

Protego ergo Obligo: an Inquiry into the Meaning and Destiny of Liberal Democracy

By Lukas Froese

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Department of Political Studies
University of Manitoba
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Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Introduction.....	3
Chapter 1: Liberty	
Introduction.....	11
Of Sovereignty: Two Principles.....	12
Liberty and Dependence	16
Of Non-domination; The Church and Civil Society	19
Of Constitutions and Rights.....	23
Conclusion	30
Chapter 2: Equality	
Introduction.....	32
The Meaning of Democracy	33
Of Power and Democracy	36
Concerning "Checks and Balances"	42
Of Elected Office	48
Some objections, and responses thereto.....	54
Conclusion	55
Chapter 3: Fraternity	
Introduction.....	57
Of Civilization and Modernity.....	58
Egoism versus Ethics	66
Of Political Thinking; The Ethical Regime	70
War and Revolution	72
Of Bureaucratic Rationalism.....	78
Conclusion	83
Conclusion	87
Bibliography	97

Abstract

This thesis applies Bertrand de Jouvenel's theory of the growth of the modern state to the emergence of the liberal democratic type that prevails across the Western world today. Conventional wisdom would have it that this was a process of growing liberty from a state of primitive despotism to a comparatively non-interventionist state today; this thesis argues that the reverse is true: the modern state emerged as a result of a progressive expansion of services and protections on the part of the state that had the effect of rendering the whole population dependent upon the state to a far greater degree than in the past; which dependence enables the central authority to make ever greater demands upon its subjects. In today's liberal democracies that process of expansion culminated in the development of the welfare state and the (ongoing) creation of rules that dictate the conduct of social life along ideological lines, aided by the pathologies which accompany the democratic form of government.

Introduction

This paper is, to borrow a phrase from James Burnham^{*}, an essay on the meaning and destiny of liberal democracy. I shall argue that it emerged as the product of an expanding central protectorate in a process that has only accelerated since the opening of the modern era and has not since abated.

Unlike Burnham's essay, and most of the other work that deals with the subject, I am for the most part uninterested in the philosophical or ideological dimension of liberalism[†]. Rather, I submit that liberalism is a phenomenon or complex of phenomena - I shall refer to this, somewhat imprecisely, as "liberal democracy" - that appear concretely in the social-political world, and which can be analyzed independently from what philosophers say about them.

It should be clear, therefore, that I eschew the normative approach in my analysis. My purpose is to expose the reality of liberal democracy, to show that it is not precisely what it is casually assumed to be - that it is not what it claims to be, through the words of its exponents. If the reader still finds himself sympathetic to liberalism, then well and good; but at least I will have explained what it is he supports, if I have achieved my purpose.

The normative approach obviously will not serve my ends. It is easy enough to point out numerous flaws in liberalism (as it is of any particular political or philosophical orientation) and say that we should therefore not hold this view, but such arguments

^{*} The reference is to the subtitle of his book *Suicide of the West: an Essay on the Meaning and Destiny of Liberalism*.

[†] This philosophy was worked out most famously (though not at all exclusively) by such thinkers as John Locke in his second *Treatise of Government* and his letters on toleration; Immanuel Kant in his *Metaphysics of Morals* and *Perpetual Peace*; John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty*; and in the twentieth century by John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* and a number of other essays.

explain even less than they persuade. It tells us nothing *in fact* when someone says that the proper end of the state is to defend the lives and property of its subjects, for example; this is only an opinion concerning propriety, or simply a wish: the state, alas, does not care what we think, and it will do what it will do. Generally this is not constrained by what philosophers think "proper".

Such an approach to political thought, anyway, risks obscuring the fact that formations like the state (for example), and the people who become habitually attached to them, have or acquire distinct interests and ambitions of their own; that they are not automata who mechanically do the task we imagine they should be doing. The state, what Bertrand de Jouvenel calls "Power", the structure of command, has a tendency to pursue the expansion of its competence, and this is true regardless of what we wish it will do. Certain wishes, however, are more useful than others in serving this end, and will be taken up by the agents of Power. The *actual function* of political philosophy, in this sense - not the *content* - is the only thing about it that is theoretically (as opposed to philosophically) interesting.

Moreover - I must make good and sure that the normative is dead, to myself and to the reader - there is the persistent problem that "ought implies can". Speculation on the ideal form of justice, what "ought" to be done on a societal or civilizational level, implies that the state of ideal justice is possible in the concrete. A casual acquaintance with history and with the actual processes of politics makes these hopes unbelievable. Such utopianism, anyway - and this is the very *least* of the problems here - all too quickly becomes millenarian, as though history can come to an end, and civilizations do not grow old, die, rot and become putrid and maggot-ridden. The consistent stupidity and petty

viciousness by which we are governed ought to inspire no man with confidence that we are not already in an advanced state of decay.

It should be clear also that I am not interested in logically *refuting* the propositions of liberalism. The arguments that ought to have rendered liberalism unbelievable are not new, for all the good they have done, and I have little to add to them. My concern is not with *arguments*, but with *facts*; my work is not philosophy, as it is normally thought of. Liberals understand themselves as those who seek to limit the reach of the state - whether they in fact do so is a question of *truth*, but it is a fact that this is what they believe. Another fact is that liberalism is by far the most successful school of political philosophy in the West today, to the point that it might be called the official governing philosophy of the Western nations. A third is that the state's reach, and its presumptions, have never been greater. To explain this apparent paradox is no small part of what I hope to accomplish in this essay.

For these reasons - because I am concerned with institutions and facts rather than propositions and arguments; because philosophers' ideas are never simply translated into fact but are rendered in ways that favor certain particular interests, including the state's - I will not take into consideration the vast literature that has been produced over the centuries by history's many liberal writers. Their work has generally been of a *moral* character, either because it inquires after principles of legitimacy or because it attempts to argue for certain outcomes which its author regards as desirable, and thus has little relevance for my project. More pertinent would be the work of liberal constitutionalists, whose work, however, was speculative and whose object lay in the future; by now the experiment has been performed and the results may be studied. This I propose to do.

I am doing no more than to attempt to explain certain phenomena I have observed with some degree of logical rigor. I do not doubt that my approach will fail to satisfy the scientist, nor that my observations, by his standards casual and unsystematic, will not count for him as "data". On the other hand I eschew philosophical examination in favor of a consideration of the concrete circumstances, especially incentives, that attend the phenomena in question. Too abstract for science, too concrete for philosophy, it may be that I am practicing some third art: call it "theory" if it please you - these arguments over words are of very little interest to me. The work I do, I do in pursuit of wisdom: in this sense only will I admit I am practicing "philosophy"*.

In attempting my explanations I draw extensively on the political theory expounded in Bertrand de Jouvenel's excellent work *On Power*, a work of capital importance to any serious political thought which explodes our modern illusions and turns Whig historiography on its head far better than I ever could. Wherein he and I differ is what I consider his excessive faith in the strength of liberal constitutional arrangements - never mind their fitness - to restrain the ever-expanding scope of command, even if he does seem to betray some doubt as to the permanence of their success; which doubt I would say has been vindicated a thousand times over since the time of writing. Nevertheless, his natural history of Power's growth, rightly understood, articulates a theory of politics and history that far exceeds in explanatory power (and political wisdom) any of his theoretical competitors, such as they are.

It might be said that my use of Jouvenel's work is creative, not to say selective. This is certainly true, insofar as this essay is not about him; I only make such use of his work as I judge necessary to advance my own point, and as an exposition of Jouvenel's

* Though it is my belief that philosophers despise wisdom in favor of mere verbal coherence.

thought I will do no better than to scratch the surface. That is to say, as an expositor of Jouvencian theory I will do poorly: but that is not how I will judge the success of this work.

The scope of my analysis does not extend far beyond what we call "Western civilization". This stands to reason, to the extent that it is in the West and nowhere else (with few exceptions that can themselves be adduced to communication with the West, thus proving the rule) that liberal democracy is to be found. That is not to say the process I shall describe *could* not be replicated elsewhere. Certainly, the Jouvencian dialectic (if I may speak thus) is as natural as the groupings brute beasts form spontaneously. What is unique to the West is the special form of civilizational decline we call modernity*, and the peculiar species of this that ultimately triumphed which we now know as liberalism.

Clearly we cannot understand liberal democracy without some understanding of liberal thought, not because we should take politicians' words at face value, nor because the broad trends have come about as the result of ideas, but because an ideological infection *has* taken hold and produced some of the specific results we can see; an infection in the absence of which we may yet have gotten along well enough, yet whose presence ensures on the contrary that the most damage possible is done.

The theory and practice of liberalism can be reduced, without misrepresentation, to the enterprise of imposing secular rules that limit the uses of power and constrain those who hold it in the interest of those subject to it. Thus, a "liberal democracy" is a democracy that is restrained by procedure and liable to be checked by institutions that may include for example, constitutional courts who enforce the rules set on political power. This is the definition on which I shall operate throughout this paper; I shall

* The justification for this bold statement is the object of my third chapter.

presume that a liberal democracy is no more nor less than that, with the provision that the rules are in actual fact enforced; even illiberal and more or less autocratic states may have constitutions, constitutional courts, and bicameral legislatures. Another trend may be observed within liberal democratic states today, the recent phenomenon of "social liberalism": this, like classical "political" liberalism, endeavors to set rules on power; in this case, on social forces and actors.

In the interest of transparency, I confess that I am writing from a position well outside of the liberal perspective. I am not conventionally 'political', although my sympathies lie unambiguously with the Right; I reject out of hand any specific label (for example, conservative, traditionalist, fascist, or reactionary), either as outright false or as implying far too much. My only interest, insofar as I have an interest in political action*, is in making the best of the possibilities available to a specific political actor - one whose success I am concerned to promote - given the specific set of circumstances that bear on it. Not everything is possible at every moment. However it may be that I find desirable features in some of the social orders of the past, they cannot be replicated given the total spiritual, material, and strategic situation at present, and probably never will again. For a like reason debates about the requirements of abstract Justice (for example) are not often useful.

I take it as axiomatic, on the other hand, that all moralizing is misplaced which concerns things that cannot reasonably be expected to be otherwise. Organization demands a division of labor, or specialization, which means hierarchy and therefore inequality; inequality is consequently a necessary feature of an orderly society, and it is

* Though it can hardly be overstated how little my or any other individual opinion actually matters.

pointless to complain about that* (to give just one example of what I mean). It is likewise senseless to blame a rising power looking to secure its best possible material and strategic advantage, as does every power that has not given up on its own will to live, for its "imperialism", because it cannot *reasonably* be expected that it will act in any other manner. Or - to give a final example - to condemn a regime for deploying any martial expedient necessary to crush a violent revolt against its rule. These are demands made by reality, and a philosophical wishing-away will by no means prevent those things from happening, but will on the contrary ensure that, when they must take place, they will be pursued with the utmost incompetence and brutality.

I bring this up, as I say, in the interest of transparency; also because I know it will often seem that I am arguing in support of monarchy, or feudalism, or some other such thing. To the contrary, I only use those as examples to illustrate various points. Arguing for those things today is clearly as much and more of a waste of time as speculations concerning abstract Justice, since they are so much less likely to be realized, or attempted, in the foreseeable future.

Likewise it may seem that I am arguing for limited, or decentralized government. I assume that I do not need to repeat myself. I have abjured at the outset, and have since been at pains to stress that I forswear normative philosophy. In many ways, though not in others, I am in agreement with Machiavelli's assessment that politics has no relation to morals. Moralized conceptions of politics - that is, ideologies - serve no function but to prevent an honest assessment of reality.

In writing this essay I have followed the three terms of the revolutionary slogan

* The shape that inequality takes, or the character and quality of the incumbents of the highest posts, is another matter - within the limits set by reality, of course.

"Liberty, Equality, Fraternity", both because I have found it a convenient way to organize my analysis, and because of the poetic value therein. My first chapter, "Liberty", paraphrases Jouvenel's account of Power's growth to expose the falsehood in the liberal conception of freedom and in the common assumption that we have been growing freer over the centuries. In "Equality" I continue to follow Jouvenel in his insight that democracy was a tremendous boon to Power and enabled its expansion beyond what was previously thought possible; I go on to argue that, contrary to popular belief, democracy has enabled Power to evade responsibility, for several connected reasons. In "Fraternity" I suggest that the emergence of liberal democracy, though it was the result of patronage on the part of the powerful, was not a purely organic process; at some point the philosophy took on a life of its own and altered the destiny of our civilization, to its detriment.

Mine is a tale of civilization and sovereignty; above all, a cautionary tale of the dangers of philosophy in politics with an object lesson in the state of the contemporary West. The danger cannot be ignored when even philosophies of freedom are destined to serve the ends of universal subjugation.

Chapter 1: Liberty

Introduction

The common understanding of the history of Western civilization is of a progression from a state of primitive despotism to ever-increasing freedom; from an all-controlling and arbitrary rule to the limited and law-bound government of the modern era. This is the opposite of the truth, as I will show throughout the three chapters of this essay.

In this chapter I will illustrate the point that the ancient regime was strictly limited by a number of practical constraints, including, especially, a number of independent power centers that jealously guarded their own privileges against the pretensions of the centralizing Power^{*}; also by sacred tradition, custom, and by an objective and permanent law, perhaps the most important function of which was precisely to govern the actions of worldly princes.

The evolution from the ancient to the modern state meant the destruction of all these things. One of the main ways this destruction is accomplished is, crucially, by the 'liberation' of the populations subject to those independent centers of power; which 'liberation' is portrayed as the advance of liberty *simpliciter* when in reality it is the exchange of the relatively undemanding economic exploitation of the master and the lord for the political and military exploitation of the state.

* * *

* Throughout this essay I will use the word Power with a capital P to indicate the political organ that roughly corresponds to what we call "the state"; I disdain the latter phrase in some contexts since it is rather too precise for my purposes. In this I follow the practice of Bertrand de Jouvenel in *On Power*, from which my paraphrase of historical processes throughout this essay is almost entirely derived. My formulation is more or less original, but the ideas are not.

Of Sovereignty: two principles

The interplay of two contrary forces, one representing Authority and the other Liberty, is one of the major impulses behind "history". These are not abstract principles fighting each other in the hearts of men, nor arguing with one another on the floor of a debate hall. It matters not at all whether they are "believed in". Concrete forces with a vested interest in a single good, the ownership of which is necessarily exclusive, represent one of these two principles by the mere fact of their existence and participation in the contest over the ownership of that good. The good in question is *sovereignty*.

We can understand sovereignty* as a political actor's freedom of action. It is always a function of that actor's political power, which in any given system is a relative value. By "relative" I mean only that any increase in power for one actor means a proportional decrease in power for the other actors in the system. Whatever advance in material or military capability has come about when, for example, a state acquires the hydrogen bomb, its power in *strictly political terms* has only increased to the extent that it is thereby able to pursue its ends more efficaciously as against its rivals. Another way to say the same thing is that the total amount of political power in a system is always constant. This holds good whether we are talking about a town or the planet as a whole, and anything in between.

Sovereignty is a function of political power because an actor's competitors for power act as constraints upon its freedom of action. In proportion as those competitors decrease in importance - in proportion as its power grows - an actor can act more freely. When all of an actor's competitors have dwindled to unimportance, that actor has

* I use this word in a purely political sense, as distinct from its juristic meaning, or again from the metaphysical sense according to which God, "the law", or "the people" may be sovereign.

become, as it were, "*the* Sovereign" in its system. This is the situation that "the state" occupies in most every country today. (Where this is not so clear-cut we often refer to such a country, revealingly, as a "failed state".)

The Platonic Ideal (so to speak) of the Sovereign is God Himself, for Whom there are neither rivals nor constraints. It is in the nature of every political actor to aspire to a like freedom. Previously, these satanic ambitions were restrained by a measure of piety that demanded the observance of a law higher than temporal rulers*, upheld by the Church (a power in its own right). In the modern era, by definition, this is no longer the case.

In any given political system, there are, so to speak, centrifugal and centripetal forces. The centripetal force is not necessarily more powerful than the centrifugal forces, either collectively or even individually; nevertheless, it must be present for the forces to constitute a system; its absence would mean independence for the other forces, which would then be systems of their own.

