

16

From Democrat to Dissident

William F. Vallicella (Gold Canyon, Arizona)

Like many conservatives, I didn't start out as one. My background is working class, my parents were Democrats, and so was I until the age of forty-one. My father was a welder, my mother a telephone operator. I came of age in the 1960s. One of my political heroes was John F. Kennedy, "the intrepid skipper of the PT 109," as I described him in a bit of fifth-grade hagiography. I supported the civil rights movement. Musically, my heroes were Bob Dylan and Joan Baez. I took up the guitar at thirteen and soon sported a Dylan-style cap and harmonica rack. I thrilled to "Blowin' in the Wind" and such other of Dylan's civil rights anthems as "Oxford Town" and "Only a Pawn in Their Game." The latter two are, respectively, about the federally ordered desegregation of the University of Mississippi and consequent matriculation of James Meredith, and about the murder of Medgar Evers. A teenager open to the *Zeitgeist*, I read the left-wing press, including the new left's *Ramparts* at the time when David Horowitz was a coeditor. This was of course before he had his second thoughts.

In the 1960s, the left acquired power and moral authority when it fought the good fight against racism and segregation. The civil rights battles were fought and won, to the extent that they could be won by such legislative action as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The liberals of those days should be given credit for forcing America to live up to the ideals enshrined in her founding documents. But power is intoxicating, and the activists who came into power in those years of ferment naturally desired to hold onto it and expand it. The power proved to be not only intoxicating but also corrupting. To maintain their power, as wrongs were righted, leftists needed to find and sometimes invent additional wrongs and additional threats to the nation's moral legitimacy. The fight for equal rights became a demand for unequal concessions as the party of JFK liberals became the

destructive leftists they are today. The quest for racial justice gradually became a race hustle. Affirmative action in its original sense soon gave way to reverse discrimination, race-norming, minority set-asides, identity politics, and the betrayal of Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream that people be judged "not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." *E pluribus unum* was replaced by tribalism and multiculturalism. The liberals whose touchstone was toleration became illiberal and culturally Marxist. Despite the febrile complaints of some leftists, "cultural Marxism" is a useful term that picks out a genuine cultural phenomenon, besides collecting "wokeness," identity politics, tribalism, social justice, and political correctness under its umbrella. But what is cultural Marxism?

16.1. CULTURAL MARXISM

For Karl Marx, the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class conflict. In market societies the two main classes in conflict are the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, which stand to each other as oppressor and oppressed. This is not a conflict that can be mediated: it can be overcome only by the defeat of the oppressors. Herein lies an important difference between (classical) liberalism and Marxist leftism.¹ For the latter, politics is war, not a process of bargaining and accommodation based on mutually accepted norms between parties with common interests and a desire to coexist peacefully. Failing to appreciate that leftists embrace what could be called the converse Clausewitz principle—namely, that politics is war conducted by other means—puts classical liberals and conservatives at a disadvantage. They cannot bring themselves to believe that their political opponents are enemies who will do anything to win and are impervious to charges of "double standards" and "hypocrisy." These conservatives allow their virtues to hobble them in their fight with enemies who reject conservative values but use them Alinsky-style against conservatives (as Saul Alinsky says, "Make the enemy live up to its own book of rules"). Conservatives are at a second disadvantage in that they are political part-timers who understand that the political is a limited sphere, whereas leftists are full-time agitators beholden to the totalitarian conceit that the political exhausts the real. The left is totalitarian in that "to realize its agenda the left must invade and dominate the sphere of private life."³ And this they do increasingly.

Cultural Marxism—retaining both the oppressor-oppressed motif and the belief in the intractability of social conflict—moves beyond classical or economic Marxism, not only by jettisoning the discredited labor theory of value but also by widening the class of the oppressed to include blacks and other "people of color," women, male and female homosexuals, bisexuals, transsexuals, Muslims, immigrants legal and illegal, and others deemed to be victims of oppression. Correspondingly, cultural Marxism widens the class of oppressors to include potentially all whites, males, heterosexuals, and religionists (Christians mainly⁴), regardless of their economic status. Thus, within the ambit of cultural Marxism, a working-class heterosexual Christian

American southern white male ends up among the oppressors regardless of any apparent beliefs or actions to the contrary. Such are Hillary Clinton's deplorables and irredeemables, and those about whom Barack Obama said, "They get bitter, they cling to guns or religion or antipathy to people who aren't like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations."⁵

Classical Marxism viewed conflict as class conflict and isolated the ruling class as the root of evil, eradication of which would allow man fully to realize himself and free himself from alienation. While retaining the idea of irreconcilable conflict, cultural Marxism replaces or perhaps supplements the ruling economic class with "the patriarchy" or the "white male oligarchy," or more abstractly with the hidden dark powers of "institutional racism" and "white supremacy," which work behind the scenes to engender racial and gender conflict. But then, as Horowitz notes, the original Marxist goal of a classless society—a conceptually coherent though unachievable project—is replaced with the incoherent goal of a raceless or gender-free society. And then you get such absurdities as now beset us among the *bien-pensant*—namely, babies being "assigned" their genders at birth and biological boys who "identify" as girls competing in, and winning, female sporting events. The deep metaphysical error here is obvious to us of the Coalition of the Sane—namely, the mistake of thinking that all of reality is a matter of social production and construction. The error is already in Marx, who sees man as malleable, without a fixed nature, and self-producing by means of the economic relations into which he enters.

