

The Demon in Democracy

Ryszard Legutko

The eerie parallels between communism and liberal democracy – and the ways both threaten your freedom.

Ryszard Legutko was born in 1949 in Poland, a couple of years after its status as a Soviet satellite had become recognized by all. He enthusiastically supported the first Solidarity movement in 1980, when he would have been in his early 30s. It was fueled by strong sense of patriotism, history, and Catholicism. The second Solidarity, coming in 1989 just as communism was falling, was not passionate about any of these three. It was more like Western liberal democracy.

Legutko noted with disappointment that communist officials transitioned easily into government positions in the new Poland. Very little effort was made to call even the ones who had committed major human rights abuses under the Communists. Good Communists made good liberal Democrats, by and large.

That is the thesis of the book. Although communism was vastly more ruthless, liberal democracy has an uncomfortable amount in common with it. The parallels merit investigation. Legutko outlines the correspondence in the realms addressed by his chapter structure

History

Utopia

Politics

Ideology

Religion

I note here a few thoughts that struck me as particularly noteworthy.

The idea that you were born with dignity is new. The traditional concept was that you require dignity by the way you behave in life. An innate "human dignity" possessed by all men is a new idea.

The idea of "human rights" that one acquires by simply being born is likewise new. The old notion with more one of quid pro quo. You get proportion to what you give. Nothing is free.

The way in which the concept of happiness" has morphed into pleasure is another of Legutko's topics. At the time the founding fathers wrote into the preamble to the Constitution "life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness" philosophers in Europe were still carrying on the question of the meaning of life that started with the Greeks. The worthwhile life was one which included virtue, service to the community, family, learning, and achieving to one's limits.

The historical notion of happiness has morphed into mere pleasure. Legutko points out that pleasure is fleeting. Even the most sublime, sex, is episodic it cannot be sustained at a constant level. Happiness is something more profound, the satisfaction of a life well lived. Modern man has lost sight of that. Legutko writes of anthropological minimalism," which means reducing man to mere appetites.

He writes that not even communism was able to politicize sex. Liberal democracy has done so with a vengeance. It has granted special status to women and gays – Legutko didn't mention transsexuals, though he should have – that give them power and privilege over history whites.

Communism and liberal democracy are creatures that must continue to grow. They must push their tentacles ever deeper into society. Schools, universities, the workplace, volunteer organizations and even families have been relentlessly politicized. The state has granted itself power to ruthlessly suppress what it doesn't like. Not mentioned but typical are Germany and Sweden forbidding homeschooling; forcing grade schoolers to shared toilets with transsexuals; forcing Christians to support abortion and birth control.

The ostracism that the politically incorrect face has become more and more severe. In Europe you can be jailed for questioning how many died in the Holocaust or whether or not ongoing Muslim immigration is a good idea. These examples are mine – Legutko tends to speak in generalities.

Legutko has rather obviously, one supposes consciously, omitted several lines of arguments from this discussion. One such thread would be cultural Marxism. He makes one mention of the Frankfurt school and two to Herbert Marcuse in about the 1950s but that is about it. He makes no mention of the ethnicities of those who worked most doggedly to undermine the traditional Christianity of the United States and Europe.

Legutko does not address declining fertility. The dogmas of liberal democracy that people doing almost everything except bearing children and raising them to be like their ancestors. In an evolutionary sense liberal democracy is bound to fail. It simply does not reproduce itself.

Legutko likewise does not discuss economics. In its failure to reproduce itself, liberal democracy is not producing taxpayers to fund the generous benefits that the voters have awarded themselves. The entire developed world is creaking under unsustainable debt as I write. The impending collapse of the current financial order will certainly present the liberal democracies with some vast challenges. It is quite likely to even undo them.

It has been a quarter of a century since communism fell. Though few saw the total collapse coming, the sclerotic nature of the decrepit communist society was a topic of common discussion. The sclerotic nature of the economy of Japan has been a topic of discussion for 30 years now. The similarities between Japan and Europe have been well noted. We should not be surprised if a financial catastrophe on the order of the Great Depression washes over the liberal democracies and forces a return to more sustainable, traditional values.