My favored illustration here is a feudal system. The king is the central power, the "centripetal force" I have been discussing in the abstract. He does not necessarily command greater forces (in concrete terms, men bearing arms) than his vassal lords (the "centrifugal forces"), either individually or collectively; and when his kingdom goes to war he must make do with his own forces plus whatever aid his vassals see fit to lend him. Howsoever great these be, often enough he does not even gain temporary direct command over these latter forces; but in any case, he must depend on the willing assent of his lords. He must, in other words, have *authority* in the true sense of the word.

* Jouvenel explains at length how divine sovereignty acted as a powerful constraint on the pretensions of would-be despots, contrary to the popular myth of "divine right" as an ideological tool of tyranny.

Preferable to the king by far that he should directly command the forces that belong to his vassals, and not depend upon their forbearance. He will tend to seek the transference of power from his vassals to himself, therefore the expansion of what he may directly command. The central power is also the centralizing power, and that power I call the *authoritarian principle*. The king's vassals, centers of power in their own right, are jealous of their powers and rights, and tend to resist the expansion of command. I call this the *libertarian principle*.*

The ideal situation for the libertarian powers, short of full independence (which they may have good reason not to prefer), is a situation wherein they possess sole and exclusive power of command over their jurisdiction (property), and are themselves something like small kings. This also happens to be the typical situation in a feudal system. (Note well: the central power has the same ideal, but runs afoul of its libertarian vassals by virtue of the fact that it is nominally above them.) *Obligations* due to the liege are minimal, and the king is only first among equals. A republic of lords, in short. The Roman republic itself very nearly approximated this ideal: a confederation of fathers who were as kings over their families, even possessing power over life and death; and who sustained the city by way of voluntary contributions *rather* than by levies exacted by a commanding power.†

We can see here a sort of asymmetric freedom. The freedom of women and children (and serfs, and so on) is to be free from the commands of the city, by virtue of the fact that they are under the power of the *pater familias*. The freedom of the fathers is

* Both of these names are slightly troublesome, since they come with baggage of their own. "Authoritarian" in fact refers not to the expansion of "authority" in the strict sense, but of command. As for "libertarian", it should be clear that I am not referring to the property-fetishist school of political thought.

† The situation, of course, was rather different for conquered peoples.

to participate in the affairs of the city.

When the power of the lords and fathers, the concrete libertarian principle, has disappeared, where - recall that political power remains constant - has it gone? For such power is to us moderns an abomination, not to be tolerated. The power of the lords was to be broken, the serfs freed, and then the family liberated, and so on. The power has gone, we are to believe, to those overlooked, those underprivileged and much abused populations who lived under the tyranny of our aristocrats. But is that not a facile answer?

Is it not probable rather that the aristocratic powers have been broken for a reason - that it serves some interest? If it was the father's charge to participate in public affairs on behalf of his family, and if, for that reason, the family remains untouched by the city's commands, then we can suppose that when the father's mediation has disappeared, command has been extended. Likewise when the lord's men have been taken out from under his authority. This is not to release them into some free air in which there is no command, but to transfer the title to their command from peripheral to central power.

This pattern recurs throughout history with a mathematical necessity. The aristocrat already has command over the commons in his jurisdiction; there is no potential for the growth of his power (assuming landed titles remain constant). The king has for his potential growth the subject populations of *all his vassals*, whose loyalty he can win with comparative ease. Aristocracies are always toppled by exploiting the untapped energies of the people.

Suppose we have a country of ten million adults - the number does not matter - and suppose that appointments to the politically and socially important posts in this

country are decided on by a council of ten members. Every individual of those ten members has a comparatively great deal of power. Take the power of election from those ten and give it to the ten million, and the power of those original ten has been effectively neutralized without appreciably increasing anyone else's - each new elector has only one millionth the power of one of the original council; effectively nil. So it is with every extension of the franchise, albeit not often so dramatic. But if the supposed beneficiaries of the change are only nominally empowered, where does the power accrue? The answer, of course, is Power itself, which is no longer bound to the ten.

We can see, then, that the authoritarian principle is essentially a *levelling* principle, while conversely the libertarian principle is *aristocratic*. This is no more than a verbal rendering of a mathematical relation.

Liberty and Dependence

Where do the two principles fit in the contemporary liberal regime? There can be no doubt: the libertarian principle has been utterly destroyed, and any social forces (most likely, today, commercial interests) that might take up the mantle exist only at the forbearance of the state. Should the two come to blows, there is no question that libertarian interests would be powerless to resist, as they do not command any substantial arms - nor is it likely they would have the will or the inclination to resist unto the point of violence in any event.* At every stage the liberal has cheered on the neutralization of the libertarian powers, and if it were these that had won the contest our civilization, such as it is, would not be "liberal" in any sense we would recognize.

* Whereas in Europe not a few wars were fought over the issue of aristocratic liberty versus royal dominance.

For the liberal, liberty is masterlessness, or what philosophers call "non-dominance" (that is, by *men*, as distinct from *institutions*); for the libertarian,^{*} liberty is mastery. Liberalism is therefore at odds with the libertarian principle, which means that it is basically an authoritarian phenomenon. This is not some hackneyed observation that today's liberals are increasingly intolerant of dissent from their doctrine, therefore "authoritarian" in the pedestrian sense of the word. Rather, liberal theory and practice are, and from the beginning have been, innately hostile to the existence of libertarian political elements.

This, by the way, is the common link between the liberalisms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that are apparently so incompatible with each other. Nineteenth century, or "classical liberalism", simply represents an earlier phase in the historical battle against illiberal or antiliberal social forces; it was enough for them to divorce state from church and to break the power of the great landowners and agricultural interests at that time, while a new era with new social forces called for a new liberalism. The welfare liberalism of the twentieth century came to fill that role. Commitment to "classical liberalism" is in a very real sense *anachronistic*; it has no particular social forces to attach to today.

To be sure, this hostility on the part of liberal *thinkers* toward the libertarian elements is not entirely principled. It arises, I suspect, from what the existence of such elements entails *in practice*: hierarchy, a great deal of inequality in power between man and man that cannot easily be rationally articulated; and liberalism is, after all, rationalist. Slavery and serfdom, in short; on a psychological level, if nothing else, in order to rouse

* I feel I must reiterate here that the philosophy called "libertarianism" has only the loosest relation to the principle I have been discussing.

the passion for liberty against the encroachments of command it must be felt that one has something to lose; whereas the subject populations "have nothing to lose but their chains"* (and third parties, like Yankee abolitionists, likewise have no interest in the success of the libertarian elements).

There is a more important reason that liberty belongs to the aristocrat; to the strong, so to speak, and not to just anyone. That reason, which cuts to the heart of the matter, is dependence. The aristocrat is self-sufficient: he sees to his own security, which is perhaps the most important thing, and provides for his needs out of his own property. The serf, the slave, the laborer, the employee depend for their security upon their master. The ambitions of the growing central Power have nothing to offer the aristocrat, who can only lose - what he loses, *if* nothing material, is his freedom; when his hold over the serf, slave, laborer, or employee is loosened (putting an end to serfdom or slavery, labor laws, the entitlements of the welfare state, etc.), this does not amount to *liberation* or *emancipation* but a transfer of dependency to the central Power. Spiritually, as it were, he remains a slave: although he has, perhaps, been made idle.

One who is not free by virtue of his own attributes, but must have his freedom guaranteed by something stronger than he, is not free, but a slave with a permissive master. There is no law, no proclamation of emancipation, that can make such a one free, who is not free in fact and in truth.

At liberty is he who will not be bullied or bought. For everyone else there can be no liberty, there can be only license. Liberals and others of the Left are right to think conservatives cruel for hoping to take away dependence from the dependent; though logically there is no reason why such dependence must attach to the state.

* I believe Marx said that, somewhere or other.

Of Non-Domination; The Church and Civil Society

If liberty, as a concrete reality, still has a place anywhere in the liberal order, it is *between* states rather than under them. It exists, in other words, as *national sovereignty*, where it exists at all. Current political realities being what they are, it is not so simple to find out which states are, after all, free and sovereign; certainly, not all of them are *in fact*. Be that as it may, it is interesting that on the whole the liberal today tends not to look kindly on the assertion of national sovereignty, with the exception of those erstwhile European colonial jurisdictions.

In any event, the liberal has an alternative definition of liberty than that which inheres in the self-interested defenders against the expansion of Power. I have already given it: non-domination. Locke famously rendered this point as the claim that no man is born the master of another, and therefore all are free and equal. Obviously this is a metaphysical claim rather than a historical one; as an assertion of historical fact it is clearly nonsense.*

The liberal has won; we can scarcely imagine what it would mean to have a master today. Even less, perhaps, can we imagine our fathers having the power of life and death over us, however sparingly used. By the same token we cannot imagine what it would mean to be free as the aristocrats were free: service paid to the crown (figurative or literal) is at our discretion, taxes are not levied and we cannot be commanded; and in addition we may dispose of our property as we see fit. To be literally outside the grasp of "the state" (such as it may be), this is the essence of the aristocratic liberty that has disappeared.

* As a metaphysical claim it is coherent, I would argue, only if you assume that Providence is not a historical reality. For a contrary view, see Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke, and Equality*.

The progressive crushing of such independent elements has left Power as effectively the only piece on the board. This political situation has given us over completely to the power of the state, in a process that can fairly be called "liberalization" - at least within some parameters. Assuming the process of liberalization has not yet been concluded, where has it been ongoing?

The new target is not much different from the old*: these are the other institutions that have acquired some measure of power and authority through the ages, but were not bound to the fate of a noble house. Probably the most important of these, historically, was the Roman church, whose earthly head claimed the right to make and unmake temporal rulers. The sundering of the Western church in the so-called "Reformation" was, in the event, of tremendous use to the worldly princes, who - particularly in northern Europe and most famously, for us, in England - took the opportunity to claim for themselves the leadership of newly formed national churches, and thereby freed themselves from papal pretensions.

It is not uncommon for liberals, and those who follow Whiggish history generally, to cite this as the moment that men of the West began to think for themselves and to free themselves from ancient despotic tradition. In reality, despotism was just then resurging in the West: for previously, the kings were the enforcers of a law that preceded themselves, because that law was the Law of God, and it acted on their power as a *limit* rather than license (contrary to the modern myth of the "divine right of kings"). A king's evasion of church authority is his evasion of responsibility to God, without which, as Dostoevsky famously pointed out, all is permitted.

* Throughout this paper it will often seem that I am making a claim about historical sequence when this is far from my intent. Unless I have made it very explicit that I am making such a claim, it should be read as no more than a narrative device.

The liberal was not far behind, teaching *toleration*. Though he did not go so far, in those days, as to insist on state (royal) *neutrality* between competing faiths, its germs infected the literature. The reasoning that supported toleration was impeccable, so far as it went, and yet it missed the point entirely. If religion was purely a matter of individual salvation, and if one is in as good a position to comprehend the requirements for his salvation as another - how Protestant all that sounds! - then the king has no business telling anyone how to care for his soul. And if the policy of burning heretics at the stake is a matter of saving their souls, then *of course* the means employed are idiotic. The reality is that there were social and political interests being served by those policies, and those criticisms fail entirely to address those interests.

Be that as it may, we note with a certain measure of irony that at the same time as worldly princes set themselves up as head of the church, politics and religion were being disentangled. The Roman church's universal authority stood as a binding obligation on all Christians in the Western world up until the "Reformation", when that authority was broken and every Western Christian became as his own pope (not excluding Catholics, who, after all, had the option of becoming Protestant). From the instant the church was sundered, the Law of God, as a principle governing worldly princes, was doomed.

The disappearance of that Law freed the way for the rise of the legislator, not to say this is the *only* factor contributing to his appearance. In our civilization the invention of the legislative power is a comparatively recent one. And it is absolutely incompatible with the "rule of law", where this is understood as a principle governing the activities of rulers (whether this be one man or many). If there is no recognized law but those that have been instituted by men, and if men can change the law on a whim, then there is no

law in the higher sense of the word, however it may be that those men must live with the rules they have created. And if there is no Law, there is only Power, as raw, despotic, and arbitrary as you could imagine.

This is the logical result of the separation of secular and sacred, indisputably a characteristic of what I have been calling the liberal phenomenon; and liberals today are as one in demanding that separation.

After the Church, the rest of the institutions we refer to under the blanket term "civil society" come under the crosshairs of the authoritarian principle. These are Burke's "little platoons", associations, clubs, even marriages and families. (The destruction of the family is the necessary result of setting women on equal footing with men, which is logically required by rationalist anthropology. More importantly, as a matter of historical fact, "freeing" women from the family potentially doubles the pool of workers, soldiers, etc. who may be exploited. A huge advantage in the mass age, the age of cannon fodder.) Liberal *theory* objects to these as sources of unmerited inequality, nepotism, exclusion, and so on; practice finds them obstacles to Power. The reason is in every case the same as it was for the aristocracy and the church: these are spheres of independence from Power.

The tactical aim is to create people who owe their worldly success and well-being to Power, because Power can then make demands on them. In the age of kings, this was done by by-passing the nobility for the important posts in government, and through the growth of bureaucracy (which is something like a thoroughly subjugated, and disenchanting, ersatz aristocracy). After that age had come to a close, Power's incumbents had changed, but the interest remains the same: and with the violent levelling of society that heralded the arrival of democracy, it had never been stronger. Revolutionary France

had powers that archetype of authoritarian, absolutist rule, the Sun King, Louis XIV, could hardly have dreamt of: most importantly, conscription.*

The rest, as they say, is history. The trend today is to create and expand the mass of dependents on state resources. To object to this on philosophical grounds is to miss the point completely: none of this was done to satisfy the demands of *philosophy*; *ideas* have done nothing. A set of interests, situated as they are in the positions of Power, pursuing their rational ends rationally, has yielded this result. The function of the philosopher is only to persuade.†

Of Constitutions and Rights

And yet, liberals understand themselves and the historical trend they represent as *restricting* Authority, rather than expanding it. This is, it can be supposed, partially a confusion: "authority" is seen, by and large, as monolithic; or more precisely, old authorities are seen coordinating and conspiring rather than competing, in such a way that secures the most despotic result possible - while the sceptic charges in and installs a new scientific and democratic authority that can be trusted to lead us ever closer to freedom and justice for all. (Scientific "authorities" are rarely or never questioned, and to this day liberals urge us to "trust the experts" completely, while - somewhat ironically - scepticism, however well-reasoned and justified, is considered benighted and even blasphemous; certainly, most do not consider it a worthy expenditure of time or effort to

* It is a testament to the wisdom of the anti-suffragettes that they opposed extending the franchise to women for just this reason.

† Once again, I insist my aim is only clarity. Not a few would read this and say, "But now we have civil and human rights legislation, while serfdom and slavery are gone. What, after all, is so sinister about Power?" According to the purpose I have set myself, I am under no obligation to answer that question; but a perpetually revolutionary regime with totalitarian ambitions can hardly be regarded as a desirable outcome by anyone who remains tethered to reality.

understand why anyone would dissent from official wisdom.)

In any event, the liberal solution to the problem of authority has been to hobble it. The means by which this was to be accomplished have been varied and the results have been interesting: to give us a paper shield, a list of rules the state must follow in its dealings with its subjects, not one of which has remained inviolate when it suited the interests of the state or public opinion, as the case may be; the "separation of powers"; and the popular election of representatives (which would have been required by liberal theory anyway) most prominent among them. I am not so mean as to suppose that they were devised with a view to their failure, but fail they have - and failed necessarily.

Liberal constitutionalism, really any kind of constitutionalism, presupposes the possibility of rationally designing the structure of power in the city. The ancients had some luck with this, but after all, their aim was in every case to produce a particular kind of citizen. They were fully conscious that they were engaging in soulcraft, whereas the liberal ostensibly abjures that art* in pursuit of other ends, namely, restricting authority. The unavoidable lesson history has given us is that he has been much less successful: we have had the separation of powers, bills of rights, democracy, and the other instruments of liberal constitutionalism for a long time (in some places, of course, longer than others), and the state has never been bigger.

