

## Augusto del Noce, Eric Voegelin and Modernity

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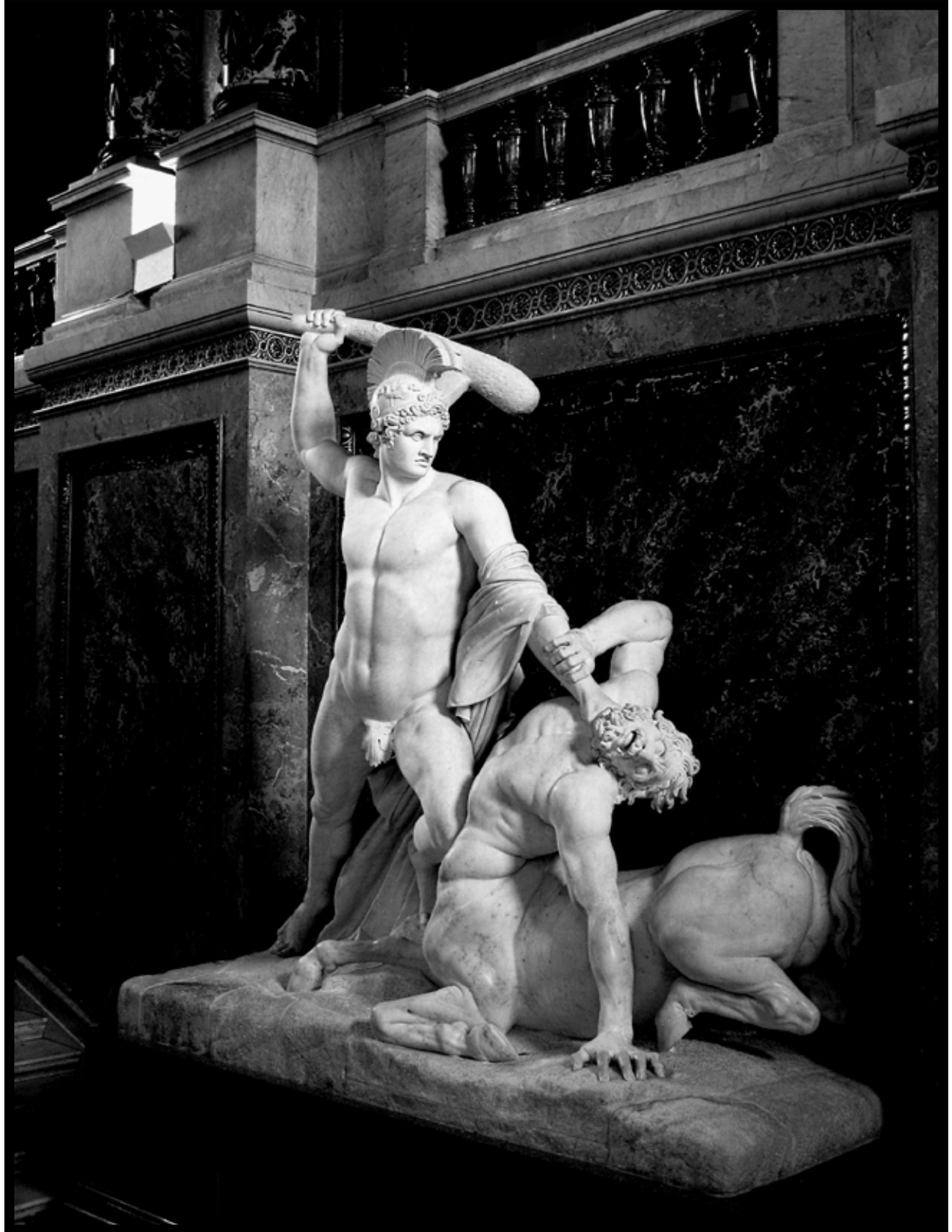
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# *The* EUROPEAN CONSERVATIVE

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## GUEST COMMENTARY

# On True Civilization

Andreas Kinning

No one is in favour of barbarism. Not even barbarians. Everyone is on the side of civilization. Hitler, Mao, and Stalin are recent cases in point. All three were very much ‘pro civilization’. At least for what they took to be civilization. Socrates said that no one willingly strives for what is bad. Everyone aims for what he believes is good. The question is, of course: What is truly good? Analogously, we should ask ourselves: What is *true* civilization?

In searching for an answer to this important question, most of us tend to focus on politics and political ideas. We are inclined to think of states and ideologies as the stuff of civilization and barbarism. From this perspective, the Third Reich and Nazism, the USSR and communism qualify as barbaric; Western society and liberalism as civilized. Conservatives, of course, have grave doubts about liberalism, and where it is leading Western society.

I agree that politics and political ideas are vital. After all, as Aristotle said, the good life is a life within the *polis*. The *polis* needs to be a good *polis*, and hence deserves careful attention.

But politics and political ideas is not everything. When it comes to civilization and barbarism, the distinction between them is also of great use at the level of personal life.

There, civilization refers to, among other things, civility, as opposed not to martiality but to rudeness, impoliteness, offensiveness, which are all expressions of a barbaric nature on a personal level.

Civility in this sense is very much underrated in our day. It is even more important than civilization on a political level. One can be happy and content, even under a tyranny, but not when surrounded merely by ill-mannered, loutish, boorish people.

Civility came to full fruition in the ideal of the gentleman, which is, contrary to what some Englishmen believe, a truly European ideal.

Historians of the ideal of the gentleman relish in finding differences in the way it has been understood in various ages and countries. They tell their reader that the gentleman of the Renaissance is not the gentleman of the Victorian Age, and that the Spanish *gentilhombre* does not equal the French *gentilhomme*, and that both differ from the Italian *gentiluomo*, etc.

All very true. But also very untrue. Because behind all the various manifestations, one finds the general idea of the gentleman transcending the boundaries of time and place. All it takes is a somewhat Platonic way of looking at things—of which historians are professionally incapable, of course.

Civility is not the only characteristic of the gentleman. He also exhibits courage in danger and perseverance in difficulties. He is neither a coward nor someone who gives up easily. Moreover, the gentleman is a man of sense. He is judicious and reasonable. Finally, he always tries to be fair, as far as humanly possible. One can count on his word. He is generous and kind.

In real life, one often feels surrounded by barbarians. Even in the company of self-proclaimed conservatives. Why is that? Obviously because most people, including conservatives, have forgotten the importance of being a gentleman. The ideal is almost dead.

That is terrible. It seems to me that conservatism should also—and perhaps in the first place—be a defence of the ideal of the gentleman. And let us not forget the ideal of the lady, its feminine counterpart, which is equally in need of restoration.

Where to look for inspiration? A good place to start, if I may be so free to make a few suggestions, are two witty books from 16th century Italy: Giovanni Della Casa’s *Il Galateo, ovvero de’ costume* (*Galateo: The Rules of Polite Behaviour*), published in 1558, and Baldassare Castiglione’s *Il Cortegiano* (*The Book of the Courtier*), published in 1528. The latter book especially was extraordinarily influential in establishing the ideal of the gentleman and woman in Europe. “It is hard, indeed, to think of any work, more opposed to the spirit of the modern age”, writes one of Castiglione’s 20th century translators. And so it is.

But behind these two books lie three other books that are the true source of the gentlemanly ideal. They are all from Antiquity. They are Plato’s *Republic*, Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, and Cicero’s *On Duties*. Of these, the first is indubitably the greatest. Every conservative should know them by heart. ■

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**About the cover:** “Theseus Battling a Centaur” by Antonio Canova (1757-1822), representing the struggle between civilization and barbarism. The 340 cm neoclassical work dates from 1804-1819 and is located on the grand staircase of Vienna’s Kunsthistorisches Museum.

# The Myopia of Cultural Relativism

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Filip Mazurczak

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When asked by an English reporter what he thought of Western civilization, Mahatma Gandhi reportedly quipped: “It would be a good idea.” Scholars doubt that this exchange took place. However, the popularity of the anecdote shows how widespread hatred of our civilization has become, including among our own culturally relativistic elites. Their self-loathing is frequently coupled with a glorification of the Far East and apologetics for Islam.

In actuality, the West created the greatest civilization in world history, and it was only until after the Enlightenment that its decline began. A comparison with Oriental and Muslim societies reveals that it was only in the West where freedom, beauty, and the search for truth could flourish.

For cultural relativists, 1789 serves as the demarcation line between barbarism and progress. In their misguided view, the West before the French Revolution was a dim, ignorant, superstitious place. True enlightenment only existed in India. The Romans and Greeks were cruel, the Church Fathers were misogynists, and the Middle Ages—the ‘Dark’ Ages—were an unredeemable embarrassment. The Renaissance was temporarily treated somewhat better, as it was incorrectly viewed as a turn towards secularization, but now it is more frequently presented as the age of corrupt Borgia popes and the time of the first encounter of Europeans with the rest of the world, a prelude to the latter’s oppression. It was only thanks to the Enlightenment and French Revolution that the West ‘discovered’ ideals such as liberty, equality, and brotherhood, which finally led to ‘progress’, the abolition of monarchy, secularization, and notions of equality that have recently led to the apex of human achievement: the legalization of abortion and homosexual ‘marriages’.

Of course, the above description of the anti-Western historical narrative is somewhat of a caricature. However, this construct is more or less what most students in the West are taught about their civilization. They are indoctrinated to hate tradition, religion, and order, instead idealizing progress and emancipation and turning towards the East for guidance.

These self-hating Westerners are right about one thing: 1789 indeed was a watershed moment in Western history, insofar as the French Revolution created the world’s first totalitarian regime. Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov wrote that the difference between Christ and Marx is that the former asked his disciples to give their own goods to the poor, while the latter asked his followers to take others’ by force and redistribute them equally. The same applied to the French Revolution, which attempted to enforce liberty, equality, and brotherhood by the guillotine.

It was the period before the French

Enlightenment that allowed the West to flourish. The interaction of Athens, Rome, and Jerusalem created a civilization based on the quest for truth, beauty, actual equality, freedom, and rationality. The ancient Greek philosophers taught us how to search for truth, while the Romans gave us the basis for modern law and, applying reason, constructed cities, roads, and works of architecture. The greatest philosophical revolution in the West, however, occurred after the Edict of Milan in 313. It was Christians who built the first hospitals and poorhouses, founded the oldest universities, and created masterpieces of art. Above all, Judeo-Christian values made Western man see his neighbour as an equal—because, to quote St. Paul, “there is neither Greek nor Jew”.

The French Revolution, and the French Enlightenment that preceded it, represents a hermeneutic rupture with the past, a point when Western thinkers detached themselves from Roman law, the West’s Judeo-Christian heritage, tradition, and the search for truth. In the 19th century, Comte replaced God with the cult of reason; Marx created the blueprint for what was to be a society without inequality (violently imposed, of course); Nietzsche convinced us that some are weak and therefore a burden to society; and Bentham rejected the notion that all men are endowed with equal dignity as “nonsense on stilts”. What followed was a series of true disasters: genocides, wars, concentration camps, and the Gulag.

The main intellectual influencers of today’s West are the ideological descendants of Comte, Nietzsche, Bentham, and Marx—people such as Michel Foucault, Slavoj Žižek (who has written a panegyric about mass murderer Lenin), and Judith Butler. They postulate a world in which everything is relative, simultaneously elevating the homosexual agenda and abortion to religious dogma. Today’s post-modernists strictly reject the search for objective truth, especially if it does not fit their ideological agenda.

For example, despite the fact that all scientific evidence shows that unborn children are, indeed, humans capable of feeling pain, that differences between the sexes are real, and that a child needs strong male and female role models for stable development, today’s ideologues champion the homosexual agenda and permissive abortion laws. They want to interfere directly in the democratic right to free worship. (In recent months in the United States, legislation intended to protect religious liberty in Indiana was lambasted by intellectual and political elites, while presidential candidate Hilary Clinton has said that Christianity must change its teaching on abortion.) In fact, many of these people no longer hide that they want to destroy the traditional family—an outcome that Marx and Engels prescribed in the *Communist Manifesto*.

Meanwhile, the West has settled for mediocrity, even ugliness. It is difficult to read Petrarch or marvel

at the perfection of Michelangelo's sculptures without feeling awe and pride to be the recipient of such a rich inheritance. Today's mass culture, however, strives for vulgarity. When Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset wrote *The Dehumanization of Art* in 1925, he could hardly have predicted that in 1999 New York's intellectual elites would venerate, as a symbol of religious freedom, a painting of the Virgin Mary covered with photographs of female genitalia from pornographic magazines and elephant feces.

As mentioned before, the anti-Western school has instead turned to the Far East, especially India, for inspiration. While India is a top emerging economy, its culture makes huge inequalities unlikely to disappear no matter how robust its GDP growth. Whereas Christianity teaches that there is "neither Greek nor Jew", Hinduism retains a caste system that consigns millions to destitution and neglect because of the families into which they were born. The abuse of women is commonplace in India and widows, considered "inauspicious", are ostracized by their families and villages.

It is traditional Western values—the very ones that young people are taught to hold in contempt by academia, the *Guardian*, and the *New York Times*—that

represent the only hope for the millions of hapless Indians suffering because of such (anti-progressive) cultural shackles. Missionaries from Europe and the Americas (Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity are the best-known example) continue to rescue countless Indians from filth, neglect and starvation. The Catholic Church in India also is a great advocate of widows' rights. These moves are not motivated by proselytism: The faithful serve persons of all creeds, and although the Catholic Church is the largest charitable organization in India, only about 2% of the population are Christian.

Further double standards abound—courtesy of the proponents of moral equivalence, no less. Western newspapers revel in stories of sexual misconduct by a tiny minority of Catholic priests, despite the Vatican's adoption of a strict line against deviant clergymen. In contrast, the late Indian Sathya Sai Baba—a cult leader who claimed to be a deity and to possess miraculous powers (such as making Rolex watches 'materialize', a trick debunked by illusionists)—was accused of molesting dozens of underage boys from various continents. Indian courts refused to investigate, because as a 'holy man' he enjoyed impunity. Such license strongly contrasts with the Roman concept of equality before the law and the separation between



“The Triumph of Death” by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (c. 1525-1569), a sprawling, nightmarish oil painting from 1652. The work is located in the Museo del Prado in Madrid.

Church and state dating back to Pope Gregory VII.

Today's cultural relativists have a similarly bizarre approach to the Muslim world, embracing Islam and rejecting Christianity. A peculiar symptom of this inversion is that in 2007, Columbia University invited Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to speak, while one year later Sapienza University of Rome cancelled a planned lecture by Pope Benedict XVI to appease anti-clerical professors. The new dogma may be summarized by Barack Obama's disdainful comments (putatively made in regard to the threat of ISIS) at his 2015 prayer breakfast: "Unless we get on our high horse and think this is unique to some other place, remember that during the Crusades and the Inquisition, people committed terrible deeds in the name of Christ."

Certainly, Christians have committed crimes towards others. However, this fact comes with two important qualifiers that do not attach to all other religions. First, the right to kill innocents was never a part of Christianity, which has always preached love of one's neighbour and forgiveness. Misdeeds by Christians resulted not out of the theology, but simply from the wretchedness of individuals. This is not the case in "the religion of peace".

Egyptian Jesuit Samir Khalil Samir has noted that Islam is based on three inequalities: between man and woman, freeman and slave, and Muslim and non-believer. When during a 2006 lecture in Regensburg Pope Benedict XVI quoted a Byzantine emperor who said that Islam is incompatible with reason, Muslims

killed an Italian nun, a missionary in Somalia, in response. Conversely, when Christians are constantly insulted on Western late-night television, they turn the other cheek.

Second, Christians—with extremely rare exceptions that are inevitable since their numbers exceed two billion—no longer commit violence in the name of their faith. Many Muslims, however, do. This distinction is not because more Christians live in developed countries and, as prevailing opinion holds, economic progress makes people less savage. Saudi Arabia, home to the two holiest cities in Islam, is a wealthy country that espouses Wahhabism, a particularly radical form of Islam, which crucifies apostates and subjects women to genital mutilation. Yet it typically receives a pass from the Left.

It is indisputable that since 1789, and especially in recent decades, the West has been in a state of decay. If it ever wants to regain its former stature, it must embrace the fact that it was once great and acknowledge the unique source of its strength. This revival can only happen if a fundamental change is made in how history is taught in the West—and if an honest look—unhampered by cultural relativism or political correctness—is taken at the differences between cultures. ■

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A view of *Regensburger Dom* (also known as the Cathedral of St. Peter) and the Clock Tower of the *Altes Rathaus* (Old City Hall) of the city of Regensburg in Bavaria.

# The Politics of Separatism

Alexander Biermann

Despite the European Union's quest toward an "ever closer union", numerous separatist movements throughout the continent continue to challenge the territorial integrity and cultural cohesiveness of its nation-state members. Paradoxically, the expansion of EU competencies has coincided with the devolution of power to various subnational regions, some of which, while gaining significant autonomy, push for outright independence. This trend toward fragmentation is troubling to those who believe that the Westphalian system offers the best framework for balancing economic growth and international peace with representative government and traditional values.

Spain's Catalonia, where I worked last autumn as an intern at the Consulate General of the United States in Barcelona, is one of the regions calling Western Europe's time-honoured nation-states into question. Madrid remains resolutely opposed to consideration of Catalan independence. Yet sovereignty backers there have experienced a high degree of success, culminating in a recent victory for pro-independence candidates in Catalonia's regional elections on September 27.

In the foreign press, the 'Catalan Question' is often cheated of its true depth. Certainly, Catalans are upset at having to pay much more in taxes than they receive from Madrid in welfare and investments. However, this surface-level explanation makes the movement appear merely as a factional spat stemming from the 2008 financial crisis. The 'Catalan Question', like other European separatist conflicts, cannot be explained away by facile reductionism. Rather, Europe's sovereignty campaigns are rooted in historic identities and the desire for local self-determination. Thanks to inadequate responses from their respective oppositions, these ideological movements succeed in gaining the moral high ground in many debates.

During my internship I monitored the four major Spanish newspapers—*El Mundo*, *El País*, *El Periódico*, and *La Vanguardia*—and also watched both Spanish and regional television. The Catalan independence movement frequently dominated Spanish media. Nevertheless, with the key exceptions of the Barcelona-based *La Vanguardia* and the Catalan TV stations, the Spanish press frequently deflected the actual debate by dismissing the pro-independence side as lawless rebels. President Mariano Rajoy has similarly tried to cast separatism as an issue that can be solved through the courts (whose political autonomy is dubious). Both the mass media and the executive have failed to challenge the weak aspects of the pro-sovereignty case.

Rather than being a recent movement or a purely economic issue, the Catalan quest for independence runs deeply through local history and culture. Any visitor to Barcelona notices the preference given to Catalan, despite Castellano (i.e. Spanish) being the national language. The Generalitat de Catalunya, the region's quasi-autonomous

government, strongly encourages the use of Catalan through its own operations and public services, city signs, and public education. In Barcelona, the city's popular bicycle transportation service, Bicing, offers online registration only in Catalan, ostensibly to prevent visitors from using the system, even though many residents originally from other parts of Spain or Latin America only speak Spanish. Catalans view winning these 'language wars' as critical to preserving their own national identity.

Not surprisingly, the Generalitat, with its pro-independence governing coalition, actively supports and funds more overt separatist initiatives. For example, Generalitat President Artur Mas i Gavarró publically promoted *Catalonia Calling: What the World Has to Know*, an attractively designed publication that presents the Catalan narrative in a cogent, seemingly impartial way. Printed in multiple languages for dissemination to foreign leaders, the book makes an emotional appeal through storytelling. *Catalonia Calling* takes the reader on a historical journey from the birth of Catalonia around 1000 AD to 1714 when Spain finally 'suppressed' the region, to Franco's repression in the 20th century, and finally to Spain's alleged current efforts to erase Catalan identity.

Recourse to history seems to be a common thread among pro-independence arguments. This approach adeptly shifts a contemporary, tit-for-tat economic squabble toward an oppressor-versus-oppressed dynamic. From the Catalan perspective, Spain has been on a quest to destroy its nation for hundreds of years. The recent tax controversy is only the latest iteration of this historic struggle. In many ways, the independence movement is more than a political campaign—it is an ideology. Such narratives, revisionist or otherwise, remain largely unchallenged. As long as Madrid fails to counter this mind-set, the sovereignty camp will continue to garner sympathy and support.

An associate in Barcelona pointed out to me that the pro-independence political bloc in the Generalitat



A. BIERMANN

Separatists and pro-Catalan independence demonstrators gather for *La Diada*, or Catalan National Day, in September 2014.



never explains how local governance will rule more effectively than Madrid. Instead, it seems to be a foregone conclusion that Catalan society, unshackled from central authority, will rid the region of the rampant corruption that has plagued Spain (including Catalonia) for years. This perception was validated by campaign slogans such as *Un país sin corrupció ni recortes* (“a country without corruption or budget cuts”) and *Un país on la justícia sigui ràpida i gratuïta* (“a country where justice comes fast and free”).

In the campaign’s historical narrative, Spain is nefarious at worst and irredeemably incompetent if not corrupt at best. In actuality, Catalonia has had its fair share of scandals, most notably the recent controversy over the region’s dominant Pujol family. Yet unless and until the region actually gains independence, sovereignty backers will be able to continue making claims of Catalan superiority without backing them up.

In comparison to truly unified Western European states, which came about due to great efforts by singular leaders such as Germany’s Bismarck or Italy’s Garibaldi, Spain has a more tenuous national identity. Spain has largely succeeded in the area of political cohesion. But unlike France, which assiduously promoted the *langue d’oïl* over competing alternatives, Spain never really achieved linguistic unity due to geographic and other difficulties. Perhaps because of this, Spain has long been subject to coercive centralizing tendencies. During Franco’s reign, Catalan was largely confined to home use—a policy which bred great resentment among Catalans. The country’s 1978 constitution acknowledges the regional languages of Catalan, Basque, and Galician, but specifies Castellano as the favoured national tongue. In May, the Spanish courts handed down a controversial ruling requiring Catalan public schools to teach at least a quarter of classes in Castellano.

The question of national identity sits at the heart of both the Catalan and Basque independence debates. Rather than seeing itself as a type of federation with varied but equal regions, Spain’s central government has long sought to make Madrid the heart of the nation, similar to the role



A. BIERMANN

Independence flags and signs are ubiquitous in Catalonia, like on this prominent building in Girona.



A. BIERMANN

Catalan sovereignty backers show their support for an independent Catalonia and continued EU membership.

of Paris in France. In addition to promoting Castellano as the national language, the federal government has tended to concentrate infrastructure investments in and around the capital. The existence of many well-funded national highways leading to Madrid, in contrast with the lack of sufficient roads connecting Spain’s Mediterranean coastal cities, has not gone unnoticed by pro-secession forces.

Supporters on both sides seem to think that Spanish and Catalan interests cannot be balanced—that one identity or the other must triumph. Indeed, as the case of Scotland has demonstrated, significant concessions of autonomy may not be enough to quell nationalist impulses. Nevertheless, many Catalonians favour independence not out of blind nationalism, but from distrust of the central government. Some independence backers likely would be content under a devolved constitutional structure that respected the identity of each region as distinct and equal, and allowed regional governments such as the Generalitat wider discretion to set policies. Like other European states facing restive regionalism, Madrid must find a way, in the spirit of subsidiarity, to reconcile national integrity with regional variances. ■

*Alexander Biermann recently graduated from Patrick Henry College in Purcellville, Virginia, where he studied international politics under Dr. Stephen Baskerville. He plans to intern with the Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C., this fall.*

# Free Expression in Poland

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Matthew Tyrmand

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Everyone perennially pays lip service to the importance of free expression, but it is only in periods of extreme stress on this issue, after *Charlie Hebdo*, for example, that it comes to the front and is actively defended. By not having more concern for all the subtle, coercive, and undermining acts of censorship that regularly occur, I believe we allow a crony system to fester and become ever more pernicious in the way that it crowds out the free, the uncompromised, the productive, and the competitive in a society.

For my father, Leopold Tyrmand, who spent much of his adult life in Poland battling the censors and being blacklisted for how he expressed himself, free speech and a free press were the fundamental issues from which all his political beliefs sprung.

It is worth recalling the First Amendment of the United States Constitution: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

The First Amendment, which codified the rights of a free citizen in the new American Republic, an experiment in democracy that we now can look back on as a resounding success, is a blanket protection for all forms of free expression. It goes even further than just protecting free speech, press, assembly and religion: In fact, the First Amendment *encourages* free citizens to complain by inputting, by suggestion, the right to petition the government for, as the framers put it, “a redress of grievances”. Sadly, such a protection was not codified into Polish law—in either the Polish May Constitution of 1791 nor in 1989 after the Round Table talks. Because of this, the risk of an illegitimate power structure coercing the citizenry has remained high.

Let us take a moment to look at some examples in which free expression is being impeded in Poland—but would be protected in America.

The first and most pernicious example is in the manner in which criticism (especially that of visible public figures) is easily stifled by the civil justice system. What I find to be the most toxic to democracy is when the elected and appointed *political* class engages in this reprehensible practice.

In theory, an integral component of the politician’s role is to continually defend his or her actions to those he or she serves, and to openly and honestly answer criticism head-on. But because political criticism is not absolutely protected, too often one cannot publicly ‘call-out’ someone and thus bring about a robust investigation of corrupt anti-competitive practices. These practices have become institutionally protected by laws crafted by the same political actors who benefit from stifling independent oversight.

This is where we have to make a distinction between the letter of the law and the spirit of the law. When government officials dole out overvalued contracts for unnecessary work to their friends, it may not be a violation under the law (codified by those doling out the contracts), but it certainly is a violation of the spirit of rule of law in a constitutional republic. Unrestricted free speech and the correlative adjunct, free press, is the only weapon that can neuter this cronyism by informing potential voters of systemic corruption.

I can relate a tangible example of this from my own recent experience. By social media proxy, Roman Giertych, a former Deputy Prime Minister and Education Minister, and a lawyer for many of the incumbent Polish government’s highest elected and appointed officials, stated earlier this year that on behalf of then-foreign minister Radoslaw Sikorski, he would be filing a lawsuit against Onet.pl, one of the biggest online news platforms in Poland, and myself.

Ostensibly this was in response to Onet having published a Facebook comment on their news site in which I had suggested that the hypothetical example I cited a few moments ago—of paying one’s friends from the public treasury no-bid contracts many times in excess of the market rate—is (to quote myself): “what fraud



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The author describes a social and political dynamic in many ways reminiscent of what his late father, Leopold Tyrmand (1920-1985), faced in communist Poland in the 1950s.

looks like”. Sikorski had been doing just this. In fact, it had all been well documented in the preceding days in a major press platform (*Wprost*) known for its investigative reporting, particularly of those in power.

