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REFLECTIONS ON WESTERN SELF-DECONSTRUCTION: EXTINCTION VIA LIBERAL OPENNESS

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It seems that instead of having joined the West we have joined a postmodern project of reducing the West to the rest.[1] Western political and intellectual elites are now competing among themselves in Western self-abasement and self-effacement, in making anything smacking of the West passé and odious. We are supposed to be "open" societies welcoming the Other while relentlessly rooting out parochial Western arrogance. The Soviet empire has collapsed, communism in Eastern Europe dismantled, and the communist ideology seems bankrupt. And yet we are ever more surrounded by the rhetoric of the savagery of capitalism and its social injustice. The rhetoric is coming from the West, updated with such buzzwords as "exclusion" and "inclusion", "marginalization" and "empowerment". The basic idea is that leaving some people "behind" or "excluded" is unacceptable, that we should be open to the "marginalized" both inside and outside our societies. This openness is touted as the superior virtue of advanced societies, trumping all ancient virtues. Consider a sample of episodes testifying to the prevalence of this mindset.

Shortly after 9/11 the Prime Minister of Italy, Silvio Berlusconi, made a statement which included this bromide: "We must be aware of the superiority of our civilization, a system that has guaranteed well-being, respect for human rights and – in contrast with Islamic countries – respect for religious and political rights." Yet it turned out that this was a major gaffe. A flock of European politicians rushed to denounce him. The Belgian Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt, said: "I can hardly believe that the Italian Prime Minister made such statements." Spokesman for the European Commission, Jean-Christophe Filori, added: "We certainly don't share the views expressed by Mr Berlusconi." Italy's center-left opposition spokesman Giovanni Berlinguer called the words "eccentric and dangerous". Within days, Berlusconi was forced to withdraw.[2] If this was hypocrisy, we should bear in mind that hypocrisy is the tribute vice pays to virtue. And the virtue in question seems to be that of taking no pride in our own civilization. Columnist Diana West wonders, "Five years after the attack on Pearl Harbor, World War II was over, Japan and Germany vanquished. Five years after September 11, we still speculate as to who, or what, our enemy is."[3] Why? In the official rhetoric, we are waging a "war on terror". The blatantly lame euphemism seems to be used in order to avoid naming the enemy: "To the progressive mind, the very concept of "the enemy" is obsolescent: there are no enemies, just friends whose grievances we haven't yet accommodated" (Steyn 2006: 200). Playwright Harold Pinter, now winner of the Nobel Prize in literature, made the following remark in a speech on *September 10, 2001*: America, he said, "is now the most dangerous power the world has ever known – the authentic 'rogue state'… [it has] what can accurately be described as a vast gulag – 2 million prisoners in fact – a remarkable proportion of them black".[4]

Consider the responses to 9/11 of Europe's philosophical luminaries. For Jean Baudrillard, the destruction of the Twin Towers was "the absolute event, the 'mother' of all events" … "they [the assailants] did it, but we wished for it. … Terrorism is immoral, and it responds to a globalization that is itself immoral" (Baudrillard 2002: 134). The sophisticated Jacques Derrida did a bit of deconstruction. "We are perhaps wrong to assume so quickly that all terrorism is voluntary, conscious, organized, deliberate, intentionally calculated: there are historical and political 'situations' where terror operates … as if by itself, as the simple result of some apparatus, because of the relations of force in place, without anyone … being really conscious

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[2] "Furor at Berlusconi Remark on West's Superiority", *The New York Times*, Serptember 28, 2001.

[3] West, Diana, "Are we in denial?" *The Washington Times*, September 8, 2006.

[4] Speech to the University of Florence by Harold Pinter (10th September 2001) http://www.haroldpinter.org/home/florence.html

of it or feeling itself responsible for it". And he went on: "Can't one terrorize without killing?" "Can't 'letting die', 'not wanting to know that one is letting others die'– hundreds of millions of human beings, from hunger, AIDS, lack of medical treatment, and so on – also be a part of a 'more or less' conscious and deliberate terrorist strategy?" (Borradori 2003: 107-108). The implied suggestion is that the terrorists acted in legitimate self-defense – against the terror of America's omission. Jürgen Habermas, another luminary, just as readily identified the root causes of the attacks: "Without the political taming of an unbounded capitalism, the devastating stratification of world society will remain intractable. The disparities in the dynamic of world economic development would have to at least be balanced out regarding their most destructive consequences – the deprivation and misery of complete regions and continents comes to mind" (Borradori 2003: 36). Since America is quintessentially associated with the evils of "unbounded capitalism", the attacks were at least explicable, if not justifiable. The implied solution seems to be that of redistributing wealth from the West to the rest.

To take another example, consider why Christianity was not included in the list of European values in the drafted EU Constitution? Presumably because this would have meant discrimination against other religions, which is incompatible with openness, the supreme value of enlightened Europe. Presumably all religions and all Gods are equal, so that the Christian commandment "Do not have any other gods before me" is unacceptably discriminatory. British columnist Melanie Phillips draws attention to the case of an evangelical Christian campaigner, Stephen Green, who was arrested and charged with "using insulting words". What did he do? He was trying to hand out leaflets at a gay rally in Cardiff. What was printed on those leaflets? None other than quotations from the Bible saying that homosexuality is a sin. Phillips comments: "by doing nothing more than upholding a fundamental tenet of Christianity, he was treated like a criminal. And yet at the same time, the police are still studiously refusing to act against Islamic zealots preaching hatred and incitement against the West."[5]

These examples of Western self-flagellation could be multiplied indefinitely. It is extremely difficult to find examples of Western elites publicly and unequivocally endorsing traditional Western values and institutions. Why? Because such an endorsement runs the risk of being condemned as bigotry. Any Western chest beating, by contrast, is at most ridiculed as "political correctness" (PC) gone too far. The presumption is that the PC mindset is the right one, even if sometimes it runs amok.

