

the army strives to produce vulgar and brutal atheists who act as beasts twenty-four hours a day. In Poland, with its background of Catholic religiosity, echoes of another world penetrate the walls of the barracks and save a good percentage of soldiers, but in countries like China and, until recently, Russia beasts were consciously produced by leaders of the system who considered their social engineering to be an achievement rather than a crime.

The book concludes with a lengthy afterword detailing the story of struggle against the totalitarian regime in Soviet-occupied Poland. Here the narrative centers on student activities, because the author played an active role in student protests. As one peruses the lists of names of students who signed various protests, one can easily find the reasons for the failure of these initiatives to bring desired changes. The lists are replete with names of people who later turned out to be on the payroll of the secret police, such as Lesław Maleszka. Secret police agents penetrated the entire protest movement in communist countries from the very beginning. Today the debate in Poland concerns not the agents like Maleszka who betrayed their colleagues in a horrible way and whose activities have been well documented, but personalities such as Lech Walesa who, according to recent discoveries of documents, was also steered by communist social engineers. In Walesa's case the stake was the system itself rather than the murders of one's colleagues.

One may ask why a university graduate like Ruszar was forced to join the army and spend a year with recruits ten years younger than he. It turns out that in the 1970s a law was passed regarding an obligatory 180-hour military training for students in all institutions of higher education. Ruszar was directed to a particular unit that had the reputation of being a punitive unit. Apparently the communist authorities hoped that isolating him in this way would wipe out his influence on others. (SB)

## **The Demon in Democracy Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies**

**By Ryszard Legutko. Translated by Teresa Adelson. Foreword by John O'Sullivan.** New York-London: Encounter Books (www.encounterbooks.com), 2016. viii + 182 pages. ISBN 978-1-59403-863-1. Hardcover. \$23.99.

### **Ewa Thompson**

**D**oes liberal democracy share common features with Marxist communism? Of course not, its adherents and propounders would say. Those who look with increasing skepticism at the turn Western liberalism has taken over the last several generations are not so sure. Professor Legutko is in that number. He dares to go against general expectations in postulating that the two political and social systems share the same roots. Both are built on the assumption that human beings either lack a metaphysical dimension (metaphysics being a product of their overactive minds), or that their spirituality can be fully ignored in planning and executing their social and political trajectories. Both systems proclaim that human development can be fully explained by science; those aspects of it that have not yet been explained will be clarified in the future. Finally, both make a claim, overtly or covertly, that full implementation of their postulates will bring universal harmony, or the happy sojourn of humanity on this earth for the rest of imaginable time. Communism claimed this overtly, while the proponents of liberal democracy merely imply that after all improper behavior and thoughts have been weeded out humanity will live in reasonable contentment forever after.

This kind of criticism of liberal democracy may seem startlingly absurd to those who are used to the facile formulae of "separation of church and state" or "freedom of religion," or "religion is a private matter of citizens." Implied in these assumptions is the thesis that there are no religions incompatible with liberal democracy—

if they are practiced in private and not brought to the public square. Liberal democratic writers do not usually write about metaphysics, nor is public discourse in countries like America occupied with things “not of this world.” Yet Legutko’s most profound thesis is just this—that the very absence of the metaphysical dimension in the public square implies a view of man and society that partakes of the totalitarian temptation. If one believes that societies can be organized without taking man’s spiritual dimension into account, one proceeds along the road that takes us to tighter and tighter state control. It goes without saying that liberal democratic ideals leave man’s relation to God totally outside the political and social discourse. This metaphysical absence is dealt with openly at the end of the book, as the crowning part of the author’s reflections on the contemporary free world.

Legutko’s credentials justify his skepticism toward present-day liberal democracies. Under communism, citizens of Poland looked with longing, admiration, and hope to the countries of Western Europe where the Soviet soldier’s boot did not step or from where it withdrew (as in Austria in 1955). In the 1990s when communism disintegrated (or morphed into social democracy), it was disappointing to discover that underneath the glitter and a better standard of living there was little to emulate in Western societies. Particularly disappointing was the discovery that Western democracies shared a number of common features with Soviet “democracies”: both looked forward to some kind of an end of history where either communism or the perfect liberal state would free citizens from political worries; both were engaged in social engineering (communism tried to raise a perfect communist man, whereas liberal democracy tries to inculcate “political correctness” in its citizens); and both worked to intimidate citizens into obedience and agreement with the prescribed trends of social life. In communism it was the communist party that had the last word; in liberal democracy, the secular elites, the media, and the universities dictate what is acceptable and what is not. There was also the disturbing discovery that in many