As liberalism gave way to cultural Marxism, people such as myself, whose idealism was tempered by moderation and common sense, became conservatives of a sort. The change in me was more relational than real, with the real change being the liberals' lurch to the left. The change was brought about by my growing realization that the culturally Marxist left was mounting an assault on just about everything I care about as a philosopher and as a citizen: truth, logic, language, religion, open inquiry, free speech, limited government, individual liberties, and reality itself. As a lover of learning I was appalled by the left's attack on the traditional values of the university, and as a citizen I was disgusted by the assault on the values and principles of the American founding. An encounter with a real-live Marxist helped wean me from my adolescent fascination with the left.

16.2. THE LEFTIST ILLUSIONS OF A RED-DIAPER BABY I ONCE KNEW

In graduate school I was friends for a time with a New Yorker who, for the purposes of this memoir, I will refer to as "Saul Peckstein." A red-diaper baby, he was brought up on communism the way I was brought up on Roman Catholicism. Invited up to his room one day, I was taken aback by three huge posters on his wall, of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin. Now there is a distinctive quality of personal warmth that many Jews display, the quality conveyed when we say of so-and-so that he or she is a

mensch. It is a sort of humanity, hard to describe, in my experience not as prevalent among non-Jews. Peckstein had it. But he was nonetheless able to live comfortably under the gaze of a mass murderer and his philosophical progenitors. The crimes of Stalin, having been revealed by Krushchev in 1956, were well known to all by the mid-1970s, the time of my encounter with Peckstein.

One day we were walking across campus when he said to me, “Don’t you think we could run this place?” He was venting the utopian dream of a classless society, a *locus classicus* that is described in a famous passage from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels:

[A]s soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.⁶

The silly utopianism seeps out of the statement “each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes.” Could Saul Kripke have become a diplomat or a chauffeur or an auto mechanic if he wished? Pee Wee Herman a furniture mover or pope? Woody Allen a bronco buster? Evel Knievel a neurosurgeon? And if Marx had actually done any “cattle rearing,” he would have soon discovered that he couldn’t be successful at it if he did it only once in a while when he wasn’t in the mood for hunting, fishing, or writing *Das Kapital*.

On another occasion, Peckstein asked, “After the revolution, what will we do with all the churches?” Like so many other communists, he cherished the naive expectation that “the revolution is right around the corner,” in a phrase much bandied about in CPUSA circles. And in tandem with that naiveté, there was the foolish notion that religion would just wither away when material wants were satisfied and social oppression eliminated, a notion that betrays the deep superficiality of the materialist vision of man and his world. The radical fails to understand the human heart. Even if religion is without a basis in reality, humans are so constituted as never to be satisfied by the paltry meanings of mundane existence, even with their wants satisfied and oppression eliminated. No socialist redemption could defeat death or supply the needs of the heart. Our restless hearts yearn to rest in the eternal.⁷ Even Nietzsche felt the yearning. “All joy wants eternity,” sang his Zarathustra. And if there is no final rest and no eternity? Then so be it, but only a fool accepts a substitute for genuine religion. Communism is an ersatz religion and a substitute source of ultimate meaning that cannot deliver what it promises. Man cannot take the place of God, for there is no Man—only men, at odds with each other and with themselves. What God could achieve if he exists is what Man cannot achieve because he does not and cannot exist.

One night we ate at an expensive restaurant, Anthony's Pier Four at the Boston harbor. Peckstein paid with a bad check. After all, it was an "exploitative" capitalist enterprise and the owners deserved to be stiffed. But he left a substantial tip in cash for the servers. As I said, he was a mensch. Around that time, a few of us graduate students had been meeting to discuss Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. One day I announced that the topic for the next meeting would be the Table of Categories. Peckstein quipped, "Is that a table you can eat on?" The materialist crudity of the remark annoyed me. And then there was the time he wondered why people thank God before a meal rather than the farmers. The man had no understanding of the religious sensibility. I was a close student of Husserl in those days. Ever the activist, he once said to me, "Read Marx, see that the shit is about to hit the capitalist fan, and you'll forget all about Husserl." We played some chess, but he didn't approve of such bourgeois escapism. A true believer who had the Answer, he marched under the banner of Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, "The philosophers have variously interpreted the world; the point, however, is to change it." He couldn't abide the ancients. "Why do people still read this stuff?" he said, referring to Plato's *Republic*.

We were friends for a time, but friendship is fragile among those for whom ideas matter. Unlike the ordinary nonintellectual person, the intellectual lives for and sometimes from ideas. They are his oxygen and sometimes his bread and butter. He takes them very seriously indeed and with them differences in ideas. So, the tendency is for one intellectual to view another whose ideas differ as not merely holding incorrect views but as being morally defective in so doing. Why? Because ideas matter to the intellectual. They matter in the way doctrines and dogmas mattered to old-time religionists. If one's eternal happiness is at stake, it matters infinitely whether one "gets it right" doctrinally. If there is no salvation outside the church, you had better belong to the right church. It matters so much that one may feel entirely justified in forcing the heterodox to recant "for their own good."

