

The Demon In Democracy by Ryszard Legutko

notes by David Alexander

Introduction

Ryszard Legutko writes that his book is about the similarities which exist between communism and democracy. He noticed, on the part of liberal democrats, an extraordinary meekness and empathy toward communism. He had thought that their visceral reaction should be one of condemnation. He had thought at first that the failure to do so was out of fear of Soviet power, but then he began to discern behind the rage against anti-anti-communists a deeper relatedness, some shared principles and ideals. Legutko observed that being anti-anti-communist even became a kind of political test for admission into leadership in the new democratic liberal reality. He noted that the assimilation of communists to the "liberal democratic game" was surprisingly easy. Legutko and others questioned the moral and political credibility of these co-opted ex-communists and they were met with a rage whose vehemence he came to believe was due to a kind of sacredness with respect to an epoch-making contract which existed with the coopted partners.

Legutko defines a system as an institutional structure and everything which makes this structure function as it does: ideas, social practices, mores, and people's attitudes. He notes that the belief still lingers regarding the system of liberal democracy that it is one of breathtaking diversity, but the opposite now seems closer to the truth: it is a powerful unifying mechanism which blurs differences between people and which imposes a uniformity of views, behavior, and language. It deracinates and it significantly narrows the area of what is permissible. It brought with it a new rhetoric of necessity.

If the European Parliament is supposed to be the emanation of the spirit of today's liberal democracy, then this spirit is certainly neither good nor beautiful. It shares many ugly features in common with communism. One witnesses there "*the destruction of language* turning into a new form of Newspeak" in order to bolster a surreality that obfuscates the real world and, at the same time too, an uncompromising hostility toward dissidents. Legutko asks if the Soviet-like similarities that are half-jokingly acknowledged even by EU devotees are not more core than has been realized and whether they will intensify rather than disappear.

Despite the fundamental differences, it is perfectly legitimate to ask about what similarities exist between the Communist and the liberal-democratic systems. He asks why liberal democrats are given to sounding the alarm about dangers such as xenophobia, nationalism, intolerance, and bigotry, which are often suspected and felt rather than perceived while, at the same time, they ignore dangers that are easy to spot: namely, the increase of developments similar to those that had existed in communist countries. Legutko believes that this is because there is an interplay between these systems and he says that this book explains this interplay in detail.

One obvious shared trait that belongs to the two systems is the being of modernization projects whose intents are to change reality for the better. The language of modernization derives from technology and it compels us to see the world as an object of engineering and innovative activity. Modernity made Prometheus a hero and *techne* was believed to be the best thing that has happened to man because it was believed to be a vehicle of infinite progress. The creators of modernity - Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Bacon - saw themselves as pioneers who boldly turned their backs on the past. They bore a contempt for the past as something that was both foolish and harmful, mixed with condescension, thinking that perhaps it once had nobility and charm. Some like Descartes took advantage of the past but, at the same time, they strove to obliterate any trace of their debt. (See the MacIntyre essay on Descartes's debt). A "conscious detachment" is inevitably entailed. There is a "proud sense of individual independence and

sovereignty." Affirming individual independence and sovereignty itself becomes a kind of therapy, and the modernist derives a deep-seated belief in his participation in the march to the future from this conflation of detachment with progress.

In both systems, a "cult of technology" translates itself into an acceptance of social engineering as a proper approach to reforming society (and so a debased human anthropology is the price of self-superior progress). In both systems, society and the world are considered as being under constant reconstruction. In one system, this meant reversing the current of Siberia's rivers; in the other, a formation of alternative family models. In both, it is the constant remolding nature which is conceived to be "barely a substrate to be modeled into a desired form."

Both regimes distance themselves from the past and embrace the idea of progress that is based on a belief in the power of *techne*. In the consequent psychological and moral stance, the old becomes "suspect" and the "modern" becomes an adulatory term. Becoming a devoted member of a communist and a liberal-democratic society generates a sense of liberation from old bonds and it entails rejecting a vast share of loyalties and commitments, especially those that had been inculcated in him by religion, social morality, and tradition. Communism, which was supposed to have started history anew, is in essence and practice "against memory." Memory again is one of the main enemies for the liberal-democratic order.

[One thing I notice about Legutko's critique is how much he analyses attitudes and psychological dispositions. It is very virtue centered and one can tend to make out the man beneath the politics that is writ large in the politics].

Chapter 1

1

Legutko examines the similar perceptions of history that are shared by liberal democracy and communism. The description of the historical process leading to communism has three main versions according to communism. According to the first, socialism/communism was the final stage of social development, illuminated by the discovery of Marx's laws of history. This was a culmination that is to be attributed to the inherent logic of history. Liberals, notably Karl Popper, later attacked this view, rejecting the idea that history could be an object of scientific inquiry by which laws of historical development could be discovered. Popper believed that this even opened the field to political violence. The Soviet Union's historical development was treated as the ideal pattern for all other Communist countries, but eventually unofficial space was made for national particularities. The second version of the transition from capitalism to communism held that society would be pushed forward by the group that was most aware of its historical role, either the proletariat, the Communist Party, the peasants in China, or students and intellectuals. The third idea of the transition was based in specific anthropological assumptions according to which the historical development of humanity was toward full self-consciousness. This humanistic-anthropological theory played an important role in the history of Marxism. It was dug up after communism transformed into regimes of crime and terror to rehabilitate the movement's human face and to contrast it with Bolshevik socialism. Karl Marx did not separate these three scenarios but combined them. In communist practice, however, the unity of the three aspects did not matter because the current party line determined the historicist interpretation that was adopted.

From the perspective of historicism, any opposition to the all embracing process of historical

development was extremely harmful to humanity and inconceivably stupid. What the enemies of progress stood for was "by definition hopelessly parochial, limited to one class, decadent, anachronistic, historically outdated, and degenerate."