Given that I had written these remarks while in New York and under the protection of the First Amendment, in English, to a small group of friends and followers, on a personal non-commercial page, and on a platform operated by an American entity, this was not really a winnable case. Rather, it was merely an act of bluster from Mr. Giertych. This was the sort of action that he regularly deploys as a tool to silence critics of the political figures in the cabal that he represents.

The burdens that politically connected actors like this impose upon a free people who may want to express ideas that are unpopular with certain segments is such that criticism and the plurality of alternative viewpoints, the lifeblood of democracy, are stifled. Without an environment for unfettered debate, where the best ideas and the best people rise to the top, freedom and ultimately prosperity are constantly threatened and never maximized.

Another example of how free expression is undermined in Poland is the subversive work of the mainstream press itself—particularly its most mature segment, which mostly utilizes conventional distribution practices. This segment historically has been better capitalized; but in recent years, the industry has faced the creative destruction that new distribution technologies have wrought and they are now scrambling to shift their businesses to these alternative methods of delivery. As this industry has become rife with cronyism, the focus now is on pleasing special interests for favours and seeking protections like a cartel rather than embracing competition. The legacy players in the media industry cannot maintain their share in this dynamic—and more egalitarian—new media system where the barriers to entry are low. The old players remain bloated, stagnant, and slow to adapt.

The ‘mainstream’ media’s ideological bent has always slanted towards the left. This is news to no one. My father often wrote about how the media’s predetermined agenda—both in the US and Poland—impacts the way in which politics is consumed by the masses. Unfortunately, what is new to the dynamic—given that their motive is now just as financial as it is ideological—is that most Polish mainstream platforms, reliant on state orchestrated protection, coordinate what they communicate and ‘sell’ to the mass market with their political partners.

The most insidious aspect of this is that this is done under a veneer of independence—in an effort to convince the consumer/voter that what is being delivered informs rather than manipulates. And the easiest way these ‘leaders’ of the press manipulate the popular narrative is by omission.

Last year, the newsweekly *Wprost* published transcripts of recordings of Polish politicians engaging in overtly corrupt back room deals over expensive dinners billed to taxpayers. This had the potential to bring down the entire government by prompting mass

resignations and leading to numerous potential criminal charges. The mainstream media machine went into hyper-drive to defend, play down, spin, and protect the principals involved. However, the underlying acts of the scandal were not discussed by any major platform (*omission*), except by *Wprost* which exposed the tapes in the first place—despite the fact that the content of the conversations was positively frightening.

To illustrate how egregious these violations of law were: One tape revealed the head of the constitutionally mandated independent central bank—National Bank of Poland President Marek Belka—actively coordinating monetary policy with an emissary of the current government—Interior Minister Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz—in a clearly delineated attempt to swing an upcoming election in favour of the incumbent party to which Sienkiewicz (and Belka) belong. This conspiracy to rapidly depreciate the currency in order to finance the purchase of the national election is tantamount to stealing from every citizen in Poland.

It was also reprehensible that the wife—Anne Applebaum—of one of the majorly implicated players—Radoslaw Sikorski (yet again)—in these embarrassing revelations worked vociferously to defend her husband and his fellow incriminated officials in print and in speech, both domestically and internationally. (As a self-described ‘journalist’, she has availed herself of mainstream media platforms in the UK, the US, and Western Europe, in addition to local Polish platforms.) But her contributions to the discourse clearly did not meet the standard definition of journalism since the most important facts of the case were never disclosed (again: omission).

The defence offered time and again by the mainstream media was that the actors exposed on undercover tapes had their privacy rights violated and that that crime had superseded any other that might have taken place (which of course went unmentioned). The media attempted to sell the idea that their privacy rights were more important than the right of citizens not to be duped by their elected and appointed officials. Moreover, when the state sent agents from the internal security service to extract ‘evidence’ that the editor-in-chief of *Wprost* ostensibly had on his laptop—all of which had been deemed pertinent to the ‘privacy violation’ cases that they were investigating—the images of physical force being used at the magazine’s offices and the protests that ensued again garnered no reactions and virtual silence from the ‘mainstream’ press. (Perhaps not surprisingly, the current Polish government, which has been widely implicated in this scandal, has drafted—and is currently trying to pass before current terms of office are up—legislation that would dismiss and render void any evidence gathered of illegal activity that is considered to have violated a politician’s privacy.)

Beyond the previously discussed methods of media manipulation—which include omission, spin, defence, coordination, and frivolous lawsuits—there exists one more method that only the biggest rent-seekers in the media can even begin to dream of: the bailout.

As an investor, this is the one that undermines

my faith in an economy the most, whether in the US, the Euro-zone, or Poland. When a monolithic corporate entity cannot compete or adapt, it withers and dies. This is a good thing. And it paves the way for new entrants and innovation: New blood brings new ideas and keeps societies competitive. But the breakdown in competition that exists in a free market when those who cannot compete begin to get tax-payer subsidies or infusions of capital from the government to stay afloat is unacceptable.

This is happening in Poland today. The reason that this is so dangerous to freedom in aggregate is that by



Sikorski



Applebaum

subsidizing one crony's right to free expression, everyone else—whether they are individuals or competitive businesses—has their rights to expression undermined and crowded out by state fiat.

A final example which I think demonstrates that free expression is under assault in Poland today is the way in which those tasked with the responsibility of public institutional administration and management abuse the power of their office. They take away what is not theirs to bestow in the first place: access to state infrastructure, which belongs to the public and which is supported by the taxes paid by the citizenry. This is an act of forceful censorship and it is brazenly anti-democratic.

A personal example may be helpful. Last year, the Consul General blacklisted me from Polish Consular events at the New York consulate. As I am a Polish citizen—and have never acted in a violent, unsafe, or similarly disruptive manner—there were no formal channels for her to do so. But given lax oversight, and the state's agents' excessive discretionary control of “the trappings of their political wealth”, citizens like me have woefully little recourse. This is a prime reason why there is a need for an independent free media that can raise awareness of such actions.

The rationale behind my ‘blacklisting’ (obtained from ‘off-the-record’ comments from staffers working at the Consulate) was that my political views—and the way in which I expressed those views—did not please Madame Consul. To be sure, my opinions of her and the government she represents were not positive—and I have never hidden this (as I write for many political outlets).

This kind of blacklisting and withholding of government services by discretionary fiat is another frontal assault on free expression. With behaviour like

this *de rigueur*, one can only imagine what the calculus is when cultural ministries and their subsidiaries dole out public funding for publicly financed projects—like movies, festivals, and other events. These processes are rife with ‘spoils system’ and *quid pro quo* politics, which create costs the taxpayer/citizen unwittingly assume.

Free expression, as we have recently seen all too frequently, is under attack all over the globe. This issue affects all: developing, transitioning, and emerging societies and economies. In contemporary Poland, a nation and economy widely credited during the last two



Giertych



Belka

decades for emerging as a beacon of post-Soviet freedom and free enterprise, the price for ‘free’ expression too often has been conformity to the government's precepts.

A truly free and independent press needs to be fought for today as vociferously as it was under the oppressive communist regimes of yesteryear. The best way to fight in its defence—and for the fundamental right of free expression—is to never cease using this right assertively, in speech and in writings, and to not shy away from proposing ideas that may not be popular—and which may bring added levels of personal and professional risk. The only thing not to put at risk is the moral clarity and personal integrity that comes from holding on firmly to one's beliefs. One should never yield one's understanding of the truth to those who would ‘re-program’ it by coercion or by force for their own benefit.

Free expression is truly the lifeblood of democracy. And it is worth repeating a somewhat clichéd quotation—often attributed to both Voltaire and Jefferson: “I do not agree with what you have to say but I will defend to the death your right to say it.” We all need to embrace the sentiments behind these words. For now, it remains to be seen if Poland can develop a legal system to protect free and unfettered expression, and to function in the same way that the First Amendment does in the United States. If it can, then Poland will be better, freer, and more prosperous for future generations.

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# Magna Carta, Liberty & the Medieval Mind

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André P. DeBattista

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The word ‘medieval’ is often used pejoratively to depict something which is uncivilised or primitive. But as the eminent medievalist George Holmes has stated, “Western civilisation was created in medieval Europe”. Although it spanned a millennium of upheaval and change, it led to a “flowering of new ways of life and attitudes” revolving around newly founded monasteries, cathedrals, universities, royal courts, and towns and cities. The axis of ‘Church, Crown, Commerce, and Country’ provided the perfect mix for the establishment of new social patterns which still provide continuity and stability today.

Towering 13th century churches remain a symbol of a transcendental continuity, while the modern nation-state can trace its origins to the royal courts in France and England. The idea of a university was also ignited during this period as the finest centres of learning were established in Oxford, Cambridge, Bologna, and Paris.

Given how radically different that age was from the present, Holmes argues that we have to “balance the similarities which arise from common humanity and a constant inheritance of ideas against the acute distinctions caused by differences of social structure and intellectual traditions”. The aim is not to identify the ideas of the present in the past but rather to pinpoint those ideas of the past which still inform the present.

I’d like to explore the Magna Carta, a document that was born in these very particular circumstances. Despite its original limited scope, the Magna Carta has continued to inform discourses relating to liberty, freedom, and the rule of law over the centuries. It is now an entrenched part of the “epic of liberty”—a narrative which seeks to justify the ancient and continuing tradition of free institutions and lawful limitations on power.

## Juridical & legislative changes

In the Coronation Charters of 1100 and 1135, both King Henry I and King Stephen declared their intention to rule according to “custom and law”. New attitudes towards law and justice created the perfect climate for legislative and juridical progress which lasted throughout the 12th and 13th centuries. Charters slowly became the preferred method of asserting legal rights. (In the 13th century alone, it is estimated that eight million charters were created for smallholders and peasants.)

The Crown established two permanent offices—the chancery and the exchequer—which were responsible for maintaining written records. The practice of codifying agreements supplemented oral traditions. By the late 12th century, centres of higher learning were established at Oxford and Cambridge, and Oxford in particular excelled at disciplines such as administration and legal procedure.

This King’s courts began to allow for new processes in the administration of justice. Norman Vincent, the

eminent Magna Carta scholar, argues that “England and England’s kings were entering a new age in which law and custom were increasingly to be regarded not as immemorial traditions committed to the memories of the older and more respectable members of the community, but as ‘laws’ in the modern sense, issued as written decrees”. Historians credit these developments with forming the foundation of English Common Law.

In 1164, King Henry II issued the controversial Constitutions of Clarendon which sought to restrict the powers and the privileges of ecclesiastical authority. The Constitutions provided the pretext for a standoff between the Crown and the Church. (The murder of St. Thomas Beckett was a consequence of this clash.)

In the court of Henry II a precedent was set for written laws which curbed, rather than licenced, the use of arbitrary power. At the same time, a new legal profession began to emerge. Eventually the administration of justice became a significant source of income for the Crown—but this soon gave way to bribery and speculation.

Two images of royal power soon emerged. First, that of the King acting on behalf of God, which Nicholas Vincent says was based on “a sense that the king himself stood in judgement above the petty disputes of his subjects”. Second, in contrast, the King was perceived to be the ultimate sovereign, immune from justice or prosecution but dependent upon the law for his income and self-image. Vincent notes that “the more royal government came to depend upon the law for its income and self-image, the more the king’s subjects were likely to resent the king’s own apparent disrespect for the laws that he claimed to administer”.

## The troubled reign of King John

Between 1192 and 1194, Richard I was held for ransom in Germany. The cost of paying this ransom had some long-lasting negative effects on the economy. During Richard’s captivity, John frequently tried to start revolts and claim the throne for himself.

King Richard I died in 1199 with no legitimate heirs. Upon his death, different parts of the Angevin Empire chose different rulers. England and Normandy opted for John, who inherited a situation which was, at best, dire.

The figure of King John is somewhat paradoxical. He took an unprecedented level of interest in daily legal and governmental matters but was inept at managing the most powerful elements in his kingdom—the Church and the aristocracy. As the youngest son of Henry II (1133-1189), King John was an unlikely king.

However, in terms of policy, there was an element of continuity throughout the reigns of Henry II and his two sons, Richard I and John. All landlords held their estates at the King’s pleasure and were subject to arbitrary fines, particularly if they caused offence. John, however, increased the pressure on the landlords by accelerating the terms of repayment.

John was widely believed to be behind the sudden disappearance of his twelve-year old nephew and pretender to the throne, Arthur of Brittany. His second marriage to Isabelle d'Angoulême set in motion various events which would lead to John's loss of territories in France and Normandy. He then developed plans for a re-conquest of these territories and taxed his subjects heavily in order to finance such a venture. However, these military campaigns ended in defeat. And soon his many misdemeanours became widely known.

Vincent chronicles a number of these misdeeds: taking his sons and nephews as hostages, offering a bounty for the murder of Welsh outlaws, his numerous mistresses, his love for beer, and his perceived Christian impiety. Indeed, John's relationship with the church was tumultuous. His reign coincided with the papacy of Innocent III, a formidable canon lawyer, and the author of numerous treatises on liturgy and asceticism. He was also immovable in his belief that he had power over all the crowned heads of Europe.

The first clash came over the appointment of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Innocent III favoured Stephen Langton, a noted scholar and lecturer at the University of Paris; John favoured his counsellor, John de Gray, Bishop of Norwich. Innocent proceeded in consecrating Langton. John, however, refused to recognise Langton's new position and he exiled

Langton. Innocent III responded by placing an interdict on England. Langton used his time in exile well. He cemented the alliance between rebel barons and the Church, and his exile became one of the rallying points of resistance to royal tyranny.

In the medieval mind, these setbacks cemented two widely held perceptions. First, the military defeats enhanced the perception that John was losing God's favour. Second, arbitrary high taxation cemented discontent among landowners. The standoff between throne and altar led to various rumours of plots and insurgencies; and there was wild speculation about imminent Divine retribution and a sudden end to the King's reign.

John could ill afford such dissent. He was planning yet another campaign for the re-conquest of lost territory in France and needed all the support he could muster. In 1213, a settlement between the Pope and the King was negotiated; England and Ireland were declared to be papal fiefs and Stephen Langton was installed at Canterbury.

However, as John planned to go into battle, he discovered that he had little support among the barons who signalled their disapproval by either rejecting the King's call to arms or refusing to pay a tax to fund the army. The barons also had the support of Londoners. In essence, the King was now dealing with an open revolt.



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A close-up of one of the panels of the Canterbury Pulpit at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. It depicts the Magna Carta, King John, and the Archbishop of Canterbury Stephen Langton. The stone pulpit was given as a gift by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, in 1907.

Buoyed by this support, the rebels now threatened to ask King Philip Augustus of France for help. Faced with this prospect, King John agreed to negotiate. Deliberations on what became known as the Magna Carta—the Great Charter—soon ensued.

### **The failure of the Magna Carta**

The Magna Carta is a product of its time. It rested on the deeply held conventions of the period, and on the intellectual and juridical milieu of the age.

Vincent unearths evidence suggesting that the rebel barons “believed that good law had once existed and that their duty lay in recalling and restoring it”. Thus, the Magna Carta “is to be viewed as a deeply conservative, not as a deliberately radical, measure”.

Negotiations took place over a number of months and, therefore, no single author can be identified. The authors borrowed from different sources of law which suited their particular circumstances including, but not limited to, the Coronation Charters of 1100 and 1135. There was no codification of English laws; yet Magna Carta makes reference to the “law of the land” and “reasonableness”. This indicates that there was an existing legal convention buttressed by various legal principles which effectively bound the King’s subjects. The Magna Carta was an attempt to bring the King within that same legal framework.

The Magna Carta was symbolically sealed on June 15, 1215, in a field near Runnymede, approximately half-way between the King’s castle at Windsor and his baronial base in London. It remains a product of its time dealing with concerns, matters, and incidents which are very time-specific. Out of its original 63 clauses, only four remain in the statute books today.

The charter was primarily intended to be a peace treaty. The Magna Carta, in its original form, never took effect. In this regard it was an abject failure: It was repealed in nine weeks. John took advantage of his new-found friendship with Innocent III and protested that his ‘divine right to rule’ was infringed upon by the barons. Innocent agreed and declared the Magna Carta to be “null and void forever” since the King was forced to accept the agreement “by violence and fear”.

Nonetheless, the Magna Carta has been given place of pride in popular lore. It is largely credited with debunking the myth that power was unlimited. Its significance wasn’t lost in Medieval England, either.

King John died a year later, in 1216. At the coronation of his nine-year old son, King Henry III, the Charter was re-issued and re-packaged as a manifesto of good governance. On this occasion, the Magna Carta had the approval of the King’s Chief Minister and the Papal Legate, thus giving it the authority which the 1215 version lacked.

Magna Carta was later revised and re-issued on several occasions. By 1225, only 37 of the original clauses remained. It was last re-issued during the reign of King Edward I in 1300. By then, much of it had been made redundant. All attempts to quash the Magna Carta on the part of some of the King’s courtiers had only

served to strengthen its “totemic status as a touchstone of communal liberties guaranteeing the king’s subjects against tyranny”.

In time, it seemed increasingly unlikely that the Magna Carta would recede in the popular imagination. And it became part of two grand epics: the English national epic and the epic of liberty. It served as a historically tangible embodiment of an ancient constitution—“a brake applied by the past to present tendencies within the law”, according to Vincent.

### **Symbol for the English-speaking world**

In the English-speaking world, the Magna Carta became a rallying symbol; the founding document of an epic of liberty which is often cited and quoted to support specific political platforms related to freedom, liberty, and the language of rights. It has become a staple in what Herbert Butterfield describes as the “Whig interpretation of history”—which amounts to the tendency of historians “to praise revolutions provided they have been successful, to emphasise certain principles of progress in the past, and to produce a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present”.

Despite the dangers of such an historical approach, the epic surrounding the Magna Carta has inspired various institutions which provide for governmental checks and balances, and which limit the overarching powers of institutions. The so-called ‘epic of liberty’ which formed around the Magna Carta has served to add legitimacy to such practices and institutions, providing both an historical framework and a reference point.

The Magna Carta was largely credited with asserting the concept of “consent” and the principle that the business of government was to be conducted on behalf of a “community of the realm”. This took place within a feudal political order and thus it was only the tenants of the king who could have exercised influence. From 1250 onwards, consent was to be exercised through a representative assembly—a parliament—where kings and representatives could meet.

Less than a century after the signing of the Magna Carta, King Edward I faced widespread discontent over taxation. On two occasions during his reign he had to acknowledge that his power was somewhat bound by the Magna Carta. He set the precedent for having parliaments seek a re-confirmation of the Charter and a clarification of its meaning. In the 14th century, this led to the formation of parliament as a permanent political institution acting, according to R.V. Turner, as both “protector and interpreter” of the Magna Carta.

The Magna Carta would later experience a second popular revival during the 17th century conflicts between King and parliament. While the King asserted his royal prerogatives, parliamentarians turned towards supposed “ancient constitutions”. The Magna Carta was perceived to be a key component of England’s ancient constitution.

One contemporary, the famed jurist and lawyer Sir Edward Coke—described by Friedrich Hayek as a “fountain of Whig principles”—conceived his own interpretation of Whig history, describing the

constitution as a “chain of royal confirmations of English law stretching back to the age of Edward the Confessor and beyond”. He perceived liberty to be on a continuing advance and thought the outcome of the Glorious Revolution to be a re-confirmation of, in the words of Turner, the “ancient compact between king and people, restoring fundamental law and limited monarchy”.

By the mid-19th century, the Magna Carta was displayed and admired as a great treasure in the British Museum. However, lawmakers and observers also began developing a more critical appraisal of the Magna Carta. Additionally, both parliamentarians and lawyers championed for a reorganisation of law. Three acts—in 1856, 1861, and 1863—repealed a number of old laws, abrogating much of the Magna Carta. Further legislative reforms in the 1960s meant that only four of the original clauses survived in the statute books.

The English essayist Walter Bagehot briefly examined the Magna Carta in his 1867 magnum opus titled *The English Constitution*. He accurately described such medieval charters as “treaties between different orders and factions, confirming ancient rights, or what claimed to be such”. He believed the principal controversy was primarily between king and nation: “the king trying to see how far the nation would let him go, and the nation murmuring and recalcitrating, and seeing how many acts of administration they could prevent, and how many of its claims they could resist”.

The Magna Carta still had the power to fire the political imagination of individuals in the English-speaking world and beyond. The only two extant copies outside of the UK are currently housed in two English-speaking democracies: Australia and the US.

The Federal Parliament of Australia purchased its copy of the Magna Carta in 1952. It is revered as a “secular relic” and is exhibited in Canberra’s Parliament House. Although the state and federal parliaments are 19th century creations, both institutions, according to scholar Stephanie Trigg, “appeal to their medieval origins in order to bolster their symbolic authority” thereby accumulating “symbolic capital”.

Interestingly, the Magna Carta seems to have enjoyed greater appeal in the US than in the United Kingdom. The American Bar Association erected a neo-classical rotunda to mark the signing of the Charter, while various artefacts at the US Supreme Court depict images representing the history of the Charter. In 2007, a copy of the Magna Carta was acquired for a record US\$ 21.3 million, so that it may remain on display at the National Archives and Records Administration.

Much of the popularity of the Magna Carta in the US is due to Sir Edward Coke’s efforts. In 1606, Coke was tasked with drafting the First Charter of Virginia. The Charter makes reference to “Liberties, Franchises, and Immunities” and was largely inspired by the Magna Carta. The same language was used in the foundational charters of the states of Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, Connecticut, Carolina, and Rhode Island. The Magna Carta is thus believed to have provided a conceptual

basis for American constitutional development. The US Constitution, widely hailed as the first modern constitution, establishes a constitutional order based on “justice ... domestic tranquillity ... common defence ... general welfare” and the security of the “Blessings of Liberty” for posterity. It provides for a separation of institutions—three branches of government which are designed to secure a system of checks and balances. All these principles can undoubtedly be traced to the spirit fostered by the Magna Carta.

### The spirit of Magna Carta

Nicholas Vincent has argued that the significance of the Magna Carta “has always been in its spirit rather than in its practical application”. The term “Magna Carta” is now utilised to denote any document which seeks to guarantee rights and limit power. For example, the Treaty of Waitangi has often been referred to as the “Maori Magna Carta”, while environmental groups often urge governments to draft a “Green Magna Carta”. All this points to the enduring relevance of the spirit championed by the Magna Carta and its meaning—which is essentially that power functions best when it is limited. Thus, seeking to impose limits on authority is now a common feature of democratic constitutions.

One of the most pressing issues during the reign of King John was the levying of high taxes to fund wars which were ultimately unsuccessful. The Magna Carta (and its subsequent revisions) addressed this, stipulating that taxes may only be levied provided consent by representatives of the tenants of the King is given. This principle was later echoed in the American Revolutionary slogan “No Taxation without Representation”.

Consent and representation are necessary to limit the exercise of arbitrary power. However, without a strong element of accountability, these cornerstones of a healthy political life are weakened and rendered almost perfunctory. Accountability is fundamental—especially in a political culture which is increasingly swayed by the power and clout of interest groups and lobby groups. Justice is another theme which features prominently in the Magna Carta. Clause 40 of the Charter reads: “To no one will we sell, to no one deny or delay right or justice”. This clause is echoed in the legal maxim “justice delayed is justice denied”.

The continuing relevance of the Magna Carta—and its ability to speak with such immediacy to the present—is something which will undoubtedly keep strengthening its position within the ‘epic of liberty’. Such a narrative speaks of the enduring tensions surrounding the nature of power, accountability, and justice. And in this, the Magna Carta must continue to serve as a historical reminder of the relevance of these concerns—and of the importance of giving them maximum priority if we are truly to have a healthy political community. ■

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# Marriage & the Family

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Rabbi Lord Sacks

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I want to begin by telling the story of the most beautiful idea in the history of civilization: the idea of the love that brings new life into the world. There are of course many ways of telling the story, and this is just one. But to me it is a story of seven key moments, each of them surprising and unexpected.

The first, according to a report in the press on October 20 of last year, took place in a lake in Scotland 385 million years ago. It was then, according to this new discovery, that two fish came together to perform the first instance of sexual reproduction known to science. Until then all life had propagated itself asexually, by cell division, budding, fragmentation or parthenogenesis, all of which are far simpler and more economical than the division of life into male and female, each with a different role in creating and sustaining life.

When we consider, even in the animal kingdom, how much effort and energy the coming together of male and female takes, in terms of displays, courtship rituals, rivalries and violence, it is astonishing that sexual reproduction ever happened at all. Biologists are still not quite sure why it did. Some say to offer protection against parasites, or immunities against disease. Others say it's simply that the meeting of opposites generates diversity. But one way or another, the fish in Scotland discovered something new and beautiful that's been copied ever since by virtually all advanced forms of life. Life begins when male and female meet and embrace.

The second unexpected development was the unique challenge posed to *Homo sapiens* by two factors: We stood upright, which constricted the female pelvis, and we had bigger brains—a 300% increase—which meant larger heads. The result was that human babies had to be born more prematurely than any other species, and so needed parental protection for much longer. This made parenting more demanding among humans than any other species, the work of two people rather than one. Hence, the very rare phenomenon among mammals of pair bonding (unlike other species where the male contribution tends to end with the act of impregnation). Among most primates, fathers don't even recognise their children let alone care for them. Elsewhere in the animal kingdom motherhood is almost universal but fatherhood is rare.

So what emerged along with the human person was the union of the biological mother and father to care for their child. Thus far nature, but then came culture, and the third surprise.

It seems that among hunter-gatherers, pair bonding was the norm. Then came agriculture, and economic surplus, and cities and civilisation, and for the first time sharp inequalities began to emerge between rich and poor, powerful and powerless. The great ziggurats of Mesopotamia and pyramids of ancient Egypt, with their broad base and narrow top, were monumental statements

in stone of a hierarchical society in which the few had power over the many. And the most obvious expression of power among alpha males whether human or primate, is to dominate access to fertile women and thus maximise the handing on of your genes to the next generation. Hence polygamy, which exists in 95% of mammal species and 75% of cultures known to anthropology. Polygamy is the ultimate expression of inequality because it means that many males never get the chance to have a wife and child. And sexual envy has been, throughout history, among animals as well as humans, a prime driver of violence.

That is what makes the first chapter of Genesis so revolutionary with its statement that every human being, regardless of class, colour, culture or creed, is in the image and likeness of God himself. We know that in the ancient world it was rulers, kings, emperors and pharaohs who were held to be in the image of God. So what Genesis was saying was that we are all royalty. We each have equal dignity in the kingdom of faith under the sovereignty of God. From this it follows that we each have an equal right to form a marriage and have children, which is why, regardless of how we read the story of Adam and Eve—and there are differences between Jewish and Christian readings—the norm presupposed by that story is: one woman, one man. Or as the Bible itself says: “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.”