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[5] Phillips, Melanie, "How Britain is Turning Christianity into a Crime", *Daily Mail*, 7 September 2006.

The underlying ideology

There is a pervasive ideology behind all this that might be dubbed as progressive, compassionate or sentimental liberalism. It is the ideology of those who perceive the traditional bourgeois society as mired in all kinds of oppressive practices, prejudices and stereotypes. They want the society to become more caring, more tolerant and more inclusive. Their compassionate efforts are now directed not only at the traditional targets such as the poor and the sick, but also at children, old people, women, sexual and racial minorities, illegal aliens, exotic cultures, rare animal kinds, depleting rain forests – an infinite series of both human and non-human beings. All of them are accorded the status of "the downtrodden and oppressed", "the weak and voiceless", a status that allows them to demand remedies from the powerful and guilty ones. "Compassion" is the battle cry in contemporary Western politics. The compassionate agenda has taken hold of all moral heights and it rules without any serious contenders, left or right on the political spectrum.

Compassion, in this agenda, is not merely a virtue, a supererogatory duty, but a matter of justice, to be implemented with Caesar's sword. The basic idea is that the "wretched of the earth" are such through no fault of their own, but because of the society lacking in social justice. The world of the compassionate is morally flat: all people are worthy of equal respect, all beliefs are equally worthy of attention, all ways of life are equally welcome, all cultures are equally valuable and a barbarian is the man "who believes in barbarism in the first place" (Finkielkraut 1995: 58). The compassionate liberal is open to everything and "has no enemy other than the man who is not open to everything" (Bloom 1987: 27). Since for him all people are basically equal, any factual inequality is a case of remediable injustice as well as an indictment on the society putting up with it. Again, since for him "people are naturally good and … do evil because of corrupting external influences", dealing with evil is tantamount to the elimination of these influences (Kekes 1997: 38).

The compassionate liberal conceives his mission as a struggle against any discrimination, intolerance, inequality, hierarchy and exclusion. Now, since a free society spontaneously evolves all kinds of boundaries, exclusions and hierarchies, he is always hectically busy. He tries to enrich the poor at the expense of the rich; to equalize men's and women's opportunities; to confer children the right to criticize the parents; to introduce race quotas at the universities; to desegregate the schools; to ban homosexuals' discrimination in the labor market, to protect the foxes from blood-thirsty hunters, etc., etc. In short, he wants to make the world flat: to put down all natural boundaries, destroy all hierarchies, traditional mores, manners, ties of loyalty, cultural and ethnic particularity, even national sovereignty. In this he takes

the stance of "aggressive tolerance" towards the dominant ethnicity, culture, tradition, morals and customs – demanding their openness to the outsiders. He wants the entire world to begin anew at the starting line of equal opportunities. Fearful of the unequal results at the finishing line he must vigilantly watch social developments and be ready to take measures against the recreation of inequalities and the emergence of new forms of exclusion and discrimination. In short, he is seeping with political energy and is truly an agent of the "permanent revolution". He is the driving impetus behind the "progressive" movements of multiculturalism, feminism, anti-racism, postcolonialism and environmentalism.

In these times he is conveniently postmodern: he proclaims the equivalence of all beliefs and values, while at the same time he denies the legitimacy of the beliefs and values dominant in the West – because of their dominance. Postmodernists are aptly described by the phrase "philosophers of suspicion", which Paul Ricoeur used with respect of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. They share the conviction that anything said or done in Western societies is mere window-dressing, a camouflage hiding something wrongful or shameful. Wherever they direct their critical gaze they see domination, oppression and fraud. The social world for them is an arena of incessant struggle in which they see only the winners and the losers, the oppressors and the oppressed, the manipulators and the manipulated – even when facing apparently voluntary relations. The social world, as they see it, is a zero sum game: anyone's gain is someone's loss. The unquestioned assumption is that the better off are somehow to blame for the mire into which other parts of humanity can sink and that they should therefore do something about it.

The archetype of this posturing is Marx's theory of class antagonism treating the whole history of mankind as the story of the struggle between the exploiters and the exploited. In this struggle all claims to truth or justice, if put forward by bourgeois "reactionaries", are mere ploys of the powerful. "Dominant ideas in any society are always the ideas of the ruling class" is the relativist thesis of *The Communist Manifesto*. Truth and justice can only be accessible to an agent whose exceptional position allows the transcendence of the struggle. This is the position accorded to the proletariat, the "universal class" of those who have nothing to lose but their chains. By a revolutionary uprising, the proletariat gains not only its own freedom, but also emancipates humanity from the curse of class antagonism. The revolutionary violence as envisaged by Marx is conceived as a retribution, as a response of the oppressed to hidden ("structural") coercion. Although bourgeois societies would not allow open coercion and their citizens are formally free, the facade is fraudulent, since it masks the "exploitation of labor". The wage earners, even if voluntarily joining the labor market, are in reality victims of coercion,

for the capitalists only pay them the costs of reproducing their labor power and expropriate the rest of the value created. The system of wage labor is a subtle form of slavery and should be abolished. Only by destroying the system – by abolishing the private ownership of the means of production – the international proletariat can lead humanity to the "realm of freedom".