The orthodox intellectual nowadays is a secularist who believes in nothing that transcends the human horizon, even if he does believe in a secular eschaton where alienation ends and oppressive hierarchies are abolished. And he takes into his secularism that old-time fervor, that old-time zeal to suppress dissent and punish apostates.⁸ It is called political correctness. To reduce it to a slogan: PC comes from the CP.

16.3. NO TRUTH, ONLY POWER

Cultural Marxism is powered not only by Marx but also by Nietzsche, who is as culturally important as he is philosophically dubious. At *Will to Power* #534, we read that "The criterion of truth resides in the heightening of the feeling of power." The test for truth is whether it increases the feeling of power. To employ some politically correct jargon traceable to Nietzsche, if a belief is "empowering," then it is true; if a belief is true, then it is "empowering." On a deeper reading, however, the dictum

offers not merely a test of truth but also a statement of its nature. Truth is just the property of increasing not only the feeling of power but also power itself: to say that a belief (statement, representation, etc.) is true is just to say that it increases the power of the one who holds the belief. To identify truth with an enhancement of power, however, is to deny truth. The purported identity of truth with power collapses into an elimination of truth.

It is common in philosophy for attempted reductions to expire in eliminations. Ludwig Feuerbach, an important influence on Marx, provides an example. If God is an anthropomorphic projection, then there is no God; similarly, if truth is a power-enhancing perspective, then there is no truth. There are only various interpretations from the varying perspectives of power-hungry individuals and groups, interpretations that serve to enhance the power of these individuals and groups. This fits with Marx's theory of ideology according to which the ideas of the ruling class about philosophy, political economy, law, morality, religion, and the like are not objectively true but reflect the interests of the oppressors and serve to legitimate and maintain existing power relations. (How classical Marxist theory itself manages to escape this infrastructural determination and achieve objective truth and the scientific status it claims for itself is a problem for Marxists to worry about. Cultural Marxism avoids the problem by going full relativist.) Nietzschean perspectivism comports well not only with cultural Marxism but also with the tribalism of identity politics. It also comports well with the voluntarism of Islam's God, an indicator of the unholy alliance of Islam and the left.

In the dark Nietzschean view, the world is thus a vast constellation of ever-changing power centers vying with each other for dominance, and what a particular power center calls "true" are merely those interpretations that enhance and preserve its power. The essence of the world is not reason or order, but rather blind will, will to power. "The world is the will to power and nothing besides." If you ask leftists of this stripe whether it is true that there is no truth, only power, they dismiss the very question with a power move. Either they have no intellectual conscience or they suppress it. They enforce the power-is-all doctrine, which is not admitted to be a doctrine. A doctrine is a teaching, and a teaching can be true or false, but then a transcendental norm comes back in, the norm of truth. So, the "consistent" leftist cannot allow himself to think; he must power his way through. But can a leftist of this stripe be consistent?

To deny truth and its value is to deny logical consistency and *its* value. Consistency is defined in terms of truth. Propositions are collectively logically consistent just in case they can all be true. This poses a problem for such darlings of the Left as Ibram X. Kendi, who maintain that there is no truth, only power, but then complain that racist whites dominate blacks.⁹ One cannot object to one group dominating another, however, if the world at bottom is just power centers battling it out. There can't be anything wrong with whites dominating blacks if all is power in the end. If all is power, and I have the power to enslave you, and the power to ward off any

unpleasant (to me) consequences of my enslaving you, then why shouldn't I? If all is power, then there is nothing beyond power to which appeal can be made. If might makes right, then there is no right. Here is another case where an attempted reduction expires in an elimination. It is inconsistent to hold that all is power and that some of its deployments are evil. If all is power, there is no good and evil. Any attempt to reduce good and evil to power results in the elimination of good and evil. But, as I said, you can't reach hardcore postmodern leftists because they will just make another power move and dismiss the question of consistency as they dismissed the question of truth.

16.4. HERMENEUTICS OF SUSPICION

If there is no truth, then there is no truthfulness. Truthfulness in persons requires as a condition of its possibility both the existence and the normativity of impersonal truth. For the culturally Marxist left, however, truth, even if admitted, is not an absolute value or norm. It is a superstructural reflection of infrastructural interests. Correspondingly, truthfulness is not a value or norm. Lacking in truthfulness themselves, they cannot discern it in their opponents, as witness their inability or unwillingness to accept our statements as we intend them.

