of pain, prompt us to apply those means for their own sakes," he writes, "and without any consideration of their tendency to those beneficent ends which the great



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Director of nature intended to produce by them.”

Does Anwar’s *Asian Renaissance*, which he claims is based on “religion and tradition,” endorse this hedonistic view of religion?

This reviewer has elsewhere developed at length the actual parallels between the European Renaissance and the Confucian Renaissance in 11th- and 12th-Century China, showing the close affinity between Confucian *ren (jen)* and the Platonic/Christian *agapē*, as well as the similarities between the Song Renaissance giant Zhu Xi and the Western Renaissance leaders Nicolaus of Cusa and Leibniz (see, e.g., “Toward the Ecumenical Unity of East and West: The Renaissances of Confucian China and Christian Europe,” *Fidelio*, Summer 1993). In both Asia and the West, Renaissance thinkers rejected the hedonism and moral relativism displayed by the likes of Locke and Smith as a curse, not a pragmatic necessity.

### Hypocrisy

While Anwar was apparently willing to compromise his professed high moral standards in order to justify his allegiance to the Adam Smith dogma of free trade, his book does, at least, retain moral indignation against those who have attacked Asia under the cover of human rights concerns. However, today, now that Anwar has joined full tilt with those same enemies of Asia, his earlier protestations ring hollow indeed.

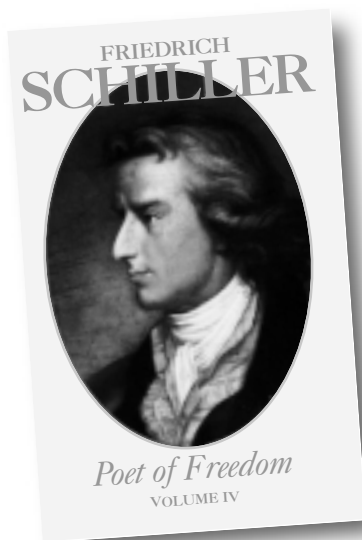
Consider this admirable passage from *The Asian Renaissance*: “When they hector us on issues such as human rights, patronize us on the matter of values, impose conditionalities on trade, we cannot help but suspect a hidden agenda—a new form of domination in place of the old.” Or the following: “True, the age of *la mission civilisatrice* is over and no one talks about it any longer without a touch of remorse or embarrassment. However, in our day, the tone is as condescending, although it has metaphorized into *la mission democratrisatrice*. That enterprise has acquired the status of a dogma in foreign relations . . . , ready to be enforced with the mightiest firepower known in human history.”

The fact that Anwar has now become one of the leading “hectorers” for these hypocritical “democratizers,” demonstrates not only his ever-shifting moral relativism, but also his primary allegiance to those deploying the “mightiest firepower known to human history.”

Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir, the primary target of Anwar’s current invective, has provided leadership to developing-sector nations in defending their economies and their populations against the ravages of the IMF and globalization. The fact that Dr. Mahathir enjoys continuing wide support across Asia and the developing sector is an indication that any new Renaissance will come not from the Anwar Ibrahims of the world, but from those who are joining forces to replace the bankrupt global financial system with a new, just world economic order.

“*There is a limit to the tyrant’s power.*”

—Friedrich Schiller,  
Wilhelm Tell.



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