

An Enemy of the People



by Miles Mathis

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Before we get to the paper, I need to do my first reminder this year to feed the kitty. As my regulars know, I run my first fund drive on Groundhog Day, just for the fun of it, and to give it a little distance from Christmas. This fund drive is just a single paragraph like this, not a daily or hourly plea, and I do this only three times a year. I remind you that you can support me by clicking any of the kittens, as on my homepage or updates page, which will take you to Paypal. Or you can go there directly and donate to mileswmathis@yahoo.com. If you don't like Paypal, you can send a check or anything of value to me at POBox 335, Garden Valley CA 95633. As you know, I don't have any advertising or any revenue from that, not because I am already subsidized or already rich, but because I want to save your eyes and mine from all that. I consider ubiquitous advertising to be one of the many banes of modern life and refuse to be a part of it. I won't have it soiling my work.

I know that some of you have already donated recently, thanks a lot! This is for the rest of you. And if you can't afford anything right now, no problem, no guilt trips, this is a free site. You are free to disseminate and share, as long as you aren't profiting or surrounding it with noise. You are also free to quote me. Some people write and ask permission to quote. You don't need permission to quote anyone, even in a book for profit. As long as you get the quote right and the attribution right. You just can't quote entire papers for profit, since that isn't quoting anymore, that is publishing, you see. At that point you are required to share profit with the author.

You may have thought I chose the subject of this paper for its similarity to my own case, but I didn't. It came to me as [a suggested free movie at Youtube](#), in the first row at the top-middle slot. Somewhat

uncanny, you have to admit. Possibly because I had clicked on something else with Steve McQueen in it, I don't know. Or more likely it was placed there by the Muses.

For those who don't know, *An Enemy of the People* is one of the most famous plays of Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, from 1882. We were assigned it as seniors in highschool, if I remember correctly, and I liked it even then. You will understand why in moment.

It concerns an honest but initially naive town doctor who has discovered the waters of his spa town in southern Norway are polluted by a tannery owned by his father-in-law and making bathers sick. The doctor's older brother is mayor, and is heavily invested in the spa. The brother and father-in-law and even his wife put pressure on him to stay quiet, though at first the liberal paper is on his side. But soon even the paper turns against him, and he decides to talk directly to the citizens of the town himself. He is surprised when they side with the mayor and the editors, feeling it is better to hide the pollution for the sake of the economy. The pollution is bacterial and therefore invisible, which makes this possible. The mayor riles up the people with the usual lies—including the one that taxes will have to be raised to clean up the water, rather than having the rich men who own the private spa company pay to correct their own mistake—and they turn against the doctor violently, becoming an irrational mob. When the doctor doesn't back down, telling that them they are just proving that “the majority is always wrong”, the citizens grow angry, voting him an enemy of the people, and setting fire to his house. He is fired from his job and the rich elders promise him he will never work again, suggesting he leave town. But he refuses and in the final scene states his intention to stay and keep fighting, being the strongest man in town due to his honesty.

The movie at Youtube is interesting not only for those reasons, but because you won't recognize Steve McQueen. He is not in a wig and fake beard, but has taken the time to grow both out naturally. Other actors are also compelling, including Charles Durning as the bad guy, Eric Christmas, and Robin Rose as the pretty daughter. Not your usual Youtube fare. I recommend you watch it and I also recommend you read the play. It is short and easy to read, and you can find it at Gutenberg.org. You may also recognize it as the basis for many later Hollywood movies, including *Erin Brockovich* and even *Jaws*, though none of them match the power and complexity of the original.

But the reason I am here today is to show you the Wikipedia page for this play, which may be the worst thing I have ever witnessed there. I send you directly to the section called **Themes**:

In *An Enemy of the People*, speaking the language of comic exaggeration through the mouth of his spokesman, the idealist Doctor Thomas Stockmann, [Ibsen](#) puts into very literal terms the theme of the play: It is true that ideas grow stale and platitudinous, but one may go one step further and say flatly that truths die. According to Stockmann, there are no absolute principles of either [wisdom](#) or [morality](#). In this Ibsen is referring indirectly to the reception of his previous plays. For example, the [commandment](#) "honor thy father and thy mother" referred to in [Ghosts](#) is not simply either true or false. It may have been a truth once and a falsehood today. [2] As Stockmann states in his excited harangue to his political enemies:

Truths are by no means the wiry [Methuselahs](#) some people think them. A normally constituted truth lives—let us say—as a rule, seventeen or eighteen years; at the outside twenty; very seldom more. And truths so patriarchal as that are always shockingly emaciated.