Leftists thus subscribe to the hermeneutics of suspicion, whose intellectual progenitors are Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Leftists refuse to take what a conservative says at face value as expressing a sincerely held opinion, even when it is based in government-certified empirical fact. If the conservative cites an FBI statistic that reflects poorly on blacks or other "persons of color," he is speaking in a "code" using "dog whistles" that supposedly only other conservatives can hear. (The inanity of the phrase is betrayed by the ability of lefties to hear the high-pitched threats of the knuckle draggers.) So, if I point out that blacks as a group are more criminally prone than whites as a group, what I am really saying is that blacks have to be kept in their place or hunted down. I am legitimating their allegedly unjust "mass incarceration." I am condoning the alleged murder of the likes of Trayvon Martin of Sanford, Florida, and Michael Brown of Ferguson, Missouri. (The truth, of course, is that these two youths were not murdered; they brought about their own deaths by their immoral, illegal, and extremely foolish behavior.) So, when I cite the FBI statistic to explain why blacks are "overrepresented" in the prison system, I am accused of retailing racist propaganda when I am simply speaking the truth. If Donald J. Trump speaks of making America great again, using the very same words used by President William Jefferson Clinton in 1991,¹⁰ leftists such as Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi report that what he is really saying is "Make America White Again."¹¹ Thus leftists ignore the manifest meaning of what the conservative says while seeking some latent "ideological" meaning, where ideology has the Marxist sense of a legitimation of existing relations of power and domination.

16.5. A CENTRAL DOGMA OF THE LEFT

It is a plain fact that humans are not equal either as individuals or as groups by any empirical measure. Why then is there so much politically correct resistance to this truth? It is because it flies in the face of a central dogma of the left—namely, that deep down we are all the same, want the same things, have the same abilities and interests, share the same values, and so on. So, if women are “underrepresented” among the engineers, for example, then the only way to explain this inequality of outcome, given the leftist equality dogma, is in terms of something nefarious such as sexism. After all, if we are all equal empirically, then the “underrepresentation”—a word enclosed in sneer quotes because of its conflation of the factual and the normative—cannot be explained in terms of a difference in interests and values or a difference in mathematical aptitude. The dogma is false and yet widely and fervently believed. Anyone who dares offend against it faces severe consequences. There is the well-known case of Lawrence Summers,¹² but more recently Amy Wax, a tenured University of Pennsylvania law professor, was relieved of some of her teaching duties when she reportedly spoke “disparagingly and inaccurately” when she claimed that she had “rarely, rarely” seen a black student finish in the top half of a class. Professor Wax spoke the truth, but the truth is no defense in the court of the politically correct. Wax violated the central dogma. In present-day academe, all must toe the party line, and woe to him who doesn’t. The universities have become leftist seminaries apart from (most of) the STEM disciplines.

16.6. THE ORIGIN OF THE DOGMA IN THE SECULARIZATION OF THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN BELIEF IN EQUALITY

What explains the fervor and fanaticism with which the left’s equality dogma is upheld? It could be explained as a secularization of the Judeo-Christian belief that all men are created equal. Long before I read Carl Schmitt, I had this thought. But then I found this provocative assertion by Schmitt:

All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development . . . but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts.¹³

The idea that all humans are equal by virtue of having been created by God, in the image and likeness of God, is a purely theological notion consistent with deep and wide empirical differences among humans. Its secularization, I suggest, involves several steps. (These are my ideas, not Schmitt’s.)

The first step is to transform the metaphysical concept of equality of persons into an empirical concept of equality of measurable attributes. The second step is to

explain away the manifest empirical inequality of human groups and individuals in terms of sexism or racism or ageism or some other “ism.” This involves a turn toward social constructivism and a reality denying turn away from the mind-independent reality of biological differences between the sexes and the races. For instance, “gender” is a grammatical term. When sex becomes “gender,” the biological reality of sex is replaced by a linguistic social construct. Similarly with race. The absurdities that result are foolishly embraced rather than taken as so many *reductiones ad absurdum* of the original mistake of making sex and race social constructs. Thus, one foolishly embraces the notion that one can change one’s race or that at birth one is “assigned” one’s sex. The third step is to jettison the theological underpinning of the original equality conception. Somehow we remain equal as persons with all that that entails (free will, uniqueness, an infinite worth as an end in itself that makes it wrong to treat any person as a mere means) even after the theological foundation has been removed.

In this way a possibly true, nonempirical claim of Christian metaphysics about persons as creatures of God and thus as equal bearers of equal rights is transformed into a manifestly false empirical claim about human animals. At the same time, the divine ground of the nonempirical claim is denied. One can easily see how unstable this is. Reject God, and you no longer have a basis for belief in equality of persons. Man reverts to being an animal among animals, with all the empirical inequality that that brings with it. But cultural Marxists cannot acknowledge this biologically based empirical inequality among individuals, sexes, and races. So, the inequality must be attributed to a false social construction by the oppressors. Unable to accept either theism (which can ground equal rights) or naturalism (which cannot), the cultural Marxist must adopt an absurd form of anti-realism or idealism.

So, the left has a problem. It is virulently antitheistic and antireligious and yet it wants to uphold a notion of equality that makes sense only within a theistic framework. The left, blind to this inconsistency, is running on the fumes of an evaporating Christian worldview. Equality of persons and rights secularizes itself right out of existence once the theological support is kicked away. Nietzsche understood this long ago. The death of God has serious consequences. One is that the brotherhood of man becomes a joke. If my tribe can enslave yours, then it has all the justification it needs and can have for doing so. Why should I treat you as my brother if I have the power to make you my servant and I have freed my mind of Christian fictions? For those of us who oppose both the left and the alt-right faction that is anti-Christian and Nietzschean, the only option seems to be a return to our Judeo-Christian heritage, which found its finest political realization in the American founding.