Over time the ardent belief in historical inevitability and the prospect of the advent of socialism for the entire human race became so remote that it ceased to be taken seriously. The failure to spread the flame of the Bolshevik revolution closed a chapter in the communist narrative. However, a kind of habit remained of opposing all that was deemed capitalist and bourgeois, and it was monotonously repeated that communism was the people's destiny.

2

Liberal democracy does not have an official concept of history that can be attributed to a particular author like communism did. Nevertheless, it follows a similar pattern. According to the popular view, the history of the world is a history of the struggle for freedom against enemies who were different at various stages of history but who perpetually fought against the idea of freedom itself, forces that kept them submissive for centuries. The history of England in this view was portrayed as a narrative of the emergence of Parliament and the creation of a constitutional monarchy, with a particular legal system sanctioning it. The question arose about what was supposed to happen at the end of history, when freedom would claim victory over tyranny. In the case of liberalism, the impetus was in its cooperative feature which was supposed to bring the race to a higher stage of development. Part of the claim was that the era of conflicts, wars and violence, was coming to an end. (Note how Steven Pinker argues in a sense for this worldview by describing a decrease in violence but in such a way as to equate death in a Inuit village from a fist fight with the extermination of millions each year in Nazi Germany based on a mere numerical argument). The liberal era was regarded as the era of peace, cooperation, prosperity and progress. Writers like Adam Smith and Frederic Bastiat predicted peace at a time when wars were ubiquitous.

There is a commonality of argument between communists and liberal-democrats in a belief in the unilateralism of history, leading inevitably to the era of perpetual peace. Also there is a belief in deliberate human action by a distinguished minority who will prepare humanity, now apathetic, enslaved and ignorant, for the new reality. There is also the notion that mankind will achieve maturity and intellectual independence and a promised modern society that is liberated from ignorance and superstition.

3

The beliefs that history has a unilateral pattern and that a better world is shaped by conscious human activity are still very much present in the modern political mind. Communists and liberal democrats have always upheld the view that history is on their side. Despite the collapse of the Soviet system, the past practices of socialism are appreciated as having represented the correct direction of social change. Both communists and liberal democrats speak fondly of "the people" while at the same time having no qualms in ruthlessly breaking social spontaneity in order to accelerate social reconstruction. Though the idea of liberal democracy presupposes freedom of action, the letter, the spirit and the practice of liberal-democratic doctrine are far more restrictive: everything that exists in society must become liberal-democratic over time and be imbued with the spirit of the system.

With the emergence from communism into liberal-democracy in eastern European countries, a self-proclaimed group of eloquent spokesmen for the new system took upon themselves the duty to delineate the direction of change and to infuse a new liberal-democratic awareness into anachronistic minds. They saw themselves as pioneers of the enlightened future.

In the schema adopted by the systems, once one sends one's opponents into the dustbin of history, any debate with them becomes superfluous. In liberal democracy, it is believed that only a fool or a fanatic would deny that a family must liberalize or democratize, which means that the parental authority has to crumble, that the children will quickly liberate themselves from parental tutelage, and that family relationships will increasingly become more negotiatory and less authoritarian. The traditional family is considered indefensible, a part of the old despotism. With the demise of the traditional family, the imagined despotic system loses its base. Democratization of the family is supported by appropriate legislation that will give children more power, such as laws allowing very young girls to have abortions without parental consent. Similar treatment is directed at educational institutions and churches and communities and associations.

Liberal-democracy has become an all-permeating system. Just as in socialism, in liberal democracy it is difficult to find some non-doctrinal slice of the world, a non-doctrinal image, a narrative, a tone or a thought. In a way liberal democracy is a more insidious ideological mystification than communism because official guardians of constitutional doctrine do not exist, making the overarching system less tangible but more profound and difficult to reverse. "It is the people themselves who have eventually come to accept, often on a pre-intellectual level, that eliminating the institutions incompatible with liberal-democratic principles constitutes a wise and necessary step."

4

"The Hegelian sting," or the veneration of historical necessity, has been well described by Czeslaw Milosz in *The Captive Mind*, which analyzes the mechanism of the communist servility of Polish intellectuals. Milosz himself never entirely abandoned historicism. Nevertheless, he ably encapsulated in his descriptions the treason of the intelligentsia in totalitarian systems. It appears now in hindsight that the mental enslavement described by Milosz was not a single occurrence that was occasioned by a short-lived infatuation with communism, but it is recurrent within the idolatry of liberal democracy and seems to be an inherent handicap of the modern mind. Looking at the modern mind in terms of the dichotomy between the old and young, it resembles the youngster more than the old man. It is more likely to reject institutions and communities (families, schools, churches) when it sees occurrences of human weaknesses in them. The socialist and liberal-democratic interpretation of history is typical of a youngster's take on things: it is bold, absolute, simplistic, and easily stimulated by optimistic projects.

Moving with the socialist and liberal-democratic flow gives an intellectual more power, or at least an illusion of it. He feels like a part of a powerful global machine of transformation. Despite liberal democracy's impressive accomplishments, the youngster fails to notice that at some point the system, or the arrangement of systems, becomes haughty, dogmatic, and dedicated not so much to facilitating the resolution of political conflicts as to transforming society and human nature. It has lost its prior restraint and caution and it has created powerful tools to influence every aspect of life. It has fallen into a trap of self-glorification.

5

The third narrative regarding the transition to the new system was that mankind would reach and develop its full creative potential. This virtually disappeared when socialism was faced with gigantic practical problems. Achieving self-knowledge was subordinated to the problems of chronic scarcity. Though it had begun with a great humanistic message, it quickly lowered its aspirations to successes that were accomplished by its main competitor, capitalism. The model communist man shrunk to being defined by ideology, work, and leisure.

Liberal democratic thought also, from the very beginning, was minimalist when it came to the image of the human being. It was supposed to be emancipatory, setting man free from the excessive demands of unrealistic metaphysics that had been invented by an aristocratic culture in antiquity and the Middle Ages.