Monogamy did not immediately become the norm, even within the world of the Bible. But many of its most famous stories, about the tension between Sarah and Hagar, or Leah and Rachel and their children, or David and Bathsheba, or Solomon's many wives, are all critiques that point the way to monogamy.

And there is a deep connection between monotheism and monogamy, just as there is, in the opposite direction, between idolatry and adultery. Monotheism and monogamy are about the all-embracing relationship between I and Thou, myself and one other, be it a human or the divine 'Other'.

What makes the emergence of monogamy unusual is that it is normally the case that the values of a society are those imposed on it by the ruling class. And the ruling class in any hierarchical society stands to gain from promiscuity and polygamy, both of which multiply the chances of my genes being handed on to the next generation. From monogamy the rich and powerful lose and the poor and powerless gain. So the return of monogamy goes against the normal grain of social change and was a real triumph for the equal dignity of all. Every bride and every groom are royalty; every home a palace when furnished with love.

The fourth remarkable development was the way this transformed the moral life. We've all become familiar with the work of evolutionary biologists using computer simulations and the iterated prisoners' dilemma to explain why reciprocal altruism exists among all social animals. We behave to others as we would wish them to behave to us, and we respond to them as they respond to us. As

C.S. Lewis pointed out in his book *The Abolition of Man*, reciprocity is the Golden Rule shared by all the great civilizations.

What was new and remarkable in the Hebrew Bible was the idea that love, not just fairness, is the driving principle of the moral life. Three loves. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your might.” “Love your neighbour as yourself.” And, repeated no less than 36 times in the Mosaic books, “Love the stranger because you know what it feels like to be a stranger.” Or to put it another way: Just as God created the natural world in love and forgiveness, so we are charged with creating the social world in love and forgiveness. And that love is a flame lit in marriage and the family. Morality is the love between husband and wife, parent and child, extended outward to the world.

The fifth development shaped the entire structure of Jewish experience. In ancient Israel an originally secular form of agreement, called a covenant, was taken and transformed into a new way of thinking about the relationship between God and humanity, in the case of Noah, and between God and a people in the case of Abraham and later the Israelites at Mount Sinai. A covenant is like a marriage. It is a mutual pledge of loyalty and trust between two or more people, each respecting the dignity and integrity of the other, to work together to achieve together what neither can achieve alone. And there is one thing even God cannot achieve alone, which is to live within the human heart. That needs us.

So the Hebrew word *emunah*—wrongly translated as ‘faith’—really means faithfulness, fidelity, loyalty, steadfastness, not walking away even when the going gets tough, trusting the other and honouring the other’s trust in us. What covenant did, and we see this in almost all the prophets, was to understand the relationship between us and God in terms of the relationship between bride and

groom, wife and husband. Love thus became not only the basis of morality but also of theology. In Judaism faith is a marriage. Rarely was this more beautifully stated than by Hosea when he said in the name of God: “I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will know the Lord.” Jewish men say those words every weekday morning as we wind the strap of our tefillin around our finger like a wedding ring. Each morning we renew our marriage with God.

This led to a sixth and quite subtle idea that truth, beauty, goodness, and life itself, do not exist in any one person or entity but in the “between”, what Martin Buber called *Das Zwischenmenschliche*, the interpersonal, the counterpoint of speaking and listening, giving and receiving. Throughout the Hebrew Bible and the rabbinic literature, the vehicle of truth is conversation. In revelation God speaks and asks us to listen. In prayer we speak and ask God to listen. There is never only one voice. In the Bible the prophets argue with God. In the Talmud rabbis argue with one another. In fact, I sometimes think the reason God chose the Jewish people was because He loves a good argument. Judaism is a conversation scored for many voices, never more passionately than in the Song of Songs, a duet between a woman and a man, the beloved and her lover, that Rabbi Akiva called the holy of holies of religious literature.

The prophet Malachi calls the male priest the guardian of the law of truth. The book of Proverbs says of the woman of worth that “the law of loving kindness is on her tongue”. It is that conversation between male and female voices—between truth and love, justice and mercy, law and forgiveness—that frames the spiritual life. In biblical times each Jew had to give a half shekel to the Temple to remind us that we are only half. There are some cultures that teach that we are nothing. There are others



“The Wedding of Samson” by Rembrandt (1606-1669), a 1560 painting located in the *Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister* (Old Masters Gallery) in Dresden.

that teach that we are everything. The Jewish view is that we are half and we need to open ourselves to another if we are to become whole.

All this led to the seventh outcome, that in Judaism the home and the family became the central setting of the life of faith. In the only verse in the Hebrew Bible to explain why God chose Abraham, He says: "I have known him so that he will instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just." Abraham was chosen not to rule an empire, command an army, perform miracles or deliver prophecies, but simply to be a parent. In one of the most famous lines in Judaism, which we say every day and night, Moses commands, "You shall teach these things repeatedly to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house or when you walk on the way, when you lie down and when you rise up." Parents are to be educators, education is the conversation between the generations, and the first school is the home.

So Jews became an intensely family oriented people, and it was this that saved us from tragedy. After the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70, Jews were scattered throughout the world, everywhere a minority, everywhere without rights, suffering some of the worst persecutions ever known by a people and yet Jews survived because they never lost three things: their sense of family, their sense of community and their faith.

And they were renewed every week especially on Shabbat, the day of rest when we give our marriages and families what they most need and are most starved of in the contemporary world, namely time. I once produced a television documentary for the BBC on the state of family life in Britain, and I took the person who was then Britain's leading expert on child care, Penelope Leach, to a Jewish primary school on a Friday morning.

There she saw the children enacting in advance what they would see that evening around the family table. There were the five year old mother and father blessing the five year old children with the five year old grandparents looking on. She was fascinated by this whole institution, and she asked the children what they most enjoyed about the Sabbath. One five-year-old boy turned to her and said, "It's the only night of the week when daddy doesn't have to rush off". As we walked away from the school when the filming was over she turned to me and said, "Chief Rabbi, that Sabbath of yours is saving their parents' marriages."

So that is one way of telling the story, a Jewish way, beginning with the birth of sexual reproduction, then the unique demands of human parenting, then the eventual triumph of monogamy as a fundamental statement of human equality, followed by the way marriage shaped our vision of the moral and religious life as based on love and covenant and faithfulness, even to the point of thinking of truth as a conversation between lover and beloved. Marriage and the family are where faith finds its home and where the Divine Presence lives in the love between husband and wife, parent and child. What then has changed? Here's one way of putting it. I wrote a book a few years ago about religion and science and I summarised the difference between them in two sentences. "Science

takes things apart to see how they work. Religion puts things together to see what they mean." And that's a way of thinking about culture also. Does it put things together or does it take things apart?

What made the traditional family remarkable, a work of high religious art, is what it brought together: sexual drive, physical desire, friendship, companionship, emotional kinship and love, the begetting of children and their protection and care, their early education and induction into an identity and a history. Seldom has any institution woven together so many different drives and desires, roles and responsibilities. It made sense of the world and gave it a human face, the face of love.

For a whole variety of reasons, some to do with medical developments like birth control, in vitro fertilisation and other genetic interventions, some to do with moral change like the idea that we are free to do whatever we like so long as it does not harm others, some to do with a transfer of responsibilities from the individual to the state, and other and more profound changes in the culture of the West, almost everything that marriage once brought together has now been split apart. Sex has been divorced from love, love from commitment, marriage from having children, and having children from responsibility for their care.

The result is that in Britain in 2012, 47.5% of children were born outside marriage, expected to become a majority in 2016. Fewer people are marrying, those who are, are marrying later, and 42% of marriages end in divorce. Nor is cohabitation a substitute for marriage. The average length of cohabitation in Britain and the United States is less than two years. The result is a sharp increase among young people of eating disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, stress related syndromes, depression and actual and attempted suicides. The collapse of marriage has created a new form of poverty concentrated among single parent families, and of these, the main burden is born by women, who in 2011 headed 92% of single parent households. In Britain today more than a million children will grow up with no contact whatsoever with their fathers.

This is creating a divide within societies the like of which has not been seen since Disraeli spoke of "two nations" a century and a half ago. Those who are privileged to grow up in stable loving association with the two people who brought them into being will, on average, be healthier physically and emotionally. They will do better at school and at work. They will have more successful relationships, be happier, and live longer. And yes, there are many exceptions. But the injustice of it all cries out to heaven. It will go down in history as one of the tragic instances of what Friedrich Hayek called "the fatal conceit" that somehow we know better than the wisdom of the ages, and can defy the lessons of biology and history. No one surely wants to go back to the narrow prejudices of the past.

This week, in Britain, a new film opens, telling the story of one of the great minds of the 20th century, Alan Turing, the Cambridge mathematician who laid the philosophical foundations of computing and artificial intelligence, and helped win the war by breaking the

German naval code “Enigma”. After the war, Turing was arrested and tried for homosexual behaviour, underwent chemically induced castration, and died at the age of 41 by cyanide poisoning, thought by many to have committed suicide. That is a world to which we should never return.

But our compassion for those who choose to live differently should not inhibit us from being advocates for the single most humanising institution in history. The family, man, woman, and child, is not one lifestyle choice among many. It is the best means we have yet discovered for nurturing future generations and enabling children to grow in a matrix of stability and love. It is where we learn the delicate choreography of relationship and how to handle the inevitable conflicts within any human group. It is where we first take the risk of giving and receiving love. It is where one generation passes on its values to the next, ensuring the continuity of a civilization. For any society, the family is the crucible of its future, and for the sake of our children’s future, we must be its defenders.

Since this is a religious gathering, let me, if I may, end with a piece of biblical exegesis. The story of the first family, the first man and woman in the Garden of Eden, is not generally regarded as a success. Whether or not we believe in original sin, it did not end happily. After many years of studying the text I want to suggest a different reading. The story ends with three verses that seem to have no connection with one another. No sequence. No logic. In Genesis 3:19 God says to the man: “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” Then in the next verse we read: “The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all life.” And in the next, “The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.”

What is the connection here? Why did God telling the man that he was mortal lead him to give his wife a new name? And why did that act seem to change God’s attitude to both of them, so that He performed an act of tenderness, by making them clothes, almost as if He had partially forgiven them? Let me also add that the Hebrew word for “skin” is almost indistinguishable from the Hebrew word for “light”, so that Rabbi Meir, the great sage of the early 2nd century, read the text as saying that God made for them “garments of light”. What did he mean?

If we read the text carefully, we see that until now the first man had given his wife a purely generic name. He called her *ishah*, woman. Recall what he said when he first saw her: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman for she was taken from man.” For him she was a type, not a person. He gave her a noun, not a name. What is more he defines her as a derivative of himself: something taken from man. She is not yet for him someone other, a person in her own right. She is merely a kind of reflection of himself.

As long as the man thought he was immortal, he ultimately needed no one else. But now he knew he was mortal. He would one day die and return to dust. There was only one way in which something of him would live



“The Unequal Marriage” by Vasili Pukirev (1832-1890), an 1862 work located in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow.

on after his death. That would be if he had a child. But he could not have a child on his own. For that he needed his wife. She alone could give birth. She alone could mitigate his mortality. And not because she was like him but precisely because she was unlike him. At that moment she ceased to be, for him, a type, and became a person in her own right. And a person has a proper name. That is what he gave her: the name *Chavah*, “Eve”, meaning, “giver of life”.

At that moment, as they were about to leave Eden and face the world as we know it, a place of darkness, Adam gave his wife the first gift of love, a personal name. And at that moment, God responded to them both in love, and made them garments to clothe their nakedness, or as Rabbi Meir put it, “garments of light”.

And so it has been ever since, that when a man and woman turn to one another in a bond of faithfulness, God robes them in garments of light, and we come as close as we will ever get to God himself, bringing new life into being, turning the prose of biology into the poetry of the human spirit, redeeming the darkness of the world by the radiance of love. ■

*Sir Jonathan Sacks was formerly the Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth. This article is based on a speech he gave to the international colloquium “Humanum”, convened by Pope Francis on the topic of “The Complementarity of Man and Woman”, held November 17-19, 2014, in Vatican City. It has been reprinted with the kind permission of the Office of the Chief Rabbi. Additional information about Rabbi Sacks’ work and instructions on how to join his mailing list can be found on the website: [www.rabbisacks.org](http://www.rabbisacks.org)*

# On Dubrovnik

Robin Harris

There have been endless disputes about the origins of Dubrovnik and about its relationship with Cavtat, or (as it was known) *Ragusa Vecchia*, further down the coast. Both were settled in early times. Cavtat was from the 1st century a Roman colony, called *Epidaurum*. Dubrovnik, we know from archaeological evidence, was a fortified Roman settlement from at least the 6th century.

According to the chroniclers, notably Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *Epidaurum* fell in the early 7th century to Slavic invaders and the late Roman inhabitants made their way to Dubrovnik and founded a settlement. The place got its name, allegedly, from a deformation of the Greek root *lan*, meaning cliff, thus *Rausa* and so *Ragusa*. This is all obviously an oversimplification. But I don't follow some scholars in dismissing the story of the collapse of *Epidaurum* and its connection with Dubrovnik entirely. The tradition is too strong.

Whatever their exact motive and numbers, the inhabitants of *Epidaurum* brought a strong sense of civic identity, and almost certainly a bishopric, with them to Dubrovnik. In this sense, the foundation myth probably does reflect part of the reality.

The settlement of Dubrovnik proper was essentially Romano-Greek. But from an early date there was another contiguous settlement of Slavs and Vlachs on the slopes of Mount Srđ. Srđ was then known in Latin as *Vergatum*, itself derived from the word *Virgetum* meaning a grove of saplings. The villages of Brgat Donji and Brgat Gornji reflect this fact. The "grove" in question was of holm oaks—in Croatian *dub*, hence *dubrava*, hence of course Dubrovnik. The first known use of the word *Dubrovčani* is in a charter of 1189 from Ban Kulin the ruler of Bosnia. The first known use of Dubrovnik is from a charter of 1215 from King Stefan Nemanja of Serbia.

These are interesting pointers to the future. But the fact remains that the population of Dubrovnik, or Ragusa, was culturally Latin not Slavic until probably the last part of the 13th century. And its ruling class became only Slavicised in manners and language later still. Moreover, the community grew up very much in the shadow of the Byzantine Empire.

## Rule by Venice

But Byzantium was distant and, by the end of the 12th century, increasingly weak. So it was

that on their return from the sack and occupation of Constantinople in the course of the Fourth Crusade, in 1205, the Venetians stopped at Dubrovnik and promptly demanded, and received, the city's submission. With occasional intervals as a result of Ragusan rebelliousness, Venice would rule Dubrovnik for the next century and a half.

Subsequent Ragusan and still later Yugoslav historians would have little good to say about this period. The fact is, however, that without Venetian rule it is highly improbable that Dubrovnik could have developed so far—politically, economically, socially, or culturally.

True, Venetian rule was in some respects an encumbrance. In particular, it closely controlled trade in the Adriatic, the so-called "Venetian Gulf", seeking to ensure that all commerce went via the Venice staple market of Rialto. In three ways, however, Venetian rule bestowed substantial benefits. In the first place, Venice provided an ultimate guarantor of Dubrovnik's security in the long struggle with the Nemanjić rulers of Serbia which now began and lasted throughout most of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The second advantage of Venetian rule was, paradoxically, economic. This though was despite not thanks to Venetian intentions. Venice wanted exclusive control in the Adriatic. But it had little interest in or aptitude for trade with the difficult, dangerous Slavs of the Balkan hinterland.

Dubrovnik shrewdly exploited this fact. In 1232, the Serenissima formally established that while Dubrovnik could

send only four ships a year to Venice, and had to pay substantial dues on the rest of its maritime commerce, it could trade without any customs dues at all with the Slavs. The Ragusan merchants used this provision to gain a grip on Balkan trade, including the silver mines of Serbia and Bosnia. The contacts and skills they acquired also uniquely prepared them for the more fraught, but still more productive, relationship they would establish with the region's future Ottoman rulers.

The third benefit of Venetian rule was institutional. The Ragusans hated Venice. But they accepted the Venetian institutional legacy with few alterations. Above all, perhaps, they absorbed the ethos that made those institutions function so effectively. Venice was unusual among the Italian city states in maintaining a high degree of stability. Schisms were frowned about. Personal ambitions were subordinated to, or at least concealed by, an austere civic virtue.



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Coat of arms of the Republic of Ragusa and the city of Dubrovnik.

This became still more the case in the state of Dubrovnik, whose major preoccupation throughout its existence was to ensure that no individual or clique became too powerful.

This is one reason, incidentally, why the picture we have of so many Ragusans is rather grey. Conformity, uniformity, and equality—at least among the noble patricians who ran the state's affairs—were emphasised. Decisions were collective wherever possible. The only Ragusan citizen to have a statue erected in his honour—in this case a rather uninspiring bust in the courtyard of the Rector's Palace—was Miho Pracat. He was a commoner, a hugely wealthy merchant from Lopud, and great civic philanthropist. And even then the Ragusan Senate wrangled for years before it agreed to commission the work. This attitude was part of the Venetian legacy.

### Hungary

The final stage of Dubrovnik's political development towards an autonomy, which can reasonably be described as independence, was made under Hungarian allegiance. Having been routed in their war with Hungary, the Venetians left Dubrovnik for good in 1358.

The Dubrovnik patriciate now managed, by an extraordinarily skilful use of diplomacy and influence, to secure terms of submission to the Hungarian King

which were unique in Dalmatia. Dubrovnik could choose its own Rector (as the Count began now to be called) from among its own citizens. It conducted its own foreign policy. It minted its own coinage.

True, it flew the Hungarian flag and employed Hungarian guards—called *barabanti*—to guard its fortresses. It also paid a modest tribute, undertook to assist the Hungarians in certain circumstances, and honoured the Hungarian King with laudes chanted in the cathedral. But for all practical purposes Dubrovnik was its own master. The city then acquired its splendid coat of arms.

Dubrovnik also undertook further territorial expansion. In later years, Dubrovnik made much of its peaceful instincts, its preference for diplomacy over war, its interest in commerce not aggrandisement. But these were really typical Ragusan attempts to make a virtue of necessity once the arrival of the Ottoman Empire transformed the military situation in the Balkans. Whenever they could, the Ragusans grabbed quite shamelessly, and quite successfully too.

### The Ottomans

The Turkish-Ragusan relationship is surely one of the most remarkable symbioses to be found in European history. Dubrovnik began tentative dealings with the Ottoman invaders from the late 14th century, but it strenuously sought to avoid paying tribute to the



DENNIS JARVIS/CC BY-SA 2.0

An aerial view of the coastal city of Dubrovnik in Croatia.



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The flag bearing the slogan “Libertas”, flown by Dubrovnik’s merchant fleet.

Sultan. Circumstances in the end, however, left it little option and in 1442 the historic decision was made to begin to pay the tribute, called *harač*. There were real dangers involved. Payment of the *harač* implied in Ottoman eyes recognition of the Sultan’s sovereignty, and how he interpreted that sovereignty was entirely in his hands.

The Turks, as an Islamic superpower, had little reason to look favourably on Catholic Dubrovnik. They began by trying to extract as much as they could from it. The *harač* thus rose sharply in the last part of the 15th century. In exchange, Dubrovnik received privileged treatment within the Empire, but these privileges were fragile and the cost was high—not least in the bribery and bullying of Ottoman officials and soldiers. Only under Suleyman the Magnificent in 1521 was the commercial relationship between the Empire and its precocious little tributary confirmed on highly favourable terms.

Dubrovnik now gained in effect a new monopoly of the Balkan trade. It paid a fixed sum, raised by its own people from its own merchants, to the Sultan. And because of a suspiciously fortunate miscalculation of exchange rates by a doubtless venal Turkish financial official, while the real value of Dubrovnik’s trade assessed in Venetian ducats rose, its payments in Turkish aspers did not.

Rather than follow the intricate struggles between the Counter-Reformation West and the Ottoman East during the 16th and early 17th centuries, I shall just point out two ways in which they affected Dubrovnik. First, Dubrovnik was well placed to appeal to both sides. Its most persistent foe was Venice, to whom it was both a rival and a reproach. But against Venice it had a distinctly odd couple of protectors. On the one hand, there was the Pope, with support from Spain, who regarded Dubrovnik as the last toe-hold for Catholicism in the region.

Equally powerful a friend, albeit a somewhat unpredictable one, was the [Sublime] Porte itself. The Turks needed Dubrovnik as an entrepot for trade with the West, and they infinitely preferred Ragusan merchants, whom they could dominate, to the arrogant Venetians whom they feared. Meanwhile, Dubrovnik juggled and spied on and lied to the two sides to survive. Hence the jibes:

A Frenchman—it had to be a Frenchman—who visited Dubrovnik in January 1658 noted that the inhabitants were known as “the Ragusans of the *sette bandiere* (the seven flags)” because they (allegedly) paid tribute to seven foreign rulers. He continued: “The Turks they fear, the Venetians they hate; the Spanish they love because they are useful; the French they suffer because of their fame; and foreigners they spy on very much.”

It was an unenviable reputation. But to these sneers the Ragusans could have given a decisive and irrefutable answer—these tactics allowed them to survive.

The second benefit of Ottoman rule, which I’ve already mentioned, was economic. The Ragusans by now were not just merchants but tax gatherers and entrepreneurs throughout the Ottoman Balkan and other territories. They had regularised their relations with Constantinople through a web of bribery, diplomacy and indeed ceremony—represented above all by the annual mission of the Republic’s ambassadors.

These *poklisari* would depart in procession through the Ploče Gate—together with the dragoman or interpreter, their priest, their barber-surgeon, their servants and their Ottoman guards. They would pass slowly through the Balkan lands from Ragusan colony to Ragusan colony, resolving outstanding issues in a quasi-judicial capacity. Finally, they would take up their lodgings in the Pera district of Constantinople. Here they would obtain confirmation of privileges, present the tribute, distribute sweeteners and defuse tensions. Sometimes it was a dangerous business, involving imprisonment and even death. But it usually worked.

When the Ottoman Empire was at war, the profits of Dubrovnik generally rose, because it benefited as the only neutral commercial go-between – and could raise its port dues accordingly. But in later years this advantage was lessened, as growing disorder led to a contraction of the volume of trade. Dubrovnik, as a tributary of the Porte, was also regarded as fair game both by the *uskoks*—the piratical zealots of Senj—and the *hajduks*, a catch-all term for other rebels against Ottoman rule.

A serious blow to Dubrovnik’s fortunes was delivered by the opening of Venetian Split as an alternative entrepot in 1590. Only in 1645, with the outbreak of a new war between Venice and the Empire, did Split’s closure allow Dubrovnik to reassert its quasi-monopoly. But by then wider regional economic problems were reducing opportunities. And soon Dubrovnik would be facing the greatest crisis of its existence.

## The construction of Dubrovnik

By now, the mid-17th century, Dubrovnik had already reached its full urban development. Dubrovnik is often portrayed as a city of peace, of culture, of international values. And in recent times of course it has been. But, as the Senate insisted in 1430, when facing the threat of attack by Dubrovnik's arch-enemy and neighbour, Radoslav Pavlović, the work on the city walls was to be carried out "non tanto per la bellezza, quanto la forteza": that is, these fortifications weren't romantic props—they were for real.

In the 14th century, the defences were erected against the Venetians. In the 15th century, especially after the fall of Constantinople, it was mainly against the Turks. This is the era of the construction first by Michelozzo Michelozzi and then by the great Juraj Dalmatinac of the Minčeta Tower.

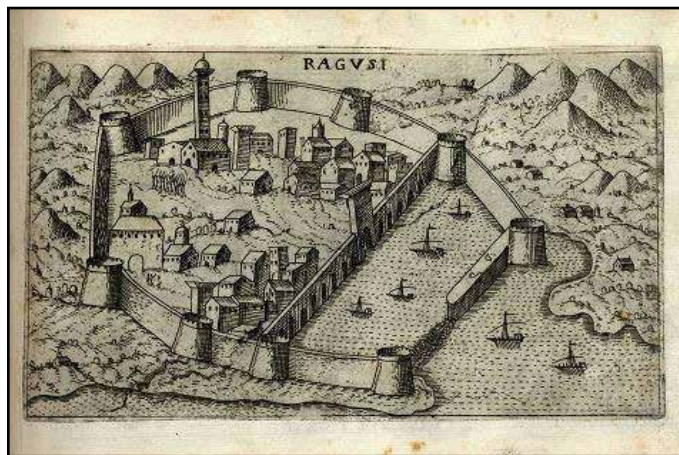
In the 16th century, when Venice sought to use the wars of the Holy League as an excuse to seize Dubrovnik, the Revelin (at the Ploče gate) and the fortress of St. John were built and rebuilt. The fortification of the harbour is according to the conception of Dubrovnik's great, long-serving and faithful city engineer, Paskoje Miličević. Miličević also designed and built my own favourite civic building—the Sponza Palace—and so well that it withstood the Great Earthquake, more than a century later.

## The Great Earthquake

At eight o'clock in the morning on the Wednesday of Holy Week, the 6th April 1667, the Great Earthquake began. Within a few seconds a large part of the city's buildings had collapsed. The great Gothic cathedral was among them. Boulders poured down from Mount Srđ. Panic and disorder broke out.

About 2,000 people, a third of the city's population, probably died; and perhaps another thousand or so were killed in the rest of the Republic. These are small figures to us, perhaps, but a true catastrophe for a city of 6,000 and a state of fewer than 30,000 souls.

The Dubrovnik patriciate's struggle to maintain



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An old printed map showing the ancient Republic of Ragusa and inbound merchant ships.

the city's independence, threatened by Venetians and Turks externally and by civil disorder within, is I think a truly inspiring one. But rather than pursue the course of the city's reconstruction, I want to look at what had been taking place within Ragusan society and culture.

## Society

I was gently criticised in one historian's review of my book for succumbing to the myth propagated by Dubrovnik about itself. I don't plead guilty: the myth reflected, as myths do, an important reality. But it's certainly true that the Ragusan myth is seductive.

Notably, Dubrovnik claimed to enjoy something called LIBERTAS—the slogan embossed on the flag of its merchant fleet. A famous passage in Ivan Gundulić's poem, *Dubravka*, eloquently sums up the conviction. Gundulić, writing in 1627, contrasts the order, harmony, prosperity and above all freedom enjoyed by the inhabitants of the enchanted grove—Dubrovnik—with the conditions endured elsewhere in Dalmatia under Venetian rule.

The triumphal chorus runs: *O ljepa, o draga, o slatka slobodo, / Dar u kom sva blaga višnji nam bog je do, / Uzroče istini od naše sve slava, / Uresu jedini od ove*



CHENSIYUAN/CC BY SA 2.0

A panoramic view of Dubrovnik taken from atop the old city walls.





LÁSZLÓ SZALAI/GNU LICENSE V. 1.2

*Stradun* (Main Street) in the centre of Dubrovnik.