16.7. THE MYTH OF SYSTEMIC RACISM

After actual racist oppression of blacks was eliminated, to the extent that it could be by legislation, the left invented “structural,” “systemic,” or “institutional” racism to keep the race hustle going. It was plain to objective investigators that the deaths

of Trayvon Martin (2012) and Michael Brown (2014) had nothing to do with race hatred. Those two brought about their own deaths by their own bad behavior. But since they happened to be black, the left seized on their deaths as examples of the imaginary construct, “structural racism.” This structural or institutional racism, however, to the extent that it existed at all, has been eliminated. See David Horowitz:

While institutional or systemic racism has been illegal in America for 50 years, the 2016 Democratic Party platform promises that “Democrats will fight to end institutional and systemic racism in our society.” There is no evidence that such racism actually exists. It is asserted in a sleight of hand that attributes every statistical disparity affecting allegedly “oppressed” groups to prejudice against them because of their identity. This “prejudice,” however, is a progressive myth. This is not to say that there aren’t individuals who are prejudiced. But there is no systemic racism in America’s institutions, and if there is, it is already illegal and easily remedied.¹⁴

The left’s race obsession is an amazing thing to behold. With every passing day it becomes more extreme. An Asian man became the focus of a controversy because his surname, Lee, which is a mere sound-preserving transliteration of some Chinese characters, reminded some people of Robert E. Lee.¹⁵ Soon thereafter, a discarded banana peel ignited racial hysteria at Ole Miss.¹⁶ To multiply examples beyond necessity, consider the absurd student demand that Lynch Memorial Hall at a small Pennsylvania college be renamed.¹⁷ Responding logically to these absurdities would do no good. Pointing out, for example, that “Lynch” is a name, not a verb, would do nothing to set straight people who have substituted the feeling-based association of ideas for rational thought. The left in general, and the Democratic Party in the United States in particular, appear to be embarked upon a path of self-destruction. They have found that playing the race card has gotten them what they want in many cases. But they need to think twice about transforming every card in the deck into a race card. While the leaders of the party are extremists, many of the rank and file retain a modicum of common sense.

16.8. EXPLAINING THE LEFT’S SEEMINGLY INCOHERENT TOLERATION OF RADICAL ISLAM

From 1789 on, a defining characteristic of the left has been hostility to religion, especially in its institutionalized forms. This goes together with a commitment to such Enlightenment values as individual liberty, belief in reason, and political equality, including equality among the races and between the sexes. Thus, the last thing one would expect from the left is an alignment with militant Islam given the latter’s philosophically unsophisticated religiosity bordering on rank superstition, its totalitarian moralism, its barbarous penal procedures, its voluntaristic suppression of reason, and its opposition to gender (or rather sexual) equality.

So why is the radical left soft on militant Islam? The values of the progressive creed are antithetic to those of the Islamists, and it is quite clear that if the Islamists got everything they wanted—namely, the imposition of Islamic law on the entire world—our dear progressives would soon find themselves headless. I don't imagine that they long to live under Sharia, where "getting stoned" would have more than metaphorical meaning. So, what explains this bizarre alignment?

One point of similarity between radical leftists and Islamists is that both are totalitarians. As David Horowitz writes, "Both movements are totalitarian in their desire to extend the revolutionary law into the sphere of private life, and both are exacting in the justice they administer and the loyalty they demand."¹⁸ Horowitz points to a second similarity when he writes, "The radical Islamist believes that by conquering nations and instituting Sharia, he can redeem the world for Allah. The socialist's faith is in using state power and violent means to eliminate private property and thereby usher in the millennium."¹⁹

The utopianism of the left is a quasi-religion with a sort of secular eschatology. The leftist dreams of an eschaton ushered in by human effort alone, a millennial state that could be described as pie-in-the-future as opposed to pie-in-the-sky. When this millennial state is achieved, religion in its traditional form will disappear. Its narcotic satisfactions will no longer be in demand. Religion is the "sigh of the oppressed creature" (Marx), a sigh that arises within a contingent socioeconomic arrangement that can be overturned. When it is overturned, religion will disappear. This allows us to explain why the secular radical does not take seriously the religious pathology of radical Islam. "The secular radical believes that religion itself is merely an expression of real-world misery, for which capitalist property is ultimately responsible."²⁰ The overthrow of capitalism will eliminate the need for religion. This "will liberate Islamic fanatics from the need to be Islamic and fanatic."²¹

Building on Horowitz's point, I would say the leftist in his naïveté fails to grasp that religion, however we finally resolve the question of its validity or lack thereof, is deeply rooted in human nature. As Schopenhauer points out, man is a metaphysical animal, and religion is one expression of the metaphysical urge. Every temple, church, and mosque is evidence of man's being an *animal metaphysicum*. As such, religion is not a merely contingent expression of a contingent misery produced by a contingent state of society. On the contrary, as grounded in human nature, a nature that is not socially produced but is fixed, religion answers to a misery, sense of abandonment, and need for meaning essential to the human predicament as such, a predicament the amelioration of which cannot be brought about by any merely human effort, whether individual or collective. Whether or not religion can deliver what it promises, it answers to real and ineradicable human needs for meaning and purpose, needs that only a utopian could imagine being satisfied in a state of society brought about by human effort alone.