As the proletariat failed to live up to the expectations in the West, "progressive" thinkers began looking for other agents of emancipation, investing their hopes in the "liberation" movements of women, racial minorities, student rebels ("flower-children"), homosexuals, and environmentalists, to name but a few. The Marxian proletariat was repeatedly replaced with other agents of change in the hope that one or another would finally achieve a radical social transformation. After the breakdown of the Marxist theory of labor exploitation, attempts at finding faults with capitalism continued unabated. The forms of capitalist oppression allegedly discovered by the critics came to be ever more refined. One can mention Gramsci's theories of hegemony that saw bourgeois oppression buttressed by Christianity and traditional culture and the Frankfurt school's attempt to graft Freud on Marxism and to trace the oppressive nature of the bourgeois society to the institution of the family and "the repressive order of procreative sexuality" (Marcuse). One should also mention the cultural revolution of the 1960's, with its message that one could be an authentic human only by flouting all of society's mores. The purpose of the revolution was to become "unrepressed" by overturning tradition, conceived as an illegitimate means of control and domination.[6]

Probably the farthest advances in this direction were made by the classics of postmodernism. In his studies of the history of discipline in prisons and madhouses, Michael Foucault stressed the power of the guards and the experts in shaping inmates' behavior and eliminating deviancy. The distinction between the norm and deviancy has, according to Foucault, no natural or objective basis; the "experts" impose it. The knowledge the experts boast is thus mere imposition of their will constituting an act of violence. By drawing analogies between the prison and other social institutions, Foucault insinuates that the bourgeois society as a whole is but a prison (or a madhouse) writ large. The normal bourgeois is a "normalized" creature. The history of modernity (coterminous with the emergence of bourgeois societies) is a history of subtle subjugation. The older regimes of brutal violence and public executions have been gradually replaced by the more refined, yet more efficient "discursive regime" of the knowledge/power tandem. The regime subjugates and "normalizes" the individual much more effectively than primordial despotism. Roger Bacon's aphorism "knowledge is power" was an expression of early modern belief that knowledge was liberating, as

[6] For a penetrating dissection of Gramsci and Marcuse see: Kolakowski 1981, Ch. VI and XI.

it provided the means of subjecting the stingy nature to mankind's needs. Foucault reversed its meaning: knowledge brings subjugation, suppression, powerlessness and injustice: "all knowledge rests upon injustice … the instinct for knowledge is malicious (something murderous, opposed to the happiness of mankind)" (Foucault 1984: 95). Reason, knowledge and truth are mere artifices of a repressive "discursive regime". The aura of truth that surrounds the various forms of hegemony is a mirage, and reason itself is but an expression of hegemony. What is needed is the liberation from reason itself, and its agent can only be the antithesis of the normalized bourgeois – a madman, a deviant, a criminal.

Jacques Derrida holds a similar position. His guiding idea is that every structure that organizes our experience and action is constructed and maintained through acts of arbitrary exclusion. By applying the method of "deconstruction" he attempts to discredit thought and reason as mere products of the male arrogance of the West having no objective basis in reality. The Western „(phallo)logocentric" categories of thought are products of arbitrary acts of dichotomization and hierarchization; they constitute a hierarchical system with "identity" given priority over "otherness", with the "other" pushed to the margins. Logocentric thought is thus a species of coercion and oppression. Deconstruction is emancipation, for it lays bare all those exclusions and evasions that have been used to marginalize the „other". Derrida is also intent on liberating the social "other" – the ostracized, the vagrant, and the alien. They are to be empowered and brought back from the margins of society closer to the core.

Now, consider what these endeavors at demarginalization really involve in the social sphere. Since any particular society is constituted precisely by what it excludes and marginalizes (in this sense there can be no completely open societies), the demands to demarginalize the "Other" are really demands to erase all those boundaries that define the bourgeois order of Western societies. Indeed, all emancipatory doctrines share this underlying intention – to discredit and ultimately to destroy the allegedly unjust (exploitative, oppressive, discriminatory) order of the West. Paraphrasing Marx, their ultimate intent is not to explain the world but to change it. Just like their precursor, Marxism, they are not explanatory theories but aggressively practical doctrines: postmodern criticism "seeks not to find the foundation and the conditions of truth but to exercise power for the purpose of social change" (Lentricchia 1983: 12). Foucault and Derrida both acknowledge the ultimately Marxist, or Marxoid, intention behind their endeavors: "If I had known the Frankfurt School at the right time, I would have spared a lot of work", writes Foucault. In an interview in 1978 Foucault castigated industrial capitalism as "the harshest, most savage, most selfish, most dishonest,

oppressive society one could possibly imagine."[7] Derrida, too, is quite explicit: "deconstruction has never had any sense or interest, at least in my eyes, except as a radicalization, which is to say also *in the tradition of* a certain Marxism, in a certain spirit of Marxism" (Derrida 1996: 92). One should notice a tension, even a contradiction, in the stance of the debunkers. Having exposed the 'discursive regime' as a mere ploy of those wielding power they find themselves in the peculiar position – of being above the fray – that is impossible by their own lights. The postmodern deconstruction thus seems to be an absolutist agenda waged by means of selective relativism.

From economic to cultural egalitarianism

This Marxoid idea of emancipation is radically different from the idea of individual liberty on which the bourgeois societies were initially built. Early modern political philosophers, Hobbes and Locke, were primarily concerned with the absolute power of the sovereign and set themselves the task of limiting its powers. In their theoretical constructions, the individuals' right of self-defense is merely delegated to the sovereign; his power is limited to the task of making secure an individual's life, liberty and property. Political power, even if monopolistic, is thus limited – it can only be rightfully used in retaliation to domestic and foreign aggression. The purpose of a political body and the state as its agent is a strictly negative one; specifically, the state bears no responsibility for the citizens' well being, for their successes or failures in life. This is what the nonpolitical "civil" society is for. Liberty is ultimately freedom from coercion, including coercive intrusions by the state into civil society. All classical liberals have shared this negative conception of freedom with the complementary idea of a "night watchman" state. Emancipatory doctrines, by contrast, used the concept in a much looser way; for them, freedom ultimately meant freedom from all constraints. In fact, it was transformed into the concept of power (freedom as empowerment) dubbed as "positive" freedom. On this conception, a free person is not at all free, if, for example, he has no money to buy a loaf of bread. By giving him the money, the state could enhance his freedom. In other words, the state has the potential of becoming an agent of liberation, of taking over the emancipatory role of the proletariat. Indeed, the transformation was what Jacques Barzun called "the Great Shift" taking place by the end of the 19th century, "the reversal of liberalism into its opposite" (Barzun 2000: 688).