So an important part of the message of modernity was to legitimize a lowering of our human aspirations. The main principle behind minimalism was equality since, from the point of view of a liberal order, one cannot prioritize human objectives. (Caldecott notes, in contrast, that one of the main tasks in restoring education has to become the restoration of an ontological hierarchy).

"Once people become used to disqualifying certain standards as too high, impractical, or unnecessary, it is only a matter of time before natural inertia takes its course and even the new lowered standards are deemed unacceptable. One can look at the history of liberal democracy as a gradual sliding down from the high to the low, from the refined to the coarse. Quite often a step down has been welcomed as refreshing, natural, and healthy, and indeed it sometimes was. But whatever the merits of this process of simplification, it too often brought vulgarity to language, behavior, education, and moral rules. A liberal-democratic man refused to learn these artificial and awkward arrangements, the usefulness of which seemed to him at first doubtful, and soon null." (pp. 29-30).

Many blamed this vulgarity and shallowness on mercantile civilization but commerce and capitalism were blamed too hastily. The success of technology, productivity, and industry were themselves conducive to the sterility of imagination and to self-satisfied pettiness.

In liberal democracy, especially recently, there is a generally acknowledged moral directive that forbids people from looking down on people's moral priorities, because in the present society, equality is the norm, not hierarchy. The Socratic model has lost its appeal for the democratic mainstream as being too aristocratic and elitist. Legutko notes the downward trend of human nature if it is not met with strong resistance or attractive inspiration. He also notes the change in the meaning of the word "dignity" in common parlance. Before it used to denote obligation and was something to be earned, deserved, and confirmed by acting in accordance with the higher standards imposed by community or religion. It could be lost by acting in an undignified way. In contrast, Legutko takes exception to using the term "inalienable" to refer to rights. He says the concept of dignity was invoked but in such a way as to imply it meant more than it did. The careless use of the term allowed for a self-exemption from the need to present an explicit and serious philosophical interpretation of human nature and to explain the grounds and conditions on which one could conceive of dignity. (Again, a failure to achieve an adequate human anthropology).

The new dignity did not oblige people to strive for any moral merits or desserts. Legutko asks if a dignity that is inborn and which constitutes the essence of humanness can generate anything that would

be essentially undignified and nonhuman. He says this dignity-based notion of human rights was a powerful factor in legitimizing a minimalist concept of human nature.

6

As Max Weber has described it, under Protestantism man had an unbearable awareness of the sinfulness of human nature and men turned their minds to work initially as an expression of piety, imposing on human sinfulness some form of discipline. The fruits of the work could not be enjoyed because that would be sinful, so they had to be invested. Disciplined work became its own proper reward. Hence, a new approach to consumption as being separated from pleasure and postponed to an indefinite future was born. A minimalist view of human nature, initially driven by religious doctrine which precluded moral and spiritual perfectibility, set the aspirations lower, but still noble and heroic. However, when Protestant doctrine was liberalized, this nobility completely disappeared.

The natural downward pull of minimalism turned out to be too strong. Eventually the old capitalism was transformed into a new system in which consumption was not only accepted but took control of the entire economic mechanism. It became the single most powerful source of motivation. Mr. Gradgrind in Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* - a fanatically discipline man who mercilessly attempts to eradicate human weakness - is a despicable figure who illustrates the negative perception of a classical capitalist by the humanist critics of modern society. Liberal-democratic society abandoned this old time rigor. While the discipline of work and high requirements of productivity persisted, it was combined with an ever-increasing indulgence in entertainment.

For centuries, entertainment, while constituting a strong inclination of our human existence, was rigorously separated from the serious component of man's life. When the minimalistic anthropology took hold, however, the barriers separating one from the other weakened and the temptation to give entertainment more and more prominence became irresistible, particularly in societies where the fear of sin had lost its deterring power. Today, entertainment imposes itself psychologically, intellectually, socially, and also, strange as it might sound, spiritually. A failure to provide human endeavors with an entertaining wrapping is today unthinkable and it borders on sin. (That is a reason why we need to revive ascetical practices).

The modern sense of entertainment increasingly resembles what Pascal long ago called *divertissement* - activity which separates us from the seriousness of existence and which fills this existence with false content. We use *divertissement* to turn away from fundamental existential matters and to suppress primal questions. Our minds slowly get used to this fictitious reality which we take for the real one. "Having neutralized all musings about objectivity, the modern man takes pride in his deep involvement in entertainment, which in the absence of other objective references he considers natural." (37)

Both conservatives defending a classic human anthropology and some of the socialists of the Frankfurt School expressed alarm at the ubiquity of entertainment as a dilution of seriousness in thought and action. For the first time in the entire history of mankind there appeared a human being who thought that not having been surrounded by entertainment from the cradle to the grave in all areas of life was an anomaly. In contrast, liberal democracy and entertainment found enthusiastic allies in each other. The omnipresence of entertainment was something by which democratic man became easily recognized. (It seems to me that a very important task for Christians in the West today is to regain a more worshipful posture toward the Lord by a greater spiritual detachment from their democracies).

Anthropological minimalism is a key to understanding today's liberal democracy. Liberal democrats embraced the Enlightenment faith in progress even more than the socialists, and since liberal-democratic civilization brought a spectacular development of technology and succeeded in providing millions of people with the benefits of modernity, their belief in inexorable progress seemed to have a basis. A remarkable correlation exists between the regime and man, more so than under communists. The relationship between liberal democracy and liberal-democratic man seems perfectly suited, the one for the other. Alternative models have not been seriously drawn so, for the near future, the expansion of liberal democracy will probably continue. Poland, like other countries in the former Soviet bloc, despite the Solidarity movement, quickly adopted a minimalist perspective in order to conform to the atmosphere and the practice of western liberal democracy. Once big ideas were gone, work and entertainment seized the imagination of the people. Poland's exotic religious defiance of Communism was quickly abandoned under the liberal-democratic pressure to conform. What became esteemed as wisdom deeper than innovation and inventiveness was to try to catch up to the "West" by imitating the United States and sometimes the European Union.