In their dangerous naïveté, leftists think that they can use radical Islam to help destroy the capitalist United States, and, once that is accomplished, radical Islam

will “wither away.” But leftism will “wither away” before Islamic fanaticism does. Leftists think that they can use genuine fascist theocracy to defeat the “fascist theocracy” of the United States. They are deluding themselves. Residing in their utopian *Wolkenskukheim*—a wonderful word used by Schopenhauer translatable as “Cloud Cuckoo Land”—radical leftists are wrong about religion, wrong about human nature, wrong about the terrorist threat, wrong about the “fascist theocracy” of conservatives, wrong about economics—in short, they are wrong about reality. Leftists are delusional reality deniers. Now that they are in our government, we are in grave danger. I sincerely hope that people do not need a “nuclear event” to wake them up. Political correctness can get you killed.

It has been said, correctly in the main, that for a conservative, leftists are wrong, whereas for a leftist, conservatives are evil. It is because they regard us as evil that they refuse to accord us respect as rational interlocutors with a point of view worth examining. This is why they exclude conservative speakers and shout down those who somehow make it onto university campuses. This is why they pepper us with purely emotive epithets such as “fascist” and the “phobe” constructions that are designed to impugn our sanity. A phobia is an irrational fear, by definition. To dismiss as an Islamophobe a person who rightly warns of the threat of radical Islam is to make reasoned discourse impossible.

16.9. CULTURAL MARXISM IN THE PRECINCTS OF THE PHILOSOPHERS

There are numerous disturbing examples of culturally Marxist rot infecting academic philosophy. I will mention only one, the attack by Simon Blackburn on Thomas Nagel’s *Mind and Cosmos* (2012). Blackburn’s *New Statesman* article²² ends as follows:

There is charm to reading a philosopher who confesses to finding things bewildering. But I regret the appearance of this book. It will only bring comfort to creationists and fans of “intelligent design,” who will not be too bothered about the difference between their divine architect and Nagel’s natural providence. It will give ammunition to those triumphalist scientists who pronounce that philosophy is best pensioned off. If there were a philosophical Vatican, the book would be a good candidate for going on to the Index [of prohibited books].

The problem with the book, Blackburn states at the beginning of his piece, is that

only a tiny proportion of its informed readers will find it anything other than profoundly wrong-headed. For, as the title suggests, Nagel’s central idea is that there are things that science, as it is presently conceived, cannot possibly explain.

Blackburn doesn’t explicitly say that there ought to be a “philosophical Vatican” and an index of prohibited books, but he seems to be open to the deeply unphi-

losophical idea of censoring views that are “profoundly wrong-headed.” And why should such views be kept from impressionable minds? Because they might lead them astray into doctrinal error. Even though Nagel explicitly rejects God and divine providence, untutored intellects might confuse Nagel’s teleological suggestion with divine providence. Nagel’s great sin, you see, is to point out the rather obvious problems with reductive materialism, as he calls it. This is intolerable to the scientific ideologues since any criticism of the reigning orthodoxy, no matter how well founded, gives aid and comfort to the enemy, theism—and this despite the fact that Nagel’s approach is naturalistic and rejective of theism!

So, what Nagel explicitly says doesn’t matter. His failure to toe the party line makes him an enemy as bad as theists such as Alvin Plantinga. (If Nagel’s book is to be kept under lock and key, one can only wonder at the prophylactic measures necessary to keep infection from leaking out of Plantinga’s tomes.) Blackburn betrays himself as nothing but an ideologue in the above article, for this is the way ideologues operate. Never criticize your own—your fellow naturalists, in this case. Never concede anything to your opponents. Never hesitate or admit doubt or puzzlement. Keep your eyes on the prize. Winning alone is what counts. Never follow an argument where it leads if it leads away from the party line. Treat the opponent’s ideas with ridicule and contumely. For example, Blackburn refers to consciousness as a purple haze to be dispelled. One wonders what is next from Professor Blackburn. A Naturalist Syllabus of Errors?

16.10. AMERICAN CONSERVATISM

My brand of conservatism could be called American. It aims to preserve and where necessary restore the values and principles codified by the founders. Incorporating as it does elements of classical liberalism and libertarianism, American conservatism is far from throne-and-altar reaction. While anti-theocratic, it is not antireligious. It stands for individual liberty and its necessary supports, private property, free markets, and limited government. It is liberal in its stress on liberties, but conservative in its sober view of human nature, a nature easily corrupted by power and in need of restraint. It avoids the reactionary and radical extremes. It incorporates the values of the Enlightenment. American conservatism presupposes the existence of “unalienable rights,” which come from nature or from “nature’s God.” First among the liberties mentioned in the First Amendment to the US Constitution is religious liberty, which includes the liberty to exercise no religion. It is first in the order of exposition and (arguably) first also in the order of importance. The second liberty mentioned is free speech. Both of these classically American values are under assault from the utopian left, which has taken over the Democratic Party in the United States.