The main concern of early progressives was economic inequality. Today's progressives are concerned with much broader issues of exclusion and discrimination. In fact, because of the dismal failure of economic egalitarianism,

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[7] Cited in Afary; Anderson 2005: 185.

they have largely shifted their egalitarian concerns away from the economic sphere to the cultural/moral sphere and sought the advancement of culturally "oppressed" or "marginalized" groups. The result is what some authors call "cultural Marxism" which entails the same kind of egalitarian solutions as existed under older socialism. Just as the older exploiting classes had to be expropriated to achieve social justice, the oppressed cultural groups are to be emancipated by dragging down their cultural oppressors. Aaron Wildavsky dubbed this attitude "radical egalitarianism", by which he meant "not only an approach to the distribution of economic resources, but … the idea of a culture or way of life devoted to diminishing differences among people [or] the belief in the moral virtue of diminishing differences among people of varying incomes, genders, races, sexual preferences and power. … Distinctions are seen as the beginnings of inequality, an hierarchical ordering of the world. Consequently egalitarians guard against such differentiation and seek to erode it wherever possible" (Wildavsky 1991: 235, xviii).[8]

The feminist author Nancy Fraser puts the idea this way: "The 'struggle for recognition' is fast becoming the paradigmatic form of political conflict in the late twentieth century. Demands for 'recognition of difference' fuel struggles of groups mobilised under the banners of nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality. In these 'postsocialist' conflicts, group identity supplants class interest as the chief medium of political mobilisation. Cultural domination supplants exploitation as the fundamental injustice. And cultural recognition displaces socioeconomic redistribution as the remedy for injustice and the goal of political struggle" (Fraser 1995: 68). In this new egalitarianism, cultural domination is analyzed along the lines of the Marxist analysis of "class dictatorship": e.g., racism is not regarded as a social attitude or philosophical belief, but is considered as the objective expression of an inequality of power that is outside individual control. In this analysis, an individual does not have to be racially prejudiced to participate in racial oppression, but merely to occupy a "privileged" position in the allegedly unjust system. Racism is thus alleged to be "systemic", or "institutional", i.e., built into the very structure of bourgeois societies. In this perspective, no escape from racism is ultimately possible without the radical overhaul of the society.

The expansion of emancipatory efforts to the cultural sphere means that the "structural violence" previously attributed to the economic "base" of the bourgeois society is now also attributed to its "superstructure" i.e., to the web of its customs, traditions, loyalties, gender roles, etc. The expansion of the scope of allegedly oppressive phenomena goes hand in hand with the widening and loosening of the criteria of oppression. While the earlier progressives tried to base their demands on some supposedly scientific theories of exploitation

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[8] See also: Gottfried 2005, passim.

(rooted in the labor theory of value), in these times of postmodern relativism it suffices to appeal to "felt discrimination" in order to start clamoring about exclusion and to demand inclusion. In practice, any discontent voiced by a homogeneous group is now accepted as evidence that the group has a grievance worthy of political concern. Any group that succeeds at obtaining the status of "discriminated against" comes to be treated as nearly sacred. It becomes the darling of political correctness, so that its detractors risk not only indictment for "insensitivity" but also harsh legal sanctions. This explains why a black man in America can say it loud "I am black and I am proud" and be cheered, while a white man can only say "I am white and I am proud" at the risk of being incarcerated. Again, in a curious twist, the former darling of progressive politics, the white working class, is no longer the object of the emancipatory concern. In the twentieth century, for progressives, the workers had been the exploited producers of wealth. "By the twenty-first, its male members were sexist, racist homophobes; cultural conservatives suspected of harbouring unsavory patriotic feelings. They went from being the salt of the earth to the scum of the earth in three generations" (Cohen 2007: 196). (Likewise in America, they are now the "rednecks".) The failure of economic Marxism redounded to the detriment of its former darlings.

The issue of homosexuality is another illustration of how emancipation works. Christians have traditionally condemned homosexuality as a grave sin. However, with homosexuals obtaining the protected status of a discriminated group, such criticism has been outlawed in many Western countries. Nowadays a Christian daring to castigate someone as a sodomite or refusing to employ him risks serious legal consequences. Paradoxically, though inevitably, the policy of gay inclusion turned out to be a policy of Christian exclusion. Paradoxically, since the policy was undertaken in the name of equal treatment; inevitably, since the inclusion could only be achieved by crushing the resistance of the excluders. If this is a double standard, then double standards are the only means of achieving the goals of progressive policies, for the equality in question can only be pursued by treating people *unequally*. Compare: for the classical liberal, equality before the law inevitably redounds to all kinds of acceptable natural inequality and hierarchy, whereas for the progressive liberal, just as for the leftist, the natural inequality and hierarchy that emerge from formal equality represent an unacceptable condition, so that "real" equality must involve the destruction of all natural hierarchies.

The expansion of emancipatory efforts, abetted by such slogans as "the personal is political", leads to an ever more intrusive state, allegedly benign because liberal, and yet in fact ever more oppressive and ultimately totalitarian. Indeed, to attain and to maintain a society of individuals equal in all respects, though naturally unequal, you need an overpowering intrusive

state ready for crushing all extant and reemerging inequalities. That liberals must take this overpowering position in order to bring about equal liberty is one of the central liberal contradictions. Since liberals are against unequal power relationships, they present themselves as liberators come to end inequality, rather than as power wielders. The result is that liberal power is nearly invisible and is thus more sinister than traditional power relations it is replacing. It is because of the prevailing cult of tolerance, non-discrimination and non-judgmentalism that the Western liberal state has become the juggernaut of political correctness riding roughshod over the fabric of the bourgeois society.

