



# THE DIALECTIC OF IMBECILITY AND THE WESTERN ELITES' WILL TO POWER - PART 1

*Posted on July 1, 2021 by Wayne Cristaudo*



## [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#), [Part 4](#), [Part 5](#)

*This collection of essays started life as the introduction to another essay about the Polish intellectual resistance to totalitarianism, in general, and two excellent recent books by Polish philosophers, one, [The Cunning of Freedom: Saving the Self in an Age of False Idols](#) by Ryszard Legutko and the other, [Homo Americanus: The Rise of Totalitarian Democracy in America](#) by Zbigniew Janowski, both on the dialectic of liberalism and totalitarianism.*

*I commenced by thinking about how imbecilic totalitarian thinking always is. And the more I pondered it, the more I was struck, not only by its own dialectic, but the alliances and circumstances that have made this kind of imbecilic-ism not only seem perfectly normal, but necessary to save the world from the phobias and panoply of injustices that our elite have identified as the sources of oppression and potential extinction-events. In sum, I realized that the political philosophical problem of the day is what I call the "dialectic of imbecility."*

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### **Imbecility, Its Dialectic, And The Imbecilic Ideas Of Our Time**

Intellectuals are peculiarly prone to falling for idiotic ideas because of their own vanity and self-interest. They commence with the conviction that because of their superior intelligence they are best positioned to identify and instruct others about how to behave so that these others will come to dwell in a better world. They inevitably find behaviours which have evolved over time which ensure group survival and development in the context of the group's lived circumstances – to be little more than acquisition in oppression. They prefer principles that they can readily learn by reading some master thinkers to the hermeneutical experience of the communities that they wish to lead and instruct. Which is why it is usually fairly young and inexperienced people such as college students who fall for the most idiotic ideas - for they often think they know everything without actually knowing very much at all. Being uneducated does not make someone an idiot. What makes people idiotic is not knowing much or anything about a topic they feel they must express their (ignorant) ideas about, because they cannot distinguish between knowledge and ignorance. Idiots get angry at people who disagree with them – particularly people who are able to distinguish ignorance from knowledge, and hence can see that the person trying to convince them is himself an idiot or is taking them for idiots.

Intellectuals are more prone to thinking they know what they don't know – and hence more prone to idiocy and outbursts of anger at those who don't agree with them - than other people; at least those who don't think of themselves as know-alls, and who generally limit their conversation to everyday topics of which they have at least some idea about what they are talking about.

As bad as idiocy is, imbecility contains an extra ingredient to idiocy – the ingredient of insanity. It has been well said and widely spread that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. We are all prone to folly, and, at times, will have all acted idiotically, done some imbecilic things. Hence a degree of social and personal imbecilic-ism is inevitable. What is not inevitable is to have a world in which imbecilic-ism is being bred through our institutions, and being – or acting like - an imbecile is a prerequisite for career advancement within any elite positions in the Western world. There was a precedent for this – the totalitarian states which were predicated upon power and prestige being the prerogative of imbeciles (thus, as Milosz noted in his *The Captive Mind*, the widespread prevalence of *ketman*, a kind of duplicitous acceptance of the reigning orthodoxy in communist countries). This is why we can note that as Western-style democracies have become increasingly imbecilic, they have become increasingly totalitarian – this is largely because they are dialectically related.

A totalitarian society requires a society of imbeciles for its subjects, and imbeciles for its functionaries. Conversely, imbeciles with great ambition and boundless pride in their knowledge and ability will inevitably demand more authority so they can prevent anyone thinking or saying anything which might deprive them of their authority. In an ideocratic age, which ours is, this means that ideas that are not imbecilic are an existential threat to the power and privilege of the imbecilic class. Imbecilic-ism, though, is infectious, for it is easier to learn something imbecilic than fathom something complicated – like, for example, the world, or human nature and human history. Worst of all, though, just as imbecility is a kind of mental and spiritual death, and folly is the unwitting accomplice of evil, an imbecilic social and political order is an instantiation of evil in which existential mass and early death will inevitably follow spiritual death.