Chapter 2

1

Communism and liberal democracy were believed to be the ultimate stages of the history of political transformation. From an inside perspective, communism and democracy are perceived to have no alternative. Within the milieu of either, it is extremely difficult to imagine something that might follow it as a later stage of development.

Both systems identify existing structures with human ideals. Both were sanctioned in moralistic terms that were essential to the system.

Over time, the mind of the liberal democrat began to resemble that of a socialist, exhibiting the same tendency to combine the language of morality and politics. The language permeates every aspect of life and every topic of conversation.

The assertions about the unity of institutions and ideals by both communism and liberal democracy are unfounded. Liberal democracy is portrayed as a realization of the eternal desire for freedom but liberalism was certainly not the only orientation expressing the desire for freedom, nor has it been consistent and pure in its devotion to freedom. Other supporters of freedom include republicanism, conservatism, romanticism, and Christianity. The contribution of liberalism to freedom in concrete shape that is well-grounded in institutions is one of many.

Liberal democrats dodge the above objection by attributing the term liberal to everything they think had succeeded in making a break through the walls of oppression and authority.

Liberals have been dogmatic on the issue of freedom on a theoretical level, but very opportunistic in practice. Even the most liberal of liberals displayed extraordinary softness against the Soviet Union and Soviet communism.

Q: What does Legutko mean when he says both systems identify existing structures with human ideals? How does this relate to liberal democracy's dismantlement of mediating institutions?

Q: What lessons ought we to draw, if any, from the liberal romance with the Soviet Union? Is there a similar dynamic between liberalism, Islam, and freedom today? Or not.

2

Both systems meet the criteria of utopia, and in fact are utopias. None of the great utopians created their blueprints for a good society with the assumption that those plans were devoid of practical value. They all believed in their practical value and their intention was to put them into practice. The first utopias, written in the time of the Renaissance, had a simple message that man can achieve greatness and be equal to God because he has unlimited creative potential. It was thought that man ought to be able to create extraordinary works of genius in politics, as he had in painting, music, literature, architecture, mathematics, philosophy, and physics. In communism, it was the movement's utopian and not scientific nature that made the Marxist version of communism so phenomenally popular.

The utopianism of liberal democracy is not as obvious as the utopianism of communism, and liberalism and democracy are related to utopian thinking in a different way. Liberal utopianism can be envisioned by imagining the liberal order in its simplicity - free-market without any state intervention, and individual rights unregulated by the state except for the general rules of cooperation - and to realize that the simple mechanisms have never been realized.

The popularity of socialism caused its enemy, liberalism, to reassess the previous methods that free markets used to try to win popular support. To win the popularity contest with socialism, free market economic liberals entered into an ideological race with it in which they deliberately and consciously used the term 'utopia' for what they were advocating. Hayek, von Mises, Ayn Rand, and Nozick were among those who openly spoke of a liberal utopia.

Since antiquity, democracy has been considered one of the defective systems; not better but certainly not worse than oligarchy or monarchy. It is extremely difficult to find a classical philosopher who would be its defender. Their primary question was what makes the best regime. They thought democracy did not qualify because it was a messy system, systematically undermining the rule of law, profoundly partisan, often hostile to the most prominent leaders and citizens.

In early modernity, there was no challenge to the view that democracy was a defective system. The Founding Fathers of the American republic devised a complex political mechanism to alleviate the weaknesses they viewed democracy as having. Nevertheless, democracy within decades had become the sole ruler of the American mind. Tocqueville saw its democracy as more a problem than a solution, with new despotism at the end of the road.

John Rawls, "the greatest of the great authorities of all the supporters, advocates and analysts of the system, and the maker of what might be called today's liberal democratic orthodoxy," called the liberal democratic political system a utopia.

Q: What does it mean to call the liberal democratic political system a utopia?

3

Churchill's famous quote about democracy being the worst form of government except all the others took on a life of its own. One version was, "Democracy is the worst political system, except for all the

rest." This contained a suggestion of moderate skepticism, a view of democracy as a highly imperfect system which requires great vigilance and implementation of corrective measures. This version is not the one that won the hearts of millions of supporters.

Another version treated the second piece of information as the basic one - that all other regimes are more defective - and it ignored the first part - that democracy has many faults. In this notion, democracy is by definition superior to the alternatives and is therefore removed from the field of criticism. From a critical view, we have passed to an uncritical affirmation of everything democratic in which it is believed that the remedy of the weaknesses of democracy is more democracy.

Q: What at this point would a critical detachment from democracy look like?

4

Some hold that no better system has been invented than democracy but this is untrue. A better system was invented in antiquity as a result of a long debate about the best political regime. Plato and Aristotle discuss it. They argued that most regimes are defective by being one-sided. The ancient thinkers distinguished three types of regimes: monarchy (one-man rule), oligarchy or aristocracy (minority rule), and democracy (majority rule). Each they regarded as good in some aspects and deficient in others. A possible solution of the problem of one-sidedness was to mix the three types in such a way that each would foster the advantages and neutralize the disadvantages of the others. Cicero referred to this regime as *res publica*.

Even the American system, which today is regarded as the exemplary embodiment of representative democracy, was established as a hybrid construction. Even in the twentieth century, approximately up to the Thirties, this hybrid view of political regimes was still quite widespread.

However, "democracy" soon became not just a description but also the norm. This meant moving away from thinking about political regimes in terms of pros and cons to the idolatry of democracy. Prior to this idolatry, the hybrid system had played a creative role in political thought, preventing politicians from falling into utopianism. Attempts today, however, to use the term "republic" in its former scope provoke the irritation of political scientists. A republic has a higher internal diversity than a democracy but politicians have come to associate the term wrongly with freedom, openness, and diversity.