crucial cases the judiciary seemed to legislate rather than interpret the existing law. Even though Legutko does not mention specific cases, *Roe vs. Wade* and *Brown vs. Board of Education* can serve as examples. When these two judicial decisions were made, the majority of citizens were against abortion and against busing. It seemed as if the judiciary was instructing society in the march toward the end of history. A contemporary example of similar procedures is the issue of forcible relocation of immigrants to EU countries. While the majority of EU citizens do not wish to receive these economic migrants (among whom Syrians fleeing war constitute only 5 percent) and opt for helping the needy in their own countries, EU bureaucracy opts for quotas to be forcibly resettled in each and every EU country. This kind of procedure is painfully familiar to those who, like Legutko, suffered under the Soviet-imposed communism.

Legutko points out that in spite of massive evidence of how horribly communism treated its own citizens, Western elites—intellectuals, artists, university circles—seldom expressed outrage at communist doings. It seemed as if outrage was reserved for Nazi crimes only. Perhaps the most famous example of this leniency is Walter Duranty and his travel reports from Russia published in the *New York Times* in the 1930s during the Ukrainian famine. Or take Jean-Paul Sartre’s flirtation with the Soviets—and Sartre was one of the most highly respected Western intellectuals in the 1960s! Legutko points out what most citizens of formerly communist Central Europe know and what most Western intellectuals refuse to learn to this day: that the totalitarian temptation affected not only Lenin or Stalin, but a number of individuals in the West who contributed mightily to the direction their societies have taken between the 1960s and the present day.

The issue of the uniformity that both communist and liberal democratic societies impose on citizens is a delicate one, however. In the first case it is a matter of uniformity by force, whereas in the second external appearances matter: one can have one’s own private views and choose a profession that does not require

revealing them in public. In other words, pressure is far less and of a different kind than in communist societies, but such a pressure nevertheless exists. Today most university professors hold the same views on abortion, homosexuality, and family as the major media, and substantive discussion about these issues begin with accepting the postulates that seemed absurd a hundred years ago. At most American universities a humanities assistant professor skeptical of the generally accepted views who made his views known and interpreted works of literature accordingly would have a slim chance of receiving tenure.

On pages 94–95, the author brilliantly identifies the “imagined communities” of neo-Marxist scholarship. Among them the primary role is played by women and homosexuals. Legutko points out that such imagined communities replaced the equally imaginary international proletariat of classical Marxism. In both cases there was not, and is not, any real solidarity between members; solidarity exists only in the progressive heads of contemporary elites. These communities are “imagined” because only those women or gays who conform to the theories about them are considered members. Women who are perfectly satisfied with being invisible, staying at home, raising children, and cooking meals are not the subjects of feminists scholars’ books; for the feminists, they might as well not exist at all. Ditto those homosexuals who are happy to stay in the closet. They are not part of that imagined international brotherhood of victimized individuals who display toward each other a victim’s solidarity. They may even be considered deserving of verbal scourging if they actively oppose postmodern sexual or feminist theories. Nor are those homosexuals who are dissatisfied with their sexual preferences and would like to change them considered members of the group whose “rights” neo-Marxists allegedly defend. In some countries the legislature forbids attempts to change the sexual preferences of gays. Legutko points out that in contemporary understanding multiculturalism does not involve the existence of many cultures in one society, but rather the existence of many political identities of the imagined collectives.

In this connection one recalls Benedict Anderson’s definition of nations as “imagined communities.” Anderson is wrong: unlike gays or women, members of the same nationality do sacrifice for one another, and history is replete with examples of such sacrifices. However, we have not heard of women or gays willingly submitting to persecution and even execution on behalf of women and gays in countries they can barely find on the map. The national community is a real entity (albeit essentialist in nature, and therefore ignored by Marxist thinkers like Anderson), whereas the artificial communities of gays and women exist in the minds of Marxist and liberal democratic thinkers, hence the participle “imagined.”

