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July 14, 2019: Adam Gopnik vs David Frum

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Title: Adam Gopnik vs David Frum

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7/14/2019—I haven't read the book, *A Thousand Small Sanities: The Moral Adventures of Liberalism*, by Adam Gopnik, but if it is as tedious and superficial as David Frum's review in the *New York Times*, the book won't be helpful. Anyone who praises "the liberal heritage of free speech, rule of law, scientific inquiry and individual conscience" is certainly on the right side of things. But Gopnik sounds incapable of fundamental analysis. I suspect this is because, as an atheist, he has no feel for religious experience and truth. See below. Take this example from the book--"The basic American situation in which the right wing wants cultural victories and gets nothing but political ones; while the left wing wants political victories and gets only cultural ones. ... The left manages to get sombreros banned from college parties while every federal court in the country is assigned a far-right-wing activist judge." Now this makes no sense. Much of what the Left wants from the courts is also cultural—not all but much. Is forcing the cake maker to make a cake for a same sex wedding political or cultural when cakes are freely available? How about contraception coverage by a religious employer when contraception is freely available elsewhere? Many of our political controversies are about cultural supremacy. The right-wing judiciary is a threat to unions and that is not cultural. But do most progressives care all that much about that? Unfortunately, no. Gopnik's fear of truth is revealed in this comment about dogmatic religion—"If you think you have unique access to the truth, why wouldn't you be intolerant of those who reject that truth?" Revelation is not why people are intolerant. For that matter, truth is not why people are intolerant. Those religious traditions were the source of our respect for conscience—as well as the source of the Inquisition. It is a mixed bag. (To be fair, Frum sees that this applies as well to the secular Left.) Intolerance arises from the content of the truth one believes she possesses. Dr. King taught that means are ends in the making. That is one basis of tolerance. I don't do everything I can to defeat error. But no one is or should be tolerant of error as such. If I respect you as a person, I try to persuade you of the truth for your own sake. Out of love. I don't persecute you. And I only act against you if you are harming others. Spreading your error is not harm because I believe your error will not stand up to shared investigation. In the end, truth will prevail. Thus, truth is the not a threat to tolerance, but its source. Think Gamaliel in the *Book of Acts*. There was no need to act against the new Jesus movement. If it was from God, it should not be opposed. If it was not, it would fail.