Liberal democracy is more restrictive, being strongly correlated with egalitarian principles that are quite wrongly believed to generate diversity. On the contrary, egalitarianism does not tolerate aristocratic and monarchical tendencies. Liberal democracy, the single most homogenizing force in the modern world, creates the illusion that it alone stands for social differentiation.

Q: What do you think of the ancient view that the three types of regimes each had strengths and weaknesses?

5

For a long time, until recently, liberalism and democracy seemed to obviously point in two opposite directions and were considered incompatible attitudes. Tocqueville and Ortega y Gasset observed that democracy is something more than a mechanism for the peaceful transfer of power in that it has also the ability to change the whole mindset of society by depriving it of all intellectual and psychological impulses and all social habits and aspirations that do not conform to democratic practices. The aridity

of the democratic mind could be discerned and deplored in Tocqueville's time because classical education was still in force, providing an outside non-democratic perspective of evaluation. From this outside perspective, people were able to observe that rampant democratization was accompanied by an anti-hierarchical conformity. [Note the parallel to Stratford Caldecott's stress on the urgent task in education of regaining an ontological hierarchy. As Christians, we must more explicitly define ourselves with spiritual detachment from democracy. It is effecting everything in our society and we must show a different perspective].

Putting democracy and liberalism together began to seem promising. Democracy would ensure the overall balance of the entire political order and liberalism was responsible for enriching the society with individual inspirations to improve things, supporting a human desire for creativity and change. Liberal democracy is usually explained by contrasting it with totalitarian democracy. Liberal democrats quite rightly observed that freedom and coercion are exclusive.

Q: Is liberal democracy a reliable safeguard of freedom?

6

When we look at the changes in liberal-democratic societies over time, we see not so much the introduction of liberalism into democracy but the democratization of liberalism. The effect proved to be the opposite of what was expected. Liberalism did not diversify democracy because it was a different kind of liberalism than what the American Founding Fathers and others hoped for, an egalitarian liberalism rather than an aristocratic liberalism. As such, it reinforced what it was hoped it would have moderated. This should not have been a surprise because the original idea of liberalism was egalitarianism.

Democratization turned liberalism into a doctrine in which the primary agents were no longer individuals but groups and institutions of the democratic state. In the final outcome, the state in liberal democracy ceased to be an institution pursuing the common good and became instead a hostage of groups that treated it solely as an instrument of change securing their interests.

The state lost its general republican character and turned into a conglomerate of the social, economic, cultural, and other policy programs enacted and imposed through democratic procedures. This meant the state had to take over more and more specific responsibilities far beyond the normal operations of the state apparatus. Intervention deeply into the social substance was deemed necessary because that was where the roots of status and recognition lay.

The democratic-mechanism itself was created not to limit political activity but to keep it going at an ever higher speed. Everyone feels the urge to act, even if the activity is phony.

It is noteworthy that the state has at the same time ceased to be associated with great hopes and is no longer viewed as a political object of worship. It seems rather to have lost the respect of the citizenry. "It can be considered a paradox that a liberal-democratic man expects more and more from the state that he values less and less." Nevertheless, the faith in the absolute superiority of liberal democracy remains unshaken.

Q: What does Legutko mean by the democratization of liberalism versus the introduction of liberalism into democracy?

Liberal democracy was said to differ from totalitarian democracy in one crucial respect: in the former, the citizens could not be "coerced to be free." In the last decades, however, we have been witnessing the emergence of a kind of liberal-democratic general will. This general will does not recognize geographical or political borders and reaches even into language, gestures, and thoughts. All in all, the liberal democrats, the socialists, and the conservatives are unanimous in their condemnations: they condemn racism, sexism, homophobia, discrimination, intolerance and all other sins listed in the liberal-democratic catechism while also participating in an unimaginable stretching of the meaning of these concepts and depriving them of explanatory power. "The groups which managed to capture...liberal phraseology and the logic that underlies it - such as homosexuals and feminists - have exerted a disproportionate influence on the government to the extent that the state institutions, including the courts, have taken upon themselves the test of breaking the resistance of less conscious and more stubborn groups."

Those who write and speak now face more limitations than they used to and institutions and communities that traditionally stood in the way of "coercion to freedom" are being dismantled. A similar pressure is exerted on education in general. Teachers can do less and less while supposedly they are being empowered more and more. The power is shifting to government officials who are ceding the power to subvert the influence of teachers and parents. "Coercion and spontaneity overlap in an almost perfect symbiosis." The universities are also undergoing the same process and it is tragic considering for centuries they were regarded as free industries of the human mind. Freedom is in retreat.

Consider the disappearance of the academic eccentric, a well-known personality, for centuries almost inseparably associated with the academic tradition and its peculiar atmosphere of the freedom of inquiry. (p. 69)

The coercion to freedom also occurs in the supranational institutions, especially the European Union. The EU believes itself a vanguard in relation to the rest of the population, acting on behalf of a society that has yet to emerge into existence. We have a parallel to communism in which there was the party which identified completely with the ultimate goal of socialism and the real people who were supposedly not fully aware of what is good for them. The EU mind has generated such a mental habit that every dissent is considered a blasphemous assault on the very idea of the European Union and the noble principles that constitute it.

Q: Why is the academic eccentric vanishing?

Chapter 3

Both communism and liberal democracy exhibited a paradoxical approach to politics in which they promised to reduce the role of politics in human life, yet induced politicization on a scale that is unknown in previous history. [Hence, we had President Obama speaking disparagingly about "politics" but complacently affirming his administration's litigation of nuns for refusing to pay for abortifacients]. Both Marx and Engels envisioned fanciful idylls and communist eschatology articulated a vision of a depoliticized society but reality was contrary. Indeed, politics intruded in to the smallest sectors of what was officially called the "developed socialist society."

