



# THE COLLAPSE OF ANGLO-AMERICAN LIBERALISM, OR THE GENEALOGY OF "WOKISM"

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A genealogy is here understood as analogous to a genetic analysis or family history. Later thinkers "inherit" or appropriate some genes from one source but some genes from other sources. Earlier thinkers would not necessarily understand, approve of, or agree with what later thinkers did with the original inheritance.

In its intellectual journey, the key question concerns the relation of the moral dimension to the political dimension.

## **Biblical**

The Hebrew prophets made the moral dimension define the political dimension. That is the whole point of being a "prophet."

## **Greek Philosophy (Plato vs. Aristotle)**

Plato: dualism: reason should control passion; ideal moral world (should) define the political structure. It's the *Laws*, not the *Republic*, stupid. The role of government is negative, restrain the bad guys. Major relevant inheritors of this line of thought are Augustine, Protestant Reformation, Kant, and (yes) J.S. Mill.

Aristotle: monism: the social world is to be understood in the same way we understand the physical world. For Aristotle, this means teleology. Each institution has a goal; (b) institutions form a hierarchy; (c) the state is the supreme institution because it aims at the highest and most comprehensive *collective* goal. By making the state (the polity) the supreme institution, the political dimension defines the moral dimension: to be good is to conform to the natural goal of an institution. The political institution (state) has a positive/therapeutic role - to promote fulfillment; utopia (achieving fulfillment) is possible because the "form is in the matter." Inheritors of this genetic line include Aquinas, Bentham, Reich, modern liberals, socialists, Marxists, and "wokists."

## **Christianity (Augustine vs. Aquinas)**

Augustine "Platonized" Christianity: As a dualist, he argued that we lived in two worlds: "passion" is the product of original sin and free will; "reason" becomes the insight or vision of the "whole" imparted to

some by the mystery of God's grace. Augustine's "dedivinized the state," detaching the spiritual/moral dimension from the political and legal dimensions. The moral dimension defines the political dimension. Personal (positive) fulfillment comes by participation in the spiritual/moral realm (Church). Public life (politics) is a necessary evil wherein the role of government is negative to inhibit or punish the bad guys.

Aquinas reconceptualized Christianity from an Aristotelian point of view. He transformed Augustine's subordination of politics to morality to the subordination of politics to law understood as deriving in hierarchal and teleological fashion from divine law. The earth and all of its inhabitants are members of a divine community. The Church claimed leadership of the world by appropriating the Aristotelian notion of a totalizing and encompassing institution. The Church asserted its independence of and the subordination of political institutions to itself by claiming access to a natural law derived ultimately from divine law, codified as canon law. This sounds like Augustine but it is significantly different. The Roman Catholic Church offers therapeutic salvation through habitual practices such as the sacraments including confession and penance.

Institutionally, the hierarchical/monarchical structure of the Church terminates logically and historically in a Pope who eventually claims infallibility. Alternatively, some lay Catholics advocate integralism. This is but another way of saying the institutional/political structure defines the moral dimension.

### **Physical Science (a) Plato vs. Aristotle; (b) Newton vs. Descartes**

(a) Modern 17th-century physics is totally Platonic, rejecting Aristotle's naturalism and teleology. In its place we get mathematical models (Descartes, Leibniz, Galileo, Newton). Despite the popular distinction between empiricists and rationalists, every modern philosopher from Descartes onwards presumed that the mind in some way or other constructs our experience.

(b) The directly relevant contrast is between Newtonian atomism and Cartesian holistic plenum (denial of empty space and action at a distance).

The fundamental Anglo-American orientation is, historically speaking, a fundamental opposition to the concentration of power. This is originally directed against government. British Enlightenment philosophers conceptualize this opposition by opting for Galileo and (anti-teleological deterministic/mechanized) Newtonian atomism. Ethics (teleological) is replaced by moral philosophy.

Initially, classical liberalism seems to be a political stance seeking a moral grounding.

Human beings are understood as atomistic strivers [Galilean Hobbes] wherein reason does not overrule passion [first law of motion, Hume] but operates, when properly contextualized (second law of motion), within a contractually harmonious social context [Hobbes, Locke, Mandeville; Hume and Smith on sympathy] sometimes guaranteed by God [Locke]. In political economy [joined by French Anglophiliac acolytes such as Montesquieu, Constant, and Tocqueville], the non-teleological moral dimension seemingly overrules the political dimension by demanding negative liberty on the assumption that self-interest is rightly understood (Bentham's felicific calculus).

Hume will have misgivings and revert to a quasi-historical understanding. Absent Macaulay historicism, this is where the evolution and collapse of liberalism will be initiated.

French Enlightenment philosophers were not part of the liberal tradition because they were generally influenced by Descartes' physics with its emphasis on a holistic plenum rather than atomism and hence its commitment to a kind of collectivism. This is clear in the philosophes, Rousseau, Comte but also in Marx who was swayed by the Comtean notions of sociology and scientism. The operative position was that the political (whole) defined the moral and thereby authorized a social technology. These theorists opted for social technology within a (nationalism-socialism) framework and/or fascism [totalitarian democracy (Talmon on why this is different from authoritarian conservatism)], or (internationalist) Marxism but not "wokism."

The German Enlightenment and its romantics were influenced by the Platonic and religious (Reformation) cultural inheritance with its emphasis on the individual control of desire as in Kant. This required Kant to reinterpret the whole of human knowledge from a transcendental Platonic perspective invoking alleged synthetic a priori guarantees for God, freedom, and immortality.