*Dubrave* (Oh beautiful, dear sweet Freedom, / The gift in which the God above has given us all blessings, / Oh true cause of all our glory, / Only adornment of this Grove.)

To all of which the cynic could answer that this is all very well, but that Dubrovnik was in no sense a democracy. And that's true. Only adult male patricians could hold political power and significant office. Their sovereignty was exercised through the Great Council. Moreover, from the 15th century till the end of the Republic it was the increasingly oligarchic Senate, and the families represented there, who largely controlled the Government—the Rector, elected for just a month, held a purely honorary role.

On the other hand, Dubrovnik was indeed free in other senses. It was from the late 13th century at least firmly founded upon a rule of law. Within the governing elite there was a large measure of equality. Ingenious measures, combining use of elections and selection by lot, and involving strict prohibitions on cabals and campaigning, were implemented to prevent concentrations of power.

Although the nobility exercised political control it did not behave oppressively. Above all, it did not stand in the way of a large body of very wealthy merchants from the citizen class—also known as the *popolo grosso*—from achieving high social status.

We don't know much about how the lower

classes in Dubrovnik lived for most of the Republic's history, except that, as elsewhere, it will have been harshly. But again there were mitigating circumstances. For example, serfdom of a fully developed kind was unknown on the Republic's territory.

While it is true that peasants in some areas were in practice tied to the land, this never involved subjection to the lord's justice: all of Dubrovnik's citizens enjoyed direct recourse to the Republic's courts. Moreover, those who lived in or near Dubrovnik itself enjoyed the benefit of a remarkable proto-welfare state and National Health Service.

Dubrovnik was proud of its healthy climate and life-style. The 15th century Tuscan Philip de Diversis, who served as the city's school master, claimed to have met rosy-faced, fighting-fit Ragusans of 90 or 100 years old—which also perhaps testifies to the Ragusan sense of humour.

Anyway, Dubrovnik showed from an early date a strong and enlightened interest in public health. From the 13th century Dubrovnik had a succession of doctors—Jews, Greeks, Spaniards, Germans and Italians, rather than Ragusans—who were employed by the town and required to provide free treatment to those who needed it. There were also surgeon-barbers and pharmacists.

Commercial considerations as well as public health ones required that special measures were taken to cope with the risk of imported disease. Dubrovnik was ahead of the other states of its day, even Venice, in instituting quarantine regulations and providing quarantine stations, called *Lazzaretti*. The first Ragusan quarantine law is dated 1377. The quarantine station moved from one site to another, finishing up in today's *Lazzaretti* on Ploče in the 17th century.

Dubrovnik founded a hospice for the destitute, known as the Magnum Hospitale, in the mid-14th century, near the convent of St. Clare at Pile. In the 16th century it was transformed into a hospital in the modern sense.

Dubrovnik had a more enlightened attitude towards children born out of wedlock than did any of its neighbours. Illegitimate children were, as often as not, recognized, and grew up in the father's family and even inherited property. But some of course did not—particularly those born to the poor.

Dubrovnik's orphanage, set up in 1429 to look after foundlings, was one of the first in Europe. It was situated opposite the Mala Braća. Two specially designed, wheel-like devices, one on each side of the orphanage, were used to draw in a baby anonymously from its mother.

The impulse is clear from the statute which declared it an "abomination and inhumanity to cast out little human beings who, because of poverty or for some other reason, are thrown out around the city like brute beasts without knowledge of their parents, for which reason they often die without the sacrament of baptism, or come to some other ill".

The orphanage was founded for this and—the

statute added—“for reverence for Jesus”. In short, the motive was Christian charity.

### Religion

It's odd, indeed, that so many historians, of quite different ideological inclinations, are inclined to under-play the importance of religion in the history of Dubrovnik—and I would even add—in the history of Croatia.

I suppose Leftists don't generally like the subject, while many Rightists as nationalists are anxious to emphasis secular elements, like language or political institutions, as defining identity.

For the Ragusan Republic, at least, there can be no doubt: it was first and foremost a Catholic state, and remaining one was at the top of that state's political agenda throughout its existence. For example, until the very end of the Republic Dubrovnik struggled to ensure that no Orthodox priest was allowed to reside overnight in the city.

Dubrovnik's Catholicism, was, however, of the Erastian kind. The patriciate did not intend to be told what to do by any cleric, except perhaps the Pope. The Ragusan nobility kept a firm grip on the religious orders and religious houses. They ensured till the 18th century that the archbishop was a foreigner, so that he could not pose a threat to the government's authority. They quarrelled with the Jesuits because of

their dangerous Counter-Reformation zeal, for fear of offending the Porte.

As everyone knows, the patron of Dubrovnik was and is St. Blaise (*Sveti Vlaho*). The saint fulfilled a parallel role to that of St. Mark in Venice—or indeed St. Tryphon (*Sveti Tripun*) in Kotor, St. Domnius (*Sveti Dujam*) in Split and so on. The Feast of St. Blaise, 3rd February, was celebrated in a style both noisy and devout.

During the franchise, or immunity, of St. Blaise—three days before and after the Feast—debtors and criminals could come to the city without fear of pursuit to deal with their creditors or the authorities. Wherever Dubrovnik established its rule and its customs it also established the cult of St. Blaise. There were ten churches dedicated to him in the 15th century—including one at Ston on Pelješac and one at Pridvorje in Konavle, thus at each vulnerable extremity of the Republic.

### Decline & fall

The period after the Great Earthquake has sometimes been regarded as a rather dreary one in Dubrovnik's history, but unfairly. Eighteenth century Dubrovnik was certainly less important than it had been in European terms. The incursion into the Mediterranean world of the British, the French and finally the Russians, and the decline of the Ottoman



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A view of Dubrovnik's Fort Lovrijenac (St. Lawrence Fortress, also known as 'Dubrovnik's Gibraltar) on the left and Fort Bokar on the lower right.



CAVTATRAZ/CC BY-SA 1.0

Coats of arms of the Ragusan noble families.

Empire, changed the balance of power, as well as the balance of prosperity, to Dubrovnik's loss.

But Ragusan society was, for all that, remarkably polished: it produced a great scientist in the shape of Rudjer Bošković, a fine composer in the form of Luko Sorkočević and a range of lesser polymaths, all strongly imbued with local pride and patriotism.

By the end of the 18th century the Ragusan maritime trade had recovered: and Ragusan ships were now bringing corn from the Black Sea through the Dardanelles to Western Europe.

The political order of Dubrovnik had, though, become sclerotic. The nobles had more or less overcome past schisms, based on blood, that divided the families of the so-called *sorbonezi* and *salamankezi*. But there were simply not enough of them to fill all the offices: such is the effect of caste on demography. Moreover, a limited section of the nobility itself had become imbued with reformist ideas derived from the French Revolutionary upheavals.

In truth, there was no way in which the Ragusan Republic could survive in the turbulent years of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars without a powerful patron—and for once in its long history that patron was lacking. In 1806, despite the Senate's desperate attempts to avert it, French troops entered Dubrovnik. This, in turn, prompted a ferocious attack by hordes of Montenegrins, supported by the Russian fleet. The aggressors' tactics, and indeed motivation, differed little from that of their offspring in the early 1990s.

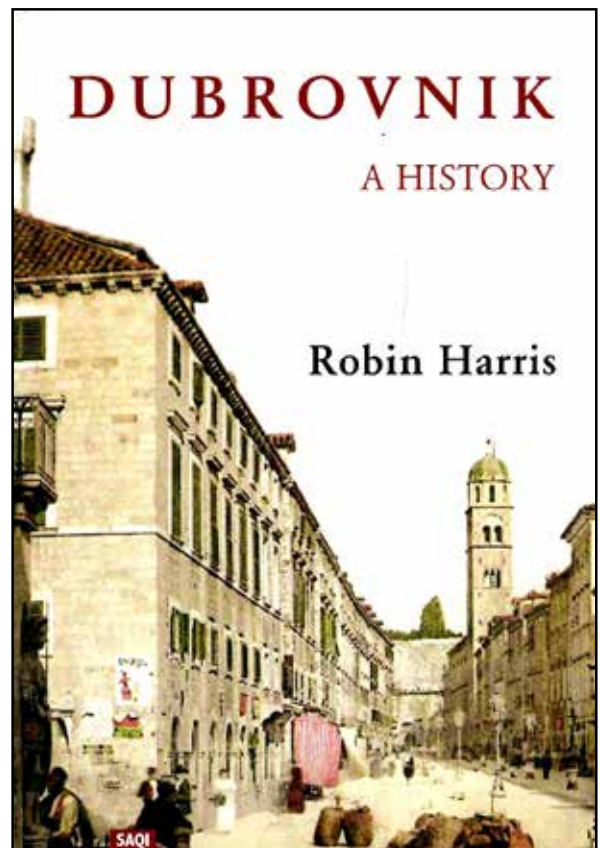
By the time that the siege was lifted, Dubrovnik's wealth, above all its merchant fleet, had been largely lost. Finally, on the afternoon of January 31, 1808, Marshal Marmont, exasperated at the Dubrovnik Senate's refusal to follow Venice's example of polite political suicide, gave the order for the abolition of the Republic. It was read out in an insulting speech by a jumped-up French Colonel. The Senators were ordered to disperse. The doors of the Rector's Palace, and of all the offices within, were locked fast and sealed. A few weeks later Marmont was rewarded by Napoleon with the title duc de Raguse.

## The Ragusans

So how shall I sum the Ragusans? They were, by and large, talented, brave, patriotic and pious—as long as piety didn't get in the way of profit. Their diplomacy was in equal degrees admired for its subtlety and reviled for its deviousness. They were resilient in the jaws of adversity and opportunist in the face of fortune. They were unswervingly consistent in strategy, while infinitely flexible in tactics. They were compassionate towards the needy; tolerant towards those to whom tolerance paid; remorseless in resisting any threat. They were diligent in business and skilled in seamanship.

And they were endowed with the talent for pleasure—as their tales of fishing trips and picnics, parties and gardens confirm. They built for themselves and their friends a chain of beautiful villas, sadly now often in ruins, along the coast and on the islands. This, Petar Sorkočević's house on Lapad, is now home to the Historical Institute. In the end, I admire the Ragusans because they knew the most important thing there is to know—they knew how to live. ■

*Robin Harris served as an Adviser at the UK Treasury and Home Office, Director of the Conservative Party Research Department, and was as a member of Prime Minister Thatcher's Downing Street Policy Unit. He is the author of [Dubrovnik: A History](#) (2003), and other books. This article is based on a private lecture given to the Croatian Students and Young Professionals Network in 2004. It is published here with his kind permission.*



The cover of the first edition of Harris's 500-page history of the Croatian city, its people, and culture.

# A New European Referendum

Tom Zwitter

On the 1st of June 2005, the Dutch people were asked in a referendum about their opinion on the new Constitution of the European Union. The Dutch voted *against* this Constitution. But within two years, their will was ignored and the text was simply passed as the ‘Treaty of Lisbon’. The public was never consulted again and, since then, the process of European integration has continued inexorably, encouraged by financial crises and other ‘threats’.

Exactly ten years after the Dutch referendum, in June of this year, the Civil EU Committee in the Netherlands presented a *Manifesto to the People of the Netherlands* at a conference held in the press room of The Hague’s parliament. Despite invitations to attend the launch, not a single member of parliament attended. (They did, however, receive a copy of the *Manifesto* in their mailboxes.) This was neglect on their part as public officials.

The EU has continued to reduce the Netherlands to merely a province of a new supranational state—one in which we have less sovereignty and a rapidly diminishing grip on power. Ten years after the 2005 referendum, the Netherlands as a sovereign state has almost vanished. Although the country may seem to exist, its power has shifted from The Hague to Brussels, away from ordinary people. In ten short years, the Netherlands has become a country that has abolished its right to self-determination—one in which its own citizens cannot rule themselves. In fact, the Netherlands isn’t even a democracy anymore.

The *Manifesto to the People of the Netherlands* analyses in detail what has happened, and uncovers all the hidden mechanisms through which authority and sovereignty are undermined. It blames the weakening of Dutch democracy squarely on the European Union and calls for a Constitutional restoration.

But the *Manifesto* doesn’t just analyse the ongoing delegation of authority to Brussels; it also refutes the main arguments used by the ‘Europhiles’ to defend the EU—such as the ‘inevitability’ of history, and the claim that the EU has brought peace, wealth, and stability to all of its member states. By reviewing Dutch government documents, and other institutional and legal texts, the authors—Arjan van Dixhoorn of Utrecht University and Pepijn van Houwelingen of the Netherlands Institute for Social Research—reveal that the only justification offered for the shift in power from the Netherlands to the EU is the claim that it improves the so-called *manageability of the EU*.

And so, in short, crisis after crisis has been used to increase the power of the EU’s institutions in Brussels, as well as that of the European Central Bank, while at the same time diminishing the power of national level institutions in each member state.

The argument of ‘manageability’ seems to merely



## Manifest aan het volk van Nederlands

Arjan van Dixhoorn &  
Pepijn van Houwelingen

Groningen: Uitgeverij De Blauwe Tijger, 2015

be the ‘garment’ of the new European ‘emperor’—one for whom (the bureaucrats argue) it is worth sacrificing democratic institutions, the last traces of sovereignty, and any remaining possibility of national self-determination. The *Manifesto to the People of the Netherlands* demonstrates how absurd this argument really is.

Last year, the Civil EU Committee gathered 65,000 signatures in the Netherlands in a petition submitted to the Dutch parliament calling for a new referendum. As a result, members of the Committee were given the right to present their arguments formally to members of parliament. The parliament then had a debate about the EU and discussed the possibility of holding another referendum—though in the end it voted against it.

This hasn’t stopped the organizers of the Civil EU Committee. The publication of the *Manifesto* is only the first in a series of events that have taken

place following the ten-year anniversary of the 2005 referendum in an effort to bring about a new referendum.

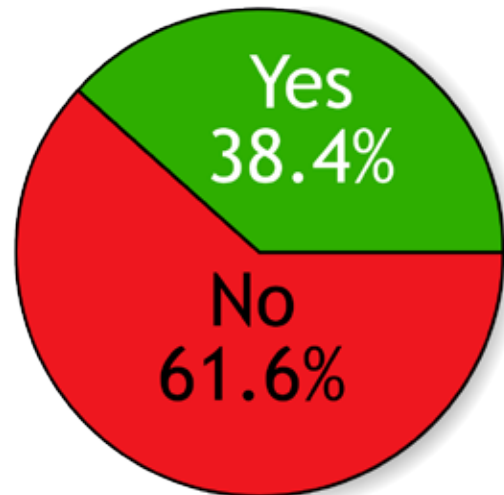
This past July, a new law came into force in the Netherlands, which creates the possibility of an 'advisory' referendum that can be demanded directly by the public. But 300,000 signatures are required. The Committee has thus begun working on gathering the necessary signatures (and so far has gathered more than 150,000).

Meanwhile, debates will continue be organized across the Netherlands to raise awareness about the undemocratic and legally questionable way in which all national authority has been systematically transferred to an unelected elite in Brussels.

This book, which includes an Introduction by Thierry Baudet, makes it clear that a referendum is necessary. Only the people of the Netherlands can—and must—determine their future. And for this to occur, the sovereignty of the Netherlands must be restored—otherwise it will continue to become part of the new, autocratic super-state whose throne is in Brussels. ■

*Tom Zwitser is the publisher of De Blauwe Tijger.*

### Results of the 2005 referendum on the European Constitution held in the Netherlands



Despite overwhelming results against ratification of the European Constitution, EU officials in Brussels have ignored the will of European citizens.



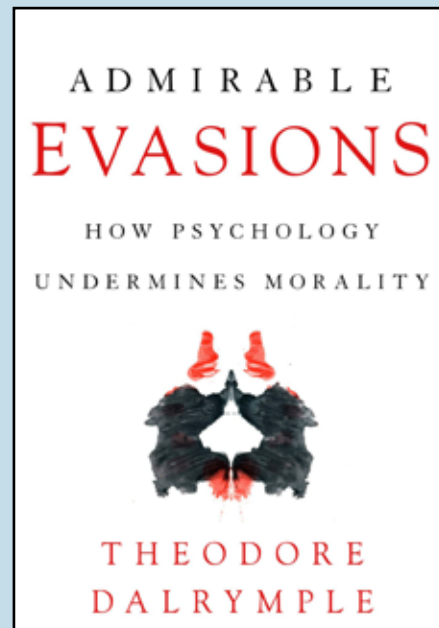
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In 2005, the European Constitution failed in two EU member states due to overwhelming negative votes in the Netherlands and France. The image shows some of the posters put up in Burgundy by opposing sides during the French referendum.

# Briefly Noted

**Admirable Evasions:  
How Psychology Undermines Morality**  
Theodore Dalrymple  
New York: Encounter Books, 2015

One of the greatest living essayists in the English language, Dalrymple turns his attention in this short book to the field of psychology. A former prison doctor, he inveighs against the field of psychology today, which he sees as ‘getting in the way’ of people’s duties and obligations. Too often, he writes, medical diagnoses are overused, and societal problems are reduced to behavioral problems stemming from neurochemical disorders. This contributes to a culture in which people are no longer responsible for their actions—and leads to “intellectual and moral dishonesty”. ■



**Le traité transatlantique et autres menaces**

Alain de Benoist  
Paris: Éditions Pierre-Guillaume de Roux, 2015

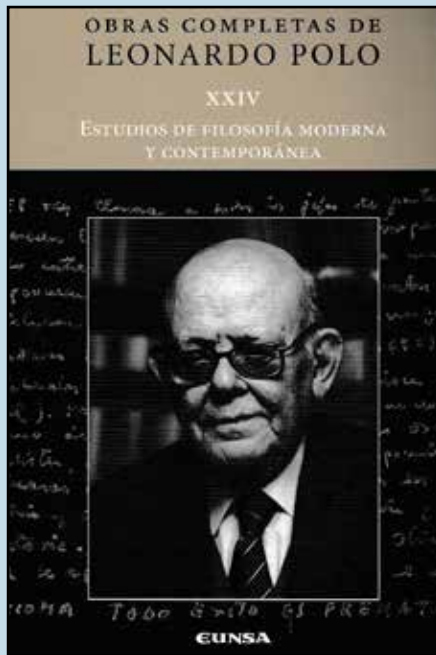
In *The Transatlantic Treaty and Other Menaces*, the controversial French academic—and founder of the Nouvelle Droite (of which we are often critical)—here explains his opposition to the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership between the EU and the US. Seeing it as nothing more than a mechanism that would facilitate the ‘take-over’ of Europe by multinational corporations, Benoist considers it one of several threats to national sovereignty. In the face of such threats, he argues, the only response is to rebel. ■ (P. Pigny)

**La tradizione e il sacro**

Roger Scruton  
Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2015

*La tradizione e il sacro* (*Tradition and the Sacred*), published this year by Vita e Pensiero of Milan, the label of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, collects six previously published essays by Roger Scruton. Scruton’s point is really the question of the day: “What keeps us together?” The answer, he suggests, is found in the question itself—where ‘us’ stands for Christian Western Civilization, and what remains of it that is still Christian and still Western—despite the contemporary narrative of triumphant irreligion. ■ (M. Respinti)





### Estudios de filosofía moderna y contemporánea

(Obras Completas de Leonardo Polo, Vol. XXIV)

Leonardo Polo

Navarra: Eunsa, 2015

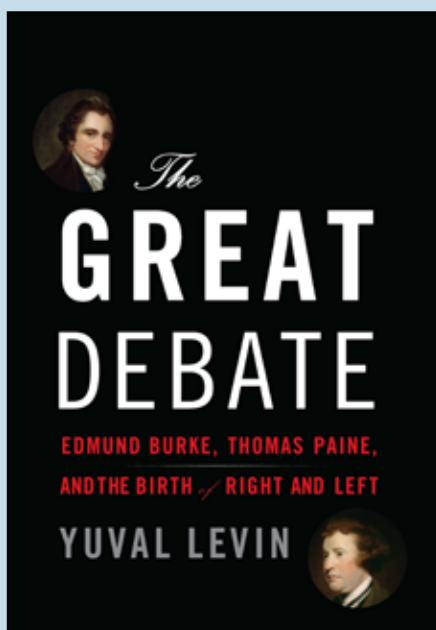
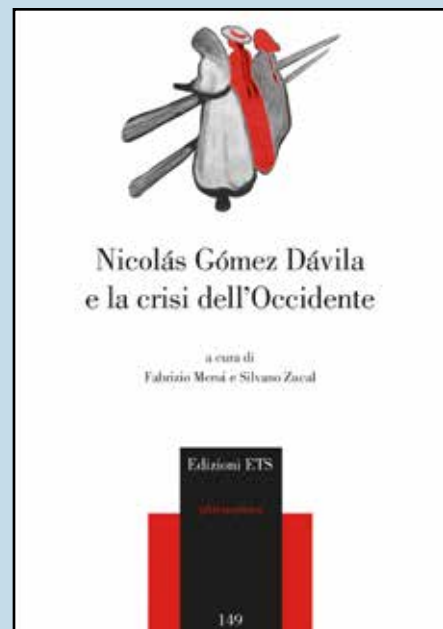
Polo, who died in 2013, remains widely unknown outside of Spanish-speaking academic circles. An influential and beloved philosophy professor at the University of Navarra, he influenced generations of students and made significant contributions to the fields of ethics, epistemology, and ontology. His complete works—including extensive unpublished manuscripts and class notes—are now being published in critical editions. A deep, challenging, and complex thinker who never lost sight of the divine, this volume, titled *Studies of Modern and Contemporary Philosophy*, gathers some of his most penetrating analyses of modern and contemporary philosophy. ■ (N. Landa)

### Nicolás Gómez Dávila e la crisi dell'Occidente

Edited by Fabrizio Meroi & Silvano Zucal

Pisa: Edizione ETS, 2015

The Colombian Nicolás Gómez Dávila (1913-1994) remains one of the most interesting—and least known—conservative writers in the world. Writing almost exclusively in aphorisms, only some of his work is available in other languages. A lyrical writer and trenchant critic of modernity, he was faithful to conservative—and oftentimes *reactionary*—principles and ideas. This book brings together the proceedings of an international conference held in Trent in May 2014 on the centenary of his birth, focusing on the political and religious aspects of his writings. ■



### The Great Debate: Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine, and the Birth of Right and Left

Yuval Levin

New York: Basic Books, 2013

Widely reviewed when it was first published in 2013, this book is one of the most engaging introductions to the ideas and legacy of Edmund Burke, using Thomas Paine as a foil. Despite their differences, and set in the context of the Anglo-American political tradition, Levin argues that Burke and Paine really had much more in common than people realize. A bright thinker and clear writer, Levin further argues that the consequences of their ideas can be seen in the US today in the political divide between right and left. ■

# The End of Germany?

Thomas Spannring

Rarely has a book caused so much controversy and upset among Germany's well-to-do and progressive elites as Thilo Sarrazin's *Deutschland schafft sich ab*—a title that translates into *Germany Abolishes Itself*. First published in 2010, the book has sold over 1.5 million copies, making it one of the most successful books on contemporary politics in post-war Germany.

The book might well have gone unnoticed had it not been for the prominence of its author. Sarrazin is an economist who at one time was a senior manager of Deutsche Bahn (Germany's federal railway), as well as serving as the Finance Senator of Berlin. He was also an executive board member of Europe's most powerful central bank, the German Bundesbank.

A quick glance at the book's index could lead the unsuspecting reader into believing that the book is merely another historical analysis of Germany, the German people, and Europe in general. To be sure, Sarrazin spends the first two (of nine) chapters setting the scene, providing the background for the rest of the book by giving historical accounts of the development of German society and the German state, and building the basis for the arguments that he makes in the following chapters. Interestingly, his concluding ninth chapter can almost be read as a work of satire, independent from the rest of the book, as Sarrazin describes two possible scenarios—"a dream and a nightmare"—of the future of Germany a hundred years from now.

Sarrazin makes his key arguments based on the social and economic problems caused by immigration, and the decline of the German birth-rate. He focuses especially on the uncontrolled immigration of largely uneducated peoples from the Muslim world. He claims that Muslim workers are disproportionately less integrated into the job market, hold fewer skills, and have a tendency of building sub-cultures that not only act independently but are, in fact, hostile to German culture as a whole.

Many of his arguments and examples are drawn from his experiences as a professional and politician living in Berlin, but he supplements these with statistics and other resources. And throughout the book, Sarrazin repeats the urgent message of the book's title, arguing that unless restrictions to immigration are implemented immediately—combined with reforms in schooling and education—Germany will abolish itself.

When it was first published in 2010, the book was one of the first to openly criticize the country's endemic political correctness and the immigration of unqualified immigrant workers into Germany. (Sarrazin is a proponent of the immigration of well-qualified individuals.) The book attacked the systematic denial by government elites that immigration has placed a burden on German culture and society.

By talking about culture and ethnicity as driving forces in society, Sarrazin broke the post-war taboo in



**Deutschland schafft sich ab:  
Wie wir unser Land aufs Spiel setzen**  
Thilo Sarrazin  
Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2010

Germany that forbade anyone from arguing that some people's values might be irreconcilable with Western values. The Left in particular was ready to condemn Sarrazin as a 'racist'. Protest rallies were organized wherever Sarrazin appeared, and anytime he tried to speak about his book he was received by angry mobs.

Sarrazin's critics, however, have missed the point he was trying to make. In fact, he merely dared to put down on paper what many Germans were already thinking but did not dare to say: that immigrant communities have created parallel societies within Germany that in many ways are hostile to native German and Western values—and especially to democracy. In addition, these communities are seen as draining resources away from the state in the form of social welfare programmes.

For the discerning American reader, this book may seem like much ado about nothing, as it merely seems to capture the status quo of a Europe in decline, a common topic in the American press. But for Europeans—and Germans in particular—Sarrazin's book sounds



a powerful alarm, and offers a beacon of hope that Europeans might once more begin to acknowledge their Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian heritage. Perhaps in doing so, they might also begin to stand up for themselves against the dominance of the left-wing mainstream and liberal elites that continue to seek the destruction of the values that have given Europe its unique identity.

The Left in Germany continues to fight Sarrazin and his book. The greatest insult to them, however, may be the fact that Sarrazin was—and remains—a member

of good standing of Germany's Social Democratic Party. His is a courageous, respectable voice among so many cowardly ones. And his book is a must-read. ■

*Thomas Spannring studied political science and holds an M.A. in European political and economic integration from the University of Durham in the UK. He is currently the President of a chemical company, and is based in Vienna and St. Louis. A previous version of this review appeared in The University Bookman. It appears with permission.*

## Borders & Political Order

Philippe Marlou

The French translation of Thierry Baudet's *The Significance of Borders* (2012), *Indispensables frontières* is timely. National borders have been under symbolic and legal attack for several decades, both within countries through multiculturalism and across countries via supranationalism.