Under communism, politics became the sole domain of the Party, primarily that of its highest authorities, above whom were the Soviet leaders as the ultimate political sovereign. From the rest of the public was expected only unceasing support for the Communist Party. Challenging the decisions of the Party authorities was considered "meddling in politics."

Marx and Engels formulated a fundamental class conflict with capitalism and predicted a progressive antagonism between the "bourgeoisie" and the "proletariat," but the reverse happened.

The paradoxical concept of socialist politics, where everything is political while everyone dreams of a world free from politics, is rooted in a paradox of the modern mind. On the one hand, modern man believes that making everything political is the highest form of manifestation of his dominion. Politicization is a consequence of his belief that everything that happens depends on his decision and that only his decision assigns meaning and value to things. It was assumed that man's growing power over life, society, knowledge, morality, and everything else would be concordant with the increasing presence of politics: more politics meant more instruments to make use of this power. (Cf. Pierre Manent's discussion of the preeminence of the will in modern man in *The City of Man*).

There was still a dream of a world without politics. It was thought that the final withering away of the state was to be the ultimate triumph of human aspiration to power. Legutko notes a serious problem with this thinking. If man reaches fulfillment by increasing his decision-making power, then it seems natural to assume that the desire for power lies deep within his nature. Why should it therefore be expected that this desire will vanish in some future system that allows the unfettered realization of human aspirations and free expression of human nature? What does man do with his powers?

Questions:

What should limit politics?

What did Legutko mean by asking if a communism without politics was doctrinally possible at all? (p. 74)

How do you think Legutko's treatment of will in the modern man compares with Pierre Manent's in *The City of Man*?

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What explains the egregious spectacle of liberal democracy and communism politicizing modern society while at the same time proclaiming loudly that they are pushing humanity to a politics free-world? How modern man came to this stage in liberal democracy is a complicated story. For a long time, liberalism and democracy had different approaches to politics. Liberalism was believed to describe human activity as largely nonpolitical and the human individual as a private person rather than a citizen. John Locke and Benjamin Constant were among the privatizers of the citizen. The freedom to participate in public life was supplanted by the individual freedom to pursue private goals.

It's not true, however, that liberal man is a nonpolitical animal, and over time this became more apparent. Locke and Constant were right to stress the importance of private matters, but this did not mean the receding of politics. Private matters, rather, became the major object of interest of politicians and thinkers.

"Liberalism is primarily a doctrine of power, both self-regarding and other-regarding: it aims to limit the power of other agents, and at the same time grants enormous prerogatives for itself" (p. 77). It attributes to itself the right to be more general, more spacious, and more universal than any of its rivals. Liberals will never give up this admittedly highest of political prerogatives to anyone and will never agree to share it. Until recently liberals have been saying that they are doctrinally transparent because they do not exclude anyone from the great society and they want to include everyone. They position themselves above all others and they always demand more power. Not only do they want to control the mechanisms of the great society, but all of its parts.

Nowadays, few liberals claim transparency. They fight hard for their power over minds and institutions. Liberalism has always had a strong sense of the enemy, a direct consequence of its dualistic perception of the world. Liberalism is unabashedly aggressive because it is determined to hunt down all non-liberal agents and ideas, which it treats as a threat to itself and humanity. The organizing principle of liberalism is dualism. The liberal claim has become that anyone who is for diversity must see the world dichotomously and whoever supports pluralism must favor liberalism. It is like saying, "In defense of pluralism, we give people the right to choose any available philosophy, provided that they choose liberalism."

Virtually everything intellectually intriguing that the Western mind produced in the field of philosophy had to be classified not only as monistic, but also as non-liberal. If we disregarded all monistic theories in the entire history of human thought, we would be left with very little. The implied effect of liberal pluralism is a gigantic purge of Western philosophy, bringing an inevitable degradation of the human mind.

The communists were the first before liberal democrats to use the dualistic perspective to fight the enemies, and they accustomed modern man to the practice of philosophical polemic in which the arguments of adversaries were evaluated in the light of political consequences. Liberals took up the practice, making this the first and most important question that they asked when they were faced with a statement, opinion or idea, whether it may be dangerous. By this was meant potentially contradicting liberal assumptions.

Liberalism's essentially intolerant and doctrinaire side has thus far been overlooked, and liberalism achieved a remarkable success in conquering people's minds.

In what way is liberalism a dualistic perception of the world? (See p. 78)

Democracy is the most political of all known regimes as none other engages so many people in civic responsibilities, and none other depends so much on them for its own existence. Democratic politicization is energized by a spirit of partisanship. Democratic society is political out of necessity because through elections it automatically gets involved in the struggle for power. The advantages of the political mechanism are many: smooth transition of power, a variety of competing programs to choose from, and hope for the losing parties within the system of winning in the next election. The emergence of liberal democracy strengthened the bad sides rather than the good sides of the democratic mold. Soon a more limited offering of party programs was available. A society may be large but that does not mean it is diversified. The spectacularly noisy bickering of political groups did

not change the herd-like nature of the demos. Whatever the initial diversity, democratic tendencies steer society toward some kind of uniformity.

Legutko describes the nature of democratic man as being "a rather uninspired being, not much interested in the world around him, closed within his own prejudices, and amenable to impulses of mimicry." The mechanism forming a uniformity of tastes has powerful, often absurd and yet seemingly irresistible waves.

Liberal democracy was thought to be capable of counteracting the uniformity but it has created its own orthodoxy. Less a forum for articulating positions and more a political mechanism now for the selection of people, organizations, and ideas in line with orthodoxy, it disappoints.