As against certain factions of the alternative right, American conservatism insists that the United States is a proposition nation: the propositions are in the founding

documents. These propositions define the American identity and provide a bulwark against the identity politics shared by the cultural Marxists and their alt-right opponents. But I also don't see how it could be reasonably denied that the discovery and articulation of classically American principles and values was achieved by people belonging to a certain tradition and will be preserved (if it is preserved) only by people in that tradition or who can be assimilated into it. This has consequences for immigration policy. To allude to *e pluribus unum*, a One cannot be made out of just any Many. Some groups are unassimilable. I take it to be axiomatic that immigration must be to the benefit of the host country, a benefit not to be defined in merely economic terms. And so I ask a politically incorrect but perfectly reasonable question: Is there any net benefit to Muslim immigration? Immigrants are naturally inclined to bring their culture with them. Muslims, for example, bring with them a Sharia-based, hybrid religious-political ideology that is in key elements antithetical to American values. If they are unwilling to renounce those elements, we have every right to block their immigration. We are under no obligation to allow the immigration of subversive elements. The founding propositions are universally true; they are not the property of whites even though whites discovered them. But such propositions, while true for all humans and in this sense true universally, are not recognized by all humans, and they are not presently capable of being recognized or put into practice by all humans. The attempt to impart these propositions to some groups will be futile, especially if it involves force or can be interpreted by the group in question as a cover for an attempt to dominate or control them for ulterior motives. The implication for foreign policy is that the United States must adopt an enlightened nationalism and not attempt to teach the presently unteachable.²³

16.11. THE DECLINE OF THE UNIVERSITIES

The university administrators and faculty who tolerate the shouting down of conservative speakers, the rescinding of invitations to speak, attacks on people and property, and the rest of the Antifa-type barbarism, are essentially cowards who love their high salaries, perquisites, and privileges. They are mostly unprincipled careerists who bend whichever way the wind blows. They are not, in the main, out to destroy the universities; they simply lack the courage to take a stand in defense of the traditional values of the university and accept the consequences of so doing. They fear being called "racists" and the rest of the names. They are over-tolerant, *bien-pensant* liberals who hope the storm passes, leaving them well ensconced in their capacious and well-appointed offices. They understand that the left eats its own and that if they make common cause with the destructive elements, they, too, may be destroyed in good-old commie fashion. So they play it safe. Friends to my right accuse me of an excess of charity. What is going on, they say, is not abdication of authority but malicious misuse of authority to complete the transformation of the universities into leftist seminaries. Whether or not that is the case, things are getting worse.

16.12. CONCLUDING AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL POSTSCRIPT

And so I quit a tenured position at the tender age of forty-one and moved to Arizona. I had long aspired to an eremitic life retired from teaching but not from philosophy. The Sonoran Desert has proven to be a fitting venue for a truth quest untainted by the academic hustle. I found a second home in the blogosphere a few years later, where, for the last sixteen years, I have authored a weblog titled *Maverick Philosopher*. A big fat folder of fan mail is more than adequate compensation for my labors. And the relatively few attacks from leftists only galvanized me in my opposition to them. I tip my hat to my fellow dissidents and wish them well as we carry the fight forward.

NOTES

1. Cf. Miliband, Ralph, *Marxism and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 17.
2. Alinsky, Saul, *Rules for Radicals* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 128.
3. Horowitz, David, *Hating Whitey and Other Progressive Causes* (Dallas: Spence Publishing, 1999), 88.
4. Islam gets a pass because, as the enemy of Christianity, it is the enemy of the left's enemy, and thus its friend.
5. Pilkington, Ed, "Obama Angers Midwest Voters with Guns and Religion Remark," April 14, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/apr/14/barackobama.uselections2008>. Read the sentence carefully. It makes no sense.
6. Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. C. J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 53.
7. "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." St Augustine, *Confessions*, Book I, Chapter 1.
8. The old-time zeal is alive and well in Islam, which hates apostates even more than leftists do.
9. See Sullivan, Andrew, "A Glimpse at the Intersectional Left's Political End Game," *Intelligencer*, November 15, 2019, accessed January 2, 2020, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/11/andrew-sullivan-the-intersectional-lefts-political-endgame.html>: "Kendi, a star professor at American University and a recent Guggenheim Fellowship winner, has no time for color-blindness, or for any kind of freedom which might have some inequality as its outcome. In fact, 'the most threatening racist movement is not the alt-right's unlikely drive for a White ethno-state, but the regular American's drive for a "race-neutral" one.'" He has no time for persuasion or dialogue either: "An activist produces power and policy change, not mental change." All there is is power. You either wield it or are controlled by it. "And power is simply the ability to implement racist or antiracist policy."
10. C-SPAN, "Bill Clinton Presidential Campaign Announcement," October 3, 1991, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4600782/user-clip-bill-clinton-make-america-great-again>.
11. Bufkin, Ellie, "Nancy Pelosi Says Trump Wants to 'Make America White Again' with Citizenship Question," *Washington Examiner*, July 9, 2019, accessed January 2, 2020, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/nancy-pelosi-says-trump-want-to-make-america-white-again-with-citizenship-question>.

