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The Need for Sophistication

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Distinctly Catholic

The other day, listening to Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner at the Brookings Institute, the thought occurred that this man may or may not know that his job, as a Democrat, is to fight for the working men and women in this country, but you would never know he knows it from listening to him. My populist instincts were heightened.

But, there is a limit to populism and, in the event, Geithner's wonkishness may be more important than throwing red meat to the masses. It is too easy in our culture to make fun of the pointy-heads, the wonks, the analysts who live in Cambridge or Berkeley, and who are very smart about some things but can be clueless about what makes the rest of America tick.

I was reminded of this when I saw the headline in this morning's Washington Post, which reads, "Egypt's generals impose martial law." I remember reading a similar headline in December, 1981, about the imposition of martial law in Poland. That was a grim news then but yesterday's imposition of martial law in Egypt is actually good news, that the military is not going to be hiding behind the constitutional niceties of a constitution that was designed to frustrate democracy not promote it. Same headline. Completely different significance. That is why we need wonks.

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