The problem is in the very heart of the project. The written constitution is only the constitution of command; other forces are necessarily untouched. Anyway, the degree of power that would need to be deployed in order to conjure up actors who could *actually* -

* They knew well their man was commercial man, and their constitutions are capable of producing no other; little did they know how far this godless commercialism would metastasize. Anyway, intentional or not, every constitution favors one kind of man over another, and with this in mind, I'll leave it to my fair-minded reader to consider whether the lawgiver does not inevitably perform this black art.

that is, effectually - counter the power of the state where these forces did not already exist would have been, from the liberal perspective, self-defeating.

Those forces did not exist, and so they needed to be created by the constitution. That is to say, the guardians of the people against the intrusions of authority were themselves organs of authority! What is surprising is not that those arrangements failed, but that they were for so long successful.

Their temporary success can be attributed, I think, to the written constitution itself, whose function, like the Law of God before it, is as a law to govern the governors. (That is, after all, the point of a written constitution.) So long as the courts, and most importantly the court of final appeal, are committed to impartiality and justice rather than personal or ideological whims, it will persist as a more or less useful instrument for the containment of Power.* But when their rulings are not reasonable, impartial, or just, when the judges are informed rather by philosophic ends, personal preference, or the shifting tides of public opinion than by the actual content of the law, they become an oligarchy of wills as arbitrary as any despot ever was.

Only power checks power: the constitutional engineers understood this, but they did not understand it well. The best hope for a check on the central power, as always, lies with the local powers. In the scheme of the liberal constitution, these are the state or provincial governments in a federation, where such exist.

Yet the local authorities are, and have been, states themselves; little Powers under a higher one. And all too often, they appear to be only the local branches of the one. Certainly it is a small comfort, when we are mired in a regulatory labyrinth, chafing

* There must also be a willingness on the part of the governor to abide by the ruling. The courts control no forces - if he does not obey, he cannot be compelled.

under the weight of bureaucracy and struggling to feed our families because half our income is appropriated under the barrel of a gun, that it is a local authority to blame. (Or conversely...)

I will have cause to deal with the matter of democracy and the separation of powers in my second chapter. What remains is to inquire after some of the specific freedoms that the liberal claims to protect. I have alluded to the problem of religious freedom already, and likewise to the freedom of association; I will treat only the related freedoms of expression and assembly here. (As for the question of the right to bear arms, which might have been a freedom for the liberal to interest himself in: he makes it unequivocally clear today that he supports the state in its ambition to disarm its subjects. In any case, technology has made the private ownership of firearms obsolete *as a check on government power* for everyone who has not the means to employ a great number of armed men.)

Liberal regimes, we are told, protect our freedom of speech; and how often we hear that democracy is the best form of government because in a democracy you are allowed to dissent! But understood rightly, this is mere political rhetoric, to be taken no more seriously than a campaign promise. In every regime dissent is permitted only if it falls into the range of acceptable opinion. Liberal democracies are no exception to this rule. True freedom of speech, in which *every* opinion may be expressed freely without consequence, appears, if at all, only in a liminal phase of a city, during which no regime has yet crystallized and acquired a monopoly on political power; in all other periods, it is a chimera.

Every regime justifies itself with a set of ideas that constitute an official

orthodoxy; these it cannot allow to be freely challenged, lest they spread and cause the population to become uncooperative or rebellious. So intrinsic is the practice of containing dissent to the art of governing that any regime which strictly observed the right to free expression would have to be suicidal.

Not every expression of opposition, as I have suggested, is outside the range of permissible dissent. If you were to say of a regime that it has not been pursuing its ends with sufficient urgency, that it ought to move more energetically, then one is not likely to face reprisals. (A curious thing, that some of our most celebrated and honored public verbalists are Marxist or other left-wing "dissidents"! One wonders if they are not the mouthpieces of tomorrow's orthodoxy.) To "criticize" the liberal state from the left is permissible, and even in many cases admired. To criticize it from a little to the right is often barely *tolerated*. To criticize from the right of this carefully controlled opposition is to court disaster. (The irony of my writing this here is not lost on me.)

What is notable about the reprisals one faces in a liberal regime if one expresses the wrong opinion, or indeed dares to tell the wrong kind of joke in "polite" company, is that they are not *usually* initiated by the state itself (although there are exceptions). Rather - this depends to a high degree on the publicity of the statements made - an "outraged"* mob appears, demanding all honors and titles be stripped from the offender, that no one should do any business with him that supports him materially, and so on. (They may relent, but not forgive, if he emasculates himself in a public show of contrition.) The regime's owners have not had to lift a finger, yet their opponents are effectively neutralized in this way.

The same holds good, by the way, not just for opinions one has expressed, but for

* I put this word in quotation marks because I doubt the authenticity of the expression.

associations one participates in. To associate with the wrong crowds or to participate in the wrong demonstrations is to tempt the wrath of the mob, which in the latter case can turn violent, as we may observe in numberless cases in recent years.

What bears mentioning is that the mob does its work with the tacit approval of the authorities. If there is a right-wing demonstration, and violent left-wing "counter-protesters" arrive on the scene, physically assaulting the former, who dare to defend themselves, we know with perfect certainty whose side the police will take in every instance. A few of the more glaring abuses on the part of the aggressors may result in the occasional arrest to maintain the illusion, but for the most part their violence is entirely consequence-free.

This is all consonant with the inner spirit of the liberal regime. During the second World War, and for some time in the post-war period, in the liberal or pre-liberal countries fascist parties were illegal. Today it is no longer illegal, with a few exceptions that need not bother us here. Is fascism more socially acceptable today than it was in those years? Not at all - if anything, less so*. It is no longer illegal because it no longer has to be; their numbers are insignificant, and if they should try to proselytize, they will quickly face the social reprisals I have mentioned. The old problem of whether or not a tolerant regime should tolerate intolerance has been neatly tied up: on the formal level their commitment to freedom of association is, in this matter at any rate, unimpeachable; yet all the same, they need not worry themselves about the possibility that their enemy might one day pose a threat. The regime no longer *outlaws* opposition: what it does, rather, is require every child's attendance, during the most important formative years of

* Not that anyone can really explain why. Ask almost anyone if he is a fascist, and he will be horrified by the suggestion. Ask him what a fascist is, and he will have nothing intelligible to say.

their lives, at schools where they are subjected to the regime's curriculum which is designed to leave no doubt in their minds that its enemies are the incarnation of pure evil and that its critics participate in the same spirit. Those few whose conditioning failed will be effectively managed by the many whose conditioning did not.

I would consider it an *interesting* reaction, to say the least, if one were to say that all is well here; that it is at least the more or less spontaneous action of more or less free individuals that keeps the opposition under control *rather* than state violence, which would be more troubling. Really! You would have the state abjure the sword, and enslave our souls? It is *by virtue* of its non-violence that the regime requires control over our thoughts! Our freedoms of speech, association, assembly are *guaranteed*; when it is found, with some surprise, that some want to use it to the regime's detriment, that guarantee becomes untenable. Rather than revoke that protection, so recklessly given in the first place, it set out to ensure that those freedoms are only *actually* used in an acceptable manner. This is the liberal path to totalitarianism. If it is not readily seen to be a thousand times more sinister for mobs of private citizens to spontaneously appear for the purposes of enforcing the regime's orthodoxy than for the authorities to forthrightly declare their enmity and intolerance toward dissidents and avoid the business of brainwashing, then I am at a loss for words.

Complaints about 'liberal hypocrisy' at any point here would be entirely misplaced. The suggestion that liberals ought to more faithfully uphold their ideals where these freedoms are concerned implies that suppressing dissent is optional. On the contrary, non-trivial disagreements concerning matters that touch on the legitimacy of the regime can quickly become an issue on the basis of which some may be driven to

violence between factions or against the prevailing order. Putting an end to such issues before they become a problem is so much a normal part of the business of ruling that one wonders how anyone ever thought they could get along without it.

Conclusion

What is important to grasp is that, in the contest between the authoritarian and libertarian elements, liberalism falls unambiguously and unreservedly on the side of *authority, not liberty*. As a worldview, its understanding of liberation is a levelling and therefore totalizing doctrine as a matter both of historical fact and logical necessity. The organ of command maximizes its authority by undermining independent centers of power and, concurrently - if the processes are not in fact identical - by uplifting the most useful and energetic elements among the subject populations.

Nothing of this process should be understood as having been *caused* by liberalism as a school of thought, save that the violent and abrupt transition from the traditional order to the democratic might have been avoided in the absence of revolutionary rabble-rousers.* The final political result, in any case, was the same, plus or minus some millions of deaths. The royal power did not need liberal theory to tell it that its interest lay in transferring political power from the old aristocracy to a new one - the civil service - that is wholly dependent upon that power for its fortunes. What has liberal philosophy to say to a prince about his own interests? But we must imagine, if we are not hopelessly naïve, that those "enlightened despots" - one and all great centralizers and unifiers! - took an interest in that philosophy more for its utility than for its (real or imagined) truth.

* This does not exclude the Russian revolution, which began as a democratic mutiny and only later mutated into a communist takeover. Anyway, the differences between communism and liberalism are not deep.

Chapter II: Equality

Introduction

In the preceding chapter I described the basic pattern of the state's growth, and that this pattern essentially shows two types of interests in conflict with each other. The first is the central power with a vested interest in expanding the range of its commands; the other consists in independent powers with a vested interest in resisting that expansion. The first succeeds by winning the allegiance of those subject to the independent powers, by relieving such difficulties as do not redound to its advantage* and by bringing their best elements into its service. Thus the expansion of the central power, the diminishment of the independent elements, is also a process of levelling and equalization.

Equality as a historical fact has existed in the West for quite some time. (Won't the Marxists be delighted to hear it?) Precisely how long, of course, will vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. The process of Authority's increase is also the process of a progressive democratization that culminates in the transcendence of the royal self-interest that set the process in motion in the first place. This happened abruptly in the American, French, and Russian revolutions (for example), more gradually in England and other nations that retain their puppet-kings. Any moves to equalize property or wealth or any of the other things those on the far-Left are in the habit of agitating for would amount to relatively shallow, really mere cosmetic changes from a political and cultural perspective.

Democracy is the only historical meaning of equality. It matters little[†] if it takes the form of socialist or liberal democracy, or if its elections are free or fixed. What matters is that the *de facto* leadership is drawn from the body of citizens, of whom it

* Jouvenel, *On Power*, pg 116.

† From a bird's-eye view, anyway. No doubt it matters a great deal to the citizens.

claims to act as representative, and that the citizenry can be made to find this claim intelligible. The really decisive factor, in short, is that the principle of popular consent has been formalized.

This chapter will explore in brief some of the consequences of democracy and its relation to the liberal syndrome. Notwithstanding one genre of commentary, liberalism and democracy are not deeply at odds. There has never been a raw democracy; every regime has in some way *channelled* the popular impulses. The peculiarity of liberalism is that it sought to do so in a way that was as little dangerous, especially to minorities, as possible; and it must be said that it has been fairly successful. (The danger has, if anything, rebounded back upon the majority.) This has been accomplished by instituting a series of obstacles, what the literature calls "checks and balances", whose purpose is to hamper or in the extreme case paralyze the political formation. My purpose in this chapter is to develop these thoughts and uncover the practical consequences they have had.

We are discussing a later stage in our culture's life cycle than in the previous chapter. In this stage Power has transcended the royal authority that created it; I use the neutral term "transcended" because, as the example of the remaining 'monarchies' in Europe make clear, it was not necessary that the royalty be *destroyed*: it need only be rendered passive by a more energetic principle - the *demos*.

The Meaning of Democracy

The theorist of modern government often enough makes reference to the ancient ideal of the mixed constitution, drawn from such writers as Aristotle, Polybius, and

Montesquieu, and the historical constitution of the Roman republic, that incorporates royalty, aristocracy, and democracy into its structure. The classicists among us like to tell us that the modern state was built (or evolved) to reflect this idea, and indeed, they are vindicated to a considerable extent by the formal configuration of the state. We can see in many jurisdictions, for example, a bicameral legislature, one house of which is composed of popular representatives while the other usually stands for some form of regional representation and is not strictly popular (thus, in some vague way, "aristocratic"). Every Western nation has a democratic body, anyway, and a single head of state, who may or may not be a mere figurehead, but either way embodies the 'monarchical' principle.

Considered realistically and unsentimentally we cannot fail to note the purity, the unmixed character of the democratic principle in all modern states that indeed soaks through every appendage of the formal constitution, while the other principles retain, if anything, only their bare existence. In the United States all three elements are elected, which is the only necessary explanation for the fact that they all remain vigorous (but for that very reason can hardly be considered non-democratic to begin with - at most, non-popular in the narrowest sense of the term); wherever one or more of the elements is not elected, those elements are effectively neutered or in the process of becoming such; and in fact, for one of the non-democratic elements to begin to assert its legal rights contrary to popular opinion would be to provoke a visceral reaction among anyone paying attention that would probably end in the loss of those rights, if not the abolition of the institution entirely.

I bring this up here to demonstrate that, notwithstanding the multifarious configuration of the Western state, it is animated by a single active principle, the

democratic; and that this principle, at least when coupled with the cultural prominence of the idea of "popular sovereignty", tends to overwhelm the others: democracy tends inexorably to monism.

The essentially transactional character of democratic authority makes its legitimacy appear self-evident. If one politician promises more and better services, and higher taxes to pay for them, and he is then elected on this basis it is not, intuitively, far different from exchanging money for services from a private contractor.* And if I agree to pay a man for (legitimate) services rendered, who is to say this was an invalid exchange? Likewise, if "we" agree that the government ought to pursue some particular undertaking, and that agreement is the basis for the government's action, who is to say that it ought not to do it?

The authority of aristocratic or monarchical states is not self-evidently legitimate in this way. Their action must necessarily be more modest; they are likely to be tolerated by the masses, who outnumber them by far, only so long as their rule remains sufficiently agreeable to the latter. As it turns out, this does not take much, so long as the ambitions of the commons are not inflamed by opportunity for their advancement (that is, democracy).

Be that as it may, I raise this issue to forestall from the very beginning any possible quibble over terms here as to what does and does not count as a "democracy". We often hear, for example, people who say that "America is a republic, not a democracy" (which, if it was ever true, has not been for a very long time), or again, that the United Kingdom is not a democracy because it has a hereditary head of state. In

* Obviously there are important differences between the two cases, but none that need concern us here.

reality, any regime that claims to rest on or embody the will of the people, the nation, the folk, is democratic *insofar* as the complete energies of the *demos* are at its disposal.

In this chapter, however, I confine myself to one subset of the democratic category, which for reasons of procedure has intuitively the best claim to being a "true" democracy and which, whether as a matter of necessity or of historical accident (I shall argue the former), has become inseparably joined to the phenomenon of liberalism. This is the sort of democracy in which elections may actually churn people into and out of office and, while I do not give the matter any attention here, today takes the institution of the universal suffrage for granted.

Of Power and Democracy

Democracy is (to pick up the thread from the previous chapter) in the first instance the removal of one set of incumbents, the agents of the royal power, and their replacement by those who claim to be the agents of the people. This claim will be made intelligible by a legitimizing procedure, the *election*. Thus the new, renovated Power claims to be the government "of the people, by the people, for the people", as one slogan puts the point.

The first consequence of democracy, then, is the establishment of a government that claims and is popularly imagined to be the creature of the people's will. Moreover, it claims to be the *only* form of government that will reliably serve the people's interest.

We have already seen the latter claim to be false. The royal power has an interest - that is, *incentive* - to win the loyalty of the people, if for no other reason than to grow its advantage in the contest over political power with the aristocracy or comparable actors.

Its incentive, in fact, is to grow that loyalty as deep and as wide as possible, so as to maximize its own power; therefore its incentive is to maintain a high minimum of kindness to the people whose loyalty it needs to win. Anyway, it is intuitively true that, as Jouvanel* says, one man who purposes to rule a multitude alone needs a broader base of support perhaps than any other government.