What? That has nothing to do with the theme of the play, and looks like it was written by AI. It only lacks the usual annoying bullet points. That is upside-down to the theme of the play, and you can see

how AI is unsubtly slandering Stockmann at many points. We are told Stockmann's ideas are comic exaggeration, when they are not. We are told that there are no truths, when the point of the play is just the opposite: in a case like this, the greater truth has to be stated no matter the short-term financial consequences. Stockmann was right in the first scene and is still right in the last, and not once is he comic, either by his own intention or that of Ibsen. Wiki pulls that bolded quote out of context and spins it 180. Stockmann is said to be on “an excited harangue”, so AI is clearly taking the side of the greedheads and the mob here. It is his brother the capitalist that delivers the excited demagogic harangue, the doctor simply trying to speak sense. The flip here is absolutely awful in its transparency and it tells you exactly who is writing Wikipedia, if you didn't already know.

Just so you know, the real theme of this play and movie is that society shouldn't be run by either the plutocrats or the masses, and that it is at its worst when the two ally, since you then get ignorant mobs led by manipulative liars. Sound familiar? As you see, Ibsen was way ahead of his time in trashing both Capitalism (society run by rich guys) and Communism (society run by rich guys hiding behind the masses). You can also see why the rich guys behind Wikipedia don't like the play or the movie, bringing AI in to flip it.

So who should run society? The doctor tells us it is independent intelligent people like him, people with an altruistic bent who enjoy solving problems and making the world run smoothly. He sets the example in the early part of the play, where we see exactly what he means. The spa was initially his idea, and he returned to his home town to help it become more prosperous. He seems like a lovely person with a wonderful family. As the spa's chief medical officer and chemist, he had been hired to cover that end of the project, though the town's elders had taken over the financial aspect of it. However, when it came time to decide how the waters should come into the spa, he was **outvoted**. He had advised they go around the tanneries upstream, but it was cheaper to take the water directly from the stream, with no diversion. That was a fatal error, one they were now compounding by refusing to correct it. The whole enterprise is in jeopardy, since with or without the doctor talking, visitors would soon come to the conclusion the baths were the opposite of healthy, and the town's economy would collapse. [Now maybe you see the parallel to *Jaws*.] Many had already gotten sick and many more would become so in the upcoming summer season. Being an intelligent person, Dr. Stockmann could see that coming, but the financiers and the townspeople thought they could outrun it somehow, by pretending it wasn't so. As usual they would shoot the messenger and bury their heads in the sand, denying all responsibility.

The play is compelling, but it does have some rough edges. All subtlety goes out the window in Act IV, and Ibsen just puts his own words into the doctor's mouth without much concern for making it look real. The townspeople would never have allowed him to speak, and if he had said those things to their faces they would have attacked him physically. His brother would have had to arrest him to save him, and we have no idea he would have done that. It would have gone very bad very fast. Plus, there was no reason for him to go down with the ship like that. The intelligent thing to do would have been to let the spa fail on its own merits, as it was guaranteed to. Everyone would learn the truth soon enough, since you can't outrun bad water. His words made it clear he had lost all respect for the people, so what was the point being made a martyr in that town and endangering his innocent children? The only other man worth anything in the town was the ship captain Horster, so what was there left to do? And the idea he would send his boys off alone to school the next day, after nearly being stoned the evening before, is ludicrous. It all kind of falls apart right there, since he is no longer acting the “independent intelligent man”. Even our hero is now looking like a fool. Is Ibsen telling us everyone is a dunce and it is all hopeless? I don't think so. It just isn't a perfect play. There may be no such thing.

There is a further problem when we go back to the film, the script of which is an adaptation of Ibsen's play by Arthur Miller, rather than the play itself. Very weird if you think about it. Why did Ibsen need to be "adapted"? Adapted in this case means Dr. Stockman's main speeches were completely rewritten and watered down, supposedly for the sake of brevity. But if the play is too long, you cut a few unimportant scenes or lines, you don't rewrite the main speeches. It would be like rewriting Hamlet's famous soliloquies or repainting Leonardo's *Last Supper* for the sake of a modern audience. [Which, by the way, I fully expect to see, if it hasn't been done already. The disciples "reimagined" as a black lesbian, an Asian trans woman, and a turbaned Muslim in a wheelchair.]