But resisting mainstream dogmas on these topics is usually the privilege of a few intellectual 'aristocrats' who are not afraid of being marginalized or attacked with slurs. In spite of a very explicit subtitle "Why supranationalism and multiculturalism undermine democracy", Baudet's book has been gaining surprisingly good traction in the French media.

*Indispensables frontières* is an important opus, valuable for the subtle originality of its argument, the large number of authors it discusses, and the number of examples it provides. Baudet does not primarily write to describe or reiterate some of the undesirable consequences of the dilution of national borders. Instead, his mission is much more ambitious: to show that undermining national borders threatens some of the very goals that proponents of multiculturalism or supranationalism usually espouse.

An example may prove useful. For a governmental or a legal decision to be seen as legitimate and accepted as such, it has to be taken in the name of a particular group of people with a certain cultural identity, with centuries of particular history.

Any decision involving a society as a whole (e.g. a law or a court order) will not necessarily be seen as legitimate—thus may not produce a peaceful and well-functioning political order—if it reflects one culture out of many, with all of them being treated identically. Thus, there is no political representation (one aspect being democracy) without borders because borders make it possible for a "we"—for a *res publica*—to exist.

Both multiculturalism and supranationalism work towards the dissolution of consistent and peaceful political orders, as they undermine political representation, which relies on the distinction between "we" and "them".

Baudet alternates between explications of political

or legal theory and applying such theories to examples, such as legal cases. Chapters on the International Criminal Court and on European Court of Human Rights are especially illuminating in that respect. This book—which is also available in Dutch as *De Aanval op de Natiestaat*—is highly recommended. ■

*Philippe Marlou is an economist and writer based in Paris.*



**Indispensables frontières**  
Thierry Baudet  
Paris: Editions du Toucan, 2015

# The Future of France?

Pr. Edmund Waldstein

Although Michel Houellebecq's *Soumission* has drawn the ire of politically correct elites for allegedly being anti-Muslim and anti-feminist, such criticisms miss the point. In fact, a careful reading of the novel reveals that it is a subtle though important critique of the breakdown of the traditional family and the dominant nihilistic sexual amorality in today's West.

Michel Houellebecq's latest novel has generated so much commentary since its publication on the day of the *Charlie Hebdo* murders that most readers will already know the basic outline of the plot: Seven years from now, a Muslim party comes to power in France and a quiet process of Islamisation begins.

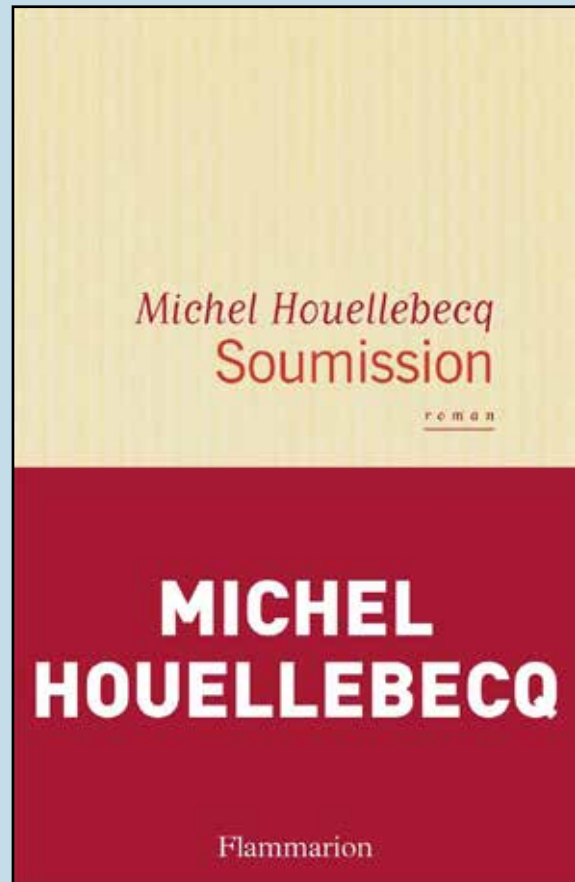
Politicians and journalists who know only the outline of the book have assumed that Houellebecq's story is Islamophobic. But careful readers have all agreed, along with with Houellebecq, that this is not the case at all. If anyone should be offended by his book, Houellebecq argues, it should be feminists.

The place of women in society is indeed one of the main themes of *Soumission*. The narrator and protagonist of the story, François, begins by describing his growing disillusionment with the secular feminism of the contemporary West and ends by accepting a version of Islamic patriarchy. However, before accepting Islam he is briefly drawn toward Catholicism, whose attitude toward women is only indirectly hinted at. His ultimate rejection of Catholicism seems to stem from the character that secular hedonism has given him.

François is a professor of literature and since his student days he has had about one girlfriend a year. The book opens as he undergoes a growing realisation that these relationships have not remedied his basic loneliness and discontent, and also, and perhaps more importantly, that the current promiscuous ideal of sexual relations has rendered the women he knows lonely and miserable. When he meets some of his girlfriends from past years, he sees that their implicit plan of "trying out" exclusive relationships with a series of boyfriends, before settling down with one final boyfriend and starting a family, has not worked.

One of them, Aurélie, was so emotionally and physically drained by her series of boyfriends that when she finally attempted to start a family she failed. This has left her a bitter misandrist, whose only topic of conversation is the failings of her male colleagues and her (unfulfilling) job. Another one, Sandra, similarly failed to start a family but has chosen to become a "cougar" who distracts herself from her inner emptiness by flirting with younger men. But the most miserable of all his female acquaintances seems to be the only one of his generation for whom the current model of relationships has gone pretty much as planned: Annelise, the wife of an old friend from his student days.

Annelise wakes up and adorns herself with



**Soumission**  
Michel Houellebecq  
Paris: Flammarion, 2015

expensive clothes and make-up for her high-stress job, in which an elegant and stylish appearance is a sign of status. But when she returns home at the end of the day, physically and mentally exhausted, she dresses in comfortable and ugly clothes, too tired to enjoy the company of her husband and children or to try to beautify their lives. Under these circumstances, her marriage seems to have become a mockery. In one of the most poignant passages of the novel, François is at Annelise's house for a barbecue, which is descending into chaos. Filled with pity he stays at her side, trying to express solidarity with her: "a vain solidarity".

The (somewhat fanciful) version of Islam to which François eventually submits is portrayed as the opposite of the failed sexual egalitarianism he has rejected. Muslim women are portrayed as dressing in shapeless robes and veils when they go outside but dressing up for their husbands. Polygamy allows for stable homes for women without sexual discipline on the part of men. Sealed off in the privacy of the home, Muslim women are absolved from the stresses of commercial and public life. They remain in an idyllic world of childhood:

“In the Islamic regime, women (at least those pretty enough to attract well-to-do husbands) could remain children for practically their whole lives. Soon after they ceased being children themselves they became mothers, and plunged again into the world of children. As soon as their children grew up they became grandmothers .... There were only a few years in which they bought sexy lingerie and exchanged children’s games for sex games .... Of course they lost their autonomy, but f\*\*k autonomy”. This is certainly an anti-feminist attitude, but is it a misogynistic one?

It might be useful in this connection to recall David Graeber’s claim in *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* that patriarchy in the classic, Old Testament sense first arose in rebellion against the decadence and sexual depravity of Mesopotamian cities; the veiling and secluding of women was partly a protest against their degradation in temple prostitution. This is certainly the way François chooses to see it. But it is hard to resist the impression that such infantilisation of women implies some degree of contempt.

Moreover, in the novel, for the new Muslim president of France, Mohammed Ben Abbas, the restoration of patriarchy is motivated not by pity for women but by a desire for power. His ultimate goal is to re-create the Roman Empire. He is scheming to admit the North African nations to the EU and then re-model the EU as an authoritarian super-state with himself as president. But he realises that a strong civilisation needs to have more children than those being generated in secular France, and thus the restoration of patriarchy is key to his project.

He thinks the ultimate foundation of patriarchy is religion, and thus his first priority is to give French children an Islamic education. But he also sees that economic changes will have to be made if France is really going to become a patriarchal society. He begins by giving women financial incentives to leave the workforce. But he goes on to attempt a complete re-structuring of economic life—abolishing both capitalism and the welfare system, with its atomizing and egalitarian influences, and building a new economic system meant to strengthen families and family networks.

Oddly enough, he turns to non-Islamic sources for inspiration here—the Catholic distributists G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc. Distributism, the astonished public learns, “wanted to take a ‘third way’ between capitalism and communism (which it understood as state capitalism). Its basic idea was the overcoming of the division between capital and labour. The normal form of economic life was to be the family business. If certain branches of production required large scale organization, then everything was to be done

to ensure that the workers were co-owners of their company, and co-responsible for its management”.

A Christian distributist could argue that overcoming the separation between work and family could allow for equality between the sexes without giving women Annelise’s problems. But for François, such questions are a bit beside the point. He is not much interested in economic theory. He is attracted to Islam because it is in power and because it seems better than secular nihilism. He does, however, go through a phase in which he is attracted to Christianity.

François is an expert on the decadent 19th century French novelist J.K. Huysmans. He had converted to Catholicism and for a long time François plays with the idea of following in his footsteps. He seems to almost have an epiphany at a medieval Marian pilgrimage shrine, but the moment quickly passes.

Later, he visits a Benedictine monastery. There are, of course, no women there. But the Christianity that François sees there implies quite a different view of women from Islam: “The voices of the monks in the icy air were pure, humble, and mild; they were full of sweetness, hope, and expectation. The Lord Jesus was returning, He would return soon, and the warmth of His presence already filled their souls with joy. That was basically the only theme of their chants, songs of harmonious and sweet expectation. Nietzsche was quite right, in that bitchy way of his, that Christianity is at heart a feminine religion”.

Unlike Nietzsche, however, François does not at first see Christianity’s feminine character as a reason to reject it. But then he returns to his room, and a comical scene ensues in which he tries to read a devotional book but becomes exasperated because he is not allowed to smoke. “You are here”, the book tells him, “to journey to that source where the force of desire can be expressed”. He becomes enraged. And unable to live without smoking he breaks off his visit early and returns to Paris.

Later, the new head of his old university introduces him to a form of Islam that will permit not only cigarettes but also a full harem—and even, surprisingly, fine wine. He converts.

In the end, it seems that the real problem with the “effeminate” religion of Christianity was that it would have required him to discipline his passions. ■



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Image taken from page 88 of *Songs of a Savoyard* published by George Routledge & Sons, London, 1890.

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# A Critique of Modernity

Alvino-Mario Fantini

Few of us have the patience—or the discipline—to engage in the kind of rigorous philosophical analysis needed to understand the roots of the modern crisis. Rare indeed is the individual who can penetrate into ‘deeper truths’, and reveal the underlying assumptions and conceptual distortions that obscure our view of social and political reality. The Italian philosopher Augusto Del Noce (1910-89) was such an individual.

Considered one of the most important political thinkers of post-war Italy, his works have escaped the attention of most non-Italian-speaking scholars. But in *The Crisis of Modernity*, Carlo Lancellotti, a mathematics professor at City University of New York, has carefully selected and translated 12 essays and lectures by Del Noce. For those interested in rigorous conservative critiques of modernity, this collection offers something new.

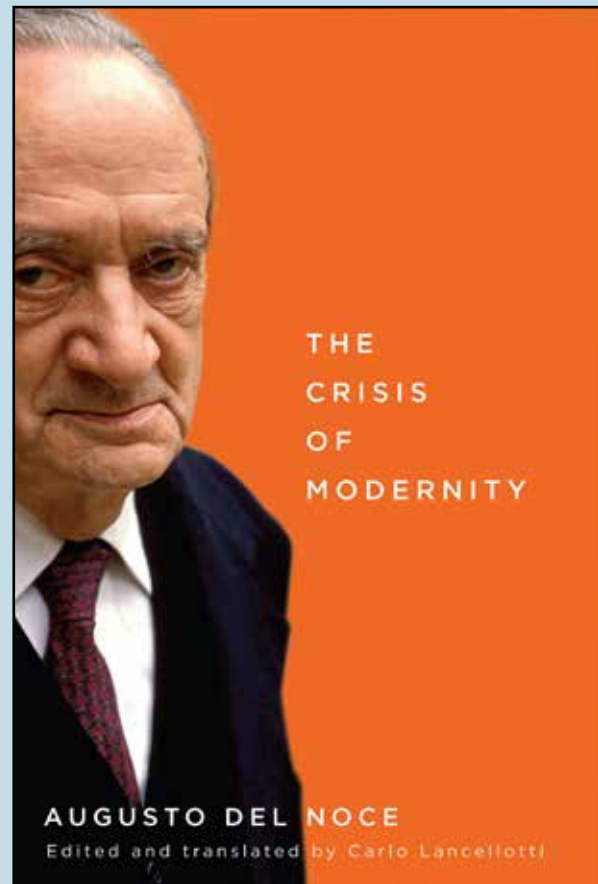
Lancellotti has organized selections from Del Noce’s varied writings into three thematic sections: modernity, revolution, and secularization (Part One); the emergence of the “technocratic society” (Part Two); and the predicament of the West today (Part Three). Also included is an appendix comprised of a 1984 interview with Del Noce conducted by *30 Giorni* magazine. The overall effect is dizzying, with different intellectual currents and political movements meticulously examined by the late Italian thinker.

Born in Pistoia, in the region of Tuscany, into an aristocratic family and raised in the city of Turin, Del Noce was from his earliest years a brilliant student. Although two thinkers dominated the 1920s intellectual milieu in which he grew up—the idealist philosopher Benedetto Croce and the so-called “philosopher of fascism”, Giovanni Gentile—Del Noce charted his own course.

As a private student at the Sorbonne he became acquainted with French scholars such as Étienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, Jean Laporte, and Henri Gouhier. As Lancellotti explains in his excellent introduction: “For Del Noce, Maritain was, more than anything else, an example of a philosopher fully engaged with history who had developed a deep and original non-reactionary interpretation of the trajectory of the modern world in the light of the classical and Christian tradition.”

Profoundly influenced by Maritain and Gilson, Del Noce adhered to a traditional Catholic perspective, even when he became involved with Italy’s largely left-wing anti-fascist movement. “Almost all my anti-Fascist university classmates ... shared [a] liberal-socialist orientation”, he notes in the 1984 interview in the appendix. But Del Noce forged his own approach to contemporary problems.

Although he never stopped doing research, Del Noce was first and foremost an educator. He taught at a high school, worked at various think tanks, and eventually made his way through the “byzantine mechanism” of Italy’s university system. He landed a permanent academic post at the University of Trieste teaching the history of



**The Crisis of Modernity**  
Augusto Del Noce  
Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP, 2015

modern philosophy. Years later he transferred to the prestigious University of Rome “La Sapienza”, where he taught political philosophy and the history of political ideas. He would spend the rest of his life there—with one term spent in the Italian senate as a member of the Christian Democratic Party.

A natural teacher, he attracted many students. He became a mentor and a friend to future eminences like historian Roberto de Mattei, president of the conservative Lepanto Foundation and editor of *Radici Cristiane*, and philosopher-turned-politician Rocco Buttiglione. Both served as his assistants. In 1991 Buttiglione published a biography in Italian about Del Noce, admitting in the beginning that “[i]t is difficult to write a book about a master and friend with whom one has shared an intellectual friendship for more than twenty years”. Nearly a quarter-century later, Buttiglione still says, “To be with him was to take part in an unending learning process that coincided with life itself.”

Del Noce’s dedication to constant learning not only made him an ideal teacher, it also makes him one of the most fascinating—and challenging—thinkers to read. He worked across disciplines—philosophy, history, sociology,

religion—and read various languages. Buttiglione tells me that Del Noce “was a man of enormous erudition and he sometimes presupposes in his reader a level of knowledge—especially of the history of philosophy—that goes far beyond that of an ordinary scholar”. Del Noce can quickly take the reader from Machiavelli, Kant, and Kierkegaard to Hobbes, Hegel, and Heidegger and then to Maistre, Maurras, and Péguy. Along the way, he might refer to Marsilius of Padua, Johan Huizinga, Thomas Muenzer, Karl Löwith, and Manuel García Pelayo. It’s daunting, to be sure. “Nevertheless”, Buttiglione assures me, “the reading is worth the while if you want to understand the world we live in.”

Lancellotti has helpfully provided extensive and detailed explanatory notes. But even in the original Italian, Del Noce expects a lot from the reader, expressing complex ideas in a highly compressed style. As Lancellotti explains, part of this is due to Del Noce’s lifelong determination to “reconstruct intellectual genealogies” by systematically exposing the “deep metaphysical premises of social and political movements”.

In his youth, Del Noce began with a study of Marx, which marked a turning point in his thinking. He realized that “all of Marx’s thought is a consistent development of the radical *metaphysical* principle that *freedom requires self-creation*, and thus the rejection of all possible forms of dependence, especially dependence on God”. In Marxism, Del Noce saw that atheism was “not the *conclusion* but rather the *precondition* of the whole system”. And it laid the groundwork for the permissive, secularized, and technocratic society of today.

Del Noce’s other early scholarship focused on the roots of fascist thought and its relationship to other ideologies. He methodically revealed the revolutionary spirit behind fascism, described its close relationship to violence, and saw it as one of several stages in the long process of Western secularization. This—combined with the permissiveness, eroticism, and what Del Noce calls the “libertine philosophy” of the sexual revolution—has brought the West to ruin. “The question of eroticism is first of all *metaphysical*”, he argues. And it arises in the context of a de-sacralized West, “which today has manifested itself as never before”.

Tracing the origins of eroticism, Del Noce says the ideas of sexual freedom had already been fully formulated between 1920 and 1930, beginning with the anti-rationalist Surrealist writers and then further developed by Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957). Reich died in an American prison, “almost completely forgotten”, Del Noce notes, “after having been condemned by the still moral United States”. But the “various beat and hippie movements then rediscovered him”.

Del Noce thus sees the countercultural revolution of the 1960s as the apotheosis of various long-dormant revolutionary strains. He elaborates: “The French ‘May Revolution’ was marked ... by the hybridization of Marxian themes with Freudian themes and themes inspired by de Sade.” But he also faults the global entertainment industry and the arts, as well as the media and other powerful elites, for having participated in an aggressive “campaign of de-

Christianization through eroticism”.

For the revolution against the transcendent to triumph, explains Lancellotti, “every meta-empirical order of truth” had to be abolished. Recreational sex replaced the truth of conjugal love. And the ideas of procreative sex and indissoluble monogamous marriage were destroyed since they presupposed, Del Noce says, “the idea of an objective order of unchangeable and permanent truths”.

Del Noce was clearly a highly astute observer of societal trends. But he also sought to understand “philosophical history”—since the West had been profoundly affected by the philosophies of earlier centuries. Atheism, empiricism, historicism, materialism, rationalism, scientism, etc. had all led to the “elimination of the supernatural” and a “rejection of meta-historical truths”.

But he was also a staunch critic of the modern West’s affluence, commercialism, and opulence. The loss of belief in the transcendent, he said, had produced a rootless society in which there was nothing to support beliefs in anything other than science and technology, entertainment and the erotic. And behind everything lay nihilism—and a rejection of the Incarnation itself. Thus, the crisis of modernity is really a crisis of spirituality.

Del Noce applied this understanding to his analysis of political phenomena like fascism and communism and to more recent trends like consumerism and commercialism. He provides the “conceptual tools to see the world you live in [from] a completely different perspective”, Buttiglione tells me. “The only kindred spirit I can think of in recent American culture is Russell Kirk.” There can be no more powerful exhortation to read Kirk’s works today than to have Buttiglione compare him to his own mentor.

Thanks to Lancellotti, we can also now read Del Noce. It’s true that at times the translation seems a bit awkward. It’s difficult to say how much is due to the difficulty of the original text or to an overly literal approach to translation. It’s almost as if the English rendition deliberately preserved the same elliptical sentence construction and parenthetical expressions that appear in the original Italian. Still, we must be grateful.

This book is not for dilettantes or neophytes. But for those who are sufficiently motivated and whose interest is piqued by questions about the nature of modernity, it may be quite rewarding. Del Noce’s thinking is so advanced and his analysis so sophisticated that it will be years until he is properly appreciated by scholars.

In his biography of Del Noce, Buttiglione writes that “the thought of Del Noce is a common patrimony of Italian culture”. I would suggest a slight revision to this statement: with the material that Carlo Lancellotti has made available to the English-speaking world, Del Noce is now—finally—part of the common patrimony of the West. ■

*Alvino-Mario Fantini is the editor in chief of The European Conservative. This review previously appeared in the September/October edition of The American Conservative. It appears here by permission.*

# A Literary Love

Roman Joch

Roger Scruton, who celebrated his 70th birthday last year, is a philosopher, farmer, and a gentleman. He resides on his farm near the town of Malmesbury in the southwest of England. This fact has inspired some to refer to him as “the philosopher from Malmesbury”—which should remind us that there once was another well-known philosopher in the same town (but of very different views): Thomas Hobbes.

Originally a professor of aesthetics, Scruton has authored forty books dealing with vastly different subjects—ranging from the aesthetics of architecture, music, wine, and environmentalism, to modern philosophy, the New Left, sexual desire, God, and fox hunting. He has also composed two operas, developed a TV series for the BBC (on the idea of beauty), and has written several novels (including *The Disappeared*, which appeared earlier this year).

His acclaimed 200-page novel, *Notes from Underground*, was published last year. It deals with many interrelated topics: love, nostalgia, life under totalitarian rule in Prague during the 1980s, the lives of dissidents, the sacred, human dignity, striving for meaningful existence, faith, betrayal, disappointment, and the unfulfilled promises of the changes that occurred in November 1989.

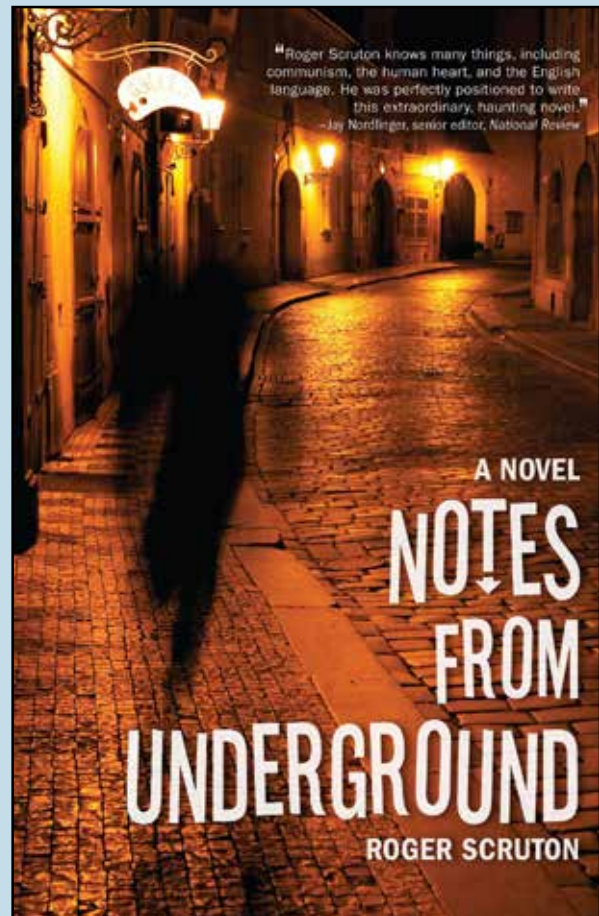
The book is about the love that Scruton has for the city of Prague and the Czech language. It is also incredibly lyrical, with purposefully ambivalent language and formulations, leaving much—including the climax—open to the reader’s imagination.

Scruton is a fitting person for the job of writing a book about life in Prague thirty years ago, since between 1979 and 1989 he actively assisted Czech dissidents, helping to smuggle censored books into the country and recruiting Western lecturers for illegal seminars of an “underground university”. (These were typically held in private apartments.) Between 1979 and 1985, he visited the country frequently—until his arrest by Communist State Security officials and his subsequent—and, at the time, irrevocable—expulsion from the country.

He returned only after the fall of Communism in 1990 and held his first public lecture (in the town of Brno) in which he called for authorities to ban the Communist Party. For his contributions to the cause of freedom in the Czech Republic, Scruton was awarded a Medal of Merit of the 1st Class, by the late Czech president, Václav Havel.

*Notes from Underground* is inspired by many of these experiences. It is written in the form of a retrospective from the point of view of the main character, Jan Reichl, who, while sitting at his university office in Washington, D.C., reminisces about the life he led as a former political dissident.

Jan was not allowed to attend university. His



**Notes from Underground**

Roger Scruton

New York: Beaufort Books, 2014

father had been put in prison in the 1970s and he had died there, too. His only crime had been running an informal reading club, discussing authors like Kafka, Dostoyevsky, and Camus with a few close friends.

After his father’s death, Jan stays with his mother in Prague, works as a cleaner, and spends most of his time “underground”—riding the city’s metro lines. There he likes to read books belonging to his father: Czech classics and authors from the period of late Austro-Hungarian Empire, people like Franz Kafka, Joseph Roth, and Stephan Zweig. He also reads Dostoyevsky, whose *Notes from the Underground* he carries around with him all the time. Inspired by his literary heroes, Jan soon decides to pen several short stories under the title *Rumors* and signs them as “Comrade Andros”, the name derived from the Czech term for “underground”—that is, a comrade from under the ground.

His mother, who types copies of dissident literature on a typewriter for others, then makes several copies of Jan’s *Rumors*—until she eventually gets

arrested. Then, one day, Jan meets Betka. He follows her from the metro, onto a bus, and then to the park of Divoka Sarka, where he loses track of her. After the arrest of his mother, Betka mysteriously appears at his door to return books by several dissidents that had been copied by his mother. Among them, is a copy of Jan's *Rumors*, too.

He is intrigued by Betka. She seems wiser than her years. She knows about things that he is ignorant of. She is beautiful in a way that he cannot express. Soon, she and Jan are discussing how to organize a campaign for his mother's release from prison—and they decide that such a campaign has to be organized in the West, with the help of the international media.

The rest of the book is the story of how Jan becomes deeply involved with other dissidents—and, eventually, Betka. He learns of the trials and tribulations of other dissidents, and develops contacts with underground circles and foreign allies.

Along the way, always accompanied by Betka, Jan discovers and learns to appreciate the beauty of his city, Prague. And through Betka—whose passions are Renaissance and baroque music, and, above all, the composer Leoš Janáček—Jan also develops a love for philosophy, literature, and music. He learns to love beauty and learns to love her.

The story, which encompasses the romantic and the political, the historical and the literary, is fundamentally a fascinating depiction of love and the search for the sacred. The richness of its language and the story's tender language make it a novel of pivotal importance. Who would have thought that such a romantic and lyrical rendering of the lives of dissidents would be written by a philosopher like Scruton? On the other hand, why not? He certainly possesses the talent, the memories, and the insight.