The comparison with democratic politics is interesting. Formally, the king rules by right of birth, divine election, or something of the sort; informally, he requires broad support if his rule is not to be one long struggle with his subjects, from which struggle he is by no means guaranteed to emerge victorious. A democratic constitution formalizes what was previously informal and creates a procedure for ascertaining *objectively* whether there is or is not popular support for the government; and if not, whom popular opinion favors. A consensus is far too much to ask, practically speaking; a majority or even a plurality suffices. Depending on the rules of the game, a government can stand with fifty, forty, thirty per cent, or even less of the electorate expressing support for the governing party and - this is the key point - provided the government can maintain the same approximate portion of support in each successive election, distributed as need be, *it only needs to care about the support of its voters*. There is little reason to care about those who did not vote for it, if it does not need them, and none at all to care about those who *would not* vote for it.

Thus with only a fraction of the total a 'popular' government can run rampant over the whole city in the name of all. In times less disordered than these, that fact can pass unnoticed. Today, on the other hand, we regularly hear the complaint that this or that government or official "lost the popular vote", unaware that a king who could only claim

* Op. cit. 118.

support from fifty-one percent of his subjects while the other forty-nine percent favored another claimant would be in a frightful spot indeed; unaware that, in fact, consensus is the historical norm, if for no other reason than inertia and apathy.

Thus, the democratic procedure allows rulers to rule with *less* popular support than previously. Moreover, representative democracy encourages the manufacture of opposition rather than support; it necessitates the formation of parties for organizational purposes, and parties tend, if not to represent distinct interests (which is often true in any case), then at least to profess different policy ideas. That exposes the body politic to the risk of ideological infection. Two people will come to disagree with each other, not on the basis of any real interest either of them have in the solution to a particular riddle but because the pretension has been created in them that they have a right to an opinion on the matter, which does not concern them^{*}; and that this opinion, however ill-informed, deserves to be heard on an equal basis with any other. (We might pause and reflect on the absurdity of the fact that the disagreement between two opinions is to be resolved, not by the intrinsic worthiness of one or the other opinion, but by how many people hold them, whether or not the decision in any way affects those people.[†] What are we to make of this way of resolving things, except to show the losing side that, if it came to blows, we have the superiority in numbers?)

Is that, perhaps, the genius of the system: to create partisan classes, one or the other of whom can be counted on at all times to criticize the government, thus to replace the independent centers of power who so jealously guarded their rights against the encroachments of Power? If so, then it has spectacularly failed. The persistence of an

^{*} This is the case of the vast majority of subjects on which people have come to hold opinions.

[†] A king, in contrast, will hear two opposing views and exercise judgment in reaching a decision. What matter that his judgment is informed by self-interest? That is a sounder base than ideological prejudice.

institutionalized opposition has manifestly failed to halt or even appreciably slow the growth of Power and its conspicuous drift in one ideological direction. On the contrary, a democratic governor wields more power than any king has dared to dream (except where a rival, democratic jurisdiction has forced his hand*), and the reason is precisely because of the overwhelming, self-evident legitimacy of the popular will. Anyway, in those moments of crisis that have historically stimulated the most pronounced growth in Power there is a tendency for the opposition to put aside its differences with the government in the interest of "national unity", which is, I think, a fairly decisive refutation of the above suggestion.

The role of democratic sophistry, utterly impervious to reason, is inestimably useful here. Even if you were not among the electors who chose the victorious party for government, you participated in the ritual which yielded the result, and therefore consented to be ruled according to its decision. And if you did not vote, then nevertheless you knew that a decision would be made, so that your abstention signals contentment whichever way the coin shall fall. Otherwise, your use of public services and infrastructure implies your consent to be ruled according to the Power that gave you these things. So on along these lines, so that, short of *physically exiting* the jurisdiction, there is nothing one can do to withhold consent from the governing power. Therefore, by definition every citizen consents to be ruled by the government, and it can do as it pleases within very broad limits.

Democracy is the principle of license applied to government.† The eternal and immutable Law of God, the chrism and charisma of rule that at once legitimized and

* See *On Power*, the chapter entitled "Of Political Rivalry".

† Plato's comparison of the city to the human microcosm in *The Republic* implies that the common people (*demos*) are the appetitive element in the city.

restrained the king, that imparted both privileges and duties, has given way to the transient popular will; more precisely, to the mindless spasms of popular emotion which include no scruples about replacing good* government with bad over a fleeting sense of boredom or a disagreeable mood. And like every private emotional spasm, the public is self-evidently legitimate by the very authenticity of its feeling, and loathes above all to be ignored. If that dread chimera spasms in this direction, then by all that is holy, we shall go in this direction and no other! If the mob demands more services, more services it shall have: but every expansion of service is an extension of Power.

(Thus an amoral, hedonistic and purely appetitive electorate is of terrific use to Power. Private and public license are in perfect alignment. This is virtually a definition of liberal democracy, and I for my part cannot think of one better. Liberalism destroys the moral character of the people by 'liberating' the appetites from social and moral discipline (a process that claims more souls with every passing generation); the low characters that result demand from the authorities an easing of responsibility, who find in these demands an opportunity for - if not an increase in their actual power, then - an increase in the security of their hold on power.)

Through an imaginary identity of the democratic state with the national will, every limit on the sovereignty of the state is a limit on the "sovereignty of the people". Some such limits are accepted, while others are dismissed, rightly or wrongly, as mere inconveniences that ought to be removed; whether an obstacle falls into one or the other category is seldom a matter of principle, but has everything to do with the specifics of the case that brought it into question: the interests involved, the desired outcome, and so on.

Nonetheless, the *presumption* is against restraints on the action of the democratic

* Good by democratic standards, anyway.

state as the expression of the national will^{*}; or if that puts the point too strongly, then in any event containing the state's reach is seen as a matter of lesser urgency as compared to containing the king's. In the age of kings it was easy to see the crown and its agents as something separate from and set above society, a distinct interest or cluster of interests that did not always align with those of "the people". It is not so easy with a parliament or other such body that supposedly embodies the expressed preferences of the voting public. If that is true, or if it is even *perceived* to be true - and there is every indication that the average person does indeed have this perception, for the most part - then despotism is a distant and mostly theoretical danger in the popular imagination. How can we tyrannize ourselves? Etc.

More to the point, when a "popular" government issues a command, the implication is that "the nation" itself issues the command. "Take up arms against our enemies, kill, die for our cause, *your nation needs you*" - this is rather more compelling than "take up arms against my enemies, kill and die for my ends, your king commands it". The kings knew it, and for this reason were never able to realize their dream of conscription; the revolutionaries in France knew it as well, and were able to do it. The age of mass government is also the age of mass warfare, of cannon fodder. For the first time a government could afford to send wave after wave of men at their enemies and overwhelm them by the sheer force of numbers, relatively unconcerned with the death toll on their own side. Such indifference to the life of the subject was by no means the innovation of an autocrat - although in fairness we must suppose, and indeed the

^{*} Even as the liberal presumption is against restraints on the individual will. Democracy is liberalism for the state; liberalism is democracy for the soul. It does not take much imagination to see how the two might come into conflict.

historical record apparently indicates as much, that they would have done it if they were able to - but of a feverishly democratic power.

This is only a particularly stark example of what Power is capable of when it is empowered by the democratic principle. More generally, we observe that, under the Law of God, it was not for men, even kings, to create laws. The Law was already given; the king's role was enforcement. When the "will of the people" is the principle of law, everything is possible; every thing is exposed to the possibility of interference, intervention, and regulation. What possibilities for the tyrant, and what an opportunity for the breeding of numberless petty little tyrants in the administrative state and in the populace at large! Nor is there any limit to what our legitimate tyrants may do. Give the people a "voice" and they will forgive much.

Concerning "Checks and Balances"

Ah, says the liberal, now you see why we are needed! We have hedged in Power with all manner of obstacles so that, when the tyrant comes along, he shall be paralyzed!

Well done, I reply; so if, wonder of wonders, the electorate shall deliver unto us a leader both wise and good, and competent to boot, I presume he, too, shall be suitably hobbled?

But nevermind that. An impossibly large web of regulations surround nearly every aspect of our lives, and in some liberal countries, state expenditures pass fifty percent of the gross domestic product; in none of them, so far as I am aware, is that number less than one third. Taxes are imposed, rather than solicited (as in our feudal past), and can consume more than half of one's annual income, depending on the

jurisdiction and tax bracket. As things now stand the state already creates dependencies through the services it offers; there are no barriers to the creation of ever more of these, and the trend, if anything, is to do precisely that. (Only socialists are more zealous than liberals themselves in their support for the proliferation of these addictive services.) Does this *read* like a description of "limited government"?

Only power checks power. Democracy is the creation of a direct link between Power and the formless, disorganized mass that is the nation, consequently the opportunity for the unlimited exploitation of the mass that is, in itself, basically passive and therefore powerless to put up any resistance on its own. It does in fact lull the populace into the belief that it can effect its will through elections, that there is no need to organize for the purposes of *real*, i.e. extra-parliamentary, strategic opposition. (For all the anarchical rhetoric on the part of the socialists, their only concrete strategic accomplishment in democratic jurisdictions has been to provoke state intervention in the affairs of private business, therefore stimulate the growth of the "bourgeois state".)

There is, then, no real opposition to Power today, if we understand "real" to mean well and truly independent actors who are organically, spiritually, and strategically destined to resist the encroachments of power, along the same lines as the ancient aristocracy. As a pure matter of *strategic fact*, such resistance - think of the word in its *physical analog!* - is notable for its absence. In vain we look to the institutes of civil society, who as a rule seek to pull the state in this or that direction but never to force it to abandon its ambitions. (Any exceptions to this rule are strategic ciphers that do not merit consideration.)

None of this is especially troubling to the liberal, the self-proclaimed champion of "limited government". This is due in large part to his preoccupation with personal license rather than with meaningful liberty, that is, independence; his understanding of "limited government" is concerned all but exclusively with rules that might be imposed on the individual subject. Thus the state can involve itself in a massive project of social engineering - for example, redefining marriage to include couples of the same sex - and the liberal can be found celebrating this as a victory for "limited government" and "getting the state out of marriage", apparently on the belief that state and tradition are synonymous rather than seeing in the latter a restriction on the former (as has been its permanent role in historical fact); also apparently overlooking the fact that by recognizing such unions the state imposes an obligation on the rest of us to do the same, without regard for our deeply held beliefs on the matter.

The other reason for the liberal's indifference toward the absence of strategic restraints is his complacent faith in the efficacy of his constitutional inventions to restrain the action of Power. No doubt Madison and Hamilton and the rest of them thought they were being terribly realistic when they devised their "separation of powers". "Only power checks power", they said (even as I have said): therefore let the functions of the state be separate, and let the institutions that carry out those functions each jealously guard their own privileges from the others. In this way none of them shall gain the mastery; the state shall remain of a divided mind, so to speak, and paralyzed should any of them attempt to establish itself as tyrant.

What has been the outcome of that centuries-old experiment? I venture a few observations, and cannot arrive at any conclusion but that these realists were not halfway realistic enough.

In the first place, all power has been assigned to the state.* This is the first consequence of a written constitution that purposes to contain power. The second is that complete sovereignty passes into the hands of those who authoritatively interpret the written constitution. They will not wield direct power over everything under their sovereignty, but they have unlimited authority to decide incontrovertibly what is or is not permissible *on every issue in the polity* that comes before it. Nor do these sovereign courts tend to be shy about wielding their power, even unto the issuance of commands to the "people's representatives" in the legislature or interfering with the legitimate business of the chief executive.

Are these not jealous of their power and privileges? Do they not resist such encroachments on their proper spheres? They do not. Apart from the fact that these usurpations are usually ideologically (that is, strategically) useful to one or more of the parties; and apart from the fact that, of all the things the constitution did not include, most notably, it neglected to give the other branches a way to combat an ambitious and overreaching judiciary, the reasons arise from the fact that they are democratically elected. In the first place, the mind of the average voter does not often distinguish between a violation of the supreme law and being *found* to have done such in the eyes of the sovereign court; a court which is - lest we forget what we ought to keep front of mind - composed of flesh-and-blood human beings with desires and ambitions of their own.

* This is no less true in a federation. At best it is a foil for the centralizing tendency (yet the trend appears to be toward more rather than less centralization all the same); but a local state is no less a state - no less a part of the apparatus of command.

Thus, to disobey a ruling of the court - potentially, to resist judicial tyranny - is commonly perceived to be the act of a tyrant, therefore less popular than obedience; and, as popularity is the only thing that a democratic politician can be trusted to care about, obedience *shall be* the result. (Those few intransigent statesmen will usually be ousted at the earliest opportunity.)

More interesting, though, is that the democrat often has good reason to prefer the loss of his power. To be sure, so long as his ambitions remain popular he will endeavor to enjoy his power to the utmost. But in those instances where leadership demands, as it must do from time to time, that he undertake some unpopular actions - which leadership he as a democrat is singularly unfit to provide - he will find it a tremendous relief if he can pass off responsibility to some other agency and insulate himself from any real decision-making. It is a matter of losing the finger to save the hand.

If we are interested, as I am interested, in the incentives that lead people to act as they do, then we must acknowledge that popularity as a condition of incumbency is an incentive not so much to bad leadership as to absenteeism; we might add, to weakness, to cowardice. Quite apart from the question, I ask in all sincerity, of whether we really think anyone who would undergo the dreadful degradation of an electoral campaign in the hopes of gaining a limited term in office is someone we ought to have in a position of leadership in the first place, the conditions of that leadership (such as it is) are themselves poisoned through and through.

Courts have been terrifically useful to the absentee "leader", and not only courts but committees, caucuses, bureaucracies and the rest of the organs of modern government; also ostensibly private foundations and corporations, and more recently

international institutions, organizations, treaties, and so on. These are the sinks of power: for power and responsibility are two sides of the same coin, and when the leader disdains both they will not disappear - political power, like energy, is neither created nor destroyed - but will accumulate elsewhere. When parliament was *actually* supreme, before the formation of the sprawling administrative state, there was nowhere for power to go; or more precisely, parliament was supreme *when* there was nowhere for power to hide. Now decision-making power - little fragments of sovereignty - over numberless issues and areas of social life rest with an unknown number of opaque agencies. This, in our era of "transparent government"! Who among us, without doing research into the matter, can even name the agencies by which we are governed - let alone any of the particular bureaucrats working therein?

This, then, is the greater significance of the "technocracy", of reliance on the "experts", of - to recall one stupid slogan that gained currency a few years ago - "evidence-based policy" (as though evidence had been habitually ignored for all history until the 2015th Year of Our Lord). How telling is that last! Why, we ask the one who claims leadership over our nation, did you inflict this policy on us? Good sir, he replies, I only did as the evidence bid me. Thus he abdicates, although he remains incumbent.

Nor, apparently, is there much indignation among the ordinary members of the legislative assemblies. This is for all the same reasons; and we might add to them the fact that the average member, even of the governing party, possesses only a small, practically insignificant share of the power that belongs to the institution as a whole, so that when he loses, he does not lose much. Indeed, probably the greatest appreciation for the institution lives among the opposition, who by definition is not in a position to defend it; and,

finding themselves subsequently in government, they will quickly forget their old interest. For that interest was a *vested* interest, and nothing more; their new vested interest is in their own impunity. It is consequently meaningless to say that "the legislative branch" has any interest in its own power, or that it can be expected to jealously guard its privileges; the interests that take root there are not united, and the actual incentives that bear on the individual office-holders have little to do with parliamentary power.

For reasons of this kind we may expect power in a democracy to accrue over time precisely where there is the least prospect of holding anyone accountable. Power disappears into the labyrinth, not as victim but as Minotaur.

Of Elected Office

Whatever un-freedoms we had (or have) under the non-state centers of power, we exchange them for the burdens imposed by the state. Those burdens, I have argued, are likely not to diminish, but to increase in a democratic regime, for that very reason: that is, because the state's reach extends directly and immediately to the people - and because it is perceived to be the liberator. I have made the point with respect to the state's new, modern, democratic power of conscription; today, apart from the requirement for new forms of obedience that only liberal engineers could have conceived, the chief burden we feel is our direct economic exploitation in the form of the taxes we pay.

Before the current era, all taxes were levied as temporary measures, to pay for whichever war was ongoing at the time. Eventually, they became permanent fixtures; today, they seem to us as natural as the air we breathe: and like that air, it hardly occurs

to us to question them. "Death and taxes", the saying goes: these are the two certain realities of human life. Not, to be sure, entirely without complaint, or even the occasional protest; but the idea of a taxless^{*} society seems quite utopian to all but the most libertarian critics.