Assault on the civil society

Fighting discrimination and exclusion in ever-new corners of social life has become the foremost pursuit of the progressive social critic and political activist. Since for him all people are basically equal (equally good, worthy of respect), no factual inequality or exclusion is ever deserved or justified. Thus the poor are excluded from lavish consumption not because of individual failure or simply of bad luck, but because of the unjust capitalist principles of wealth distribution. Sexual minorities are discriminated against not because most people do not want to deal with them, but because society is dominated by the patriarchal order imposed by heterosexual males, under which "gays and lesbians suffer from heterosexism" (Fraser 1995: 78). The "Third World" is mired in poverty and disease not because of its barbarian habits, but because of the "trauma of colonialism". The list is open-ended and constantly expanding. The logic of the emancipatory drive is that of shifting the burden of the plight of the excluded (the poor, the homosexuals, the colored, non-Westerners, etc.) onto the alleged excluders (the rich, the heterosexuals, the whites, the Westerners, etc). Cowered by the dominant ideology of liberal compassion the latter meekly shoulder it.

The emancipatory drive and the political activism inspired by it create a political market of social compassion. In this market, sentimental activists and cynical political entrepreneurs ("limousine liberals") compete for victims of discrimination and for agendas of social inclusion. The activists see the objects of their concern as victims of the "system" they themselves inhabit, as abject, powerless and merely receptive beings, like children. This is why their sentimentalism is always accompanied by paternalist arrogance. Paternalism, however, only gives rise to infantilism, for the more the alleged victims are released from the necessity of taking care for themselves, the more childlike, dependent and burdensome they become. Welfare breeds greater need for welfare. It also creates incentives for the emergence of new

claimants for compassion, as new victim groups are elbowing their way – are pushed by the activists – into the public arena with new "grievances". All of this is illustrative of Charles Murray's "law of unintended rewards": "Any social transfer increases the net value of being in the condition that prompted the transfer" (Murray 1984: 212). As a result of subsidizing individuals because they are poor, there will be more poverty; by subsidizing people because they are unemployed, more unemployment will be created; supporting single mothers will lead to an increase in single motherhood. In short, social welfare programs are ultimately counterproductive. They are also demoralizing, as they tend to reward the misfit and to punish the successful, thus eroding the moral fiber of the society.

Paradoxically, though inevitably, the only winners in the game are political entrepreneurs. They need the victims of the system, for only by attending to their alleged grievances they gain or keep their own elevated moral grounds. They need to have a constant or even growing supply of them in order to use them as moral shields in the struggle for political clout and power. "Groups disliked, distrusted, or feared by the general public are particularly eligible to become mascots who symbolize the superior wisdom and virtue of the anointed" (Sowell 1995: 149). The threshold of grievance has to be lowered continually in order to justify further crusading and, of course, to justify the lofty status of "the anointed" themselves. Progressive politics combined with elitism is a seductive mix. To hunt for new types of grievances, to set the victims and the victimizers against each other, to divide and conquer – this is the winning strategy of the players in the game of social compassion. As Bernard de Jouvenel noticed long ago, "redistribution is in effect far less a redistribution of free income from the richer to the poorer, as we imagined, than a redistribution of power from the individual to the State" (1952: 179). Repeated failures of social programs make no impression on their proponents, for they are in command of the moral high grounds as the "caring" and the "compassionate" ones. They are moral narcissists basking in their own good intentions.

John Rawls is an exemplary contemporary liberal. Assuming the basic equality of people, he considers any factual inequality as morally arbitrary. Postulating equal distribution of goods as the base line, he proposes the "difference principle" for dealing with factual inequality. According to the principle, social and economic inequality should be "regulated" so that it would serve the worst off. The principle is said to be an expression of "an undertaking to regard the distribution of natural abilities as a collective asset so that the more fortunate are to benefit only in ways that help those who have lost out" (Rawls 1971: 179). In other words, inequality can only be justified if it leads to lesser inequality. How far should the regulation go? Since after

any act of regulation there would emerge another group of the worst off, the process should continue as long as there is no worst off group, that is, when all and everyone is equally well-off. The end-result is the situation of social and economic equality. The problem is that the result can only be achieved by dumping property rights, that is, by destroying the basis of a free society. Marxism offered a short cut for this overdrawn procedure by proposing a revolutionary upheaval; Rawls prefers a step-by-step procedure to the same destination. So indeed, "liberals have no enemies to the left" (James Burnham). Current liberalism combines a very simple ultimate principle, equal freedom, with willingness to compromise with existing arrangements while the implications of that principle gradually transform the whole social order. That is what it means to say that liberalism is reformist, and that explains why liberals have a perpetual bad conscience with respect to leftists.

Rawls is chiefly concerned with economic inequality. However, the emancipatory agenda is now set on abolishing any inequality, ending all exclusion and discrimination. "Discrimination" has become a label to condemn and stigmatize as wrong any social situation where people express their diverse preferences for association with other people. But what is wrong with discrimination? Discrimination is a basic fact of life: everyone is constantly discriminating by choosing friends, spouses, business companions, employees, restaurants, clubs, churches. Discrimination in this sense, or freedom of association, is a basic liberty enjoyed by individuals in free societies. "Discrimination" in the pejorative sense is primarily applied to public officials (e.g., judges) if their decisions are perceived as biased and unfair, for in contrast to the private person an official is under an obligation not to follow personal preferences. However, in contemporary usage this pejorative meaning has been turned on its head: now a *private* person can be accused of discrimination if he refuses to rent an apartment to a Moslem or would not hire a self-declared homosexual.