Here are some interesting passages from the book:

"... liberal democracy, as it has developed in recent decades, shares a number of alarming features with communism. Both are utopian and look forward to "an end of history" where their systems will prevail as a permanent status quo. Both are historicist and insist that history is inevitably moving in their directions. Both therefore require that all social institutions—family, churches, private associations—must conform to liberal-democratic rules in their internal functioning. Because that is not so at present, both are devoted to social engineering to bring about this transformation. And because such engineering is naturally resisted, albeit slowly and in a confused way, both are engaged in a never-ending struggle against enemies of society (superstition, tradition, the past, intolerance, racism, xenophobia, bigotry, etc., etc.) In short, like Marxism before it, liberal democracy is becoming an all-encompassing ideology that, behind a veil of tolerance, brooks little or no disagreement."

"Both communism and liberal democracy are regimes whose intent is to change reality for the better. They are—to use the current jargon—modernization projects. Both are nourished by the belief that the world cannot be tolerated as it is and that it should be changed: that the old should be replaced with the new. Both systems strongly and—so to speak—impatiently intrude into the social fabric and both justify their intrusion with the argument that it leads to the improvement of the state of affairs by "modernizing" it.

"Having armed himself with rights, modern man found himself in a most comfortable situation with no precedent: he no longer had to justify his claims and actions as long as he qualified them as rights. Regardless of what demands he would make on the basis of those rights and for what purpose he would use them, he did not and, in fact, could not lose his dignity, which he had acquired for life simply by being born human. And since having this dignity carried no obligation to do anything particularly good or worthy, he could, while constantly invoking it, make claims that were increasingly more absurd and demand justification for ever more questionable activities. Sinking more and more into arrogant vulgarity, he could argue that this vulgarity not only did not contradict his inborn dignity, but it could even, by a stretch of the imagination, be treated as some sort of an achievement. After all, can a dignity that is inborn and constitutes the essence of humanness, generate anything that would be essentially undignified and nonhuman? The dignity-based notion of human rights was thus both a powerful factor to legitimize a minimalist concept of human nature, and its legitimate

child. Moreover, it equipped modern anthropological minimalism with the instruments of self-perpetuation, the most efficient instruments of this kind ever devised in the history of the Western societies."

"The conservatives, who, in principle, should oppose the socialists and liberal democrats, quite sincerely argue that they, too, are open, pluralistic, tolerant, and inclusive, dedicated to the entitlements of individuals and groups, non-discriminatory and even supportive of the claims of feminists and homosexual activists. All in all, the liberal democrats, the socialists, and the conservatives are unanimous in their condemnations: they condemn racism, sexism, homophobia, discrimination, intolerance, and all the other sins listed in the liberal-democratic catechism while also participating in an unimaginable stretching of the meaning of these concepts and depriving them of any explanatory power. All thoughts and all modes of linguistic expression are moving within the circle of the same clichés, slogans, spells, ideas, and arguments. All are involved in the grand design of which those who think and speak are not Legutkos but with whose authorship they deeply identify, or—in case of doubt—from which they do not find strength or reasons enough to distance themselves."

And some worthwhile quotes from other writings:

"The EU's elites are unbending in their belief that "one has to be liberal in order to be respectable, that whoever is not a liberal is either stupid or dangerous, or both. the elites of the West, including those of the United States. Being liberal is the litmus test of political decency. This is today's orthodoxy. If you criticize it, or you're against it, you're disqualified." The world has shrunk and the liberal paradigm seems to be omnipresent."

"A liberal is somebody who will come up to you and tell you, 'I will organize your life for you. I will tell you what kind of liberty you will have. And then you can do whatever you like.' "

"We often say, half-jokingly and half-seriously, that now Poland may become a country to which people will defect"—people "from France, the Netherlands or Britain."

This is a five-star effort. There are many more gems in the book than one can possibly cite in a review.