For instance, Miller cuts these lines:

Dr. Stockman: But yesterday morning—no, to be precise, it was yesterday afternoon—the eyes of my mind were opened wide, and the first thing I realised was **the colossal stupidity of the authorities—**.

What I mean is only that I got scent of the unbelievable piggishness our leading men had been responsible for down at the Baths. **I can't stand leading men at any price!**—I have had enough of such people in my time. They are like billy-goats on a young plantation; they do mischief everywhere. They stand in a free man's way, whichever way he turns, and what I should like best would be to see them exterminated like any other vermin—.

For I cherish the comforting conviction that **these parasites**—all these venerable relics of a dying school of thought—are most admirably paving the way for their own extinction; they need no doctor's help to hasten their end.

And these:

The majority never has right on its side. Never, I say! That is one of these social lies against which an independent, intelligent man must wage war. Who is it that constitute the majority of the population in a country? Is it the clever folk, or the stupid? I don't imagine you will dispute the fact that at present the stupid people are in an absolutely overwhelming majority all the world over. But, good Lord!—you can never pretend that it is right that the stupid folk should govern the clever ones! (Uproar and cries.) Oh, yes—you can shout me down, I know! But you cannot answer me. The majority has might on its side—unfortunately; but right it has not. I am in the right—I and a few other scattered individuals. The minority is always in the right. (Renewed uproar.)

I am sticking as closely to my subject as I can; for my subject is precisely this, that it is the masses, the majority—this infernal compact majority—that poisons the sources of our moral life and infects the ground we stand on.

The kind of common people I mean are not only to be found low down in

the social scale; they crawl and swarm all around us—even in the highest social positions. You have only to look at your own fine, distinguished Mayor! My brother Peter is every bit as plebeian as anyone that walks in two shoes—

—because he thinks what his superiors think, and holds the same opinions as they, People who do that are, intellectually speaking, common people; and, that is why my magnificent brother Peter is in reality so very far from any distinction—

Arthur Miller replaces that with this:

Just because there is a mass of shapes in human form, that doesn't make them people. That honor has to be earned.

I am against the age-old lie that the majority is always right. Listen to me, the majority is always wrong. Was the majority right when they crucified Jesus? Was the majority right when they refused to believe that the Earth revolved around the Sun and allowed Galileo to be driven to his knees?

The majority is never right until it *does* right.

So Miller has completely cut the lines against authority and leading men and watered down the lines against the majority. He has inserted Jesus and Galileo when Ibsen said nothing about them.

You may or may not agree with some of that or all of it, but I hope you can agree that re-writing a famous play because you find it too revolutionary is morally and artistically beneath contempt. It is exactly the kind of censorship by the majority or the leading men Ibsen was talking about. Miller became at that moment one of Ibsen's billy-goats. It is the height of hypocrisy to stage a play about censorship and then censor it. Ibsen is one of the dozen greatest playwrights of recent history, and that is generally admitted, so how can anyone justify bowdlerizing his work like this? If you disagree with it, fine, say so. But don't rewrite it and try to pass off the fake as the original.

For myself, I think Ibsen could have stated it better, and with less words. The whole thing about truths lasting 20 years, as in the quote at Wiki, is extraneous and confusing, and I would have said it differently. But that isn't the question. This is Ibsen's play, not mine, and it is not up to me to rewrite it. Would Miller like it if someone rewrote one of his plays, watering it down? Of course not. In the visual arts, this would be illegal, [see VARA](#), which is a 1990 extension of copyright protection in the US, making it illegal for later owners to alter or destroy artworks, even non-famous artworks. Obviously, literature should have the same protection, especially famous or culturally significant literature like that of Ibsen. It is hard to believe it doesn't, and hard to believe a famous playwright like Miller would agree to rewrite the famous play of one of his predecessors.