Although the dialectic existed in Plato (it was the question-and-answer method that sifted out the contradictory statements in search of discovering the nature of something), in modern times, the term took a rather different and interesting development, which was originally used by the philosopher Immanuel Kant. He used the term dialectic to describe the tendency of the mind to deploy categories that were essential for our understanding of experience as if they had a meaning beyond that function.

When that happened, Kant argued, we were caught up in illusions created by the capacity to reason because what were mere ideas of reason (according to Kant these were the ideas of God, freedom and the immortal soul) were treated as substantive, i.e., akin, in terms of our knowledge, to things we could experience.

His critic Hegel used the term in a different way – like Kant he thought the dialectic was generated by reason itself, but he held that Kant had misunderstood and belittled the power of reason. Where Kant subordinates reason (the capacity to develop principles) to the human understanding (the capacity to form judgments out of data we access through the senses), Hegel derives the primacy of the understanding over reason from a failure to understand that any knowledge we have is only possible because of the ideas, principled totalities, "the sciences" at our disposal. Data or information is never completely raw. Any contingency we come across is, then, only recognized by us because we ascribe a predicate to it. But that predicate comes from the body of knowledge we draw upon in our identification of what it is and how it differs from other contingencies.

A body of knowledge is a totality in which empirical data have already been assembled and coherently connected as concepts. This is itself predicated upon the overarching idea or telos that enables (more precisely, rationally directs) the conceptual coherence through its stipulation of what the coherence involves. The inner coherence and relationship between ideas, in turn, are all part of one overarching totality or pattern/idea. This is what Hegel calls the absolute, (English translators tend to capitalize Hegel's terminology, but in the German every noun is capitalized so this habit tends to mislead English readers by having them think Hegel is using a very technical and idiosyncratic language. In fact, he used the vocabulary that had become commonplace among German philosophers).

Further, the absolute is the condition/principle that provides coherence to the parts; it is not passive but active; that is, it itself is developing and dynamic. Without it, nothing would connect; we would have no knowledge about anything. To repeat, then, Hegel saw reason as dynamic. What drives the dynamic is the movement generated by the oppositions that push it for ever greater integration and coherence, ever greater knowledge, which is also ever more reason and freedom. For Hegel, they are one and the same – reason has no extrinsic limit, i.e., it is the absolute and its absoluteness is its very freedom.

An early example from a writing on two contemporary philosophers, whom he saw as precursors, J. G. Fichte and F. W. J. Schelling, helps clarify the issue. The proposition  $A = A$  is a statement of identity. But the very form of the statement is indicative of a difference discernable to consciousness and produced

by consciousness. The difference is between subject and predicate, which Hegel thus represents by the form  $A = -A$ , which, notes Hegel, thus indicates that  $A = B$ .

Stated otherwise, Hegel sees that for reason, nothing, apart from reason which has postulated the identity and difference, is purely finite; what is finite is but a component of the infinite, the absolute, which gives it meaning. Hence, for Hegel, rationality was a process of substantialization; and hence also why the world itself is the expansion of reason as the triumphal labour of the spirit of freedom. It is not that there is not anything outside of one's head – Hegel's point, repeated over and over again, is that a thing is, for us, not really anything other than the predications we ascribe to it. When I say, in other words, "a rose is a rose," I have not said anything about what the rose is – so it is the predications of a subject (say X) that display the knowledge that the subject (i.e., the person speaking about X) has. One can see here that this is why Hegel is saying that the residual X of something being beyond our knowledge – what Kant calls the thing-in-itself – is meaningless for Hegel. If we really were talking about something of which we had absolutely no knowledge, we could not even begin with it – and when we begin with some new contingency, we bring to bear a plethora of potential predications to identify it; that is, the absolute is already dictating possible classifiers. Heady stuff, I know – but not nonsense.