One finished this book with many thoughts—and with one overpowering feeling of love ... for Betka. How is it possible to fall in love with a literary character? To be sure, Betka is charming, strong, and fragile all at the same time. She is, in contrast to Jan, far more mature. She is wise in the ways of the world. At the same time, as Jan discovers she is not altogether open or honest with him.

With all this said, I found myself asking at the very end: Would I fall in love with Betka? Yes, absolutely, I would. ■

*Roman Joch is the Executive Director of the Civic Institute in Prague. He obtained his M.D. degree from Charles University and was previously the Foreign Affairs Secretary of the Civic Democratic Party (1994-1996).*



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# The Necessity of the Good

Rémi Brague

We are all disciples of Aristotle. Whether or not we realize it, whenever we are talking about the Good we are working with ideas that are Aristotelian in origin. We speak of good food and good company, good behaviour and good outcomes. These modes of the Good share a basic assumption: The good is not the Good, but instead a quality or attribute of something else. This is well and good. The Aristotelian way of thinking has a proper role. But we're losing our sense of wonder and enjoyment. We do not see the Good in which all these good things participate and from which they draw their lustre. It is time, therefore, to put aside Aristotle and rehabilitate Plato. For without him we are in danger of losing our reason to want to continue as a species.

Aristotle criticized his master Plato and observed that, for practical purposes, the Idea of the Good is useless for ethics. More useful is the *prakton agathon*, the good that can be done. Plato's Ideas are ideals, perhaps idols, but in any case they are idle. Concrete things act upon each other. To quote the ever-recurring example, "a human being begets a human being". Meanwhile, the Platonic Ideas stay in their heavens and twiddle their thumbs. In contradistinction to Plato's flights of fancy, Kant said that the philosophy of Aristotle is work. The great Macedonian sage was a business manager of sorts. He put the ideas in the things, expecting them to roll up their sleeves and produce something.

## The secondary character of the Good?

From this active point of view, one can consider the Good as superfluous, as something merely decorative, as something that makes life more beautiful, to be sure, but that one can perhaps take or leave. In entertaining the good as a possibility that we might do without, we are following Aristotle's distinction between life (*zēn*) and the good life (*eu zēn*). Aristotle says the political community comes into being for the sake of securing "the bare needs of life". But it goes on existing for the sake of the good life. To put it in Marxist terms: Life, in the sense of being alive (*zōē*) or leading a life (*bios*), is the infrastructure; the Good is hardly more than a superstructure, something that sets a crown on life. The Good is there as an adjective or an adverb rather than a noun.

Given the clear priority of life, the Good is certainly a good thing—nobody gainsays that—but it is not necessary. Two cheers for the Good, but it is not the most urgent task. What is most important is being alive rather than not.

The secondary character of the Good is expressed in the old popular wisdom of the Greek people, upon which Aristotle and before him Plato drew. The Milesian poet Phocylides, in the early 6th century before Christ, gives us a saying: "We should

look for a living, then for virtue, but only after one has got a living". Plato explicitly alludes to this aphorism in the Republic when discussing the proper education of the Guardians. The same view is expressed in other proverbs, for example, *primum vivere, deinde ... philosophari* (first live, then philosophize). Machiavelli puts the same sentiment into the mouth of a leader of the Ciompi, who revolted in Florence: "We have no business to think about conscience; for when, like us, men have to fear hunger, and imprisonment, or death, the fear of hell neither can nor ought to have any influence upon them." One can find everywhere stronger and more-cynical versions of the same. In Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*, the line "First comes the grub, then morals" is in all mouths.

In all this we find the same basic assumption: The good is something that we do. As a consequence, we can do the good or fail to do it. From time to time, we have to let it go provisionally, postponing it to the future. As the object of activity, it belongs to the realm of practical philosophy, especially to the branch that deals with the actions of people—which is to say, morals. Little wonder that we have taken our moral bearings from Aristotle's ethics.

## Being & freedom

But what if the Good is a condition of life rather than one of its modes? And what if it is an absolutely



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Image from p. 21 of *Queen Summer; or, the Tourney of the Lily & the Rose*, written and illustrated by Walter Crane, and published in 1891.



necessary condition? There is a classic way to ground the necessity of the Good. It involves tying Goodness to existence. This is the approach we find in Boethius, who bequeathed it to the whole Latin Middle Ages. He presupposes that the Good and Being wax and wane together, that they run parallel to each other. There's no difficulty in recognizing in this foundational assumption the scholastic doctrine of the convertibility of the transcendental properties, especially of Being (*Ens*) and the Good (*Bonum*): *ens et bonum convertuntur*.

If every being, as such, is good, then the presence of the Good is necessary wherever there is something, which is to say, everywhere. The Good may even stretch farther than Being, as Dionysius Areopagita suggests. But turning to his mystical theology would lead us too far. I agree with his doctrine, up to a point. But it is recondite and far from our present-day ways of thinking. Better, therefore, to proceed indirectly and in more-familiar terms.

Let us begin with something very much of concern in the modern era: human freedom. It is something that ethics presupposes and fosters. Kant's account of the foundation of morals shows this with great clarity. Ethical life is genuinely ethical if and only if it holds in check the influence of external agents. To be governed by something external to oneself leads to what Kant calls "heteronomy". When we are governed by others, we are not responsible for our actions. We may do moral acts at the command of others, but to be a moral agent in the full sense requires us to obey our own laws. We need to attain the condition of "autonomy", the condition of life in which our doing is a direct consequence of our will. The truly good person is thus the person who does good deeds at his own command.

Yet in this we presuppose something. The good deeds come from a subject that is already there. There must be a self who is the seat of self-command. This is not something we should take for granted. What kind of subject is the source of free action? Whence comes this moral subject?

We can begin by stipulating that this subject is a rational being. It must be rational to be able to act. As Aristotle points out, simple motion is not action. A stone that rolls down a steep slope doesn't act. Neither does the plant that grows, pushes its roots deep in the earth, and unfolds its boughs. Nor does an animal act, properly speaking, for acting means implementing a course of action that one has planned and chosen, in freedom.

This should not lead us to assume that human beings are the only moral subjects that exist. Kant explicitly states that the subjects that abide by the moral law are not necessarily human beings, but rational beings in general. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, he insists that the moral vocation "is declared by the reason to be a law for all rational beings in so far as they have a will, that is, a power to determine their causality by the conception of rules". This moral calling stipulates that the law we establish for ourselves must

be a universal law. "It is, therefore, not limited to men only, but applies to all finite beings that possess reason and will; nay, it even includes the Infinite Being as the supreme intelligence".

Schopenhauer poked fun at the idea and wrote with contempt that Kant probably thought of the nice little angels. He was right, even more than he knew. For Kant appeals to the angelic mode of rational existence as a way to dramatize what he sees as the all-conquering power of reason. In "Perpetual Peace," his meditation on the triumph of righteousness and the end of history, he seeks to show that the problem of building an enduring political constitution is in principle soluble even if the citizens are devils, provided the devils are rational. If they listen to their calculating reason, these utterly bad creatures can understand that it is in their interest to live in peace with each other.

In his belief that reason can govern even devils, Kant exaggerates the paradox that David Hume expressed one generation earlier: that politicians should take their bearings from the assumption that "every man must be supposed a knave". Modern thinkers have generalized the insight. The trick is to design a political system in which everyone has a self-interested reason to play by the rules. Human society is a pack of wolves domesticated by rational self-interest.

Now, one may ask whether this makes things too easy. Did Kant not make his task too light? Did he in fact choose the simpler case, while giving the impression of choosing to scrutinize the more difficult one? Because devils are so utterly bad, you can't expect the shadow of a good intention when they set up their pandemonium. This would seem a terrible impediment to any enduring political arrangements. But this is only one side of the coin. The flip side is that, by choosing devilish beings, one avoids the question of the temporal and bodily existence of rational beings.

As do angelic beings, the devils float in what Greeks called *aion*, and the Romans *aevum*, a time of



METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Detail of "The Triumph over Evil" (c. 1550/1580) by Anonymous showing many infants, playing instruments and carrying weapons, while demons are dragged, hanged, and pierced with arrows.

indefinitely long duration. As such, they soar above physical and biological existence. Among other things, this means they have no need to reproduce in order to exist as a species.

### Men & angels

These considerations on pure spirits may sound arbitrary, and even otiose. Yet pondering the angels and devils sheds light on our present predicament, which is best summed up as a fatal separation of what makes life good from what makes life life. In his book on the leading minds of the modern era, *Three Reformers*, Jacques Maritain observed that Descartes lifted the human intellect up to a place that classical metaphysics reserved for the angelic intellect. In the case of Descartes, I doubt this holds true. Nevertheless, Maritain is right about the general trend of modern thought. Its categories seem tailored for angels rather than for human beings.

The proud self-image of modern thought puts freedom at the centre of all that is worth striving for. As Hegel put it, “The right of the subject’s particularity, his right to be satisfied, or in other words the right of subjective freedom, is the pivot and centre of the difference between antiquity and modern times”. Hegel thought no further stage necessary; modern times are the End Times. Whether or not Hegel was right about that, he was surely correct to identify freedom as the defining commitment of our times. Thus our problem today. And if we press freedom’s demands to their logical conclusion, we reach the point where totally free beings should call themselves into being. Radical autonomy entails the power and right of self-creation. Existence itself needs to become a human project, something we can do.

Here we meet again our friends the angelic beings. According to traditional theology, devils are fallen angels. As pure, bodiless spirits, the angelic hosts were brought into being by God. But they had to decide, right after their creation, whether they would thankfully turn toward God or dream of an independence over and against their Creator. In short, a devil becomes what he is—a fallen angel—through an act of freedom. He exercises the “right of the subject’s particularity”. In the same way, good angels distinguish themselves from the apostates when they freely accept God’s creative love. Thomas Aquinas reasons that this happened in a decision of freedom that took place in an instant, but made them forever what they are. The Devil is not self-begotten, contrary to Satan’s boast in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Every angel is God’s creature, but each makes itself what it is—devil or good angel—through an act of free will.

Up to a certain point, human beings can choose the properties that we want to give ourselves and in that sense exercise the right to our own particularity. We can choose our job, our partner in marriage, and our “lifestyle,” as people now put it. But there are limits. As Kierkegaard said, we don’t create ourselves, we only choose ourselves. Today, however, we play footsy with the wish for a total self-determination that would

make us quasi-angels. We toy with the idea of weighing the anchors, especially and perhaps not surprisingly in matters concerning sex and reproduction, where the biological basis of life can be turned into a lifestyle in the former case and a project in the latter.

This ambition is quite real and already well advanced. But the question is still there. Where does the human being with the capacity for acting in freedom come from? Whence comes the life that can be good?

The concrete subjects with whom we interact, indeed, who we ourselves are, were born in some place and at some point in time. Now, birth is an event not determined by its subject. He or she does not exist before conception. This foundational fact represents an extreme case of heteronomy, since it doesn’t affect only what a being is but the very fact that it is. Why do I exist? That’s what other people decided for me.

Furthermore, our birth as individuals of the species *Homo sapiens* is simply a recent event in the series that goes back to the very beginning of life in the “warm little pond”, as Darwin put it. The series even reaches as far as the so-called Big Bang, since physicists tell us that the atoms of which our body consists were made only moments after the beginning. Why do I exist? That’s something that depends on the great contingency of things being the way they are.

### Birth & death

Hannah Arendt put forward the concept of “natality” as a counterpoint to our grim obsession with mortality. She thinks that birth underscores the possibility of making a new beginning in action. This obscures a deeper truth about birth, which is the aspect of pure passivity. Being-born is not something we do. It happens to us. In this respect natality is akin to mortality. But not entirely so.

If you will permit me the hackneyed lines of Rilke: “O Lord, give each of us our own death: / a dying that is born of each life, / our own desire, our purpose, love, dearth.”

It is a strange petition: Whose death should we die, if not our own? But perhaps it’s not so strange. We often speak of a “good death”. The old-fashioned notion draws attention to how we endure death’s dark arrival. We can in a certain sense make our death a project, our project. We can use what little freedom we have left to accept death in a fitting way. We can make dying into a moral act, or at least surround it with moral acts.

This is not true of birth. We cannot make our own birth into a moral act. Yet it remains intimate, so much so that it is more a part of me than anything I might do, because it is the basis for the me that does things. My birth is necessarily my own, not the birth of another. My “Mine-ness” (*Jemeinigkeit*), to use Heidegger’s term, shows birth’s paradoxical features. The “I” to whom this event happens can’t claim any preexistence, but is made real or possible by this very event. And although my coming to be has no source in me—and in that sense has nothing to do with me—what could be more dear to me than the fact that there is a me?

This intertwining in birth of radical “Mine-ness” and radical heteronomy produces a clash of two irreconcilable contraries. Or at least it does for any view of human life that makes freedom the *sine qua non* of personhood, which is what happens when “good” is only an adjective or adverb and never a noun.

Kant has already shown us the extent to which modern man is ashamed of being simply human and so dreams of becoming something more. Dostoyevsky wrote of this shame as early as 1864, at the end of his enigmatic *Notes from the Underground*: “We are oppressed at being men—men with a real individual body and blood, we are ashamed of it, we think it a disgrace and try to contrive to be some sort of impossible generalized man.” Dostoyevsky was not a philosopher, but his observation can be transposed in a philosophical key: The shocking thing is individuation, the fact that we received our own particular body. We would be glad to possess the same universality as the angels, since each and every one of them is his own species.

Günther Anders’s notion of a “promethean shame” identifies a similar sense of inadequacy. We are ashamed not to be a match for the perfection of our own products. The artefacts are perfect because they were designed and made according to the blueprint, not begotten and born.

The solution is to ascend to perfection. Nietzsche’s Zarathustra is to overcome man and to sail in the direction of the Overman. Today, the dreams—or nightmares—of a post-human endpoint of history are deeply rooted in the desire modern man feels to escape the passivity of his birth, the moment of natality that can’t be turned into a project or enterprise, that can’t be made good. Hence the fascination with the so-called “transhumanist” project of transforming men into beings that would be more than men.

If we’re not inclined toward the Overman and want to remain loyal to the human condition, then we face a fundamental question: What do we do with this radical impossibility of doing anything about our birth?

### Procreation

There is a point at which freedom as the condition of action and the radical non-freedom of birth meet each other, and even clash against each other. This point is generation. For the existence of mankind depends on the free decision of its members. Children are born only because men and women come together and conceive them. This is not automatic. From the very beginning human freedom has played a role in the forward march of the generations. All the more so as technology progresses. Instinct may vouch for the survival of animal species. In the case of man, however, species survival is more and more relayed by freedom. Freedom’s dominion over natural impulses is a fact that we should wholeheartedly affirm. But, mind you, we should affirm this dominion if and only if it brings the subject of freedom to self-assertion, not to self-destruction. For this we need an external fulcrum.

Plato conceived of the Good not so much as a

norm that active subjects have to abide by but rather as a creative principle. He compares the Idea of the Good with the sun. Now, Plato insists that the sun doesn’t only shine its light on what already is, a role it plays to show us right action, the path to the good life. It also and more importantly gives being and life to what doesn’t yet exist. It furnishes coming to be (*genesis*), growth (*auxè*), and food (*trophè*). This corresponds to our everyday experience and was what Aristotle had in mind when he made what seems an odd qualification: Human being begets human being with the help of the sun. He meant this in a literal sense, which is to say, material sense. The sun makes plants grow, brings again the spring and so forth. Yet we should not limit ourselves to the literal. The sun’s indispensable light can be interpreted as a metaphor for the necessity of the Good for the survival of man.

How can I tolerate not having created myself? My answer is: If and only if I come from some utterly good principle. Suppose that I owe my being to chance, to the concurrence of blind forces. This is now a common view, one widely thought to be mandated by modern science. If this is so, I have no reason whatsoever to contribute to the coming to be of new life. But if I understand myself as the creature of a good and generous God, who calls me to share his life and love, then I have reasons to ensure the continuance of life.

Put bluntly: If a blind watchmaker threw me into life without asking me for my advice, why should I play the same trick on other people by bringing them into the world? If, on the contrary, I experience myself as the creature of a good and generous God who calls me to partake of his own loving life, then I have the very best of reasons to use my freedom to promote life. ■



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# Augusto Del Noce, Eric Voegelin & Modernity

**Bjørn Thomassen & Rosario Forlenza**

All was darkness, superstition, and despair—until the Enlightenment and the revolution ushered in modernity as a radical departure from the old, classical, and Christian civilization. That, at least, is how many in the modern West understand their history—and, therefore, their identity.

Conservative thinkers, of course, have often challenged this view. One of the most profound attempts to correct this narrative and its destructive side effects was made by the Italian thinker Augusto Del Noce (1910-1989), especially after his encounter with the works of his Austrian contemporary, Eric Voegelin (1901-1985). Del Noce sought to reconceptualize the modern call to freedom from within the Christian Catholic tradition. And his trenchant critique of ‘gnostic modernity’, a legacy of the Enlightenment was accompanied by an attempt to develop an alternative ‘Catholic modernity’ instead.

Del Noce’s thought remains crucial to post-war Europe. Even the Marxist intellectual Lucio Magri, has asserted: “Augusto Del Noce, one of the finest minds among the Left’s adversaries ... said that the Communists have both lost and won. They have lost disastrously in their Promethean quest to reverse the course of history, promising men freedom and fraternity even in the absence of God, and in the knowledge that they are mortal. But they have won as a necessary factor in accelerating the globalization of capitalist modernity and its values: materialism, hedonism, individualism, ethical relativism. An intransigent Catholic conservative, Del Noce believed he had foreseen this extraordinary heterogenesis of ends, though he would have had little reason to be pleased by it”.

Both Del Noce and Voegelin tried to formulate a critique of modernity that exposed the tendencies that could be detected within both communism and fascism but which could not be reduced to those ideologies. And both came to argue that in the modern world, something ‘new’ had taken the place of utopian ideologies—what Del Noce called the “opulent society”, the kind of society in which we live today, driven by consumerism, globalization, materialism, technocracy, the triumph of finance over politics, and characterized by a generalized loss of ethical foundations.

## **A new Christian Democratic politics**

Del Noce grew up and studied in Turin, where he graduated in philosophy with a dissertation on Malebranche in 1932. Having been profoundly marked by the rise of fascism and the horrors of the Second World War, he saw a need to find ways in which Catholics could forge an accommodation with democracy and modern, secular politics. And greatly

inspired by Jacques Maritain, he sought to think through the possible links between Catholicism and liberalism.

For Del Noce, this was not merely a scholarly enterprise: From the 1950s onwards he was strongly committed to the Christian Democratic project as formulated by Alcide De Gasperi. However, he was deeply frustrated with the weaknesses that plagued Christian Democratic politics.

According to Del Noce, Christian Democrats needed to provide their own interpretation of history if they were to avoid being subjugated by the narratives of other political ideologies. Catholics, he believed, could be fully modern and democratic, building on their own ideological and religious roots, without the need to rely on inspirations and sources alien to their own traditions. Otherwise, he thought, they would be unable to counter the claims of the Communist Party, which had gained tremendous momentum during the 1960s and 1970s.

At the same time, Christian Democrats needed to articulate an alternative vision to another enemy more insidious than communism and fascism: what Del Noce called the “opulent society”, or Western irreligion. Just like communism and fascism, this was the product—not the culmination—of the modern



MARCELLO MENCARINI

The late Augusto Del Noce (1910-1989) in his study.

project. It was against this third ‘enemy’ that a re-discovery of Catholic tradition as a way of interpreting the present would stand its real test.

### The question of modernity

How should modernity be “re-conceptualized”? According to Del Noce, philosophers and historians had taken three different theoretical positions vis-à-vis modernity:

(1) the “anti-modern” attitude (the “restoration”), also defined as the “archaeological utopia” of the past (for example: Joseph de Maistre);

(2) the “ultramodern” attitude (the “utopia of the future”), which eagerly embraces any modernist developments, including secularization;

(3) the “compromising” attitude, which seeks a middle ground but thereby “de-ideologizes the political” and reduces politics to mere “pragmatic choices”. Del Noce placed Christian Democracy in this latter third category. As such, Christian Democrats were losing the “Christian” aspect, the religious élan.

All three positions were unacceptable for Del Noce because all three were based on a “spiritual separation between Faith and Reason, Faith and History, Nature and Grace”. The “central problem of contemporary Catholic thought”, wrote Del Noce, is precisely this “Cartesian separatism”. According to him, the rationalistic philosophy that grew from this had as an objective the ‘erasure’ of any transcendental perspectives from history.

Del Noce tried to trace back and reconstruct a dual development in the history of Western thought. This meant elaborating an elaborate intellectual genealogy that went from Descartes to Nietzsche and passed through Hobbes, Spinoza, Feuerbach, and Marx, on the one hand, while also developing a trajectory from Descartes to Rosmini via Pascal, Malebranche, and Vico. This second line of thought—“the line of ontologism”—was the basis for Del Noce’s claim of an “alternative tradition” of modern thought—one that retained a transcendental perspective of history.

### The encounter with Voegelin

Eric Voegelin lived through both World Wars. His was an age where the “ordering structures” of society were collapsing. And his work was an attempt to understand both wars, as well as the related political ideologies and mass movements.

Voegelin diagnosed the modern world essentially as “gnostic”: a worldview driven by the idea that there is no order in nature, and that humans therefore are forced to “artificially” create order out of the disorder of the world through their own devices. This all stemmed from a sense of alienation or ‘homelessness’. To Voegelin, this amounted to intellectual hubris that was deeply nihilistic and which hopelessly emptied the world of meaning. He recognized this tendency as underpinning both modern science and modern politics.

Some of Voegelin’s early writings were about the roots of Nazism; however, for him, the problem turned out to be much broader. Like Del Noce, he also identified a “gnostic tendency” in modern political movements. He provocatively categorised a host of other ‘-isms’ under the term ‘gnosticism’—such as scientism, Marxism, or positivism writ large. In other words, for Voegelin it was somehow the very modern worldview and its search for “inner-worldly fulfilment” which was deeply pathological. Consequently, the end of Nazism was not the end of “the problem”.

Del Noce encountered Voegelin’s writings in the late 1960s, after the former had already published such books as *Il problema dell’ateismo* (*The Problem of Atheism*) in 1964. He went on to write the introductory essay to the 1968 Italian edition of Voegelin’s 1952 classic, *The New Science of Politics*. Titled “Eric Voegelin and the Critique to the Idea of Modernity”, Del Noce’s essay explicitly reflected on modernity and secularization as a ‘new Gnosis’ (or knowledge). His subsequent works—on Marxism, atheism, and secularization, and on revolution and tradition, permissivism, and the opulent society—all reflect Voegelin’s influence.

According to Del Noce, the philosophical proposals elaborated after the Second World War had failed in their attempts to liberate themselves from “fear”. Rather, he thought, “the anti-Platonic new world constitutes itself in the name of force and fear”. It is Voegelin, he wrote, who had first identified the emergence of a new phenomenon: the “prohibition to ask questions”, a kind of epistemological ‘closure’ that in the name of “science” or revolutionary thought erects a self-sustaining ideological edifice, declaring “irrelevant” anything that might serve to question the very premises set up.

In addition, both Voegelin and Del Noce saw atheism fundamentally as a spiritual “revolt against God”. Thus, because the question of truth had been eliminated, the ideology of atheistic secularism had ended up constructing “another reality” in its stead—as a sort of secular projection of a fundamentally religious dimension.

This, however, was a dangerous construction, a kind of “horizontal transcendence” which in practice turns man into God, and which substitutes the spiritual dimension with a secular notion of fulfilment and perfection, in which man seeks to be liberated from any dependency on external forces. This is the ultimate expression of hubris.

The ‘modern’ theory of secularization is an integral part of that particular narrative of modernity. The term ‘secularization’, Del Noce wrote in the 1980s, “is always to be found in a judgment on contemporary history typically favourable to the Marxist revolution, or to the idea of progress; as a consequence, through the modern age, the mundane character of the world has triumphed”.

Del Noce relied on the concept of secularization in his discussion of the opulent—or affluent—society

(what others have called the ‘technological society’). This is the society that comes after revolutionary Marxism and which Del Noce considered the last stage in the process of the loss of the sacred and the race towards atheism—an atheism that was much worse than Marxist atheism. According to Del Noce, secularization means the “de-sacralization” of the world. Modernity can thus be understood as the secularization of Gnosis—and not as the secularization of Christianity.

He wrote: “Having encountered the concept of Gnosis, we now encounter the concept of secularization, and perhaps we are then on the right track trying to pin down its exact meaning. I propose that this term, so diffused today, is meaningful when linked to Gnosis, and not to Christianity”.

The essential aspect shared by the various philosophies of history is not a ‘residual transcendence’ that they retain; rather, it has to do with a trend that dates back to Joachim of Fiore, a force that animated English Puritanism and which later fully materialized during the Enlightenment. It was a Gnostic revolt that entrusted man with the task of redemption and which appealed to the masses because of its subversion of traditional order.

As Del Noce wrote in his introductory 1968 essay, “[t]he spirit of modernity, as the foundation of evaluations and of modern political movements, is thus the immanentization of the Christian eschaton; and the factor that furthers this evolution is, in [Voegelin’s] view, gnosticism, and therefore the evolution of the spirit of modernity coincides with the evolution of Gnosticism”. Del Noce agreed with Voegelin that modernity enacts an immanentization of the Christian eschaton—which means that the human being, through the discovery and unveiling of the law of history (such as Marx and Engels’s diamat), can redeem himself in the world.

Del Noce also endorsed Voegelin’s view of totalitarianism as a modern expression of Gnosis—a political project that proposed a human self-redemption and salvation that was entirely historical and intramundane. Thus, all forms of totalitarianism are expressions of “political perfectionism” that is substantially anti-Christian, as it denies that Evil is constitutive of the human being. Evil is thus reduced to merely a “consequence of society”.

Gnosis produces a sort of theology of self-liberation—without the sacramental mediation of grace. This results in, for example, the Third Reich as willed by Nazism or the communist realm of freedom and social justice after the withering away of the State. In this way, both Nazism and Marxism can be seen as the most significant types of contemporary Gnosis. At the same time, Gnosis has Christianity under check: Redemption through the grace of God is replaced by ‘self-redemption’ through the denial of original sin.

To Voegelin, this idea of the ‘superman’—a man who, so full of hubris, claims to save himself and forces others to save themselves—was already

present in Ludwig Feuerbach’s humanism and in Marx’s scientific socialism. It was also embedded in every manifestation of socialism, which, along with earlier medieval heresies, elicited their own historical origins and produced their own symbolism.

In the context of this current of thought, God is only a projection of the human spirit. Del Noce wrote: “God would not exist because His existence is the product of human demands. This argument implies that God could exist only if Man would not need Him”.