Equality gave the West the main moral impulse and determined the direction in which the political imagination pushed the fighters for a better world. This paramount status of equality clearly favored the Left much more than the political Right. There was a tremendous shift to the left in Europe and similarly in the United States, although in America we can still see a culture war continuing unresolved for decades, although the forces of the left seem to prevail gradually over those of the right. This formation of a broad political consensus in the Sixties generated a major influence on the character of the social and institutional changes in Europe. Now there is talk of "mainstream" politics and "mainstream" parties, and those outside of this "mainstream" are believed to be either mavericks and therefore not to be taken seriously, or fascists who should be politically eliminated (Trump).

Two major elements turned into a petrified set of ideas: a multiparty mechanism and universal suffrage. The revolution that shook the Western world in the Sixties did not happen under stifling authoritarianism but where the democratic system was firmly established. The revolution was not a triumph of classical democracy but rather an explosion of livid impatience at the discipline of the democratic system. It became regarded as necessary to fight for a democracy that was more and more democratic as well as liberal, and the system, it was allowed, could be manipulated to bring about this norm and indisputable benefit.

Is there something about the democratic mold which makes democratic man tend to be incurious, "a rather uninspired being, not much interested in the world around him, closed within his own prejudices, and amenable to impulses of mimicry" (p. 82) If so, what is it? If this is true, then special care and deliberate practices would seem in order to inure ourselves against the deformation of the mold. What sort of practices might help in this regard?

4

The crowning achievement of the changes in the perception of democratic politics was the European Union. For the majority of Europeans today, World War II is a closed stage of history, both in terms of individual human biography and because it has been judged to belong to the world of the past with no connection to the present. However, the revolution of the Sixties is still a living experience, complete with a social mythology received and relived by the younger generations. The goal of European integration has been taken over by incurious apparatchiks and bureaucrats who do not speak like their predecessors of seeking a perpetual peace, but who rather seek to construct a federal super-state. "The European Union reflects the order and the spirit of liberal democracy in its most degenerate version" (87). There are no clear mechanisms for the transmission of power, no institutionalized ways

for voters to affect the direction in which the EU should go.

The European Union was not deliberately created as an anti-democratic system but as a hyper-democratic or hyper-liberal-democratic project. The liberal democrats at the helm believe themselves to be the embodiment, the quintessence, and the fundamental guarantee of the liberal-democratic order. They regard the Parliament, where the same cartel has ruled for years without opposition, as better than national parliaments, where there is usually an opposition. The mind of the model EU politician has been conditioned in such a way that any dissident move to the right from the mainstream must meet with the most severe condemnation.

The EU is a kind of elite government, a liberal-democratic government of the European aristocracy. Both the portrayal of the EU as a majoritarian democracy and as the rule of enlightened aristocracy reflect well the internal logic of the system. The shift of the mainstream to the left with a simultaneous rapprochement between left and right came into being in nation-states. The public never questioned the rule of the mainstream in recent "undemocratic" moves.

A remedy must come from the nation-states: a dethronement of the mainstream and the breaking of the liberal-democratic monopoly. Otherwise, the EU will not change by its own will and the majority of Europeans will continue to cling to the belief that the EU is a more or less accurate emanation of the soul of today's Europe.

What are your reactions to Legutko's characterizations of recent history in Europe and the West, and in his depiction in the nature and character of the European Parliament and European Union?

What is the significance of the European Union for today's democratic liberal order?

(Legutko's remarks bring to the fore for me a sense of the importance of being informed about the EU, and properly assessing and reflecting on its significance in the present order. I was reminded of an article by R.R. Reno in *First Things* May 2017 called "Return of the Strong Gods" in which he predicts an eventual clash between the establishment and populism, possibly brought on by a recession that would attend the election of a right wing candidate as a "violation of human rights."

Reno not long ago reflected to some extent on Legutko's book in an editorial or two. I also feel a heightened desire to finish Chantal Delsol's trilogy of ISI books by reading *Unjust Justice: Against the Tyranny of International Law*, which I suspect has many insights related to Legutko's here).

Though liberal and democratic institutions gave lip service to the acceptance of free nonpolitical self-organization of communities, this was invalidated by a much stronger tendency to perform a deep political restructuring. What in actuality happened was an atrophy of social spontaneity and a hypertrophy of politics. In the liberal tradition, communities such as family and nation were not believed to have independent existence and were looked at individualistically with suspicion. Similar strong pressure to restructure communities and ultimately to weaken their roles did not exist in the democratic tradition as long as the democratic mechanisms were limited to the emergence, the maintenance, and the transfer of power in the government. After the ascendancy of liberal democracy, the goal of the elected authority became the liberalization of society, or the harmonization of the whole

of society with the political system.

Communists also disliked communities for their alleged anachronism. "Just as communism was not possible with families adhering to the feudal-patriarchal system, so liberal democracy is believed to be incomplete and unsuccessful with schools respecting traditional moral and cultural authoritarianism. The arguments are analogous."

When it became largely acknowledged that the system of liberal democracy was destined not only to secure a smooth transfer of power from one government to another, but to organize the entire fabric of society, communities became a natural object of critique and then open attack.

Feminist ideology proclaimed that women are united by a special feeling of togetherness and solidarity they called a sisterhood. The way women were defined was a close equivalent of Marx's proletariat. They were believed to form a transnational political group. "Women" thus defined, like "proletariat," does not denote an actual existing community. A real woman living in a real society, is politically not to be trusted because she deviates too much from the political model. In fact, a non-feminist woman is not a woman at all.

Another example of the bringing into existence of certain groups by giving them a political identity is the example of homosexuals, who by political fiat gained a status of a transnational movement fighting for power and political influence. Multiculturalism is nothing more than a program to build a society in which there exists not many cultures, but many political identities attached to many real or, more often, imagined collectives. It has little to do with historically constituted communities but it is rather a program of the politicization of certain groups that could radically change the fabric of society.

Once the social groups are turned into political parties, they lose their communal character. The word "multiculturalism" as used today despite numerous criticisms and ridicule, represents another hoax that liberal democracy has created and that it has turned out to be surprisingly effective. Multiculturalism is not about culture but about politics and it is mono rather than multi.