In any event, we must inquire after the relation of democracy to the tax burden if we are to gain a more complete appreciation of the consequences of the former: though I do not suppose that I will have accomplished more than a quick and relatively shallow summary here.

The pool of appropriated resources is one of those "public" things that democratic procedures and rhetoric creates in the imagination. The money has been collected from all, but only one party disposes of it. (The parties in different polities vary in their degree of submissiveness to the leader; it may be that, in effect, one man alone makes such decisions.) Whichever that party is, it must face election and re-election and holds, therefore, a limited tenancy in power, consequently limited access to the "public" resources.

Compare the situation of one who rules for life. The distinction is the same as that between a renter and an owner[†]. The owner has every reason to take the long view because, all else being equal, his hold on power is secure; he does not need to fear that a sudden shift in the public mood will throw him out of power. This is all the more true in the case of hereditary rule, in which case the prince (if he is not a worthless steward of his children's patrimony) must govern with a view far beyond his own lifetime.

^{*} Somewhat amusingly, the program I am using to write this informs me that word must be an error.

[†] I came across this comparison somewhere, but I cannot recall the source. Likely as not, it no longer exists.

The renter, on the other hand, simply has no reason to plan beyond the next election. Imagine that you are given access to vast amounts of wealth for four years; after four years a coin will be tossed, and if it comes up heads you will have another four years' access, but if not, then someone else - your rival - gets a turn at the trough. If you are acting rationally, you will get all you can out of the first four years.

Of course, I have not described democracy here. There is no coin: there is an electorate. So the money you dispose of is not spent for your enjoyment*, it is spent persuading them to maintain your access to the public purse. If you fail, you lose control of the public funds - so you get as much out of your current advantage as you can. But why limit yourself to the present pool? You can go into debt to expand services - why not? You are not yourself liable, the entire taxpaying public must shoulder the burden. They will not complain, if the money seems to them well-spent.

Once again we see that the easy separation of official from office encourages, or at least does nothing to discourage, irresponsibility. The head of a house - whether common or noble or royal makes no difference - cannot avoid responsibility; his house's debts will not disappear. It is only if he lacks all concern for the interests of his descendents that he will be comfortable leaving them to deal with the consequences of his prodigality. He is existentially bound to his status as head, but the democrat must bear very few of the burdens of his actions personally: and these, no more than his subjects.

"But we may turn such scoundrels out of office", you say. You may, after he has completed his term; anyway, more often than not, you do not do it when you have the chance, or you replace him with someone no better than he: if not immediately, then within the next cycle or two. Be that as it may, if he does not in any *natural* way come to

* Not too conspicuously, anyway. We must be naïve to think this never happens at all.

feel the consequences of his irresponsible behavior, if he must be *informed* of it through the electoral mechanism, and if that mechanism amounts to his ejection from office - surely, this is an ingenious way to make sure that our governor never has a chance to learn from his mistakes! Like the protagonist in one of Lovecraft's stories, he is damned by the mere acquisition of such terrible knowledge! A more perfect formula for permanently mediocre statesmanship I could not devise than this.

And yet (to return to the central issue here), not a few would prefer lower taxes to an expansion of public goods and services; the higher the taxes get, we must suppose, the more of these there will be. There is, so to speak, a political market for these sorts as well, so that, in effect, we have two (main) parties in a democracy: the party of big spending, and the party of lower taxes or the simulation^{*} of such. Other issues[†] may find a home among one or the other or, depending on the specific institutional arrangements, among some of the lesser parties, but the central distinction lies in their approach to the management of the "public" funds, sources of revenue, and so on.

The two parties are like the accelerator and the brake in a car. A car would not be an automobile if it had no accelerator, and democracy would not be democracy without despoiling the populace of its resources and delivering them back under the guise of public generosity. But the "brake" is of vital importance to the system as well, both because the more active party needs something to run against for it to remain legitimate in the eyes of the subjects, and because it serves to reconcile the individualist (in this

* E.g. through tax credits.

† These the main parties would prefer to avoid, if they are not obviously electoral winners, because of the democratic incentive to cowardice I have already alluded to. If the culture decisively favors one side on these issues there will be a convergence of opinion among the parties, which has everything to do with the electoral incentive and nothing to do with conviction, or with right and wrong, or even with the public good. You may have principles, or you may have democracy, but you may not have both.

context, one who prefers to take responsibility for his own destiny) with this intrinsically collectivist arrangement. That latter work is partially illusory - the work of the active party is not often reversed, but, if altered at all, then adapted and ratified, therefore made bipartisan - yet real enough insofar as we have not descended into *total* servitude to the democratic state that might have provoked a revolt, though doubtless one that would be no more than an incoherent spasm in the direction of - more democracy.

The function of the passive party - in the English world this is usually called a "conservative" party - is little more than to occupy the space where power is found, for a time, so that the changes wrought by the active party may be digested. Its default state is to lose, and while in power it fails to accomplish any meaningful reversals of its supposed antitheses. (The observer will note that, if it is ever put to them that they ought actually to wield power for their ends, they recoil in horror and say, in effect, "that's what *they* do!" Indeed.) Its use to the democratic state - really, to its apparent rivals in the active party - is to ensure that the pace of the despoliation and other social changes remains more or less agreeable to its subjects.* Thus it serves as a stabilizer rather than as a legitimate contender for power, insofar as it does not offer a true alternative to the active party that is, as it were, the core of the regime.

None of this is in any way refuted in a country in which the conservative party is the more electorally successful. This may simply be a reflection of a more cautious national character, but more probably is a function of "brand loyalty", so to speak. No doubt another important factor is that those parties have taken on so many of the characteristics of their rivals, and the ideas to which they have historically stood opposed,

* I am reminded of the parable of the frog who allows itself to be boiled because the water was cool when it was dropped into the pot.

that they are functionally indistinct. There is not a serious contender among these parties conventionally placed "on the Right" that is not in actual fact and *sub specie aeternitatis* a party of left-wing radicals.*

In any case, the *parties* in any literal or concrete sense are not what is important here, but rather the two opposite tendencies of reform and conservation. There is rarely a third tendency, opposed to the ends of the reformers yet determined to seize the initiative (whereas the conservative is to be understood as merely reactive). What we have on the ideal level is a game in which one side is playing to win while the other is playing not to lose, or to mitigate its losses; a tug-of-war in which one side has only planted its feet and refuses to budge while the other actively pulls it in the opposite direction. Without doubt they will all move in the direction they are pulled, however resolutely the opposition resists movement, because there is no counter-movement. Likewise there is no question that the parties, the state, the people will all be pulled in whatever direction the reformers are pulling due to the absence of a countervailing tendency.

Thus, all boasting aside, it is only on rare occasions and under exceptional circumstances that we are presented with genuine alternatives in a democracy. We may move quickly, or we may move slowly, but there is no question as to our destination. There is a simple explanation for this, and it is the very same I have been presenting from the beginning: that is, because the interests of Power and the natural tendencies of the masses - to ease the burdens of labor and relative economic deprivation - are in accord with one another. Anyone who purposes to limit the power or extravagances of the state

* In Canada the "Conservative Party" supports, or (what amounts to the same thing) refuses to oppose unrestricted state-funded abortion, liberal divorce laws, same-sex marriage, anti-discrimination, and the importation of a mid-sized city's worth of third-world immigrants annually, to list just a few considerations that ought to void its right-wing bona fides.

on the basis of a popular mandate must wage war on two fronts: against the natural inclinations of the people, who stand to lose when Power does, and against the permanent staff of the state, who have no reason to acquiesce in the loss of their own employment and privileges. Simply put, the cause of the limited-statists is hopeless and in the best case is not likely to accomplish anything other than to retard the historical process that might see us out of the present impasse.

Some objections, and responses thereto

I have dwelt at length on the character and consequences of democracy because the phenomenon of liberalism as it exists today is inseparable from the modern democratic power structure. I have done no more than to briefly outline the shape of that power structure in what must be considered only the vaguest terms; and, moreover, it must be noted that I have left out some important facets of the total. The most important of these, I think, is the role of the media and academic institutions that continue to maintain, for all intents and purposes, a monopoly on the control of information, in the management of public opinion and the consequent direction of public affairs which is in no way limited to electoral outcomes.

It can also be said that I have not faithfully described the *actual* behavior of officeholders of various kinds; that there are numberless examples of their acting in ways contrary to what my description would expect on a day to day basis. In a similar vein, it might be said that I have overstated the power of bureaucrats and understated that of elected officials. These criticisms are well-taken, so far as they go; however, I am attempting to explain and predict *trends* in the long-term and on a larger scale than they

would suggest, and I remain convinced that my description of political activity in a democracy is not far off the mark *taken in the aggregate* and concerning the decisive issues. No doubt that description can be improved in many ways, but, as this essay is basically introductory material, I will suffer it to stand as it is.

Anyway, one need not accept that there is an *incentive* for the democrat to abandon responsibility. One need only perceive a few facts, first: that, as we live in elective, representative democracies rather than, say, democracy by jury or by lottery, of necessity everyone who comes to occupy the halls of Power is someone who actively seeks the advantages and trappings of office. Those who seek the advantages and trappings of office are, it is generally agreed, rarely if ever immune to the seductions of power (nor, to be sure, are those who do not seek office). Given their corruptibility, and the fact that we are not after all *homo politicus* but that office is sought as much or more for status as for power, and given the insecurity of tenure in office, logically it may be expected that the average officeholder will tend to behave in ways calculated to maximize his chances of remaining in office. Consequently he will avoid, when possible and necessary, controversial decisions; therefore he surrenders responsibility.

Conclusion

I have depicted democracy here as a political system in which the government has unlimited license to effect its will, and in which power tends inexorably to slide away from public view into courts, bureaucracies, international institutions, private companies - in short, everywhere that it is *inaccessible* to the public and where there is the least prospect of holding anyone accountable for their decisions, due to the structural

incentives imposed on the officeholder. In a way this recalls Michels' point about the inescapable trend toward oligarchy in every form of organization^{*}; and I will note in passing that historically, the two non-liberal types of democracy[†] have likewise resolved the problems imposed by elections by removing power from the people's hands: though these have done so more openly than has the liberal.

In a communist or fascist regime the party comes to be embedded in the state. In a liberal regime power is hidden where it can the least be touched so that it matters as little as possible which party is in power. Democracy is the method that has been used to take power away from the formal political actors. This is why populists, one and all hostile in whatever degree to liberalism, who promise to restore power to the people and their elected representatives, are characterized *without irony* by the liberal elite as being a "danger to democracy". But the democratic incentives I described earlier are also the reason why populism is unlikely to achieve any lasting victories without an aggressive purging of the state and its private colluders.

^{*} Robert Michels, *Political Parties*.

[†] Communism and fascism. Clearly those three varieties do not exhaust the democratic category, but they are conceptually the purest.

Chapter III: Fraternity

Introduction

So far, in my first two chapters, I have given some explanation of the reasons for the success of the liberal school of thought: in a word, patronage. Liberal philosophy proved a useful justification for the expansion and centralization of Power, and therefore also the diminution of autonomous centers of power. Moreover this process is recognized by liberals themselves, as evidenced by the dominance of Whig historiography, as simply the *definition* of "progress".

Without question, the "liberal phenomenon" would not have been possible without this centralization of power I have described. That liberal ideas prevailed in the English world but had to be imposed, for example, on Germany, suggests that liberalism is not the inevitable outcome or by-product of this process itself but came about in response to certain cultural peculiarities. In short, there is something of liberalism that is an optional extra so far as Power is concerned, and this is what constitutes the liberal phenomenon; though it is probably not *reducible* to those cultural peculiarities I have mentioned, insofar as the phenomenon has been more or less successfully transplanted outside of the English world.

The vast energies of the Western *demos* have been unleashed by Power in the modern age. What are they being used for? Historically, as Jouvenel says, the expansion of Power was for the purpose of expanding the engine of war. We are not being put to any such use today by the liberal powers, and they have not made use of conscription in decades; it would, indeed, be quite unthinkable (which isn't to say that it would not happen in the event that a real war should break out). Liberalism is no longer, if it ever

was, a fighting doctrine, notwithstanding some belligerent rhetoric that usually comes from those who have no expectation that they will themselves be a part of the fighting; we can hardly mount a justification for our defense, never mind for resurgence or expansion.

This, I suppose, is the heart of the liberal phenomenon, in cultural or civilizational terms. The two other major existential postures (as these phenomena must be admitted to be), fascism and communism, were famously expansionist; whence it follows that if the West had decided upon one of those other paths, whatever else you might want to say about us, we would not likely be suffering from the present demoralization.

Of Civilization and Modernity

Civilization is the domestication of the human animal. Like the domestication of other animals, it is a matter of investing present energy for the sake of later consumption. It consists in discipline and breeding; the ability and capacity to delay gratification to a tremendous degree and for prolonged periods - for many generations, ideally.

Brute beasts have no need to discipline themselves, and if we were content to live on their level, we, too, could go without. Nature would correct, as it always does, any tendency for us to exceed our reach - for example, to extend our numbers beyond what the land can support - so that there is, in a manner of speaking, abundance rather than scarcity in the natural world. Scarcity appears, absent a "supply shock" or an unsustainable growth in demand, either when we consume excessively or when we save and invest.

That, if we were merely economic beings, is where we could with a high degree of probability suppose the origin of war lies: the scarcity that arises from one group's hoarding for future consumption. An equally rational explanation (from the economic point of view) could lie in the desire of one group that another should bear the pain of investing; thus the one group conquers the other to draw on its resources over a long period of time: precisely as we domesticate brute beasts. We domesticate because we are savvy predators; we anticipate, correctly, that the overall sum of energy to be drawn from our prey will be greater, and certainly more durable, if we cultivate the source rather than hunting it for immediate consumption.

More likely, because we are not merely economic beings but are possessed of innumerable irrational drives and appetites, we would do battle even without those incentives to incline us to war. But whatever the reason, we make war and we conquer.

Jouvenel locates the origin of Power in conquest.^{*} The tribe of conquerors, if they do not see some use to be had from the conquered, would have no reason to leave them alive. On the contrary, the conquered are perceived by the conqueror to be a source of energy: therefore they are cultivated.[†] And as the shepherd or the rancher does not cultivate his livestock for their own sake, but so that he has a source of meat and other produce, likewise the conqueror begins his rule entirely for his own self-interest. But the analogy reaches further: the shepherd comes to sincerely care for his livestock; likewise the war-chief comes to be interested in his project of cultivation for its own sake, although neither he nor the shepherd lose their self-interest.

^{*} *On Power*.

[†] Not every time, of course.

Thus, in *Power* there is something of both self-interest and sociability, both egoism and altruism.* So much should not surprise anyone who has read up to this point. Moreover, Power is evidently a civilizing influence for the greater part of history; the progress of civilization and the growth of the state tell the same story. The conquering band seizes the rule over another tribe; the goal of cultivating the latter for their benefit creates the necessity to maintain reasonable relations with the conquered; the chief then seeks to press the energies his vassals cultivate into his service; the rest, I have already explored at some length - it is the process I have described in my first two chapters.

The conquering tribe domesticates the conquered, then the king domesticates his lieutenants. Who domesticates the king? Could not only a god discipline such a man?† That, at any rate, was the traditional response. A novel view is that the people who had for so long enjoyed the benefits of the king's discipline must civilize *him* - to draw on the energies of his Power for *their* own good.

This is democracy, with all the consequences I have already described - and others I have not. What is novel about this democracy is its *scale*: as though the throne has been kept intact but the king has been replaced with "the nation". Democracy had up until the seventeenth century (or eighteenth, if you will not include the United Kingdom following the parliamentary usurpation of 1688) not been attempted other than on the local level. It is, in other words, a highly impersonal affair, and takes place via the election of representatives, since the scale will not permit real participation.

* This has been a quick summary of Jouvenel's argument in *On Power*, roughly from page 107-149. Jouvenel, I should note, does not write in terms of "civilization".