Hegel's philosophy of the identity of actuality and rationality, with its brilliant depiction of a Logic that is a metaphysics, would have been the greatest contribution to human knowledge ever made, were it not for one insurmountable problem: Hegel would have to know everything were he to prove he was right. For he would have to claim not only that the absolute produces everything – but that this production is discernable; so, he has discerned it all. Spinoza had already predicated that the infinite was the condition of the finite; and Schelling had used this against Fichte's claim to make the ego the absolute condition of all knowing. But Hegel claimed (using Schelling's own words against him) that Schelling's philosophy was simply a poetics; and hence a shot in the dark. Hegel wrote his three volume Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences to show how all the branches of knowledge were interconnected and were generated by the absolute, as reason (through Hegel) developed and contemplated itself. To be sure, Hegel makes a great deal of demonstrating this; but as one wades through his Philosophy of Nature, the attempts to connect all the elements of the physical sciences just look crazy. His Philosophy of History has somewhat dated better, but it is extremely selective and completely unsatisfactory as history – it just leaves too much out (like Church history which is hugely important for understanding the European world), as if reason had little interest for what people actually did in service to the spirit of freedom.

Sadly, for Hegel – the contingencies of life thwart even the greatest minds and the best of reasons. Though even more sadly for the world, Hegel was right in one respect – systemic thought of the sort that is a vast pattern and assemblage of ideas, what he called philosophy, but which in the degenerate form that the “know-all” philosophy of today takes, to wit ideology, remains dialectical – but alas is imbecilic. And because the making of the modern world has to do not only with the social actions, consensuses, technologies, and institutions that we have generated, but with the ideas that direct that action, our daily practices, appeals and commitments are completely entwined with these ideas. In short, the modern life-world is an ideocratic world in a way that other life-worlds were not. Hence Hegel's error is grounded in something true, which, though, he misconstrues.

But in so far as the world is ideocratic and in so far as ideas matter so much, which is also why we school ourselves to the point of idiocy in trying to deal with the ideas that we operate with and within, noticing what we do really matters.

Sadly, too, this does leave us in a far more troubled relationship with our traditions than what was the case with previous societies – indeed modernity was a Faustian pact in which we would pursue perfection by perfecting our knowledge, at the expense of all that “pre-conscious” knowledge – what Burke called prejudice, which was the basis of collective experience/tradition.

The thing about ideas, however, and Plato notwithstanding, is that they do not exist independently of human beings. This is not to say, though, that refusing to comply with them is a small matter. On the contrary, to the extent that vast chains of solidarity and institutional consensuses and directives are formed out of common interests that are narratively and hence ideationally connected, ideas can be matters of life and death. Idolatry has a terrifying cost, and the idolatry of ideas is no exception – for idolatry not only involves losing one's soul, but damnation.

And I do not know how anyone today cannot see the Western world as being damned by the idolatry of its ideas. And like Eve, who stupidly worshipped the tree whose fruits were supposed to give her complete knowledge and power, we modern idolaters in pursuit of perfect knowledge and power have become servants of the devil. And the devil of today is a dialectical one. We recall the Augustinian insight that evil is non-being, non-being because it is parasitical off of being. Much like Hegel's dialectic, in which being and nothing are conjoined, in his works on logic, by becoming – the dialectic of imbecility is one in which non-being, or the non-real, is passed off as the real. What is required is becoming an imbecile to appreciate the unity of the contradictions.

Anyone who is capable of even a modicum of thought can see the contradictions in today's world – the list of imbecilic contradictions reaches from the personal to the general and is ceaseless. But we all know them – the most privileged children in history identify as victims; the wealthiest people who have ever lived present themselves not only as corporate benefactors to the entire human race, but as overseers of truth and virtue, who dictate what truth and virtue must be; institutions of higher learning are institutions of total conformity and compliance with what its administration says; the mass media not only decides what information is news, but what information you must not even consider to be true; elected politicians call for defunding the police, but increasingly discover new parts of life to be publicly scrutinized and punished through legislation; this of course is meaningless if violators of the new laws are not punished.