It is an untenable argument, yet unquestionable within the categories of neo-Gnostic thought. To assign the creation of God to man, as well as the task of building the ‘Ideal City on Earth’—that which Christianity placed in Heaven—means to divinize man. The concept of sin is turned upside down, too: It is not God who redeems and liberates man but man who redeems himself from the sin of having created God.

Yet—and this is probably the only criticism Del Noce has of Voegelin—the indiscriminate use of the term ‘Gnosticism’ is confusing. It is important to distinguish between an old or ‘ancient’ Gnosis and a new, or ‘post-Christian’ Gnosis. This can lead to, Del Noce says, “an extremely serious misunderstanding”—that is, “the idea of the unity of pre-Christian and post-Christian Gnosticism”. He further writes: “Ancient Gnosticism atheizes the



The philosopher of history Eric Voegelin (1901-1985) before returning to Germany.

world (by denying its creation by God) on behalf of divine transcendence; the post-Christian sort atheizes it on behalf of a radical immanentism”.

Hegelian Gnosticism—which emerges at the culmination of a process in which religion is reduced to philosophy—is a new Gnosticism, a ‘post-Christian’ one, which sees history as the fulfilment of man who, in overcoming the alienated world, attains a god-like nature in Promethean fashion.

Following Hegel, what Marxism is fighting is the ancient form of Gnosticism that abandons the world by declaring it inherently unfair and evil, and impossible to correct. “Within the new Gnosticism”, Del Noce writes, “the activist and revolutionary form is bound to prevail over the contemplative form”. To define the process generating the “myth of modernity and Revolution”—or the “historical watershed that opens the way to the new man”—nothing is better than the term “new Gnosis”. “New”, Del Noce explains, means “post-Christian”, “fallen”, or even “degenerate”, a term that “Voegelin could perhaps accept”.

The old Gnosticism continued to survive in certain pessimistic strands of modern thought. Thinkers such as Simone Weil and the Italian Pietro Martinetti, says Del Noce, both of whom exhibited a rationalistically configured pessimism, struggled with Christianity. But in the new Gnosticism, such religious anxiety is denied, as the evil and pain of the world are not a “gaping wound” but just necessary obstacles to the achievement of ‘progress’. Ancient gnosis is about cosmic pessimism and the radical dualism between God and the world; the new gnosis turns this around so that the negative becomes a positive.

The spiritual attitude that underlies modern pessimism has analogies with the pessimism of ancient Gnosticism. The legitimization of violence that forms part of modern-day activism was also part of a modern version of Gnosticism.

The theme of violence forms part of Gnosticism every time. Modern violence—the sort that became rife in the 20th century—is not ‘natural’ violence. It is the outcome of the post-Christian context in which, for the first time, it has been justified as ‘creative’ violence—the necessary birth pains of the new world that has to be produced. “Violence and the Secularization of Gnosticism”, the title of a 1980 Del Noce essay, linked the two aspects of the problem: violence and the process that gave rise to it, secularization.

In the end, the encounter with Voegelin allowed Del Noce to arrive at a deeper theoretical understanding of the new form of violence that had arisen in the 20th century—and which increasingly has characterized the 21st century.

### **After gnostic modernity**

Del Noce recognized that materialism lives on in contemporary scientism. Materialism ignores concerns over morality and transcendence, and

justifies and ‘grounds’ the primacy of economy and finance. In other words, the technocratic, opulent society is connected to a neo-positivistic scientism that eliminates the impulse—the motivation—of the dialectic of revolution and brings alienation to a maximum.

The opulent society is the highest form of man’s ‘self-estrangement’. It occurs with the reciprocal dehumanization of the relationship of ‘otherness’ (the relationship of the self with the self and with other human beings). Everyone perceives other human beings as ‘aliens’, strangers, persons not united in a common devotion towards the same shared values. The ‘other’ thus becomes either an obstacle to overcome or an instrument for our own self-empowerment. This is the evil now corroding Western society.

In the post-Marxist, ‘profane’ period of secularization—which is marked by the advent of the irreligious, technocratic, ‘opulent society’—democracy has become simply another form of relativism. The relativism of Western thought has divorced freedom from truth, and has opened the way for a totalitarianism more powerful than communism: a Marxism without any promise of a future revolution—in short, the suicide of democracy.

Del Noce here followed Voegelin precisely as he tried to propose a unitary and comprehensive interpretation of contemporary history, which aimed at demonstrating that the ‘theological’ problem was still open—or could be re-opened. Yet the triumph of the opulent society took the wind out of any possible spiritual renewal based on a Christian philosophy, and on a conception of nature and human beings open to the transcendent.

These were conflicting dynamics that Del Noce could not resolve. And in this, perhaps, he was also brother-in-arms with Voegelin.

Solutions to the deep crisis of modernity with which we now live are hard to find. But whatever they may be, they must ultimately stem from a diagnostic attempt that goes back to the very roots of the crisis. In this regard, the intense reflections sparked by the encounter between Del Noce and Voegelin, remains of vital importance today—perhaps more than ever before. ■

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# Caspar von Schrenck-Notzing: Conservative Founding Father

Harald Bergbauer

Caspar von Schrenck-Notzing (1927-2009) was a leading German conservative in the period after World War II. Between the 1960s and 1990s, he founded the widely-read conservative magazine *Criticón*, set up the Foundation for Conservative Education and Research, and published a number of thought-provoking books. And in 2006, he was a decisive voice supporting the establishment of the conservative European association, the Vanenburg Society.

His most prominent book is *Charakterwäsche* (*Character-Washing*), which appeared in 1965. It contained an excellent analysis of the ways Germans had been ‘re-educated’ after World War II. In it he explained that Allied forces saw three possibilities to deal with Germany after the war:

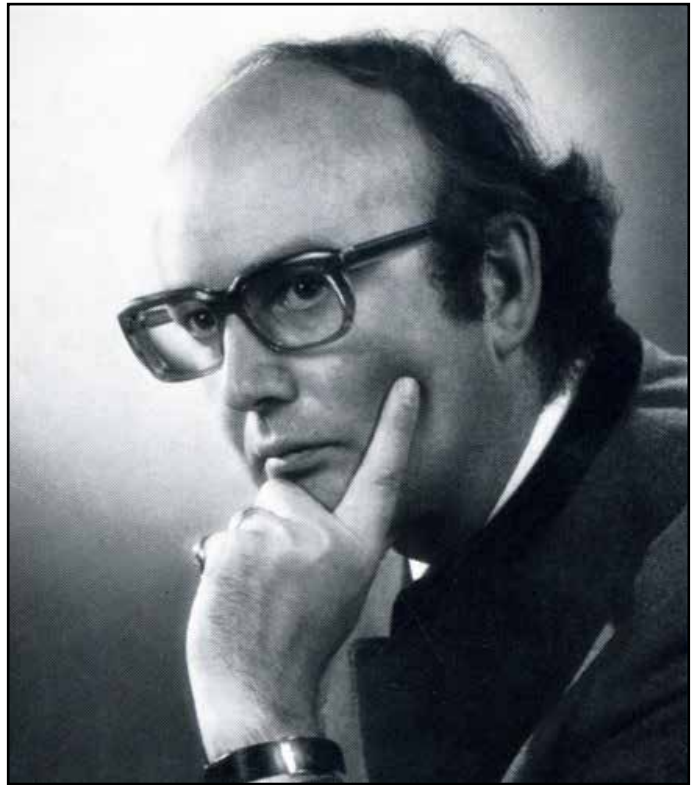
“The first possibility referred to the so-called ‘Morgenthau plan’ which saw Germany as the great and perpetual source of disturbances in world history, and recommended the permanent isolation of the country from its neighbours, as well as the systematic weakening of its economic and political power. [Germany] should be re-modelled as an agrarian state.”

“The second option distinguished between two kinds of Germany. On the one side, there was the (bad) Germany of the Prussian squires, the rich industrialists, the influential generals, the Romantic philosophers, and the legal positivists; but on the other (good) side, there were the passionate pacifists, the trade unionists, the idealistic socialists, and the enlightened philosophers. The obvious solution ... was to foster the good party at the expense of the bad one.

“The third option was provided by ‘character reformers’. They rejected the Morgenthau plan and dismissed the thesis of the two different Germanys. Instead, they maintained that certain qualities—such as, for instance, aggressiveness or racism—are in no way hereditary but simply the outcome of a certain ‘misdirected’ culture.”

According to Schrenck-Notzing, the solution offered by the “character reformers” was to “alter the general culture in Germany by introducing a new style of leadership”, which they expected would eventually lead to a new way of life in Germany. In the end, the Allied Powers adopted this approach.

But in order to change the German character, democracy first had to be established. Setting up a democracy not only meant creating political institutions on the basis of regular elections and offices with term limits; it also required a deep transformation of the whole political culture. Democracy had to be



FKBF

The late Caspar von Schrenck-Notzing (1927-2009) in the prime of his life.

publicly praised and it had to be practiced so that it would eventually become the natural inclination of all Germans.

In order to realize this goal, various things had to happen: The German school system had to be changed, faculties of political science at universities needed to be founded, the content of television programmes had to be adjusted, and the old party system had to be completely re-modelled. Schrenck-Notzing offered a fundamental critique of this “character-washing”. He argued that the influence of the Allied Powers on Germany went far beyond the political and military realm, and that they ended up imposing an ideology—using methods not unlike those used by prior political regimes.

In this respect, Schrenck-Notzing observed that none of the institutions like schools, universities, the press, etc. were ever ‘free’ in the sense that a true democracy is supposed to be free. Rather, such institutions were first studied systematically and then afterwards supervised closely. Schrenck-Notzing called this kind of a democracy an “educational democracy”—one that does not give power to people but, on the contrary, only to a select group of individuals who direct, control, and manipulate public opinion.

In his Foreword to *Charakterwäsche*, Schrenck-



Notzing wrote: “People say that Germany in 1945 was a tabula rasa on which things never heard could be written. Nothing is further from the truth. In 1945 Germany was not a blank slate but a heavily inscribed one. The inscriptions, however, were not written in German but in English, Russian, and French.” Since then, he continued, the historical roots of Germany’s present were to be found less in Germany and more in Russia and the US. “Washington and Lenin are much more prominent figures in contemporary Germany than Bismarck or Frederick the Great”, he wrote.

One might be tempted to think that Schrenck-Notzing’s rejection of the democratic reforms imposed by the Allied Powers and his apparent rejection of the ideal of democracy may have been fuelled by a certain affinity for authoritarianism. But this would be a hasty conclusion and grievous mistake. For an adequate judgment of Schrenck-Notzing’s political orientation, it is best to look at his autobiography. Writing in the third person, he noted:

“Schrenck-Notzing was born in 1927, and was 18 years old when the Second World War ended. He was a son in the oldest aristocratic family in Munich, dating back to 1214 and whose members oftentimes in history had held high offices. He was educated during the war, but contrary to the then ruling ideas, he was instructed in the liberal-pacifist and anti-centrist ideology of the famous Munich professor of philosophy, Frederick Foerster.”

“After studying history and sociology at the universities of Fribourg, Munich, and Cologne, he spent three winters in India. The outcome of this stay was his first book, *100 Years of India*. In it he analysed the impact of European rule on India. In 1961, he returned to Munich and found a completely different cultural atmosphere than when he left. This made him investigate the effects of the Allied Powers’ policy on Germany. And just as he had analysed the impact of British rule on India, he now turned his attention to the presence and strategy of the United States, in particular, on Germany.”

It’s clear that Schrenck-Notzing was no nationalist defending a past regime. On the contrary, he was a ‘classical conservative’ who was shocked by the changes he saw in Germany. His stay in India had sharpened his eyes and mind. He was simultaneously surprised and repelled by the influence of foreign powers on Germany, and by the wholesale re-arrangement of his country’s institutions and ‘cultural framework’. This is what he criticized in his first book.

Three years later, during the high point of the student rebellion of 1968, he published another book titled *Zukunftsmacher (Future-Makers)*, in which he detailed the various manifestations of the left—and lamented its widespread influence in Germany and abroad. Two years later, he founded the conservative periodical, *Criticón*.

Schrenck-Notzing’s great hope during the 1970s was that a conservative *Tendenzwende* (reversal of the trend)—and along with it, a “reconstruction of

conservatism” (the title of one of his articles)—would succeed. But things did not work out that way. Nor did the party politics of the *Christlich Demokratische Union* (Christian Democratic Union or CDU) under the leadership of Chancellor Helmut Kohl (1982-1998) meet any of his expectations. He saw there that conservative principles were used by politicians merely to accumulate votes and advance particular ‘power interests’. Too often, tactical manoeuvres displaced genuine principles. And given that political milieu, Schrenck-Notzing distanced himself increasingly from political activity.

In order to promote a ‘true conservatism’, Schrenck-Notzing chose to dedicate himself to the establishment of ‘Library of Conservatism’. He collected thousands of books about the history of German conservatism since the late 18th century, and also gathered the most important works of American, French, Italian, Russian, and Spanish conservatism. In addition, he amassed a huge collection of periodicals from different countries.

Separately, he also founded a conservative institute which, in 2000, was transformed into a foundation called the *Förderstiftung Konservative Bildung und Forschung* (Foundation for Conservative Education and Research or FKBF). In addition to organizing lectures and roundtable discussions, it produced many publications—books, periodicals, and even the detailed *Lexikon der Konservatismus*, which was published in 1996.

In 2004-5, when I began to cooperate with Schrenck-Notzing, he was—understandably—concerned about the future of the FKBF. On his 80th birthday, he hoped to leave the running of the foundation to someone else. At the time, no one at the foundation had any experience with independent fund-raising; their resources were just enough to cover the office rent and finance a few smaller projects. So Schrenck-Notzing began looking for partners who might be interested in taking over the foundation or cooperating with it.

The first trip I undertook in the name of the FKBF was in 2004 to the annual meeting of the conservative association known as the Philadelphia Society, that year meeting in Miami, Florida. There I met, among others, the chief academic officer of the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI). Despite Schrenck-Notzing’s critique of the influence of the Allied Powers in post-war Germany and their attempt to re-educate Germans, Schrenck-Notzing admired the American talent for organization. Conservatism—and this was his firm conviction—could only survive as long as its exponents were well-organized. He saw that too often conservatives acted as individualists. He thought that they would harm the ‘conservative cause’ if they did not properly organize themselves—something which they should do both nationally and internationally. And the best organizers he thought were the Americans.

This deeply held conviction was also the

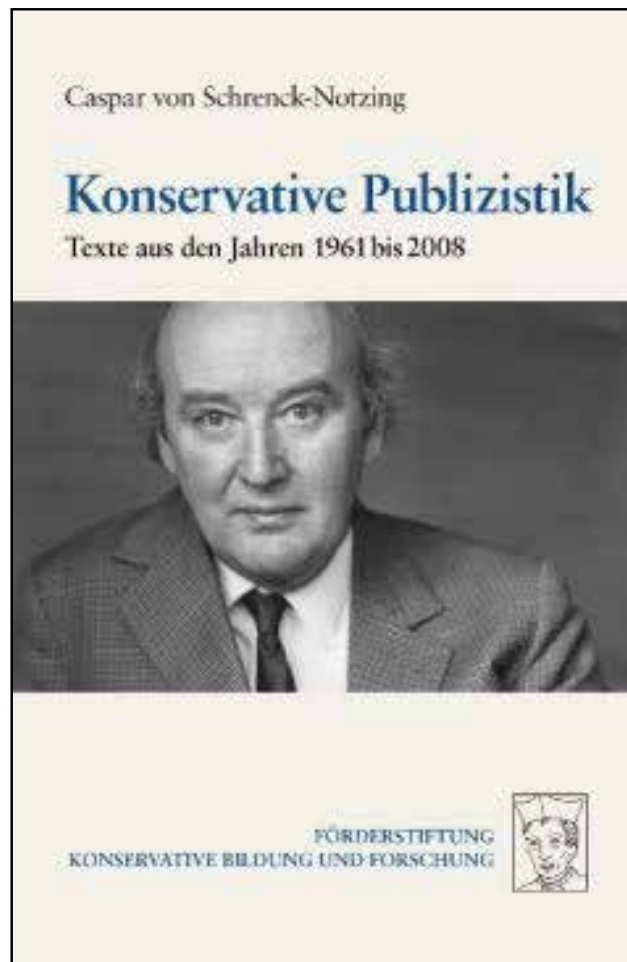
reason why for decades he paid close attention to the American conservative movement, and stayed in close contact with some of its best representatives—people such as Russell Kirk, Henry Regnery, and Claes Ryn. For many years Schrenck-Notzing was also a regular attendee of the Philadelphia Society’s annual meetings. Sometimes when he and I talked about American conservatism, he would indicate proudly that he was not only one of that Society’s longest-serving members but probably its only European—and especially the only German—one.

My 2004 trip to the US did not provide any solutions to the foundation’s problems. But it did yield new European contacts—particularly several people who had an interest in setting up an organization in Europe to promote conservative ideas. As a result, in 2005 Schrenck-Notzing and I travelled to the Netherlands and met with officials of the Edmund Burke Stichting to discuss the possibility of collaborating. Although the outcome was not one we had sought, the meeting laid the foundation for what eventually became the Vanenburg Society—and, later, the Center for European Renewal (CER).

What happened to *Criticón*, the FKBF, and the Library of Conservatism? By 1997, at the age of 70, Schrenck-Notzing had already handed over control of the magazine to a former contributor, Gunnar Sohn. Unfortunately, instead of building on the successful tradition that had for three decades made *Criticón* the most important German periodical of intellectual conservatism, Sohn changed its focus to economic and financial issues; and instead of maintaining the periodical’s conservative values, he replaced them with the liberal values of the German middle class.

This was a huge disappointment to Schrenck-Notzing, and many former readers cancelled their subscriptions. In response, a new bi-monthly magazine, *Secession*, was set up in 2000 by the *Institut für Staatspolitik* (Institute of State Politics) in Saxony-Anhalt, an organization run by a younger generation of conservatives. *Secession* intends to perpetuate the legacy of *Criticón*—though its focus, as well as its writers, readers, and editorial positions differ slightly. *Secession* recently published its 66th issue, and it has access to a wide range of intelligent authors. Thus Schrenck-Notzing’s idea of having a “medium of communication” among German conservatives has been kept alive.

With regard to the management of the FKBF, Schrenck-Notzing in 2006 turned to the editor of the leading conservative weekly, *Junge Freiheit* (*Young Freedom*), Dieter Stein. After some discussions, Stein took over both the foundation and the library, which are now located in Berlin. And since 2008 members of its staff have been managing its growing collection of materials. In the very beginning, it had merely been Schrenck-Notzing’s personal library; but after some years, it absorbed the library of his good friend, the philosopher Günter Rohrmoser. Today the FKBF has the biggest collection of conservative materials



FKBF

The posthumously published collection of articles and essays by Schrenck-Notzing.

in Germany, with more than 20,000 books in various languages. The library allows students, scientists, journalists, and politicians to conduct research there, and occasionally it organizes lectures and seminars on various topics of interest.

The FKBF also has an active publications programme, producing books and monographs of special interest. One of the foundation’s most recent publications, *Konservative Publizistik: Texte aus den Jahren 1961 bis 2008* (*Conservative Journalism: Texts from the Years 1961 to 2008*), is a tribute to Schrenck-Notzing. It brings together some of his most important articles from a period of nearly 50 years—and thus ensures that his important work on behalf of conservatism will not be forgotten.

The FKBF and library today are thriving. Hopefully, the Vanenburg Society, which Schrenck-Notzing also helped found, will thrive as well. In both cases, the seeds of Schrenck-Notzing’s work certainly seem to have been planted on fertile ground. ■

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# Defining Right & Left

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Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn

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There's a great deal of semantic rubble in the vocabulary commonly used in the Western World. But we come to a very necessary, not universally accepted definition—the definition of the terms “right” and “left”.

If a workable definition existed, our task would be superfluous. This would also be the case if we could dispense altogether with these two magic words. They can, however, be put to very good use and often—as handy labels—truly simplify matters.

Right and left have been used in Western civilization from times immemorial with certain meanings; right (German: *rechts*) had a positive, left a negative connotation. In all European languages (including the Slavic idioms and Hungarian) right is connected with “right” (*ius*), rightly, rightful, in German *gerecht* (just), the Russian *pravo* (law), *pravda* (truth), whereas in French *gauche* also means “awkward, clumsy”, (in Bulgar: *levitsbarstvo*). The Italian *sinistro* can mean left, unfortunate, or calamitous. The English sinister can mean left or dark. The Hungarian word for “right” is *jobb* which also means “better”, while *bal* (left) is used in composite nouns in a negative sense: *balsors* is misfortune.

In Biblical language the just on the Day of Judgment are to be on the right and the damned on the left. Christ sits *ad dexteram Patris* (on the right hand of the Father) as the Nicene Creed asserts. In Britain it became the custom to allocate seats to the supporters of the government on the right and to the opposition on the left side. And when a vote is taken in the House of Commons the “ayes” pass into the right lobby behind the Speaker's chair while the “noes” go to the left lobby. They are counted by four members who then inform the Speaker of the outcome. Thus in the Mother of Parliaments right and left imply affirmation or negation.

On the Continent, beginning in France, where most parliaments have a horseshoe shape (and not rows of benches facing each other) the most conservative parties have been seated to the right, usually flanked by liberals; then came the parties of the center (who frequently held key positions in the formation of government coalitions); then the “radicals” and finally the Socialists, Independent Socialists, and Communists.

In Germany after World War I, unfortunately, the National Socialists were seated on the extreme right because to simple-minded people nationalists were rightists, if not conservatives—a grotesque idea when one remembers how anti-nationalistic Metternich, the monarchical families, and Europe's ultraconservatives had been in the past. Nationalism, indeed, has been a by-product of the French Revolution (no less so than militarism). After all, nationalism (as the term is understood in Europe, though not in America) is

identitarian, whereas patriotism is not.

In Central Europe nationalism has a purely ethnic connotation and implies an exaggerated enthusiasm about culture, language, folklore, ways of life. Patriotism, on the other hand, puts emphasis on the country. A patriot will be happy if there are many nationalities living in his Fatherland, whose keynote ought to be variety, not uniformity. The nationalist is hostile toward all those who do not ethnically conform. Thus nationalism (as understood on the Continent) is the blood brother of racialism.

The misplacing of the Nazis in the Reichstag has thus hardened a confusion in semantics and logical thinking that had started some time earlier. The Communists, the Socialists, and the Anarchists were identified with the left, and the Fascists and the National Socialists with the right. At the same time one discovered a number of similarities between the Nazis on the one side and the Communists on the other. Thus the famous and perfectly idiotic formula arose: “We are opposed to all extremism, be it from the left or the right. And, anyhow, Red and Brown are practically the same: extremes always meet”.

All this is the result of very sloppy thinking, because extremes never meet. Extreme cold and extreme heat, extreme distance and extreme nearness, extreme strength and extreme weakness, extreme speed and extreme slowness, none of them ever “meet”. They do not become identical or even alike.

The moment one counterattacks and inquires from the good man who just pontificated about the meeting of extremes what precisely he understands by right and left, he proves unable to give any coherent analysis of these terms. Lamely he will hint that on the extreme are the reactionaries—the Fascists, for instance. Asked whether Mussolini's Repubblica Sociale Italiana was a reactionary or a leftist establishment, he will again mumble something about those paradoxical extremes. Certainly the left is collectivist and progressive; the Communists are “extreme progressivists”. If he sticks to this piece of nonsense, one should point out to him that certain primitive African societies with a tribal collectivism are not really so “extremely progressive”. This is usually the moment when the conversation expires.

The first fault with this loose reasoning lies in the aforementioned belief that “extremes meet”; the second in the almost total absence of clear definitions of left and right. In other words, there is a deficiency of logic as well as an absence of semantic clarity. Logic stands independent of our whims, but we can provide clear definitions.

Let us then agree that right is what is truly right for man, above all his freedom. Because man has a personality, because he is a riddle, a “puzzle”, a piece of a puzzle which never completely fits into any pre-established social or political picture, he needs “elbow-

room". He needs a certain *Lebensraum* in which he can develop, expand, in which he has a tiny personal kingdom. "L'enfer, c'est les autres" (Hell, that's the others), has been said by Sartre, a pagan existentialist, towards the end of his play *Huis Clos*.

The Great Menace is all around us. It is vertical because it comes from above, but it is also horizontal because it attacks us from all sides. In a state-insured, government-prescribed, and—to make matters worse—socially endorsed collectivism, our liberty, our "Western" personality, our spiritual growth, our true happiness is at stake. And all the great dynamicisms of the last 200 years have been mass movements attacking—even when they had the word "freedom" on their lips—the liberty, the independence of the person. Programmatically this was done in the name of all sorts of high and even low-sounding ideals: nationality, race, better living standards, "social justice", "security", ideological conviction, restoration of ancient rights, struggle for a happier world for us all. But in reality the driving motor of these movements was always the mad ambition of oratorically or at least literarily gifted intellectuals and the successful mobilization of masses filled with envy and a thirst for "revenge".

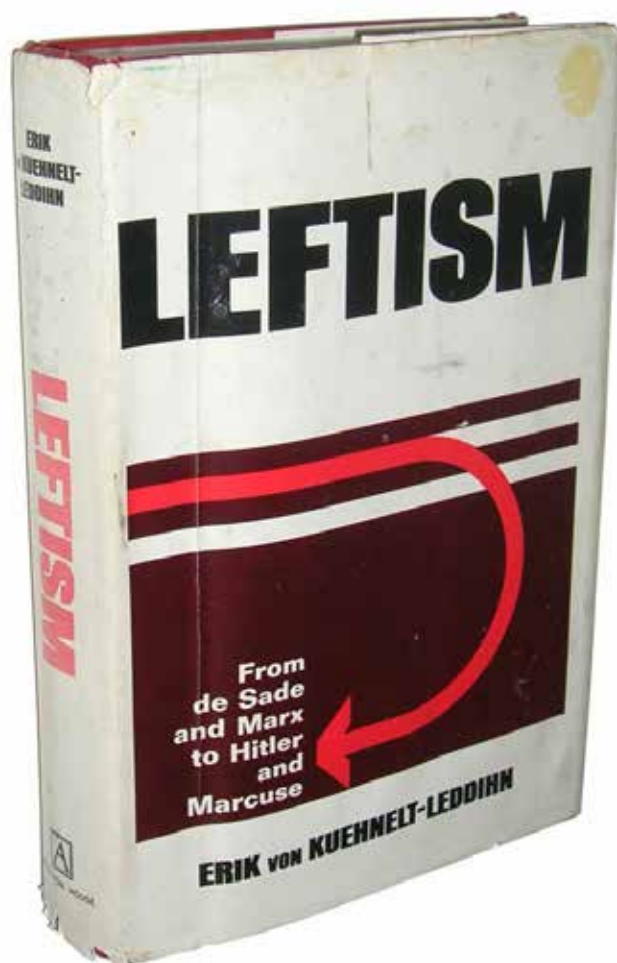
The right has to be identified with personal freedom, with the absence of utopian visions whose realization—even if it were possible—would need tremendous collective efforts; it stands for free, organically grown forms of life. And this in turn implies a respect for tradition. The right is truly progressive, whereas there is no real advance in utopianism which almost always demands—as in the "Internationale"—to "make a clean sweep" of the past, *du passe faisons table rase: dyelayem gladkuyu dosku iz proshlago!* If we return to point zero, we are again at the bottom of the ladder, we have to start from scratch again.