† Civilization consists in the imposition of discipline for the conservation of energy. There was not a trace of dishonesty or irony in the imperialist claim that they were civilizing the natives of their conquered lands.

This situation creates, as I have previously argued, the understanding that Power has been reconstituted for the express advantage and use of those whom it governs; and it so happens that the consequence of this understanding is unprecedented license for the agents of Power. But it is also deceptive: it creates the illusion that our representatives are our servants and do not themselves take on interests of their own. On the contrary, having come to occupy the halls of Power they do form their own interests, which they are able to pursue in perfect security under the cover of "public service". What was set up to be altruistic by design has acquired egoistic traits, even as previously the conquerors began in self-interest and came to do good for their subjects. This dual character of Power is irreducible.*

What is conspicuously lacking, on the other hand, is any direct *material* connection between the ruling class and their subjects in the same way that the conquering tribes of ancient times had with theirs. "Public servants" are *employees* who receive a salary, a pension, and so on; society is not for them an *investment* in which they have a stake and from whose prosperity they benefit, except insofar as the policies they enact come to benefit them. In other words, so far as they receive their salary and can continue to persuade sufficient numbers to vote for them, *rationaly* (that is, economically) they have no reason to care what their policies do.

Combine these facts with the innovations in productive processes that came with the industrial revolution, and we have a new situation that we call "modernity". Industrial processes came eventually to produce a relative abundance. Politically, there is a highly centralized state that had already been extending its protectorate to all the people for

* *On Power*, page 132. On the subject of democratic leaders coming to have egoistic (or, in his words, "oligarchic") tendencies, see also Robert Michels, *Political Parties*.

some time; the renovated, democratic Power of tremendous alienating scale and the comparative abundance of resources together amounted to a *radical* break from the circumstances of our forebears and calls for a *radical* new approach to politics. Or so we are to believe.

Modernity is the cultural phase in which technological advancements have wrought sufficient social change that ancestral wisdom and sacred tradition are no longer accepted as reliable guides for thought or action. Put differently, it is a phase in which it is thought that civilization's conserving disciplines may be eased. All the long centuries of saving have borne fruit: now is the age of consumption. We can now afford to go soft and to practice a pure idealized, moralized politics rather than the *Realpolitik* that prevailed in every other epoch because to act otherwise would be suicidal madness.

There is divergence in the modern forms because it cannot be agreed which morality we ought to aspire to; but there is no question in the democratic age *whether* the state exists to pursue moral ends. To serve and advance the interests of the people, the nation, the folk; to protect life, liberty, and property; to provide economic security to the citizens; to ensure equality in one of its hundred meanings - these are *moral* ends that have nothing to do with the *actual* purposes, let alone practices, of Power. A moralized conception of politics is, however, useful to Power to the extent that it provides legitimacy and justification for its action and expansion. Usually, indeed, it amounts to a moral imperative that the state do what its natural ambition would have it do for its own sake. Once it is believed that the state exists to do good, anyway, the problem of countering it falls by the wayside.*

* Even in those cases of regimes considered tyrannical the calls for diminishing the state are rare; attention is focused all but entirely on effecting regime change.

Centuries of moral, intellectual, and spiritual capital (to use a crude, ugly expression) have been built up, in spite of the relatively greater challenges and dangers faced by earlier generations (who indisputably bore the greatest weight of civilization), to create this most prosperous of cultures. Yet in proportion as our prosperity grew, the discipline that made it possible came to be relaxed: this is the key to understanding modernity, for it is precisely this relaxation and thus gradual de-civilization. Considered in this aspect, it cannot be understood otherwise than as a phase of *civilizational decline*^{*}, and in fact this is so by definition. Moreover, the political forms, theories, and the practices arising from them that have become possible in the modern phase are luxuries that would have been unaffordable before modernity, and are always unaffordable in proportion as our collective security is not guaranteed. In the event of some catastrophic civilizational collapse - for example, resulting from some natural cataclysm - they will become unaffordable again; the same is true in less extreme cases.

The relatively strict codes of personal conduct and the moral integration of the individual in his family, clan, tribe, or whatever, must be understood as constituent of civilization's disciplines. The idea implicit in the way liberals talk about history, that things were such due to primitive stupidity on the part of our ancestors, and that they could have taken on the liberal ideal of barely limited personal license at any time without serious consequences, is ludicrous and impossible to credit. A comparison of birthrates alone ought to demonstrate the extreme stupidity of this view.

The total moralization of politics that is liberalism is a luxury that will not survive the harshness of necessity. Liberalism, like all ideologies, lays the entire stress upon the

^{*} I have not read the book myself, but I understand Hans-Hermann Hoppe makes a similar point about democracy's tendency for instant gratification in *Democracy: The God that Failed*.

social element of politics. The state exists to protect (if not to serve) the rights and interests of its subjects; and perhaps its action is not limited to those of its subjects but is in principle universal. Hence the liberal's love for declaring the "universal rights of man" and so on.

The liberal equivocates. No one's interests are intrinsically more worthy than another's; no *group's* interests are intrinsically more worthy than another's, all else being equal. The fact that such and such would be in *our* interest as a nation (or whatever group) carries no more weight than if it was in the interests of another nation. However noble such objectivity may be on the personal level - no doubt it would spare us much drama - it is hardly a quality one can find desirable in a leader whose presumed purpose and title of legitimacy is to advance *our* interests.

(Doubtless I have put this point too strongly. But it is indisputable that the liberal puts considerably less weight upon such 'tribalist' considerations than has been normal.)

Nor does such objectivity have equitable effects, predictably enough. The West's interests in terms of such goods that the liberal will recognize - material prosperity, formal national independence, and others of their 'causes' - have been, and for the time being remain, well looked-after. Elsewhere, for example, Africa (particularly in the colonial age), they have not: but they could be, albeit at some non-negligible strategic cost for the West. Liberal thinkers have not, on the whole, shown themselves to be particularly apt for the consideration of strategic interests, so they have been minimally concerned with such losses. The liberal *qua* liberal will thus prefer the concrete, strategic loss for the West in favor of an abstract victory of liberal principle or of some other

group.* Objectivity in theory translates in practice to an anti-West prejudice, favorable on the other hand to anyone who can successfully posture themselves as "victims" of our predatory activity. The same basic logic applies to so-called "marginalized" groups within Western society, whether real or manufactured; though it conspicuously does not extend to those minorities embattled by the liberal state itself, for obvious reasons.

When political power becomes the exclusive possession of a liberal class, consequently, the direction of the nation's energies lies at the discretion of those among whom, in the *best* case, there is scepticism about the legitimacy of pursuing our interests. Self-doubt in deliberation, a lack of confidence in action, apologetic in speech, complete moral disarmament and consequent capitulation before everyone who succeeds in inducing the sensation of shame - such an "elite" cannot fail to have a powerful demoralizing and depressing effect upon the entire culture.

The appearance of the ethical regime - the regime that has abandoned the pure pursuit of power, with the attendant incidental beneficial effects, to pursue those and other hypothetically good effects directly - is, I have suggested, a result of the receding pressures of necessity. It is clear that a band trying to survive in a hostile environment with few resources, subject to the fury of the elements and beset on all sides by wild beasts and marauding gangs, would have no time to worry about the question of whether the structure of their band met the obscure requirements of "social justice". Such luxuries are for times of peace and plenty, when prosperity has made us comfortable and thus complacent: most importantly, *when we have resources to waste*. Nor should such resources be understood as merely material.

* Cf. Burnham, *Suicide of the West*.

The ethical regime is a regime of waste. It depends upon the expenditure of resources (spiritual, moral, and human as well as material) in excess of what it is capable of producing* and agnostic as to the usefulness of those expenditures for the political unit; it is prodigal, therefore, with its pre-revolutionary patrimony. That is to say, to single out one element, its continued functioning depends upon a relatively high degree of cohesion among the subjects, and of the subjects to the ruling class; which cohesion it has not only shown itself utterly incompetent to foster, but in fact its schemes, had they been planned for precisely the opposite effect, could hardly have been more successful. In brief, the ethical regime undermines its own supports, and must either perish or transform into something else.

Egoism versus Ethics

Today we uncritically hold the assumption that self-interest is out of place in those whom we put into positions of power; that their sole purpose ought to be "public service"; that altruism and, dare I say, idealism are to be preferred. Politicians are censured whenever it becomes apparent that all they do, they do for the sake of re-election. (Ah, my friend, whatever did you expect?)

There is much to be said, in all honesty, *against* altruism and idealism; evil proceeds as much from these as from self-serving behavior, and the greatest evils of all have proceeded precisely from those with the highest hopes and the most infectious enthusiasms.

* It might seem that we have a good handle on the production of material goods, though even that much is at least questionable, considering the extent to which we are dependent on imports and debt.

But let us leave that aside. I wrote above that there is an irreducible duality at the heart of politics (even as there is an irreducible duality in the hearts of men), the duality of egoism and altruism. This deserves more explanation than I have been able to give it thus far.

I have been at pains throughout this essay to show that the self-serving prince has a real interest in doing right by his subjects, in various ways: at first because he must maintain 'reasonable relations' with them, and eventually because they become, at least to some extent, an end in themselves (as with the shepherd, or the gardener, etc.). Must one who enters "public service" to do good, on the other hand, take on the opposite character?

To the extent that one intends to do good (whatever "good" means), and needs power to do it, one must be a seeker and holder of power: one must do what it takes to gain and to maintain one's hold on power. If someone perceives that the good he hopes for depends upon his remaining in office, he will perceive it as his duty to so remain. Whether he likes it or not - whether or not he at any point *feels* self-interested - he must *act* in his own interest as an officeholder; that is, he must do things for no other reason than to hold on to power. It cannot be assumed that pursuing his image of the good, right, or just will be sufficient to acquire, retain, or increase power.

Moreover, the advantages and trappings of power have a tendency to seduce and therefore moderate those who acquire it. To be among the privileged, set above the masses who have no power, by all accounts has a certain effect upon the soul. All told, while power may not have been sought for its own sake, it comes to be enjoyed for its own sake. (Beware the incorruptible; beware the ascetic prince! He will spare his subjects as little as he spares himself, and his irresponsibility knows no bounds.)

There is another dimension to the problem that demands our attention. It is assumed that the state exists to do good *internally*, though we have seen where that leads; a similar assumption exists as to its relations with external groupings; that is, it ought to be guided by more or less altruistic considerations, as I noted concerning the liberal's 'objectivity' above. I hope to find some intimation as to whether this assumption can be credited through an extreme hypothetical case.

In the land of Omega, we have tribe Alpha, which is armed and possesses x amount of food; tribe Beta, which, for whatever reason, is not armed* and possesses y amount of food; and tribe Gamma, which is armed and intends to destroy both Alpha and Beta and take their resources for itself. x is not enough food to keep Alpha at full strength, and y is not enough to keep Beta at full strength, but $x + y$ will be enough for either (though obviously not enough for both). Moreover, if Alpha is at full strength it will be able to defeat Gamma, but if it is not at full strength it will be defeated and destroyed. Beta can repel neither Alpha, should the latter choose to seize their food, nor Gamma, because Beta has no weapons.

Is it *right*, morally, for Alpha to take Beta's food for itself, and leave the latter to starve? Probably not. Can Alpha afford to worry about that? Definitely not. Both tribes will be destroyed if it does otherwise, and there is no reason why they both have to die. An altruistic caricature might say Alpha could, or should, surrender both their arms and food to Beta so Beta could fight off Gamma (and wouldn't that be *noble*); a slightly less caricatured response is to say that they should do what is *right* no matter the consequences, and take their chances with Gamma on less than full strength.

* This is stipulated to avoid distraction and is not otherwise significant.

Yet it seems - does it not? - that there would be something objectionable about a leadership, which is responsible to and for Alpha, not Beta, that would consider either alternative - let alone put either into action. Here they have a means readily at hand that will secure their victory - their survival - in the coming war, and they may choose not to use it because some *other* band, for which they are not responsible and which will die either way, will meet its fate? It is well and good for a private citizen to have scruples about such a thing, but a leader has an obligation to those he leads to see them through such trials. Leadership consists precisely in making such difficult and dubious decisions, and a failure to live up to the task amounts to a betrayal of those who trusted him. The question of whether it is *wrong* to take from Beta what Alpha needs to survive can only be a distraction.

But it will be said that this example is just what I said it is: an extreme case; its conclusions cannot be generalized. To which I have three things to say: first, it is not obvious to me that questions of group egoism and altruism in less extreme cases are different in kind rather than degree from what I have been discussing, so my point stands. Second, that our present circumstances are not extreme does not make it wise or prudent to act as though they shall never again become such, especially when we might suspect that precisely such imprudence may in the long run bring about extreme conditions once more. Finally, there is a broader lesson to be learned about the distinction between ethical and political thinking that the example was supposed to help convey, to which that rejoinder is not relevant.

However, to the extent that my critic has a point, it basically agrees with what I myself have said: that moralized politics is for times of comfort and plenty, if ever there is a time for it.

Of Political Thinking; The Ethical Regime

There is a mode of thought peculiar to politics* with its own special considerations that do not appear in other fields. Political thinking is not economic thinking; economic thinking is not political thinking. Economic thinking will tell you that, because of comparative advantages between different countries (for example) in the production of goods, an international division of labor is efficient and, all else being equal, most beneficial for all concerned. Political thinking will tell you that it is madness to make ourselves dependent upon another state for arms, food, and other strategic resources because supply chains can be interrupted; because the deal may, and probably will fall apart eventually, since nothing lasts forever; because the particular situation in the system of states that supports the deal *will* eventually change, and may change rapidly; because it makes us vulnerable to international shocks of various kinds; and so on. In short, we should not depend upon other states because it weakens us strategically. This must be the primary concern of the political thinker, and separates *political thinking* from various ways of *thinking about politics*.

Similarly, ethical thinking is not political thinking. The thought is already present in the earliest political philosophers that the state exists for some more or less obscure,

* By "politics", here I mean the pursuit of power; the analogy is with economics, if this is understood as the pursuit of wealth or utility. This is a somewhat different (though perhaps not all that different) meaning of politics than Jouvenel's, according to which it is any and every instance where men are moving men.

but good, end; we have yet to overcome this faith (for it is really no more than that), notwithstanding Machiavelli's attempt to disentangle the two.

Clearly there is no uniform "ethical" mode of thinking. One argument concerning a particular problem may seem decisive to one ethicist, and to another it will not; it may, in fact, appear to him to be radically defective. In ethics, then, there is a variety of distinct schools of thought, and while there is a certain degree of diversity within the schools, they share a few common presuppositions that cannot seriously be questioned without putting oneself outside the school, to whatever extent. These core presuppositions, it might be said, constitute the *ideology* or worldview of the school.

Modernity is characterized by ethical regimes. That is, where in the pre-modern era we had regimes that were basically self-serving, and self-interest drove them to pursue socially beneficial ends, now there are regimes which are understood to exist *for* the achievement of socially beneficial ends, in which self-interest is anathema (which isn't to say it is nonexistent). Those ends, beyond what any regime would do if it knew what was good for it, are not indeterminate but specified (in what I have been calling the "ethical regime") by the school to which the ruling class adheres. This can be attributed to* democracy, at least in part: either because parties try to make the case for their election on the basis of ideas, where elections are more or less real; or because they need to make a case that they already represent the people, the folk, the nation, where democratic procedure is not honored.

I have already discussed the matter at length, but it should not pass unremarked that this ethical self-conception gives the "statocrats" license to go above and beyond what is necessary for the good of their subjects, therefore increases Power; thus, another

* Or blamed on - the worst regimes of the twentieth century were ethical, i.e. ideological regimes.

reason for the ruling class to take on an ideology that will serve their will to power. This should not reflexively be seen as a good thing, simply because self-interest has been relegated to second place. The butchers of the twentieth century were going "above and beyond" when they slew their hundred millions; they would have been much more benign in the absence of their ideological distortions - if they were, in other words, merely self-serving. The weight of evil is very far from favoring self-interest exclusively.