Freedom of association is thus under a massive attack by the liberal state. On the one hand, the policy of "anti-discrimination" is intent on *compulsory integration*, erasing the boundaries that spontaneously evolve in people's private relations. On the other hand, with the prevailing cult of "multiculturalism" and the postmodern idea of the equivalence of all cultures, many Western countries promote non-assimilation or *compulsory segregation* of ethnic, cultural or religious minorities. By urging and implementing compulsory integration (and segregation), sentimental liberalism is attacking the spontaneous social order that evolves on the basis of property rights and freedom of association. As Paul Gottfried laments, this is "current liberalism's assault on what the old liberals called civil society" (Gottfried 1998: 25). Specifically, current liberalism gives liberty to speech and actions that undermine

traditional Western order, while it restrains speech and actions defending that order. Western societies are now so saturated with this PC ideology that any attempt to question its tenets or to contest their value is met with accusations of racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia, Eurocentrism, imperialism, bigotry, intolerance or insensitivity, with the charge of fascism topping them all. If this is Orwellian thought control, it is the necessary outcome of emancipatory liberalism.

One should again notice the paradox: the policy of fighting private discrimination requires systemic official discrimination. For instance, affirmative action directed at the blacks in America is simply inverted race discrimination or racism against the whites. One should also notice that private discrimination does not lead to the systemic consequences of anti-discrimination policies undertaken by the state. A private person discriminating against another person bears the costs of the practice: e.g., an employer refusing to hire an able man only because of his race faces the risk of losing him to a competitor who is not so prejudiced. Private discrimination, if based only on prejudice, always risks private punishment, and so is unlikely to become common practice. Even in those cases where it becomes common practice, there is no reason to consider it wrong. Some groups, because of their differences, might simply be unable to integrate even minimally. Naturally, they move apart and separate. No attempt at their compulsory integration can do away with the differences – most probably it can only inflame them. Similarly, compulsory segregation, by putting the brakes on natural processes of assimilation, creates within the free societies islands of potentially hostile aliens. "Anti-discrimination" policies thus develop a self-destructive logic: the policy of the inclusion of those who have been excluded at the level of private relations can only exacerbate those features of the excluded that have been the reason for their exclusion in the first place.

Freedom of association is the very core of liberalism as once understood. In some ways it is the fundamental liberty, the most basic to ordinary human living. Yet it is quintessentially a liberty belonging to the older liberalism of the 19th century, the liberalism that sought freedom by *limiting* the power of the state over individuals, families, local associations, and other social institutions. 20th century liberalism, by contrast, sought freedom and equality by *expanding* the power of the state. The freedom to be admitted or hired anywhere trumped the freedom of being able to choose whom to hire or admit. Current liberalism, with its principled demand for the elimination of all discrimination, becomes more and more comprehensive and intrusive, continually moving forward and sweeping aside the remaining ramparts of exclusion. Any ethnic, cultural or national heritage, any attachment to the inherited historical community is supposed to disappear as something rel-

evant to anything significant someone might ever legitimately want to do. The same goes for sex and religious affiliation. None of those things is supposed to affect anything significant in our life together. If they did, that would be discrimination and injustice, and it would be everyone's obligation to use all possible means to root it out. In the name of individual emancipation, all social power is gradually eroded. That is what "diversity" and "inclusiveness" mean. The 'progressive' liberal state is thus an enemy of the 'reactionary' society, for to deny an individual, an institution, or a society the right to decide whom to associate with is tantamount to destroying him or it as an individual, institution, or society. Robert Nisbet penetratingly commented on the flip side of the liberal endeavor: "The political enslavement of man requires the emancipation of man from all the authorities and memberships … that serve, in one degree or another, to insulate the individual from external political power" (Nisbet 1953: 202).

Turning threats into self-incriminations

John Rawls argues that the factual distribution of goods is morally arbitrary and should be rectified in the direction of redistribution from the haves to the have-nots. And what about the *negative* goods, the bads? Shouldn't they likewise be redistributed? If unequal distribution of goods is morally arbitrary, can it be that unequal distribution of bads (e.g., responsibility for crimes) is not just as arbitrary? The default position for a liberal is to consider it just as arbitrary and to call for the redistribution of bads. The main strategy for doing this is appealing to the "root causes" of bad behavior. The idea is that the offender cannot be guilty all on his own; his misdeeds should rather be explained as an expression of some grievance, as a result of some social exclusion. The society's response should be doing something about the grievance and the exclusion. Responsibility for bad or criminal behavior is thus taken off the shoulders of the offender, shifted to wider social surroundings and ultimately dumped on the rest of the society (including the victims of the crime). On this view, the more brutal the expression of the grievance, the more heinous the crime, the more it is indicative of the perpetrator's social exclusion and the more society ("the system") is to be blamed for such behavior. Traditional punishment, on the liberal view, is no solution, as it does not deal with the "root causes" of the problem, i.e., exclusion and social injustice. It is "the system" that must be changed, not the wrongdoer. The society has to be more sensitive to the excluded, the marginalized, the alienated, the desperate and the depressed. In the liberal's worldview, it is the wrongdoer who is really a victim, one that "is 'trapped' by social and economic forces … the problem is in the society, not in the people innocently 'trapped'" (Lakoff 1996: 203).