Curiously, both Kant and Hegel (Kojève, Fukuyama) provided a moral foundation for political liberalism only recently recognized and appreciated.

Neither Kant, nor Hegel, nor Nietzsche has anything to do with Nazism. Nazism is the German version of (anti-semitic) nationalist-socialism eventually theorized as fascism (Schmitt) in opposition to liberalism and internationalist Marxism. Post-WWII Germany reverts to gemeinschaft-moral demands on their

constitution as opposed to gesellschaft ones.

## **The Degradation of Liberalism**

All modern moral philosophy began with the Renaissance (Mirandola) postulation of an individual human being choosing and pursuing his/her own directions of activity. What needs to be explained is what obligations we have to others. The negative liberty of the British Enlightenment presupposes a self (selves) pursuing its (their) self-interest properly understood. In a deterministic (Newtonian) world there is no telos that guarantees that any individual possesses an individual homeostasis or that a group of individuals has such a homeostasis that would enable proper understanding. This lack of a guarantee becomes all the more problematic in democratic societies (threat of the "tyranny" of the majority in Tocqueville and in J.S. Mill). Whatever the shortcomings of other positions, there is no knock-down argument that any individual is better off always respecting the interests of others (Hume's sensible knave).

Absent such a guaranteed convergence, other alternatives arise. First, the British Idealists (T.H. Green, Bradley, Bosanquet) rejected the "atomistic" form of individualism. Instead, they argued that humans are fundamentally social beings who by their very nature owed obligations to help others. The British Idealists did not, however, reify the State but became what we know as Modern Liberals promoting a welfare state version of the felicific calculus in opposition to classical liberals. Other writers such as G.B. Shaw and the Fabians (Webb) promoted this view in popular culture

Second, (A.V. Dicey), socialistic ideas were in no way a part of dominant legislative opinion earlier than 1865, and their influence on legislation did not become perceptible until 1868 or dominant until 1880. Moreover (Dicey) the opposition between the individualistic liberalism of 1830 and the democratic socialism of 1905 conceals the heavy debt owed by English collectivists to the utilitarian reformers. From Benthamism the socialists inherited a legislative dogma [principle of utility], a legislative instrument [parliamentary sovereignty], and a legislative tendency [constant extension of the mechanism of government]. The specific ends of Benthamite legislation were subsistence, abundance, security, sexual equality, environmentalism, and animal rights "each maximized, in so far as is compatible with the maximization of the rest." The principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number is inimical to the idea of liberty and to the idea of rights (Himmelfarb). Socialists acknowledge social dysfunction and even moral depravity as the product of the market economy's threatening concentration of great power which requires, in response, using the political institution to correct or

counterbalance the perceived degradation of the moral domain.

The third significant feature is the sexualization of liberalism, socialism, and Marxism. Enter Wilhelm Reich, incorporating his version of psychoanalysis into dialectical materialism. The most powerful and potentially self-destructive and socially disruptive drive in human beings is sex. In his mis-appropriation of Freud, Reich argued that neurosis (and all other dysfunction) could only be cured by having a proper orgasm understood as the full discharge of the libido in which you lose your ego and embrace your social self. Reich is the "founder of a genital utopia" (Sharaf). Reich has had a remarkable influence on popular culture from Foucault to Norman Mailer to films and pop music.

Liberalism in general has always known what it is against but not what it favors. It inherited a moral compass but it philosophically rejects custom and tradition and history as sufficient grounds. The consequence is no moral compass. Hence, the modern liberal welfare state does not have a clear conception of the nature and limits of the use of social technology. Instead, it has used social technology to redefine morality. It struggles to design education as a way of dealing with the challenges of parliamentary democracy, and continually expands the role of government until it becomes indistinguishable from democratic socialism. The perceptive Marxist critique of democratic socialism ultimately nudges it to discard the "democratic" qualifier as inhibiting long-term planning. Hence the embrace by some of "wokism" indistinguishable in practice from totalitarian Marxism and fascism.

## **Summary**

From Hobbes to Bentham, the liberal view is that human nature is nothing but appetites. The role of liberty is to mediate between appetites unbound and the binding required by other appetitive beings. This requires removing the restrictions on appetites. The politics of emancipation in the Anglo-American world is the dialectical resolution of this role. It incorporates the satiation of one's appetites, the right of respect for having one's appetites and determinations (being/identity), control of education to enable the breaking up of traditional/oppressive forms of social reproduction to enable this appetitive self, as well as the political demand that this emancipated self receives the resources (reparations, career and office holding opportunities) distributed on the basis of one's identity that enable its perpetuity. The emancipation of self requires for its realization a complete overhaul of the entire political, economic, pedagogical, and social spheres.

The alternative view of the self is that liberty is in the service of internal freedom or autonomy (self-control). That is why Mill rejected Bentham, and why he reconstructed utilitarianism to reflect all four versions of Kant's categorical imperative, and reasserted the Platonic view that the "moral" defines the "political." As opposed to the other forms of liberalism, Mill, following Kant, maintains that no one can or should promote or have an obligation to promote from the outside the moral perfection of another person because that contradicts and undermines the internal freedom that is a condition of moral perfection. Mill saved liberalism from itself, but it was too late.

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Featured: *Collapse of the Roof*, by Nicholas Evans; painted in 1978.

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