War and Revolution

The ethical regime is the product of revolution (thus, is invariably born in criminality and treason). The self-interest that characterized the leadership of the traditional order must be repudiated, and its apparatus of command must be reconstructed along the new ethical lines that are democratic in form and substance, if not in practice. The result, as I have pointed out, is the increase of Power. A further consequence is the temporary redistribution of political power between states: temporary because rival powers will not be long in adopting the relevant innovations of the revolutionary state for themselves to remain competitive^{*}; consequently there is an increase in destructive potential all around without any gaining a lasting competitive advantage. (Jouvenel calls this the "Law of Political Rivalry", which holds that there is a sort of arms race in policy between rival powers such that, if one institutes a set of reforms that give it an advantage - e.g. militarily - with respect to the other, then the latter must sooner or later reform along similar lines to remain competitive.)

The ethical dimension of the revolutionary regime introduces a point of contention in its relations with other powers. Its neighbors, on their side, often believe -

^{*} *On Power*, "Of Political Rivalry".

quite fairly - that the revolution will spread to their own lands, with the complicity of the revolutionary state itself; and the revolutionaries, for their part, are all too willing to oblige. Revolution is spread as much by war as by subversion.

Whether or not wars have been fought *primarily* for the sake of ethical or revolutionary principles, this is how wars are being justified; it is even considered immoral to introduce considerations of national advantage, political or economic, into the question. Should America go to war with Germany in the 1940s? For the prevailing school of thought it is enough to know what Hitler was up to in order to reach its answer in the affirmative, thus to justify sending hundreds of thousands of young Americans to their deaths in a foreign land. There is no consideration of the *consequences* of Germany's defeat.

Should America have gone to war with Germany, we ask the political thinker. What was the result of the war? Did America strengthen its strategic position, or did it strengthen its rivals? The Soviet empire, *objectively* a more murderous and tyrannical regime than the Germans', and America's most important rival to date, took the lion's share of Europe (which it promptly revolutionized) as a result of Germany's defeat, and the immediate goal of the war, securing the independence of Poland, was not achieved. (In Asia, likewise, Imperial Japan was defeated only for China to fall into the clutches of Mao Tse-tung, the most prolific killer in human history; also a communist, and therefore anti-American and anti-Western as a matter of course.) We are taught, on the other hand, that this objective and concrete defeat was a victory. This is true only militarily - our forces triumphed over those of our enemy - and, perhaps, ethically: a monstrous tyrant has been eliminated, which is true, although he has been replaced by another at least as

bad as he - so it is doubtful that Europe came out ahead.* (We often hear that America was defending its freedom in this war, and others: a statement utterly detached from reality. America's freedom was never at stake in this or any other war in its history. There would have been no German invasion of America, whatever the outcome of the war in Europe.)†

Is it good to deliver more than four hundred thousand of our men (to recall only American losses) to violent death in order to *possibly* secure a better situation for the peoples of faraway lands? If we have the men to spare, then yes: this response is apparently that of our leading political ethicists. For one thinking politically this is unacceptable, for a few reasons. In the first place, the deployment of our resources for any purpose that does not strengthen us is waste; the welfare of peoples in foreign lands simply do not have a place in the calculus.‡ And, insofar as our strategic resources, including manpower, are thus squandered, it therefore strengthens our rivals and weakens ourselves. Furthermore, as in the Second World War, our enemy may be strengthened by the outcome of the war itself; whereas, in the same war, "our" (i.e. America's) gains were rather more dubious, insofar as our strategic ends were, and remain, ill-defined.

To the extent that our political class in the West is willing to countenance war today, it is only the "just war" that it will favor, where this ancient term is taken to mean, first, defensive wars; but more importantly, a war to neutralize an unjust government. An

* Politically, it obviously did not. No European power has ranked among the first of the world powers since the end of the Second World War. Thereafter Europe has been subjected to America and, for a few decades, communist Russia.

† None of this should be taken to imply support for Adolf Hitler (I am second to none in the desire that Germany had had other leadership in that period), only that I decline to read history in Manichean terms, according to which that man and his regime are *the* embodied principle of evil. Germany's defeat in the Second World War was a *political* disaster for Europe; I do not exclude the possibility (though it remains only a possibility) that for reasons independent of politics it may have been a good thing.

‡ A lucid ethical argument can also be made against such crusades. In brief, that those in a position to command the men of a nation to die for it have a responsibility to make that decision only under necessity.

"unjust government" such as merits destruction is one that involves itself in the violation of "human rights", as we put it today; thus, the "just war" today is a war to effect regime change, on the expectation that the successor regime will be liberal and, especially, democratic: will, in other words, conform to the principles of the American regime. This is more properly called, as it would be in previous eras, *revolution*.

The First World War marked the occasion on which the American Revolution reached European shores; in the Second, it went global, and only recently does it seem that the tide might after all be receding. A reflexive anti-monarchism and anti-traditionalism, plus an unreflective promotion of democracy with at most an afterthought given to the protection of minorities, this revolution is to a very high degree *principled*: it spared not even its allies in the world-historical struggle against the march of the communist. Its consequent total political stupidity can be seen as arising from its apparent situation as a halfway point between Right and Left. The Right is, beyond question, its ally against the communist; yet the Americanist (so to speak) is also a revolutionary, formed in opposition *not* to the communist, who is, as it were, his ideological first-cousin, but precisely to the traditional *Right*. Even as the worldwide communist revolution must be resisted as an ideological rival, the Americanist has his own revolution to complete *against his right-wing anti-communist allies*.

The result was an irrational hostility to some friendly regimes; the liberal, as the torchbearer of the American Revolution, would actually be more at ease with allies who were rather *less* allergic to communism than their real Rightist friends. The communist, for his part, had the good fortune of having few, if any, friends outside of the communist world itself; thus strategy and ideology were in perfect alignment. The strategic and

revolutionary goal was to plant communist government over every square inch of the earth. The American's revolutionary goal is instead the promotion of democratic 'self-government' which is, so far as American anti-communist strategy is concerned, a wild card. Strategy and ideology were at odds with each other; America did not finally *win* the Cold War: rather, the communists lost.

Revolutionary thinking can thus be seen to yield a sort of Manichaeism with respect to the designation of friends and enemies; such Manichaeism is, as I've indicated above, strategically incompetent. But it has a further consequence I have hinted at which deserves more attention. Consider two scenarios:

In the first, country Primus has a (say, historical) claim on a certain territory of strategic importance that is currently in the possession of country Secundus. The leadership of Primus believes its arms and manpower are enough to defeat Secundus and, after escalating tensions between the two countries, Primus declares war on Secundus. Primus seizes the territory in question and, having successfully defended it to the point of decision, sues for peace. They reach an accord, and the conflict is concluded, at least for the time being.

In the second, Primus and Secundus are led by regimes that are committed to widely differing ideologies. Primus has some considerable distaste for the ideology of Secundus, but the latter, for its part, regards the Primus ideology and regime as pure evil and considers the overwhelming majority of Primans who support it to be wicked, stupid, and barbaric. War breaks out, somehow, and initially Primus seems to have taken a commanding lead of Secundus. Primus tries to make peace, but is rebuffed. The tide starts to turn in favor of Secundus. Primus sues for peace again, and is refused again:

Secundus demands total and unconditional surrender. The regime of Primus, unwilling to surrender power, fearful of what will happen when they fall into the hands of Secundus and having not yet lost hope for a more or less favorable outcome from the war, declines. Eventually Primus is thoroughly defeated.

Secundus now has complete power over the representatives of the regime and ideology they found so detestable, and over the people who supported them. Is it to be expected that they will be gracious winners, acknowledging the honor and dignity of the opposing leadership? Will they permit the people who were so committed to the latter to persist in their beliefs? *If that was the intent, there would have been no insistence upon unconditional surrender.* They will do as all revolutionaries do (for "unconditional surrender" is nothing if not a revolutionary formula): humiliate and execute the leadership and their collaborators (and not a few others, for good measure). They will aggressively try to stamp out every remaining trace of the old regime and its thinking. Is *that* process likely to be purely nonviolent and without abuses? Suppose that, according to Secundus, Primus violates in all or nearly all it does Secundus' views of "human rights"; it considers Primus the *enemy of humanity*: does that not make Primus something other than human in the eyes of Secundus, deserving of inhuman treatment?*

Such self-righteousness as holds that we alone are the possessors of virtue and that our foe has nothing but wickedness in him cannot fail to inspire the worst brutality and barbarism.† There is no requirement in the designation of the enemy that there must be *hatred* or any particular ill will between belligerents, as the first scenario indicates; it ought - this is a *political*, not an ethical ought - rather to be an entirely *rational* decision.

* Carl Schmitt made the same point in *The Concept of the Political*.

† Indeed, there could have been no persecution of the Jew (for example) if it was not believed that they are wicked and devoid of goodness, while their enemies are righteous.

Yet even if it is the case that all goodness is on one side and all evil on the other - though there has never been such a conflict in all of human history - it becomes false when we do not act as though it is false; when we do not treat even the wickedest of foes with honor.* And I, for my part, cannot find greater righteousness, though I strain my imaginative faculties to their utmost, where ethics comes to be substituted for mere politics.

Of Bureaucratic Rationalism

We are nearing the end of our journey, so let us take stock. I have explained how liberalism came about as an authoritarian phenomenon, adopted for the purposes of neutralizing Power's rivals and other constraints, amongst which we may count traditions, religious authorities, moral customs, and so on. I went on to explain how democracy is used to expand the authority of the state, and how liberalism entails an exploitation of the democratic incentive to remove political power from the people and their representatives. Next I have described the liberal state as a revolutionary state and is the victim of ethical-ideological distortions that tend to delegitimize rational political action.

But there remains one crucial question that must be answered before we can be in a position to finally understand, as I put it at the start (borrowing a phrase from Burnham), "the meaning and destiny of liberalism". That question is, why has *liberalism* come to power; how did self-denial and out-group preference become a path to power?

The short answer is that contemporary liberalism is an evolution of the theory and practice of undermining the independent centers of power from ancient times; why specifically liberalism and not, say, fascism, is probably due to cultural and historical factors which I have not the space, time, or inclination to explore here.

* Thus Christ enjoins us to love our enemies.

But there is more to be said. Whenever possible, I have argued, power accrues where it can be least accountable; in a liberal state that is committed to maintaining the semblance of a legal opposition, such power as remains in the political formation itself flows to the judiciary and the agencies of the administrative state. Thus liberal power is at home in those institutions which tend in the highest degree to *rationalize* relations, action, and decision-making.

Nor does this seem to be accidental. One gets the impression studying, for example, the moral theory of Immanuel Kant that his idea of the morally perfect being is not a human at all, but a sort of automaton that does nothing but follow the ethical maxims that have been written into its code. In any event, liberalism as a philosophy seems to be nothing other than the complete rationalization of human life; that is, to the extent that human life is *liberalized* it is *rationalized* - the irrational elements are subtracted. Thus professional liberal philosophers today actually ask in all seriousness if it is wrong to express affection for our children in various ways that could give them an "unfair" advantage by comparison to other children.

Back in the real world, anyway, there are questions of favoritism (e.g. racial, or sexual, or the more prosaic nepotism) of various kinds and in various contexts that have been decisively resolved in favor of a strict rationalism. Non-discrimination law is a perfect example of the rationalization of human relations, and it depends for its administration and enforcement upon bureaucracy* .

* I am using this word in a horribly imprecise manner to catch all the assorted rationalizers, public and private. This includes, but is not limited to, courts and tribunals as well as "human resources" departments, and, of course, bureaucrats in the normal sense of the word.

(N.B.: Political liberalism aims to subject political power to rules, rationally devised, and this empowers those elements in the state that serve to uphold those rules; social liberalism has the same aim with respect to *social power*, with predictable results.)

Those bureaucracies may or may not actually belong to the state, but either way they toe the liberal state's line and enforce compliance with state regulations whose aim is apparently the inculcation of an anti-traditional "toleration". The point is not whether those regulations actually achieve any desirable ends in some or many cases - whether this is true or not will be a matter of opinion - but only the extension of command and the erosion of tradition. By means of these regulations the state by-passes intermediary institutions, like the employer, to command obedience to the administrative state directly. Failure to comply can result in re-education, if one is lucky; termination of employment, a civil suit, or compulsion to appear before one of the kangaroo courts that enforce what, in this country, we call "human rights law" that, with few exceptions, tend automatically to side with the complainant - if one is not.

Like any body of power, there is a tendency for bureaucracies to seek their own expansion; thus, to expand the field of rationalization. This is the reason why the professional class that both constitutes the sociological core of liberalism *and* populates the bureaucracies, private and public, have an interest in, for example, theoretically unrestricted immigration. The newcomers, who are now taken from every corner of the earth and not only those whose people can be expected to get along well in the host country, have little in common with the native-born; they will not support the traditional cultural institutions, or to the extent that they do, it will be in such a way that will demand reinterpretation and reconstruction of the institution in question along lines that will be

desirable to the powers that be (since tradition, it must be recalled, is a barrier to the pretensions of Power). Otherwise they will tend to form institutions of their own, which will mean as a matter of pure mathematics a decrease in political power for traditional institutions and for the common culture itself, which is the main barrier to the sovereignty of the bureaucratic state.

But there is more: the fact that the newcomer is *not* expected to get along well in the host country is a large part of what makes him desirable from the bureaucratic standpoint. When tensions flare up it is the bureaucrat (or the judge) who must be called to intervene; thus the situation gives yet more reason for him to insinuate himself into the relations between man and man, to expand his competence and his protectorate.

Tension between newcomers and natives is only one example; actually there is a long list of unforgivable sins against the spirit of universal brotherhood* that cry out for bureaucratic intervention (which is growing increasingly coercive). At some point the danger arises for the bureaucrat that he will be *successful* and will have put himself out of work. The solution to that problem is the creation of new wounds for him to heal, the designation of new "protected classes" and suchlike; the discovery of these ills, and their propagation, is the work of academia and the media respectively. This is *ideological* work, in the Marxian sense, for justification and support of the bureaucratic state.

All this contributes also to the atomization of society; and insofar as the natural bonds between members of society are eroded the state, as the great unifier, must grow correspondingly greater.

Thus there is a perpetual, slow-motion social revolution, and liberalism - which

* I have in mind such phrases as "racism", "sexism", "homophobia", "xenophobia", and so on.

has, admittedly, absorbed other assorted Leftist doctrines* as a matter of historical fact - is the philosophy of that revolution. The preoccupation, ostensibly, is with "justice", and "injustice" is to be combated by the state so we might reach it. But three facts are observable, first: that the only *influential* descriptions of "justice" are not readily distinguishable from bureaucratic rationalism†, however it may be that the ideas of more obscure liberal thinkers depart from that definition‡; second, that new "injustices" are found every year that no one could previously have imagined and which supposedly cry out urgently for bureaucratic intervention; third, that the rectification of those "injustices" *invariably* involves violence to institutions or customs that might otherwise restrain Power.

Hurling thus along the current trajectory it is not overly fanciful to imagine that our destination is a new totalitarianism, perhaps one that takes an altogether new form. The total politicization of social life is already *expected* to a considerable degree: we are not to pay honor to those with unacceptable opinions or attitudes or who have merely made a joke deemed impermissible, and indeed, they are to be economically and socially ostracized in proportion to the magnitude of the supposed 'offense'; religious or other social groups which do not adhere to the standards of bureaucratic rationalism are to be brought into line (hopefully internally, so that the revolution can be passed off as an organic process); some thoughts have become unthinkable and some truths unspeakable because they pose a danger to the logic of the whole operation, while on the other hand we are required to pay homage to an ever-lengthening list of transparent lies. What is

* Though even admitting that, I would argue that it has not changed in its essential character.

† Clearly this phrase does not refer to those regimes where the bureaucracy exists to serve some master, in which its imperatives and incentives would be rather different than in the liberal regime.

‡ If they do, they do not differ widely; resistance to, for example, "civil rights" law is by now disqualifying.

important, anyway, is that dissent from the official line has become *socially* unacceptable and exposes one to social sanctions. I should find it a strange line of reasoning if it was concluded that, because the state was not involved in coercing the dissident (which, depending on the country, is by no means guaranteed), that therefore ours is *less* totalitarian than some other past examples. What is more uncanny, that the state should punish its dissidents, or that the whole society should spontaneously conspire to enforce the state's will against one of their own?