This inversion of responsibility (redistribution of blame) is the main feature of the explanations that appeal to the "root causes" of deviancy and misbehavior. They are really exculpations in the sense that deviant behavior is treated as due to some overpowering causal factors allegedly beyond the agent's rational control. For the early progressives, it was mainly poverty that was the debilitating and thus the exculpatory factor; for current progressives, new grievances from an ever-expanding list of exculpatory conditions are used to fill the slot. Any failure or misdeed on the part of those assigned to a victim group is portrayed as a "social problem", that is, not as a problem with the feckless or the wrongdoers, but as a problem with the society. By treating a piece of behavior as a deterministic effect beyond the agent's control, any misdeed can be interpreted as *caused*, not *committed*, with the blame shifted to the wider society. Because of this selective determinism, responsibility becomes highly and predictably selective – ultimately, it is the ordinary, normal, non-deviant people who are made responsible for the misdeeds of the designated victims and it is they who have to bear the costs of "social problems". The schema of such explanations is quite simple: the misfortune or the misdeed of an X is due to his (its) unfavorable environment, the "root cause"; the solution is to make the environment more favorable to X. For example, if X is a tramp, the society should provide him with a free dwelling; if X is the "Third World", the West should write off its debt; if X is a Moslem terrorist, measures should be taken to root out non-Moslems' Islamophobia. It is always a foregone conclusion that the "root cause" is an element or an aspect of Western bourgeois societies – to be apologized for, to be paid a tribute for or to be eliminated in the name of social or global justice.

Liberal beliefs and policies thus tend to displace the dangers posed to the society onto the society itself. Self-inflicted "Western guilt" that is now occupying the high grounds of a superior morality is but a particular case of this moral and causal inversion. Because of the liberal belief in substantive equality of all peoples and cultures, the worse any minority or non-Western group really is, the worse the West must be made to appear, as the guilty cause of the non-Western group's dysfunctional behavior. In particular, this explains current anti-Americanism, the prevalent left-liberal belief that "America is the root cause of the forces that assault it and that its adversaries are actually its victims" (Horowitz 2004: 242). In a massive act of denial, liberals and leftists displace the danger Islam poses to the West onto the West itself – onto American imperialism or Christian fundamentalism or Islamophobia. Instead of the threat being the real Islamic agenda to establish an Islamic world theocracy, the threat becomes the fictitious American agenda to establish an American empire or a world Christian theocracy, a threat that must be met by weakening America and downgrading Christianity. This

explains why for a liberal, Islamophobia is a greater threat to "open society" than Islam, a stance reminiscent of the Cold War era progressives who considered anti-Communism greater threat than Communism itself.

Again, paradoxically but inevitably, attempts at dealing with the problem of offensive behavior by looking for "root causes" only exacerbate the problem and encourage such behavior. Why so? Consider the matter from the point of view of the offender. The soft-pedaling policy of looking for "root causes" only confirms to him the reality of his grievances and provides him with reasons to continue the practice. Faced with the liberal response, the offender draws two conclusions: first, that he is in the right, while the indulgent party (part of the "the system") is in the wrong (and should feel guilty); second, that he can gain even more (be offered more "sensitivity" and "care") by perpetrating even more outrageous misdeeds. Offensive behavior and indulgent response create a symbiotic combination of rage and guilt feeding on each other: the offending party becomes ever more brazen, while the soft-pedaling party ever more guilt-ridden. The rhetoric employed by the liberal morally disarms him against any rampaging thug. Since offensive behavior, for the liberal, is evidence of his own failed emancipatory endeavors, he should feel most guilty when the offender does his worst – and kills *him*. Portraying the offender as a victim is a gateway to morally sanctioned violence. Having embraced the language of systemic victimology the liberal has no moral defense against the claims of any victim group he has empowered.

The liberal policies are now recreating in Western societies a quasi-feudal order where privileges are accorded not by the principle of individual merit, but by the principle of individuals' belonging to designated victim groups. A quasi-Marxist categorization of human beings is being used, whereby moral worth is assigned to *groups* according to their place in the victim/oppressor array. This is accompanied by moves of social engineering designed for the benefit of the "victimized", the "weak". Societies are to be perfected through elevating the weak and dragging down the strong. Individual merit means nothing, nor does the specific situation. Virtue and vice depend not on what a particular person actually does, but on which group that person can be said to belong to. However, the difference from feudalism is that while feudal privileges were "defended on the supposed excellences of those who were privileged", the new egalitarianism "appeals to the deficiencies of those whom it favors" (Kekes 2003: 64). The more abject, the lowlier the alleged victim, the more effort should be spent on elevating it (and on downgrading its oppressor) and the more moral worth the effort has. This is weirdly reminiscent of the Leninist understanding of morality: "We say that our morality is entirely subordinated to the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat. Our morality is derived from the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat" (Lenin 1963: 272).

The ultimate inversion

The logic underpinning the policies leads to even more radical conclusions. Let us consider again Jacques Derrida's ruminations on the emancipatory theme. Derrida is fascinating in that he purifies the moral intention behind the political endeavors of postmodern sentimental liberals. Deconstruction is a method for the clearing away of artificial structures created by the marginalization of the "Other". Deconstruction is not mere destruction; rather it is a positive endeavor at making us open to the excluded and marginalized. A deconstructionist implements or restores justice: "Deconstruction is justice. … I know nothing more just than what I call deconstruction" (Derrida 1992: 21). Justice is openness to the Other. Which other? One's parents, children, spouse, friends, compatriots? It is cheap to be open to those you love or respect. True openness, the morally most valuable openness can only be pure and infinite hospitality offered "to someone who is neither expected not invited. To whomever arrives as an absolutely foreign visitor, as a new arrival, nonidentifiable and unforeseeable, in short, wholly other" (Derrida 1999: 128-129). Derrida is here urging what can be dubbed as *xenophilia* – our openness to, and embrace of, those who are the most strange, the most alien. He formulates – radically and rigorously – the ultimate intention behind all emancipatory doctrines. All of them are intent on achieving "social justice", or in Derrida's terms, "infinite justice" – an ideal situation where nobody has any grievances, and everybody is included in one great family of the whole of humanity. How should one proceed with its realization? John Rawls suggests that we should start with improving the lot of the worst off in our own societies. Derrida urges hospitality to the most alien.