Legutko spends less time than might have been advisable on changes in the universal image of what constitutes a happy and successful life. While in ages past happiness was perceived as connected to the spiritual side of man, in liberal democracy the emphasis is on entertainment and pleasure. One is supposed to have a good time all the time. The heroes of today’s youth are movie stars rather than people of great moral achievement—what is moral achievement anyway, a liberal democrat may ask. People living in a liberal democracy discount the notion of clear and imminent danger from abroad, but their leaders try to instill in them the fake fear of “wrong” or “backward” views and actions. I say “fake” because in spite of the horrific visions of scorched earth painted by some believers in global warming, few people lose sleep over such visions. They are creations of the elites who wish to lead society in a direction best known to themselves. In liberal democracies the specters of famine or war are not seriously considered, while CO<sub>2</sub> is. Yet problems such as climate change would be easier to alleviate by piecemeal actions than by all-embracing schemes imposed on an unwilling world, somewhat like the Soviets who made grandiose plans of reversing the flow of Siberian rivers in order to irrigate deserts in Central Asia.

The book has its flaws, the gravest of which is the author’s tendency to slip into a classroom lecture mode instead of maintaining the polemical mode that in today’s intellectual

world gives books a chance to survive and flourish. Legutko's observations are brilliant, but as he continues his lecturing one begins to feel a scarcity of quotable data to support the argument. One feels that the argument is plausible, indeed correct, but the difference between scholarship and journalism consists in that scholars supply quotable sources for their discoveries. In the classroom or in journalism there is no time for data and just delivering the outline of an argument must suffice, but in a book that deals with fundamental issues in an often strikingly original way a certain amount of documentation, and therefore footnoting, makes the argument rock solid. Related to this lack of documentation is the lack of firm subdivisions in chapters. The impression that topics overlap one another often arises. Greater orderliness within chapters would have improved the book. Even without footnotes and bibliography, however, the book is one of the most profound probes into the woes of liberal democracy to date. One should be alarmed that this kind of book has appeared so late in the history of liberal democracies. Δ

## Donald Trump's Warsaw Speech and the Nihilism of Modern Sophisticates Edwin Dyga

On 6 July 2017, US President Donald Trump stood before the Warsaw Uprising Monument on Krasiński Square (Plac Krasińskich) and reminded Europe—by extension, the Western world—of the choice facing its cultural and political elites in the early twenty-first century. That his message was delivered in Poland was both symbolic and telling; it constituted a warning and a call for the reassertion of those things that have defined our civilization by reference to the near-Sisyphean struggle of the Polish underground in the Second World War. The history of overwhelming odds, betrayal by alleged allies, and the brutalities of genocidal war set the scene for a Huntingtonian declaration for civilizational perseverance: “Because as the

Polish experience reminds us,” Trump stated, “the defence of the West ultimately rests not only on means but also on the will of its people to prevail,” adding that “the fundamental question of our time is whether the West has the will to survive” and specifically, whether “we have the desire and the courage to preserve our civilization in the face of those who would subvert and destroy it.” The partisans of the Warsaw Uprising understood the value of what they were fighting for in 1944, and Trump's words last month were an urgent reminder of the apocalyptic risks to the rest of the continent, should its leaders fail to unapologetically embrace and reaffirm their heritage in the political and cultural sphere. “We write symphonies. We strive for excellence, and cherish inspiring works of art that honor God . . . We put faith and family, not government and bureaucracy, at the center of our lives. Those are the priceless ties that bind us together as nations, as allies, and as a civilization.” Notably, these things can only be achieved by a confident people with a strong faith in their place in the world, and it is those two things, *confidence* and *faith*, of which Europe has suffered a chronic deficiency.

A people ceases to embody a civilization the moment their cultural assertiveness is numbed to the point where they can no longer distinguish the boundaries of their hearth or the framework of their identity. The process of collapse in Western Europe seems to have gathered considerable momentum over the last half decade, particularly with the aggressive demographic shifts that have tested the threshold of tolerance in ways unimaginable half a generation ago. Yet it seems difficult to imagine a political solution to a problem that obviously runs deeper than mere disputes over the bureaucratic style of governance. The predictably pathological responses to the recent terrorist attacks in Manchester, London, and recently at the Cathedral of Our Lady in Paris, is emblematic of a spiritual crisis that has retarded the ability of a people to think clearly and act with conviction. Instead of righteous anger at those who fostered the conditions for the violent spiral of decline, people one might expect to