Be that as it may, we can see at once the symbiosis of regime to ideology. Liberal ideas give the justification for the total regulation of social life from above and, consequently, an extreme concentration of political power within the nation into the hands of the bureaucratic-judicial oligarchy.

Insofar as relations (between citizens, between subjects and the state, etc.) are equalized, they are rationalized; insofar as relations are rationalized, they are conducted procedurally; insofar as relations are conducted procedurally they, are regulated bureaucratically. Like the trail of slime a snail leaves in its wake, the movement of reason through a culture can be tracked by the presence of bureaucracy.

Conclusion

What I have been calling the "liberal regime" is a product of the interplay between Power's natural tendency to grow, even unto monstrous dimensions, and the liberal rationalism that it adopted as a stimulant to that end. The extent of this adoption has gone on to perverse lengths that have made the pursuit of Power's typical ambitions (i.e. expansion through conquest) unlikely, if not impossible: in the first place because those

ambitions have become unthinkable, and second, because liberalism has in any case made the requisite physical and moral discipline *optional*, which means, in practice, that it will be mostly neglected. Hence, liberal democracy is not "the end of history" so much as it is a dead-end of history. I shall not go so far as to say that the logic that supports the regime was *designed* to demoralize its subject populations and morally disarm the liberal nation; I will say, however, that if this *had* been the goal, its ideologues would not likely have done much different.

The basic instinct of liberal rationalism is that social life, in all but its most personal aspects, should be conducted along lines that do not far depart from rational (that is, bureaucratic-egalitarian) norms. If it be objected that this is a caricature or straw-man, then it should be recalled that this is already the practice and has been for some decades in liberal nations, to the extent that one cannot arbitrarily refuse service, employment, housing, or, depending on jurisdiction, membership in a social association or other such institution; and if one refuses association *even in* one's personal life for reasons that have been deemed unacceptable, then one is liable (should the fact be made known) to every kind of social and economic sanction. Nor is there any logical reason to suppose that it this is the end of it.

In any event, "the meaning and destiny of liberalism" is by now apparent. It is a basically inward-looking bureaucratic collectivism with totalitarian ambitions (inward-looking because no longer concerned with expansion); which ambitions, if the regime does not fail in one way or another, are likely to be achieved. If this strikes the reader as being a rather histrionic characterization of the present circumstances, it is only because he lives and thinks with the regime's vector. The dissident knows the danger.

The liberal regime retains the veneer of democracy because it is necessary for a Power of this scale and of these colossal pretensions to present itself as an essentially *ethical* construct, in service to the people whose creature it is, and looking to secure in all things their freedom and equality. Yet it is precisely its *ethical* character that gives license to the pettiest tyrannies. Without question, the totalitarian state is necessarily a *democratic phenomenon*. The total politicization of society would be quite impossible in the absence of democratic legitimacy and the mobilization of the masses.

Yet, the importance of the elected official is not what it once was. Power has accrued elsewhere; thus, the party that would combat the encroachments of the state are left powerless, while their opponents have free rein to grow it under their democratic mandate.

It would be wrong to imagine that this growth has been simply imposed upon an unwilling population. Those who were able to live independently from the benefits that may be conferred by the state have good reason to resist its encroachments, although it must be supposed that they, too, had (and have) their price. The process was fuelled by the political exploitation* of the rest who are defined rather by dependence than the reverse. This began with the abolition of slavery and serfdom, then the extension of the franchise and the removal of property qualifications, then the welfare state, culminating finally in protections for the "disadvantaged" of various descriptions. This has in no way made those populations independent, but has only transferred their dependence from the natural protectorate (wife under husband, child under father, slave under master, serf under lord) to the abstract protectorate of the state.

* We give our employers our labor; we give Power our vote.

Conclusion

I have explained the emergence of liberalism, both as a philosophical school and as a type of regime, as the result of a process of power consolidation on the part of 'the state' and its precursors. The centralizing Power finds its own increase in the diminishment of its rivals in the same system and, thus, has a tendency to pursue a policy of levelling intrinsic to its own nature. Political doctrines of equality have provided justification for this tendency, and have therefore served as tools for the subjugation and neutralization of independent sources of power. Moreover, the same tendency exists to grind the institutions of civil society into the "dust and powder of individualism" in our time. There is a totalitarian impulse latent in every Power, and liberalism has, in its own way, been the (perhaps unwitting) servant of that impulse.

Moreover, I have characterized the liberal syndrome as the product, as it were, of an excess of civilization - or at least, an excess of civilizational *success*, a deficiency of hardship - and marks a general decline or decadence. The wholesale embrace of philosophies that celebrate important strategic and other losses for ourselves would in no way be possible among a people that remains vigorous and self-confident, but only among a people grown old: not with the old age of maturity but of sickness and senility.

But neither portrayal of the phenomenon or the historical processes that spawned it should yield an attitude of fatalism with respect to political action today. The only necessary implication is that our possibilities are not endless, but circumscribed by forces that are completely beyond anyone's control: which means, as it happens, that we are on an equal footing with every other historical epoch. Possibilities for the mitigation of modern evils remain.

I must reiterate, on the other hand, the point I made at the start, that there is to be found in these pages neither a plan nor a programme for reform or revolution. Any plan to limit the state by means of the creation of such powers (for example, feudal centers of power) as have checked it in the past would face insurmountable difficulties today, not least the problem that their creation would likely necessitate extensive use of state power itself. All the same, I will indulge the temptation with a few remarks here.

I, for my part, can see no end to the ills I have identified so long as democracy remains the active principle of our government. Democracy can be an effective check on state action only if it is confined to the giving or withholding of assent to measures proposed by others who are not, and are not seen to be, the agents of the people. Moreover the *demos* must be resistant to the pressures - both carrot and stick - that Power can bring to bear. In order to have free men we must first have *men*, and then they must be free. The modern democracy is not, as it is normally assumed to be, a government of free men, but of subjects; democracy is the opposite of a republic for the same reason that aristocracy is the opposite of oligarchy.

But if we insist on living with an active democracy - I myself make no such insistence - then the more the better, at least up to a point. I mean that the configuration of *the whole state* ought to be dependent upon the outcome of each election, even if it means we have as grubby a spoils system as we can imagine. The alternative is the permanent administrative state in which power flows away from responsibility as inexorably as water flows downhill. This will on the other hand make the permanent state and therefore the bureaucratic oligarchy an impossibility, and will necessarily mean a

small, limited Power, inasmuch as a large state cannot be reconstituted and set in motion in a limited term.

More seriously, an insistence that proposed changes to the rules of social life be put to a referendum could go a long way in putting a brake on the intrusions of the state, provided that voters remain attached to the idea of their own liberty. That, alas, is by no means certain today; if they are not committed to freedom, the only effect would be to grant additional authority to state power.

However, it may well be the case that the present regional and global strategic situations, not to say internal politics and expectations, make the limited state impossible. Certainly, this is true of the great powers, which are subject to the "Law of Political Rivalry" (which holds that there is a sort of arms race in policy between rival polities, so that reforms in one polity may require similar reforms in the other to remain competitive - above all militarily); for non-sovereign states - those under the protectorate of the non-American powers - the possibilities are, perhaps, greater. It may be, however, that there is nothing to do but to steer the state in a direction less destructive than the present. The great energies that have been unleashed by the liberal-democratic revolution, which the resulting regime has so far neglected to harvest, can after all be put to use. At the very least, a reconstruction of the physical and moral disciplines that we have lost may be accomplished; beyond that, I decline to speculate.

On a less grandiose scale, we can assert with confidence - what only the most dangerous radicals have ever denied in any case - the need, and the desirability, to bolster those spheres of independence from Power. Above all, this means the family and the church. There are many reasons that totalitarians and radicals have despised both, none of

which ought to recommend a similar response from any responsible adult. Protection of these things ought to be *the* organizing principle for those who would resist the encroachment of Power, rather than unattractive, unpersuasive, and unpopular theories about the unmitigated good of international trade, "creative destruction", and the mobility of labor that means in reality the devastation of local communities and the homogenization of the nations. (In point of fact those results present an opportunity for Power.)

Independence, not only from the state but from other social forces, remains as ever a worthy goal. The ideal, if I may be permitted to speak thus (bearing in mind that ideals necessarily contain a measure of unreality), is self-sufficiency. Clearly such a thing is not universally realizable; to reach that ideal one must have a reasonable amount of land, and there is today simply not enough to go around. Nor would it be desirable even if the land could be reapportioned: either as a matter of policy or of preference for a great many people. Some, perhaps most, will ever be content with their status as the servants of those more powerful or wealthy than they: who are we to take that away from them? But these dependents - this class of dependents includes not only the wage-slave but the urban professional of every description, many or most of whom are no doubt better off in material terms than the self-sufficient - should be kept well away from political power, lest they effect, as in historical reality they have effected, a general enslavement and dependency.

Whatever recommendations I have put forward here (which of course should not be taken to be exhaustive of the political possibilities today, nor even representative of the best) should be read as no more than possible aspirations unlikely to be achieved in

reality. Even so, steps can be taken in their direction, or others, that would improve our lot. The most important thing, it seems to me, is that the irresponsible be permanently and completely removed from power and the institutions that made them possible destroyed.

In any event, there are a few lessons to be learned from the theory I have introduced here. The first is that any attempt to gain power on the basis of democratic persuasion without attracting the support of particular social or political forces will fail, because it is founded on an assumption of political individualism that is basically mythical. Liberalism came to define the intellectual horizon because powerful forces - I have emphasised the state, but it was by no means the only one - found it useful to their ambitions, and not because it was true. If anything, human psychology being as it is, liberalism came to be seen as useful before it was seen to be true; it is believed in *because* it is useful. Likewise with certain liberal or post-liberal mutant strains that have appeared since roughly the 1960s which seem to push the liberal regime into ever more ominous directions. The extent to which *private interests* have come to pledge allegiance to ideas useful only to Power demonstrates how few truly independent centers of power remain.

The second lesson to be learned is that power without security results in irresponsibility. Insecurity creates dependence, and dependence is the major condition for servitude; this amounts to a de facto transfer of sovereignty away from its formal seat to those who are insulated from the political consequences of its exercise. Suppose this means that popular sovereignty has after all become a fact: but when has a crowd, and this a crowd of millions or tens of millions, ever been responsible? Or on the other hand it could mean a great deal of leverage for private donors to political aspirants. Actually we can only guess where power lies; we begin by attempting to demystify power by making

it reliant upon the consent of the masses, we end subject to occult forces. No one had to ask who held power in the reign of the Sun King.

Third, that regimes are dynamic rather than static. They are put into motion by the ambitions of their constituents, and if these lose their vigor they will be overtaken by more vital elements than they. This means that there is no freezing the polity at a point of equilibrium, either "natural" (whatever that should amount to) or utopian; there shall be no "end of history" 'til the Lord returns in His glory.

But the most important lesson, by my estimation, is that there simply is no legal or institutional substitute for the person. The liberal project has been to subject power - and this, in all its forms - to rules, and these devised, administered and enforced by humans. The effect, anyway, has been to replace personal responsibility with a merely pragmatic way to eject undesirables from office (and this, only a small subsection of those with power) while in no way solving the problem of perverse incentives that has been created by the attempt to rewrite the rules.

There have been, on the other hand, a number of relevant matters I have not been able to discuss, or to discuss adequately; I will recall a few of them briefly here. In the first place, much work remains to be done in locating political power, and its sources, in the present regime; I have accomplished no more than a gross oversimplification in this paper. It shall suffice for me at the moment to acknowledge that fact. Otherwise, there is the role of technology in shaping the regime under which we live, and the character of the regime in the spiritual dimension.

The first-order consequences of technology for Power are, of course, the uses to which it can be put directly. It can be used to control and surveil us in ways never before

possible, though at present it is used more or less sparingly. Otherwise there are communication technologies that allow for the rapid sharing and dissemination of information, and of transportation that allow for the rapid deployment of forces.

Second, there are opportunities for Power in the necessity for rules to regulate or in some cases mandate the use of some forms of technology. In transportation, for instance, the widespread use of the automobile necessitated the creation of traffic laws and the construction of infrastructure and in general expanded the competence of Power. (That is not to say such was not justified in this instance.) Now, with development in the area of automation, the prospect has already been raised, with varying degrees of support, that personal operation of automobiles should eventually be outlawed in the interest of sparing us deaths and injuries from traffic accidents. The fact that we cannot immediately discount that prospect of a massive restriction on our freedom as paranoid fantasy speaks volumes.

Firearms have been another problem, insofar as they are the best means to counter a threat to one's person (unlike, say, a knife or a bat, which requires engaging with the threat at close quarters). The danger lies in the inevitability of criminals acquiring such tools, which has justified the imposition of draconian restrictions on their use and ownership. The occupants of Power are not concerned with the fact that they thereby disarm the law-abiding rather than criminals (who, by definition, do not obey the law) and in fact must see this as a desirable outcome, to the extent that it increases dependence upon the state for security; which security they are unlikely to actually provide unless the victim of a crime is fortunate enough that law enforcement was near at hand to assist as

he is preyed upon. (Where this is not the case, which must be the majority of crimes, their work is little more than cleanup.)

There is another feature that must be observed, which is that, in proportion to the complexity of the technology that we require to maintain our way of life, we are made dependent upon those specialists whose job it is to produce that technology. It is impossible to live a modern life in the modern world without being dependent upon the producers of technology. The result is that enormous prestige and no small amount of power - though the precise nature of that power is not clear - rests with the masters of our advanced technology.

However, none of that is so significant as is the total situation that our dependence upon them creates: in short, that independence and therefore freedom are diminishing as possibilities for us. Our way of life rests upon the premise, as it were, that the difficulties of living a minimally comfortable and leisurely existence have already been solved; the hard work has already been done by someone else, and this, to a great extent, by technology. The consequence is that, with respect to our counterparts in other eras, we are weak, lazy, stupid, unskilled, vicious, and cowardly. We are too pampered and comfortable, we have no substantial hardship or discomfort - this is all the more true in the era of the welfare state - to have any considerable competence or usefulness outside of the particular circumstances we have created for ourselves. Should these fail, our losses will be catastrophic. (This would be true in any case; our numbers have been artificially inflated by a number of factors, which inflation would simply be 'corrected' in the event.)

This brings me to the second matter I would recall in brief, the *spiritual dimension* of the problem. Modernity, whatever I have said by way of an attempt to define it, has not been understood until it is perceived to be a *disenchantment* of life, the 'de-deification of nature' and of time; in brief, everything Nietzsche meant when he said that "God is dead". It is a civilizational shift in posture toward nihilism, therefore toward meaninglessness, toward emptiness.

Undoubtedly, it is in the spirit above all that liberal democracy must be felt, in proportion to one's spiritual sensitivity, to be a monstrous tyranny. Not only freedom but nobility and greatness have become impossible; if we have, in fact, been equalized, then it is only by dragging what is best down into the filth to be trampled by swine. It is a small consolation to one who in the depths of his soul craves danger and death and noble things to live and die for that *he is spared these things*, that he has permission to work for the perpetuation of the machinery that enervates his spirit and to produce children to share his miserable lot.

Nay, such a one must hate even the virtues of liberal democracy, and give the lie to Fukuyama's claim that this is the most satisfying of polities; he must laugh in derision at the suggestion that an Alcibiades - let alone an Alexander or an Octavian, an Attila or a Temujin! - could have been content as a mere industrialist or mountain climber.

What he needs is not *recognition* - what does the "blond beast" care about that? He needs a sword in his hand, a war cry on his lips, and the blood boiling in his veins; he does not *risk his life*, he *chooses death*.

We can no more imagine that this one is satisfied in a liberal democracy than that a lion is satisfied in its cage at a zoo. Nor, indeed, can we be confident that this is after all

a rare sort I have evoked here; the tendency is alive and well even in basically unmanly types: thus cries for "justice" are loudest today, when "injustice" by any commonly used metric is as low as it has ever been, and not likely to diminish much further. What is desired is not the end, but the fight.

Liberal democracy is incapable of giving us the good fight, so we have bad ones. Its only solution to nihilistic violence is to increase the tyranny of nihilism; this and a thousand other "fatal contradictions" have doomed it to failure.

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