Feminism is now not the "culture" of feminists but the political platform espoused by governments, the EU, etc. and the ideology of homosexuality is no longer in the hand of homosexual activists and their organizations.

The result of the accumulation of these catchphrases by the mainstream was the homogenization of the modern world.

Today the modern state openly and proudly carries out the policy of social engineering, intervening deeply in the lives of communities while enjoying total impunity. The law is becoming a sword against unresponsiveness to aggressive social restructuring. Like under communism, the law has become an engine for the transformation of the present into the future rather than an impartial judiciary. Groups deemed to deserve special protection are allowed into the inner circle of those officially anointed as oppressed.

If we recognize "women" and "homosexuals" as communities are false constructs of political imagination, what implications does this have for our discourse on topics related to these categories?

Democracy differs from communism in that the focus in it is primarily on groups and cooperation is a paramount category. However, the dialogue in liberal democracy has as its aim to maintain the domination of the mainstream and not to undermine it. Once the belief that the liberal-democratic system has a wonderful cooperative nature takes hold, politics comes to mean the mutually respectful cooperation of parties and the opposite is conflict that leads to discrimination, unjust domination, and war. Effective politics then becomes a comprehensive, ever expanding task to ensure the preconditions on which cooperation is dependent. This explains the rise of the phenomenon of political correctness, which is simply the view that the duty of citizens of the liberal-democratic society is to participate in the great collective enterprise, where there is total cooperation on all levels.

The state is entrusted with the task of incessantly working to impose and improve cooperation policies by removing all real and potential barriers, creating a favorable legal environment, and reshaping public space and education in such a way that the people's minds internalize the rules of politically correct thinking. The price of such an undertaking is that there is no limits to the state's interference in people's lives.

Language came to be viewed as the main political weapon used by the oppressors against the oppressed. Calling a homosexual a faggot is now formulated as an act of participation in the exclusion of homosexuals from the democratic cooperation.

Communism has a comparably strong sense of political evil, originating from an internal act of treason and a profound inability to accept the communist message. They have therapeutic programs to help sinners abandon bad habits and to "raise" their consciousness. Democratic liberals took over even the rhetoric of "raising consciousness," despite its negative historical connotations.

It is considered everyone's responsibility, not just the government, to oversee the rules of cooperation and fight against non-collaborative groups [the Savages]. A significant role is assigned to intellectuals for tracking. They are to first identify a criminal thought and then to warn against the slippery slope that leads from this thought to political domination. Liberal democracy, like communism, produces large numbers of lumpen-intellectuals who ecstatically get involved in tracking disloyalty and fostering a new orthodoxy.

In both communism and liberal democracy, the incidental is treated as a systemic problem, which really means that whatever happens is systemic and nothing is incidental to the system. Harassing people for incidentals is then ennobled as an act of guardians who, in their purity, carry on their shoulders the responsibility for the future of liberal democracy worldwide. The publication of a poem under communism was enough to put the whole Politburo on the alert. (Osip Mandelstam's poem about Stalin). Trackers of traitors to liberal democracy easily succumb to the belief that they are a brave small group struggling dauntlessly against an overwhelming enemy. Similarly, under communism, people were made to believe they were involved in a never-ending fight against the enemy. They are deluded in thinking that they are a brave minority. A strange sense of comfort is induced in a situation where they have the most powerful political tools in today's world but at the same time pride themselves in their courage and decency.

Perhaps liberal-democratic man's politicization of his privacy is his main contribution to the change in thinking about politics. He has politicized marriage, family relations, communal life, language, bathrooms and showers. (Freud said anatomy is destiny but he did not have his consciousness raised to the current heights of gender ideology).

The family was always considered the most serious obstacle to the task of building a new society. In modern times, the family, while not particularly respected by philosophers of liberal and democratic persuasions, was not an object of systematic attack. The communists were far more outspoken in arguments referring to sex and the sex instinct.

For the real great sexual revolution, the West had to wait until the Sixties. This revolution combined two things. First, it repeated the communist plan to overthrow the repressive power structures, including marriage and family. This time, though, its slogans of sexual liberation mobilized millions of people. The message was that sexual impulses had been so far suppressed, that the suppression had been deleterious, and that once sex was liberated life would be so much better. This concept received its revolutionary form from Herbert Marcuse, who explained how to combine sexual liberation with a political struggle to overthrow the system. He portrayed a diabolical image of modern capitalism as able to neutralize all the revolutionary movements. Sex he portrayed as the only power in man and society, inherently subversive and as yet uncontrolled by the Man. Sex itself became the paramount political weapon.

The sexual revolution was the culmination of growing consumerism in Western societies.

Perhaps the most momentous aspect of the victory was that the concept of happiness fell out of use and was eventually equated erroneously with pleasure. Originally happiness was a quality that one could attribute to an entire life, not to an episode or moments. The sexual revolution is arguably the most extreme manifestation of the episodic nature of man. To surrender one's life to sexual pleasure meant once and for all abandoning any attempt to give one's existence a unifying meaning.

In classical ethics pleasures were feared because they not only do not have a self-mitigating mechanism, but are likely, when unchecked, to do away with external mitigating measures. With the growth of consumerism this fear evaporated. The cult of pleasure was pushed to a new low. Free sex was made out to stand for spontaneity against soulless technology. As before, what was intended as a plan to cleanse the world of politics ushered in politicization on a scale that is unprecedented in liberal-democratic societies.

The sexual utopia did not manifest itself although, on the other hand, sex was politicized and it became a part of the official agenda of the state and its institutions. Contemporary literature describing the condition of sexually liberated man depicts a rather gloomy picture of despair and senselessness. The only thing that can happen to people and societies going along this road is a continuation of the same sexual policy, which, perpetuated by a bureaucratic routine, will become even more ruthless.