Clearly, Arthur Miller didn't censor this play for the sake of brevity or easy comprehension, since it was already easily comprehensible as it was. As a leading man, he censored it to protect his fellow leading men from revolutionary thoughts and uncomfortable truths. And he censored it to protect the easily fooled mob from having to see itself as an easily fooled mob. But Miller was far more protective of the leading men than he was of the masses, since even in his adaptation you see them acting like an

ignorant mob, led by the lies of the greedy mayor. At least Miller doesn't completely flip the play like Wikipedia now does, trying to make the doctor look like the bad guy.

I will be told Ibsen the aristocrat was promoting a return to aristocracy. That was the old critique of the play, before AI decided to just mangle it completely. But he can't have been, since his hero here is not an aristocrat. Or at least not a rich guy or peer. *Aristos* actually means “best”, not “of the nobility” or something, so Ibsen *is* promoting that, in a way. He is promoting the idea of the most civic-minded, and the least greedy and selfish, as the best elders and statesmen, but that is not what most people think of as an aristocracy. You would probably call it a meritocracy, but where merit wasn't decided just by intelligence, but by selflessness or “goodness”.

It has also been said Ibsen was promoting his own class, the Norwegian patrician old families that were being replaced by the nouveau riche merchants. That's true in part, but misses the bigger picture: as we see clearly in *An Enemy of the People*, Ibsen was attacking the “leading men” of his time, those running the towns and cities, whether they were merchants or patricians (gentry). He was attacking his own upper class, the “aristocrats” of the day, which is why he was heavily censored and slandered, and still is to this day, as we see both with Miller and at Wiki. The leading men didn't allow Ibsen's plays to be staged for decades, destroying the argument he was secretly promoting them. Fortunately for Ibsen, the leading men soon found no one understood what he was saying anyway, and that they could easily spin it, just like they do with everyone now. So they decided instead to canonize him, thereby completely detoothing him.

You will say that is because to the extent Ibsen was revolutionary, it was a hopeless revolution, since how would his intelligent and conscientious people walk around the rich guys and their controlled mobs? If it was hopeless in Ibsen's time, it is ten times as hopeless now, since the intelligent and conscientious have been purposely obliterated by 150 years of de-education and de-moralization projects.

That's true and I can't deny it; in fact that is what a majority of my papers on this site have been about in the past twenty years: showing you exactly how the destruction of our class has been achieved, and the projects they have used to achieve it. But let me answer you this way. Maybe it isn't a matter of hope. When I think about it, I have never done anything I do from hope or lack of it. Have I done anything I did because I genuinely thought or hoped I would someday be made King and could change the world with a wave of my scepter? No. I have done all I have done because I thought it was worth doing, **no matter what**. Even if I knew the world was going to end tomorrow, I would still do it. For instance, I didn't paint all those pictures because I wanted to change the history of art. I didn't even paint them for money. Anything else would have sold better. I painted all those pictures because I wanted to paint all those pictures. Those were the pictures I wanted to paint, and I wanted to paint them that way, so I did. I didn't even write about art to change the history of art. I wrote all those things because I had something to say and wanted to say it. It was a joy to write them whether or not anyone ever read them or agreed with them. Having readers and agreement and changing the world is great, but it is frosting. They were written because I couldn't NOT write them, and that was the cake. Or the steak.

Let me put it a second way, to help clarify. Let's talk about someone besides me. One of the reasons I wanted to write art counter-criticism back in the 1990s was because I read Whistler's *Gentle Art of Making Enemies* and admired it. Did I admire it because he changed the history of art? No, because he didn't, for the most part. He stemmed the tide for a few years, perhaps, but then died and art history was swamped by the Moderns. I admired it and wanted to do something like that because it seemed a

fine thing to do. It was beautifully written and powerful and mostly true, and I thought I might be able to match it someday, in my own way. That was basically the same reason I painted the pictures: I saw beautiful pictures and wanted to do something like that. I was pretty sure I had it in me and felt it was a fine thing to do. In that case my first influence wasn't Whistler, but Sargent. I also learned from Whistler, but it was mainly Sargent in the early years that I wanted to match or get near.

Same thing in poetry and science. I saw or read things that I thought were very fine and I wanted to be a part of it. In physics I didn't have a direct influence, but I felt a mechanical system like that of Newton or Maxwell was very useful, and since it wasn't complete I thought I might be able to help in my own small way.

I have told you I think I was set up by the Muses, and the Muses didn't come to me in my dreams and tell me to do all this because I would be elected to run a town or a country. They just told me to do it, it seemed like a good thing to do, and I didn't ask any more questions. That is how it works and hope has nothing to do with it.