Stephen Hicks calls postmodernism *reverse Thrasymacheanism*, alluding to the sophist Thrasymachus of Plato's *Republic*. Thrasymachus marshaled relativistic arguments in support of the claim that justice is the interest of the stronger. Postmodernists, according to Hicks, simply reverse the claim, for they are on the side of the weaker and the oppressed groups: justice is the interest of the weaker (Hicks 2004: 182). Following in the steps of Emmanuel Levinas,[9] Derrida carries the idea of "reverse Thrasymacheanism" one step farther, to its logical consummation in xenophilia. In fact, he carries the idea of liberal non-discrimination to its logical conclusion. Consider: in Rawls' conception, the weak still belong to *our* society, to *us*,

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[9] Levinas' philosophy might be summarized by the motto "I feel guilty, therefore I am". Consider: "My being-in-the-world or my 'place in the sun', my being at home, have these not also been the assumption of spaces belonging to the other man whom I already have oppressed or starved, or driven out into a third world; are they not acts of repulsing, excluding, exiling, stripping, killing?" (Sean Hand, ed., *The Levinas Reader,* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989, p. 84).

and thus an element of discrimination and exclusion still remains. Derrida takes the final step by abolishing the element. The morally most valuable inclusion is hospitality to the absolutely foreign, to the wholly other, thus ultimately and logically – to the deadly enemy. Derrida is the philosophical nemesis of liberalism, showing that with its radical attack on all moral and cultural distinctions and all moral and cultural inequality liberalism is incompatible with any particular social order. Erasing such distinctions is the essence of political correctness that reduces all moral questions to a choice between "inclusion" ("hospitality") and "discrimination" ("hate"). It makes it impossible to distinguish between bigotry, meaning the desire to hurt some other group, and the legitimate defense of one's own people, their identity, and their interests. It makes self-extinction the supreme moral virtue.

In Alain Finkielkraut's penetrating observation on current PC mindset, "We condensed the infinite array of human experiences into a single story line, a single and monumental opposition: It is all solidarity or segregation, openness or ethnocentrism. In short, we were so utterly concerned for the Other that the figure of the Other eventually replaced that of the *enemy*. … The result is clear: Being at war with one's enemy is a human possibility; waging war on one's Other is a crime against humanity" (Finkielkraut 2004: 29). Indeed, if xenophilia is the supreme virtue then defending one's culture from an onslaught of the Other is xenophobia, the greatest offence. Such is the moral inversion that current liberalism is ultimately committed to.

These are the times when we have a nearly ideal case for testing the consequences of liberal xenophilia. Challenged by Islamic resurgence contemporary liberalism meets its nemesis. Islam is a totalitarian religion set on converting or conquering non-Moslems, while contemporary liberalism is an ideology set on renouncing Western exceptionalism and embracing the radically alien. The two intentions are perfectly complementary: absolute intolerance meets suicidal hospitality. In Western Europe that has already defined itself as mere openness (as a gap or a hole), with the growing belligerence of the Moslems already inside, Europeans will try ever more hard to integrate them and will feel ever more guilty for failing. Unless it renounces the ideology of xenophilia, the West will go down not with a bang but a whimper. With the ideology in place, instead of Moslems assimilating to the West, the most likely development is that of European West assimilating *to Islam*. And the development will not be lamented as Western decline but rather welcomed as "social progress", as advancement towards a more vibrant and colorful "diversity". Liberalism permits, even welcomes, the dissolution of Western civilization, for in the light of its

principles the dissolution will be seen not as a defeat, but as the transition to the all-inclusive order of the united mankind that has left behind the parochial and divisive distinctions of the past. At no point in this development can a liberal stop giving ground and stand up against the encroachments of the enemy, for he cannot recognize the threatening Other as an enemy without ceasing to be a liberal. Conversely, the West cannot survive without recognizing the utter destructiveness of current liberalism.

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Algirdas Degutis
APIE VAKARŲ SAVIGRIOVĄ:
ŽLUGIMAS PER LIBERALŲJĮ ATVIRUMĄ

SANTRAUKA

„Politinis korektiškumas", kuris šiandien viešpatauja Vakarų elito mąsty-senoje bei politinėje praktikoje, yra specifinės ideologijos – sentimentalaus liberalizmo – vedinys. Ši ideologija remiasi moralinio ir kultūrinio reliaty-vizmo teze – kad visi gyvenimo būdai yra vienodai sveikintini ir kad visos kultūros yra lygiavertės. Šios prielaidos pagrindu šiuolaikinis liberalizmas vykdo vadinamąjį socialinį ir net globalinį teisingumą užimdamas agre-syvią nuostatą dominuojančios moralės ir kultūros atžvilgiu. Tolerancija, atvirumas ir svetingumas "kitam" yra aukščiausioji, netgi vienintelė dorybė, kurią jis išpažįsta. Šios dorybės aukštinimas reiškiasi kaip tradicinių Vaka-rų vertybių žeminimas. Kova su diskriminacija, vykdoma tolerancijos var-du, iš tikrųjų yra Vakarų civilizacinių laimėjimų diskreditavimas, Vakarų kultūros bei moralės standartų griovimas. Liberalioji kova su ksenofobija neišvengiamai virsta ksenofilija, kuri beveik tiesiogine prasme yra Vakarų savižudybės ideologija. Daugeliu požiūrių ši liberalioji inversija yra marksis-tinės ekonominės revoliucijos analogas kultūros ir moralės srityje. Kaip ir marksizmo atveju, praktinis jos įgyvendinimas gali vesti tik į ją priėmusios visuomenės žlugimą.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: liberalizmas, politinis korektiškumas, moralinė in-versija, Vakarų savigriova.