These imbecilic ideas are generated dialectically and form a pattern. Here is a long list of common place imbecilities I have jotted down. I am sure you, dear reader, could add just as many, if not far more. My list is haphazard, and sometimes variants of the same imbecilic idea. Some things on the list are expressed as contradictory pairs, while in some others it is in its pairing with reality itself that we can see the contradiction that is a symptom of the dialectic of imbecility.

- Western countries are racist, and oppressive – but people escaping oppression have a right to live in the West
- Biology is a social construct – but if a child thinks he is a female born in a male body, or vice versa, then a doctor or psychiatrist must accept that as true
- No one who runs a business may refuse to serve someone on the basis of their sexual choice or colour – but it is permissible to refuse to serve someone if their political beliefs are not progressive
- We should level the playing field so people can be more equal – but biological males who identify as female must be accepted into women's sports teams
- Men oppress women – but biologically born males should be allowed to defeat biologically born females in sports
- All blacks are oppressed – so, Oprah Winfrey is also oppressed as are all other wealthy black people
- Irrespective of their economic circumstances all whites are privileged – so, a white homeless person is privileged
- People who are not white heterosexual biological males who attend ivy leagues are victims of oppression
- All whites are racist – but if I am white and accept that all whites are racist, I distance myself from

whiteness and hence may be less racist than you if you don't think like this

- The system we live in determines us – if I know how the system works I am not determined by the system
- I can own and be flown in a private jet, but if I publicly avow my commitment to preventing climate change I contribute to less fires, less hurricanes and the survival of polar bears
- The amount of energy required to make renewable energy need not be taken into account when demonstrating the superior economic efficiency of renewable energy
- Fact-checking has to be conducted by an independent group of journalists who all have the same beliefs about how to fix the country
- A reliable source is someone who has information that is harmful to the representative and group who do not agree with how we think
- The past of anyone we disapprove of, including the past members of our own party, must be rigorously scrutinized in order to condemn whatever they are doing or might think right now – unless “we” like what they are thinking
- Oligarchs, highly paid celebrities, corporate managers, highly paid administrators, tenured educators, journalists, politicians, lawyers, judges, military officials, intelligence operatives on the Left are more thoughtful and morally committed to helping people than people who think they are personally and intellectually and morally as flawed as everyone else but have found a way to enhance their prestige and “value”
- Freedom of speech is not a right but a privilege – and I decide what speech is free but I am against privilege
- A non-Mexican white wearing a sombrero or a white who wears braids is engaging in cultural appropriation – but members of the white Democratic Party (politicians) wear African garb are displaying solidarity – non-Westerners who wear jeans are victims of cultural imperialism
- Context dictates everything except some words must never be said, even if quoted to prove the opposite of the intention that the word normally conveys – those words are regularly said by people on the street and entertainers who are so fragile that if they hear those words, they will be psychologically scarred.
- People who think and say hateful things should be mocked, scorned, de-platformed and driven out of their employment
- Racism, sexism, transphobia, Islamophobia are Eurocentric values – it is irrelevant that non-Western countries support traditional roles for the sexes, Muslim societies do not give de facto, or in most places even de jure equal rights for Christians and Jews, trans people or LGBTQ etc.
- Our institutions should show their commitment to social justice by flying the lgbtq etc pride flag on LGBTQ etc. day – but Muslim students must feel welcome in our society and at universities
- Anti-Semitism is not anti-Semitism if one is advocating the elimination of the state of Israel - and