When you are a baby, you don't live each day because you have hope for the next day. You live each day because you are there—what else are you going to do? Pass? That's why I am always dumbfounded when people say they just can't be hopeful like I am. I am not hopeful or unhelpful. Hope has nothing to do with it, which is probably why Obama led with it: it is the most pointless thing they could come up with. Or no, it is actually the perfect misdirection, since it leads to dread and inaction. You think you need hope to proceed, so if they can take away your hope they take away your impetus. So they build you up with the hope idea, then yank it out from under you on purpose. But hope is any airy abstraction: nothing really depends on it. Good and great people don't proceed on hope, they proceed on rightness.

We are here, so the job is to do the greatest thing you can do each day. If that is just feed yourself and keep from getting run over, fine. But if you are like me and you can do more than that, you get busy doing it, because otherwise you get bored. You can't live with yourself. To say it another way, I am driven to create and always have been, and I don't question it. I don't need hope, since I can run on fumes. If I needed any positive input to run, I would have crashed into the weeds decades ago. I can run on nothing but negative input, and did for many years before my websites caught on.

Why did I divert into that? Here's why: Although Ibsen's Dr. Stockmann was sort of a Jesus figure, he wasn't *really* a Jesus figure because he put everything in terms of society. Did you ever notice Jesus never talks about societies or citizens or any of that? He dismisses it all with a wave of the hand: give unto Caesar, etc. In the end, it just doesn't matter to him: one society is as bad as the next. Or, it only matters in terms of how it affects individual spirits. The society is just a setting, a test, a backdrop, and what matters is *what you do*. You can always find an excuse for doing nothing in any society or world; the question is, can you find motivation to do something? That something you decide to do is all important, because it is a sign of who you are.

You will say that all my efforts trying to help good people or resist bad people is wasted then, since that is about society. No, not at all, you aren't getting it. It is about me **choosing something to do and doing it**. It is about my soul and their souls, not about society. It is worth doing whether or not society changes or whether or not the world ends tomorrow, because society is just a temporary construct, but souls aren't temporary. We are eternal.

You will say that it is a spiritual journey, then, like a yogi perfecting himself, and the world is no more

than a hologram. No, not at all, you aren't getting it. The points may seem subtle, but they are absolutely critical, which is why I am not letting them pass. Saying that society is a temporary construct is not to say it is a hologram, or no better than a hologram. Society, though an abstraction and backdrop, is REAL. It is there to test you, so you cannot take a pass. Your response matters, and retreat is a failure. You were born here for a reason, and that reason was not to wish you hadn't been born here. A yogi perfecting himself is a type of retreat, since he isn't doing anyone any good, himself least of all. The exercise is fine, but the rest of it is just stasis or circling. You can go back to God when you die or sleep, but when you are awake it is time to confront the world one way or the other. To do and to act, to try to make the world a better place. But whether or not it actually *becomes* a better place is not up to you. You didn't create the world or the people in it, so fixing it is too big a job for you.

Think of it this way. What if you did conquer all the bad people and take over the world, turning it into a paradise? What would the next generation do? They would be bored stiff. For my younger readers, think of life as a video game. Suppose someone created a video game where you lived in paradise: nothing ever went wrong, all the people were happy and kind and believed exactly the same things you do, there were no problems to solve, there were no bad guys or mean people, and everyone was smart and beautiful. No one would buy it, right? Why? Because it's a big yawn. No one wants to watch that movie or buy that vidgame. There is no hill to climb, nothing to learn, and no excitement, just sleeping, eating, and maybe gardening. That isn't interesting, and **that is precisely why that world isn't your backdrop here.**

Also weird is that if I do a search on “McQueen Enemy of the People”, I get this again from AI:

I can't answer this request. My responses are designed to be safe, respectful, and compliant with ethical principles. You may ask another question.

So the internet is (not so) slowly being whittled down to government propaganda, vetted by a clueless AI. Famous plays are being explained as the opposite of what they are. Next AI and Wiki will tell us Jesus was just using comic exaggeration when he overturned the moneychangers tables, and that the point of the Sermon on the Mount was that the rich deserve to inherit the Earth, since they are the ones writing the will.

*Neither did Nietzsche, which I consider an interesting parallel, though I won't get into it here.