Bernard of Chartres said that generations were "like dwarfs seated on the shoulders of giants, thereby capable of seeing more things than their forebears and in a greater distance". As a matter of fact, almost all utopias, though "futuristic" in temperament, have always preached a return to an assumed Golden Age, glowing in the most attractive colours of a falsely romanticized version. The true rightist is not a man who wants to go back to this or that institution for the sake of a return; he wants first to find out what is eternally true, eternally valid, and then either to restore or reinstall it, regardless of whether it seems obsolete, whether it is ancient, contemporary, or even without precedent, brand new, "ultra-modern". Old truths can be re-discovered, entirely new ones found. The 'Man of the Right' does not have a time-bound but a sovereign mind. In case he is a Christian he is, in the words of the Apostle Peter, the steward of a *Basileion Hierateuma*, a Royal Priesthood.

The right stands for liberty, a free, unprejudiced form of thinking, a readiness to preserve traditional values (provided they are true values), a balanced view of the nature of man, seeing in him neither beast nor angel, insisting also on the uniqueness of human beings

who cannot be transformed into or treated as mere numbers or ciphers; but the left is the advocate of the opposite principles. It is the enemy of diversity and the fanatical promoter of identity. Uniformity is stressed in all leftist utopias, a paradise in which everybody should be the "same", where envy is dead, where the "enemy" either no longer exists, lives outside the gates, or is utterly humiliated. Leftism loathes differences, deviation, stratifications. Any hierarchy it accepts is only "functional". The term "one" is the keynote: There should be only one language, one race, one class, one ideology, one religion, one type of school, one law for everybody, one flag, one coat of arms and one centralized world state.

Left and right tendencies can be observed not only in the political domain but in many areas of human interest and endeavour. Let us take the structure of the state, for instance. The leftists believe in strong centralization. The rightists are "federalists" (in the European sense), "states' righters" since they believe in local rights and privileges, they stand for the principle of subsidiarity. Decisions, in other words, should be made and carried out on the lowest level—by the person, the family, the village, the borough, the city, the county, the federated state, and only finally at the



AMAZON

Picture of a slightly battered copy of the first edition of *Leftism*, published by Arlington House in 1974.

top, by the government in the nation's capital.

The breakup of the glorious old French provinces with their local *parlements* and their replacement with small *departements*, named after some geographic feature and totally dependent upon the Paris government, was a typically leftist "reform". Or let us look at education. The leftist is always a statist. He has all sorts of grievances and animosities against personal initiative and private enterprise. The notion of the state doing everything (until, finally, it replaces all private existence) is the Great Leftist Dream. Thus it is a leftist tendency to have city or state schools—or to have a ministry of education controlling all aspects of education. For example, there is the famous story of the French Minister of Education who pulls out his watch and, glancing at its face, says to his visitor, "At this moment in 5,431 public elementary schools they are writing an essay on the joys of winter". Church schools, parochial schools, private schools, or personal tutors are not at all in keeping with leftist sentiments.

The reasons for this attitude are manifold. Here not only is the delight in statism involved, but the idea of uniformity and equality is also decisive; i.e., the notion that social differences in education should be eliminated and all pupils should be given a chance to acquire the same knowledge, the same type of information in the same fashion and to the same degree. This should help them to think in identical or at least in similar ways. It is only natural that this should be especially true of countries where "democratism" as an '-ism' is being pushed. There efforts will be made to ignore the differences in IQs and in personal efforts. Sometimes marks and report cards will be eliminated and promotion from one grade to the next be made automatic. It is obvious that from a scholastic viewpoint this has disastrous results, but to a true ideologist this hardly matters. When informed that the facts did not tally with his ideas, Hegel once severely replied, "*Um so schlimmer für die Tatsachen*" (all the worse for the facts).

Leftism does not like religion for a variety of causes. Its ideologies, its omnipotent, all-permeating state wants undivided allegiance. With religion at least one other allegiance (to God), if not also allegiance to a Church, is interposed. In dealing with organized religion, leftism knows of two widely divergent procedures. One is a form of separation of Church and State which eliminates religion from the marketplace and tries to atrophy it by not permitting it to exist anywhere outside the sacred precincts. The other is the transformation of the Church into a fully state-controlled establishment. Under these circumstances the Church is asphyxiated, not starved to death. The Nazis and the Soviets used the former method; Czechoslovakia still employs the latter.

The anti-religious bias of leftism rests, however, not solely on anti-clericalism, anti-ecclesiasticism, and the antagonism against the existence of another body, another organization within the boundaries of the State: It gets its impetus not only from jealousy but, above all, from the rejection of the idea of a supernatural, a

spiritual order. Leftism is basically materialistic.

The Provident State, Hilaire Belloc's "Servile State", is obviously a creation of the leftist mentality. We will not call it the Welfare State because every state exists for the welfare of its citizens; here a good name has been misused for a bad thing. In the final prophecy of Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* the possibility, nay, the probability of the democratic state's totalitarian evolution toward the Provident State has been foretold with great accuracy. Here again two wishes of the leftist find their fulfilment, the extension of government and the dependence of the person upon the state which controls his destiny from the cradle to the grave. Every movement of the citizen, his birth and his death, his marriage and his income, his illness and his education, his military training and his transportation, his real estate and his travels abroad—everything is to be a matter of knowledge to the state.

One could continue this list ad nauseam. Naturally, we must add that in the practical order of things there are exceptions to the rule because leftism is a disease that does not necessarily spread as a coherent, systematic ideology. Here and there an isolated manifestation can appear in the "opposite camp". Sometimes, to quote an example, the stamp of rightism has been applied to Spain's present government. Yet it is obvious that certain features of the Franco government have a leftist character as, for instance, the strong centralizing tendencies, the restrictions placed on languages other than Castilian, the censorship, the monopoly of the state-directed syndicates. As for the first two failings—leftist tendencies are failings—one has to remember the effects of the immediate historic past.

Nationalism (in the European sense) is leftism; and Catalanian, Basque, and Gallegan (Galician) nationalism naturally assumed a radically leftist character opposing "Castilian" centralization. Hence, in Madrid, almost all movements promoting local rights and privileges, be they political or ethnic, are suspect as leftist, as automatically opposed to the present regime as well as to the unity of Spain. (Spain is "*Una, Grande, Libre*"!) Oddly enough—but understandable to anybody with a real knowledge of Spanish history—the extreme right in Spain, represented, naturally, by the Carlists and not at all by the Falangists, is federalistic ("localistic", anti-centralistic) in the European sense. The Carlists are opposed to the centralizing tendencies of Madrid and when late in 1964 the central government made an effort to cancel the privileges of Navarra, the *fueros*, the Carlists of Navarra, nearly issued a call to rebellion—at which point the government quickly declared its own preparatory steps as a "mistake" and backed down.

All conservative movements in Europe are federalistic and opposed to centralization. Thus we encounter in Catalonia, for instance, a desire for autonomy and the cultivation of the Catalan language among the supporters of the extreme right as well as the left. The notorious Catalanian Anarchists always have

been supporters of autonomy, but formal anarchism has always been a curious mixtum compositum. Its ultimate vistas were leftist, socialistic in essence, but its temper was rightist. Much of present-day “communism” in Italy and Spain is merely “popularly misunderstood anarchism”. But, on the other hand, it is also significant that in 1937 open war broke out in Barcelona between the Communists and the Anarchists. And it was the Anarchists who resisted the Communists in Russia longer than any other group, until in 1924 they were literally exterminated in all Soviet jails and camps. Hope of “taming” them had been abandoned.

Or let us take the Metternich regime in Central Europe. Basically it had a rightist character, but having been born in conscious opposition to the French Revolution it had—as so often tragically happens—learned too much from the enemy. True, it never became totalitarian, but it assumed authoritarian features and aspects which must be called leftist, as for instance the elaborate police system based on espionage, informers, censorship, and controls in every direction.

Something similar is true of Maurrasism, which was also a curious blend of rightist and leftist notions, characterized by deep inner contradictions. Charles Maurras was a monarchist and a nationalist at the same time. Yet monarchy is a basically supranational institution. Usually the monarch’s wife, his mother, and the spouses of his children are foreigners. With two exceptions (Serbia and Montenegro), all the sovereign ruling houses of Europe in the year 1910 were foreign by origin. Nationalism is “populist” by contrast, and the typical republican constitution

insists that the president be a native of the country. Maurras undoubtedly had brilliant insights and many a European conservative has borrowed from him. But it was by no means accidental that he collaborated when the Nazis occupied his country. Nor was he a Christian during most of his lifetime. He returned to the Faith, however, some time before his death.

If we then identify, in a rough way, the right with freedom, personality, and variety, and the left with slavery, collectivism, and uniformity, we are employing semantics that make sense. Then the stupid explanation that communism and Nazism are alike because “extremes always meet” need not trouble us any longer. In the same camp with socialism, fascism, and that particularly vague leftism which in the United States is known perversely enough as liberalism, there is another phenomenon to be explained elsewhere. This, however, is not the case with European liberalism. It is significant that the Italian Liberal Party (*Partito Liberale Italiano* or PLI) is seated to the right of the Democristiani, next to the monarchists. We will always use right and left in the sense we have outlined here, and we are convinced that this distinction in semantics is indeed a vital one in discussing the political scene of our age. ■

*Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn (1909-1999) was an Austrian political theorist. He was a columnist for National Review for 35 years and lectured widely. This article is an abridged version of Chapter 4 of the book, Leftism, originally published in 1974 by Arlington Press. It appears here with permission from the Ludwig von Mises Institute.*

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# The Cultural Roots of Conservatism

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Roger Kimball

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I've been asked to share some thoughts on "the cultural roots of conservatism". That's a tall order, so while I will say something about roots, something more about conservatism, I propose to focus mostly on the first essential word of my mandate, "cultural".

After the protracted bout of global warming we've been through here in the northeast, everyone is looking forward to spring. Spring means longer days, more sunshine, and, even for many city dwellers, the planting and tending of flowers and vegetables.

Which brings me to the word "cultural". I remember the first time I noticed the legend "cultural instructions" on the brochure that accompanied some seedlings. "How quaint", I thought, as I pursued the advisory: this much water and that much sun, certain tips about fertilizer, soil, and drainage. Planting one sort of flower nearby keeps the bugs away but proximity to another sort makes bad things happen. Young shoots might need stakes, and watch out for beetles, weeds, and unseasonable frosts ...

The more I pondered it, the less quaint, the more profound, those cultural instructions seemed. I suppose I had once known that the word "culture" comes from the capacious Latin verb *colo*, which means everything from "live, dwell, inhabit", to "observe a religious rite"—whence our word "cult"—to "care, tend, nurture", and "promote the growth or advancement of". I never thought much about it.

I should have. There is a lot of wisdom in etymology. The noun *cultura* (which derives from *colo*) means first of all "the tilling or cultivation of land" and "the care or cultivation of plants". But it, too, has ambitious tentacles: There's the bit about religious rites again and also "well groomed", and "chic, polished, sophisticated".

It was Cicero, in a famous passage of the *Tusculan Disputations*, who gave currency to the metaphor of culture as a specifically intellectual pursuit. "Just as a field, however good the ground, cannot be productive without cultivation", Cicero wrote, "so the soul cannot be productive without education". Philosophy, he said, is a sort of "cultura animi", a cultivation of the mind or spirit: "[I]t pulls out vices by the roots", he said, "makes souls fit for the reception of seed", and sows in order to bring forth "the richest fruit". But even the best care, Cicero warned, does not inevitably bring good results: The influence of education, of *cultura animi*, "cannot be the same for all: Its effect is great when it has secured a hold upon a character suited to it". That is to say, the results of cultivation depend not only on the quality of the care but also on the inherent nature of the thing being cultivated. How much of what Cicero said do we still understand?

In current parlance, "culture" (in addition to its use as a biological term) has both a descriptive and

an evaluative meaning. In its anthropological sense, "culture" is neutral. It describes the habits and customs of a particular population: what its members do, not what they should do. Its task is to inventory, to docket, not to judge.

But we also speak of "high culture", meaning not just social practices but a world of artistic, intellectual, and moral endeavour in which the notion of hierarchy, of a rank-ordering of accomplishment, is key.

Let me pause to introduce one more bit of etymology: "[H]ierarchy" derives from words meaning "sacred order". Egalitarians are opposed to hierarchies in principle; what does that tell us about egalitarianism?

Culture in the evaluative sense does not merely admit, it requires judgment as a kind of coefficient or auxiliary: Comparison, discrimination, evaluation are its lifeblood. "We never really get near a book", Henry James once remarked, "save on the question of its being good or bad, of its really treating, that is, or not treating, its subject". It was for the sake of culture in this sense that Matthew Arnold extolled criticism as—you all know the famous phrase—"the disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world".

It is of course culture in the Arnoldian sense that we have primarily in view when we ask about the cultural roots of conservatism. And it is the fate of culture in this sense that I will be chiefly concerned with in these remarks. But it would be foolish to draw too firm a distinction between the realms of culture. There is much confluence and interchange between them. Ultimately, they exist symbiotically, nurturing, supplementing, contending with each other. The manners, habits, rituals, institutions, and patterns of behaviour that define culture for the anthropologist provide the sediment, the ground out of which culture in the Arnoldian sense takes root—or fails to take root. Failure or degradation in one area instigates failure or degradation in the other. Some people regard the astonishing collapse of manners and civility in our society as a superficial event. They are wrong. The fate of decorum expresses the fate of a culture's dignity, its attitude toward its animating values, which is why conservatives have always regarded the degradation of manners as presaging other, more sinister degradations.

Let me say something, too, about the nature of metaphors. The problem with metaphors is not that they are false but that they do not tell the whole truth. The organic image of culture we have inherited from Cicero is illuminating. Among other things, it reminds us that we do not exist as self-sufficient atoms but have our place in a continuum that stretches before and after us in time. Like other metaphors, however, it can be elevated into an absurdity if it is pushed too far.

Oswald Spengler's sprawling, two-volume lament, *The Decline of the West*, is a good illustration of what happens when genius is captivated by a metaphor.

Spengler's book, published in the immediate aftermath of World War I, epitomized the end-of-everything mood of the times and was hailed as the brilliant key to understanding—well, just about everything. And Spengler really is brilliant. For example, his remarks about how the triumph of scepticism breeds a “second religiousness” in which “men dispense with proof, desire only to believe and not to dissect”, have great pertinence to an era, like ours, that is awash in New Age spiritual counterfeits. Nevertheless, Spengler's deterministic allegiance to the analogy between civilizations and organisms ultimately infuses his discussion with an air of unreality. One is reminded, reading Spengler, of T. S. Eliot's definition of a heretic: “a person who seizes upon a truth and pushes it to the point at which it becomes a falsehood”.

That said, for anyone who is concerned about the cultural roots of conservatism, there are some important lessons in the armoury of cultural instructions accompanying a humble tomato plant. Perhaps the chief lesson has to do with time and continuity, the evolving permanence that *cultura animi* no less than agricultural cultivation requires if it is to be successful. All those tips, habits, prohibitions, and necessities that have been accumulated from time out of mind and passed down, generation after generation. How much in our society militates against such antidotes to anarchy and decay!

Culture thrives and develops under the aegis of permanence. And yet instantaneity—the enemy of permanence—is one of the chief imperatives of our time. It renders anything lasting, anything inherited, suspicious by definition.

Our culture wants what is faster, newer, less encumbered by the past. If we also cultivate a nostalgia for a simpler, slower time, that just shows the extent to which we are separated from what, in our efforts to decorate our lives, we long for. Nostalgia—the Greek word for “homesickness”—is a version of sentimentality—a predilection, that is to say, to distort rather than acknowledge reality.

The attack on permanence comes in many guises. When trendy literary critics declare that “there is no such thing as intrinsic meaning”, they are denying permanent values that transcend the prerogatives of their lucubrations. When a deconstructionist tells us that truth is relative to language, or to power, or to certain social arrangements, he seeks to trump the unanswerable claims of permanent realities with the vacillations of his ingenuity. When the multiculturalist celebrates the fundamental equality of all cultures—excepting, of course, the culture of the West, which he reflexively disparages—he substitutes ephemeral political passions for the recognition of objective cultural achievement.

But what seems at first to be an effort to establish cultural parity turns out to be a campaign for cultural reversal. When Sir Elton John is put on the same level as Bach, the effect is not cultural equality but cultural insurrection. And if it seems farfetched to compare Elton John and Bach, recall the literary critic Richard Poirier's remark in 1967, that “sometimes [the Beatles] are like Monteverdi and sometimes their songs are even better than Schumann's”.

In the face of such levelling assaults, the most basic suppositions and distinctions suddenly crumble, like the acidic pages of a poorly made book, eaten away from within. Culture degenerates from being a *cultura animi* to a *corruptio animi*.

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* may be a second-rate novel—its characters wooden, its narrative overly didactic—but it has turned out to have been first-rate prognostication. Published in 1932, it touches everywhere on 21st century anxieties and has a lot to say, implicitly, about the cultural roots of conservatism. Perhaps the aspect of Huxley's dystopian admonition that is most frequently adduced is its vision of a society that has perfected what we have come to call genetic engineering. Among other things, it is a world in which reproduction has been entirely handed over to the experts. The word “parents” no longer describes



METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

“Arches in Ruins”, an oil on canvas work by French painter Hubert Robert (1733-1808).





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“Philosophy”, a woodcut by German master Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528).

a loving moral commitment but only an attenuated biological datum. Babies are not born but designed according to exacting specifications and “decanted” at sanitary depots like The Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre with which the book opens.

As with all efforts to picture future technology, Huxley’s description of the equipment and procedures employed at the hatchery seems almost charmingly antiquated, like a space ship imagined by Jules Verne. But Huxley’s portrait of the human toll of human ingenuity is very up-to-date. Indeed, we have not—not quite, not yet—caught up with the situation he describes. We do not—not quite, not yet—inhabit a world in which “mother” and “monogamy” are blasphemous terms from which people have been conditioned to recoil in visceral revulsion. Maybe it will never come to that. (Though monogamy, of course, has long been high on the social and sexual revolutionary’s list of hated institutions.) Still, it is a nice question whether developments in reproductive technology will not soon make other aspects of Huxley’s fantasy a reality. Thinkers as different as Michel Foucault, Francis Fukuyama, and Michel Houellebecq have pondered the advent of a “post-human” future, eagerly or with dismay, as the case may be. Scientists busily manipulating DNA may give substance to their speculations.

It is often suggested that what is most disturbing about *Brave New World* is its portrait of eugenics in

action: its vision of humanity deliberately divided into genetically ordered castes, a few super-smart Alpha-pluses down through a multitude of drone-like Epsilons who do the heavy lifting. Such deliberately instituted inequality offends our democratic sensibilities.

What is sometimes overlooked or downplayed is the possibility that the most disturbing aspect of the future Huxley pictured has less to do with eugenics than genetics. That is to say, perhaps what is centrally repellent about Huxley’s hatcheries is not that they codify inequality—nature already does that more effectively than our politically correct sensibilities like to acknowledge—but that they exist at all. Are they not a textbook example of Promethean hubris in action? It is worth stepping back to ponder that possibility.

In the 17th century, René Descartes predicted that his scientific method would make man “the master and possessor of nature”. Are we not fast closing in on the technology that proves him right? And this raises another question. Is there a point at which scientific development can no longer be described, humanly, as progress? We know the benisons of technology. Consider only electricity, the automobile, modern medicine. They have transformed the world and underscored the old observation that art, that techne, is man’s nature.

Nevertheless, the question remains whether, after two hundred years of breathtaking progress, we are about to become more closely acquainted with the depredations of technology. It would take a brave man, or a rash one, to venture a confident prediction either way. For example, if, as in *Brave New World*, we manage to bypass the “inconvenience” of human pregnancy altogether, ought we to do it? If—or rather when—that is possible (as it certainly will be, and soon), will it also be desirable? If not, why not? Why should a woman go through the discomfort and danger of pregnancy if a foetus could be safely incubated, or cloned, elsewhere? Wouldn’t motherhood by proxy be a good thing—the ultimate labour-saving device? Most readers, I think, will hesitate about saying yes. What does that hesitation tell us? Some readers will have no hesitation about saying yes; what does that tell us?

These are some of the questions anyone concerned with the cultural roots of conservatism will have to conjure with.

As Huxley saw, a world in which reproduction was “rationalized” and emancipated from love was also a world in which culture in the Arnoldian sense was not only otiose but dangerous, and hence severely policed. This suspicion of culture is also a sub-theme of that other great dystopian novel, George Orwell’s *1984*, which ends with the work of various writers, such as Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, Byron, Dickens, being vandalized by being translated into Newspeak. When that laborious propaganda effort is finally complete, Orwell writes, the “original writings, with all else that survived of the literature of the past, would be destroyed”.

The point is that culture has roots. It limns the

future through its implications with the past. Moving the reader or spectator over the centuries, the monuments of culture transcend the local imperatives of the present. They escape the obsolescence that fashion demands, the predictability that planning requires. They speak of love and hatred, honour and shame, beauty and courage and cowardice—permanent realities of the human situation insofar as it remains human.

The denizens of Huxley's brave new world are designed and educated—perhaps his word, “conditioned”, is more accurate—to be rootless, without culture. Ditto the denizens of Orwell's nightmare totalitarian society.

In *Brave New World*, when a relic of the old order of civilization—a savage who had been born, not decanted—is brought from a reservation into the brave new world, he is surprised to discover that the literary past is forbidden to most of the population.

When he asks why, the bureaucrat in charge says simply: “[b]ecause it's old; that's the chief reason. We haven't any use for old things here”.

“Even when they're beautiful?” asks the Savage.

“Particularly when they're beautiful”, replies the bureaucrat. “Beauty's attractive, and we don't want people to be attracted by old things. We want them to like the new ones.”

Huxley's brave new world is above all a superficial world. People are encouraged to like what is new, to live in the moment, because that makes them less complicated and more pliable. Emotional commitments are even more strictly rationed than Shakespeare. (The same, again, is true in 1984.) In the place of emotional commitments, sensations—thrilling, mind-numbing sensations—are available on demand through drugs and motion pictures that neurologically stimulate viewers to experience certain emotions and feelings. The fact that they are artificially produced is not considered a drawback but their very point. Which is to say that the brave new world is a virtual world: Experience is increasingly vivid but decreasingly real.

The question of meaning is deliberately short-circuited.

Huxley's imagination failed him in one area. He understood that in a world in which reproduction was emancipated from the body, sexual congress for many people would degenerate into a purely recreational activity, an amusement not inherently different from one's soma ration or the tactile movies. He pictured a world of casual, indeed mandatory, promiscuity. But he thought it would develop along completely conventional lines. He ought to have known that the quest for “agreeable sensations” would issue in a pansexual carnival. In this area, anyway, we seem to have proceeded a good deal further than the characters who inhabit Huxley's dystopia.

In part, the attack on permanence is an attack on the idea that anything possesses inherent value. Absolute fungibility—the substitution of anything for anything—is the ideal. In one sense, this is a product of what the philosopher Michael Oakeshott criticized as “rationalism”. “To the Rationalist”, Oakeshott wrote in the late 1940s, “nothing is of value merely because it exists (and certainly not because it has existed for many generations), familiarity has no worth and nothing is to be left standing for want of scrutiny”. The realm of sexuality is one area where the effects of such rationalism are dramatically evident. It was not so long ago that the description from Genesis—“male and female created he them”—was taken as a basic existential fact. True, the obstinacy of sexual difference has always been a thorn in the side of utopian rationalism. But it is only in recent decades that the engines of judicial meddlesomeness, on the one hand, and surgical know-how, on the other, have effectively assaulted that once permanent-seeming reality.

What we are seeing in sexual life is the fulfilment, in some segments of society, of the radical emancipatory vision enunciated in the 1960s by such gurus as Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown. In *Eros and Civilization* Marcuse looked forward to the establishment of what he called a “non-repressive reality principle” in which



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“A Colonnade in Ruins” by Hubert Robert. This was modelled after Bernini's famous colonnade for Saint Peter's in Rome.

“the body in its entirety would become ... an instrument of pleasure”. The sexual liberation Marcuse hailed was not a fecund liberation. As in *Brave New World*, children do not enter into the equation. The issue is pleasure, not progeny. Marcuse speaks glowingly of “a resurgence of pregenital polymorphous sexuality” that “protests against the repressive order of procreative sexuality”. A look at the alarmingly low birth rates of most affluent nations today suggests that the protest has been effective.

When Tocqueville warned about the peculiar form of despotism that threatened democracy, he noted that instead of tyrannizing men, as past despotisms had done, it tended to infantilize them, keeping “them fixed irrevocably in childhood”. What Tocqueville warned about, Marcuse celebrated, extolling the benefits of returning to a state of what he called “primary narcissism”. What Marcuse encouraged, in other words, is solipsism, not as a philosophical principle but as a moral indulgence, a way of life. I note in passing that Marcuse was a college professor: How proud he would be of those contemporary universities which have, partly under his influence, become factories for the maintenance of infantilizing narcissism.

A couple of concluding observations: In *Notes towards a Definition of Culture*, T. S. Eliot observed that “culture is the one thing that we cannot deliberately aim at. It is the product of a variety of more or less

harmonious activities, each pursued for its own sake”. “For its own sake”. That is one simple idea that is everywhere imperilled today. When we plant a garden, it is bootless to strive directly for camellias. They are the natural product of our care, nurture, and time. We can manage that when it comes to agriculture. When we turn our hands to *cultura animi*, we seem to be considerably less successful.

Let me end by noting that the opposite of “conservative” is not “liberal” but ephemeral. Russell Kirk once observed that he was conservative because he was liberal, that is, committed to freedom. Kirk’s formulation may sound paradoxical, but it touches on a great truth. To be conservative: that means wanting to conserve what is worth preserving from the ravages of time and ideology, evil and stupidity, so that freedom may thrive. In some plump eras the task is so easy we can almost forget how necessary it is. At other times, the enemies of civilization transform the task of preserving of culture into a battle for survival. That, I believe—and I say regretfully—is where we are today. ■

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A Gothic view of Kenilworth Castle in Warwickshire, England, on a blustery day.



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