by implication Israelis

- Anyone who has sex with someone under the age of consent is a paedophile – but calling Mohammad, who did have sex with his nine-year-old wife, a paedophile is hate speech
- People who like having sex with people of the same sex can not only be proud of having sex with people they like having sex with – but feel that their morals are the ones that should dictate what people who have sex with people of another sex morally think or feel
- The death penalty is an unconscionable violation of human rights – but the elimination of an unwanted pregnancy should be allowed up until birth or even immediately after birth
- Defund the police – but there should be more legislative control over behaviours previously considered personal because the personal is political and oppression occurs in the private sphere
- No national guard should be used to stop looting and burning or even killing if it is in the cause of protesting against white privilege – but such guards have to be deployed in Washington to ensure the survival of democracy against people who broke into the capitol building but did not burn, loot or kill anyone, even though one of themselves was killed
- It is legitimate for state officials to raise funds to bail out looters who loot because they believe Black Lives Matter – but people who wear MAGA hats and wrongly enter the capitol building are insurrectionists and should be punished with severe prison sentences
- Non-elected people who own media companies have the right to decide who can say what and can de-platform an elected president or candidate
- It is wrong to raise the historical importance of racism within the Democratic party because the party which fought to eliminate slavery and had the first black representatives is racist and can be “proven” to be racist because they support traditional family values which are a major contributor to escaping poverty
- Black conservatives are stooges of racism – but blacks caught up in welfare dependencies and broken families should vote for the party that supports policies leading to ongoing black welfare dependency and broken families
- Anyone who calls for an audit of the 2020 federal election is a conspiracy theorist –but George Bush stole the 2000 election
- Believe all women unless the woman claims to have been raped or abused by members of the party that expressly claims that all women should be believed
- Whites are too powerful and it is racist to think blacks cannot do what whites can do –but blacks should not be expected to perform well in acquiring knowledge of the sciences, including mathematics, because to educate them to perform well would be racist
- A person is not what he/she does – but a person is what he/she represents
- Identity is an irreducible substance and a social construct therefore it is a norm, e.g., a black is a black and a white a white – but a black who does not believe what white people say in books or

classrooms (critical race theory) is a race-traitor, or does not know his own identity

- Anyone who shares my identity represents my interest – provided they think like me about what my identity means
- The family is the source of oppression – but lgbtq etc people have the right to marry and have a family
- The US army is an agent of imperial aggression – but trans people should have the right to an army career and gender reassignment surgery
- One cannot drink alcohol without Id because it is harmful to one's health – but a child has the right to have drugs and surgery that change his/her biological sex
- People are naturally good but they require approved education to be so
- Hierarchy is bad – but we need to provide equal opportunity to let the disadvantaged enter into our elite institutions – if you have a degree from an elite institution, you are better educated, and more worthy of entering an elite profession than someone from a "poor" school
- Diversity is a right and is good – but anyone who thinks differently on the aims and objectives of the requisite diversity training should not be employed or must apologise
- Education is all important – but all disciplines are racist even math and sciences
- The moral and political insights of people who pretend to be other people – i.e., actors – and people who have the ability to sing or play or write songs know more than you do about your own social and political interests because they know what is right and true
- Movie stars who act in an industry which produces countless violent movies often about the need for someone to use a gun to stop bad people – also oppose gun ownership
- All artists should provide moral leadership because they are morally good people and better informed
- The number of people killed for the production of cocaine is not worth any consideration when considering the moral worth of people who regularly take cocaine but devote themselves to creating a more just world (whilst earning a high salary)
- A Hollywood star is a victim of drug addiction – and should receive our sympathy – a family killed in drug wars in Mexico does not deserve any attention
- People who come into the USA from its southern borders should be allowed in irrespective of the law – but visa entry requirements to the US at West and East Coast airports and ports may continue

The list is as inexhaustible as its contradictions are imbecilic. Believing them is imbecilic; but the word "belief" can have a strong meaning. If someone just mouths these things, it might mean he is stupid – but it may be that many people who say these things do not actually believe them. Maybe they just

don't object to them. Maybe they think it better to stay out of harm's way. Maybe they are cunning and realise that there are material benefits, job opportunities, promotion, etc. in going along with the imbecilic contradictions.

In any case, what matters is not that there are people stupid enough to believe all this – but that it is the logic of the educated, of the elite; and that it is the logic of belief that governs and circulates in our institutions. It also seems that a lot of people have a vested interest in taking other people for imbeciles, which brings us to the case of the last US election and the current US president, the topic of the next essay in this series.

**[Part 2](#), [Part 3](#), [Part 4](#), [Part 5](#)**

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*The [featured image](#) shows, "The Dust Lickers," by Odd Nerdrum; painted in 2005.*