12. "Lawrence Summers," *Wikipedia*, accessed January 3, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lawrence_Summers#Differences_between_the_sexes.
13. *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. G. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 36.
14. Horowitz, David, *Big Agenda* (West Palm Beach: Humanix, 2017), 51.
15. de Menezes, Jack, "ESPN Removes Asian-American Presenter Robert Lee from Charlottesville Game as Name Is Same as Confederate General," *Independent*, August 23, 2017, accessed January 3, 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/us-sport/espn-robert-lee-remove-presenter-charlottesville-confederate-general-racist-asian-american-name-a7907701.html>.
16. Starnes, Todd, "Discarded Banana Peel Causes Racial Hysteria at Ole Miss," *Townhall.com*, August 30, 2017, accessed January 4, 2020, <https://townhall.com/columnists/toddstarnes/2017/08/30/discarded-banana-peel-causes-racial-hysteria-at-ole-miss-n2375376>.
17. Associated Press, "Students at Pennsylvania College Demand Building Called 'Lynch Memorial Hall' Be Renamed Because of Racial Overtones," *DailyMail.com*, December 8, 2015, accessed January 3, 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3351894/Students-Rename-building-called-Lynch-ex-president.html>.
18. Horowitz, David, *Unholy Alliance: Radical Islam and the American Left* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2004), 124.
19. *Ibid.*, 129.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, 130.
22. Blackburn, Simon, "Thomas Nagel: A Philosopher Who Confessed to Finding Things Bewildering," *New Statesman*, November 8, 2012, accessed January 4, 2012, <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/culture/2012/11/thomas-nagel-philosopher-who-confesses-finding-things-bewildering>.
23. Cf. my "Paul Gottfried on Propositionalism," *Maverick Philosopher Blog*, November 4, 2017, https://maverickphilosopher.typepad.com/maverick_philosopher/2017/11/paul-gottfried-on-propositionalism.html.

REFERENCES

- Alinsky, Saul. *Rules for Radicals*. New York: Vintage, 1989.
- Associated Press. "Students at Pennsylvania College Demand Building Called 'Lynch Memorial Hall' Be Renamed Because of Racial Overtones." *DailyMail.com*. December 8, 2015. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3351894/Students-Rename-building-called-Lynch-ex-president.html>.
- Blackburn, Simon. "Thomas Nagel: A Philosopher Who Confessed to Finding Things Bewildering." *New Statesman*. November 8, 2012. <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/culture/2012/11/thomas-nagel-philosopher-who-confesses-finding-things-bewildering>.
- Bufkin, Ellie. "Nancy Pelosi Says Trump Wants to 'Make America White Again' with Citizenship Question." *Washington Examiner*. July 9, 2019. <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/nancy-pelosi-says-trump-want-to-make-america-white-again-with-citizenship-question>.
- C-SPAN. "Bill Clinton Presidential Campaign Announcement." October 3, 1991. <https://www.c-span.org/video/?21803-1/governor-bill-clinton-d-ar-presidential-campaign-announcement>.

- de Menezes, Jack. "ESPN Removes Asian-American Presenter Robert Lee from Charlottesville Game as Name Is Same as Confederate General." *Independent*. August 23, 2017. <https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/us-sport/espn-robert-lee-remove-presenter-charlottesville-confederate-general-racist-asian-american-name-a7907701.html>.
- Horowitz, David. *Big Agenda*. West Palm Beach: Humanix, 2017.
- . *Hating Whitey and Other Progressive Causes*. Dallas: Spence Publishing, 1999.
- . *Unholy Alliance: Radical Islam and the American Left*. Washington, DC: Regnery, 2004.
- "Lawrence Summers." *Wikipedia*. Accessed January 3, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lawrence_Summers#Differences_b.
- Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The German Ideology*. Edited by C. J. Arthur. New York: International Publishers, 1970.
- Miliband, Ralph. *Marxism and Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Pilkington, Ed. "Obama Angers Midwest Voters with Guns and Religion Remark." *The Guardian*. April 14, 2008. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/apr/14/barackobama.uselections2008>.
- Schmitt, Carl. *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Translated by G. Schwab. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.
- Starnes, Todd. "Discarded Banana Peel Causes Racial Hysteria at Ole Miss." *Townhall.com*. August 30, 2017. <https://townhall.com/columnists/toddstarnes/2017/08/30/discarded-banana-peel-causes-racial-hysteria-at-ole-miss-n2375376>.
- Sullivan, Andrew. "A Glimpse at the Intersectional Left's Political End Game." *Intelligencer*. November 15, 2019. <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/11/andrew-sullivan-the-intersectional-lefts-political-endgame.html>.
- Vallicella, William F. "Paul Gottfried on Propositionalism." *Maverick Philosopher Blog*. November 4, 2017. https://maverickphilosopher.typepad.com/maverick_philosopher/2017/11/paul-gottfried-on-propositionalism.html.

Copyright © 2021. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. All rights reserved.