

STATE OF EVIL
A Demand for Revolution

WITH OTHER ESSAYS

John Xavier

“The need for a new way of life becomes apparent.”

Kropotkin

State of Evil

WHEN ACTION IS NEEDED Resistance as a Moral Imperative

1. Liberty Introduced

Every slave has the right to kill their master. Why? Because everyone has a basic right to liberty and, accordingly, all the means at their disposal needed to achieve this. Given that, the same must also be true of our political systems. Everyone has the right to destroy a system which oppresses them. But that's not all. The ideals of justice and truth, in so far as we sincerely believe in them, impose obligations on us. If we really want to create a world in which these ideals prevail, any suppression or other injury they suffer will compel us to take action. To be aware of an atrocity and do nothing is to consent to it. Inaction in the face of evil participates in evil and the world we live in is full of evils. Under such circumstances there can only be one conscientious course of action. War. Incessant war. And war waged with the utmost ferocity.

Defending the right to personal liberty is clearly the primary concern of a free society. Liberty cannot be long safeguarded through defensive means though. A purely reactionary public will see the erosion of the laws that protect them and their own political power. As this decay worsens, it infects all areas of society until the fabric of the existing culture begins to unravel and revolution erupts or social collapse occurs. History shows that this is not only the cycle of things since the beginning of civilization, it's intensifying as time pushes forward, threatening to culminate in an irreparable disaster. Our destiny however remains ours to decide.

Whatever we desire from the world, we are compelled to choose but, in order to make any choice authentic, we must understand the true nature of our situation and the consequences of our actions. To advance the cause of liberty requires educating ourselves on what it means to be genuinely free and what the preservation of said freedom entails. For example we must be able to distinguish between the spheres of personal and social liberty while understanding how the former places limits on the latter. Out of this knowledge a criterion for our own political responsibilities will unfold.

2. The Role of Choice

It should be emphasized again that this is a moral question. Wherever values enter into our lives, we're confronted with moral situations since, even if the values at issue aren't preoccupied with explicitly moral concerns, still the matter of our commitment to said values brings us into the realm of moral responsibility. A person's morality furthermore emanates from the character of their individual self so no appeal to conscience can be persuasive if it doesn't ultimately have an impact on the individual which is more profound than competing urges to be immoral. The outcome here is very much decided by opposing influences. As such, this entails a dynamic hierarchy of values in which personal liberty provides an objective foundation. Regardless of what values the individual might have at a given time, these values must be formed by some process having its origin in the depths of their person. Arising from personal liberty then. No matter how confused someone is, their choices are still the ultimate determining factor in producing the values they subscribe to. Naturally, because values themselves are contingent on personal liberty, and because personal liberty is fundamental to all value creation, personal liberty is consequently itself of the highest value. All other values are subordinate to it since without it no valuation is even possible. Every achievement made by human beings had its beginning in the exercise of individual freedom, so accordingly the cultivation of this provides us with an objective moral basis.

The best society is one that distributes the opportunity for freedom of choice equally to all its members. This is not only because every individual has an equal right to make choices for themselves but also because doing so is the only way to activate the full creative potential of said individuals and so maximize their creative contribution to society as a whole. However, the corrupt elements within society, those whose selfish desires can only find satisfaction through the exploitation of others, will inevitably work against this. They're a minority among the populace who are twisted by the pathological ambition to have people subordinated to them in demeaning relationships. They wish to live at the expense of other human beings and, being possessed by such desires, are fundamentally enemies of freedom; their gratification depends on nothing less than the suppression of liberty. To the extent that someone is unconscious of the true nature of their own exploitive way of living, it's possible they can be converted to the values of liberty and justice; we are all born ignorant after all and so the significance of our own actions can easily escape us. If they're aware of the suffering they cause though, and are indifferent to this, they can only be destroyed. Moral appeals will have no power over them. They may not have any choice in this but then neither can we in our response.

3. Liberty in Society

This brings us to the problem of social liberty. Specifically in respect to how it's circumscribed by personal liberty. Many political ideologies and theorists have prioritized social ideals over the needs of individuals but doing so is clearly wrong; all of societies' merits are contingent on it providing more for the individual than the individual can provide for themselves on their own. This is the only basis for anyone forming any kind of pragmatic relationship. Hobbes rightly ascertained that the essence of society lies in an agreement analogous to some kind of social contract, however unspoken and subconscious it may be but, while this provides the basis for modern social theory, its real implications are generally ignored. And quite often deliberately. Because the truth has radical consequences here; if society can only be justified on foundations of voluntary relationship, then the legitimate rights of every individual and institution end where consent ends. In a world governed by as much deception as ours though, it can only be expected that an insight so lethal to falsity would be suppressed. Instinctively and insidiously.

Next we do well to ask whether the principle of consent is constrained in any way. That is to say, where does an appeal to consent lose validity? Fortunately the framework of personal liberty readily supplies an answer to this question; an individual cannot meaningfully withhold consent from others regarding conduct that protects someone else's personal liberty or doesn't infringe on their own. The instigator of an assault for example has no legitimate basis on which to protest the use of physical force by their intended target to defend themselves. More generally, the absolute rights of personal liberty are restricted to the consciousness of a person and their physical body. Over these the individual essentially has total authority; so freedom of thought and conscience, and freedom of movement and wellbeing. Moving along the spectrum from the private to the more public, certain recognized areas of private space like the interior of a home or place of business can be categorized as personal domains whose concessions to social liberty only begin where other persons enter them or they're used for purposes that affect the public. Beyond these now lies the realm of the public which can be divided into two primary categories; private property open to public use and the commonwealth, or that which belongs to all citizens equally. As before, each degree of public involvement increases the public interest and so the scope of consensus required. Yet liberty is always maximized.

To genuinely value one's own liberty inevitably means a feeling of responsibility for the liberty of others. If anything is sacred, liberty is sacred, because only through liberty is any kind of meaningful existence possible. So whatever social context is considered, its ideal will invariably consist in a state of being which encompasses the greatest amount of total freedom. Something which is furthermore only achieved by the equal distribution of freedom among its members since otherwise the necessary fundamental commitment to liberty itself is being contravened. No authority can possess wisdom in such abundance so as to be an adequate substitute to the mature individual for their own personal choice; let anyone who disagrees seriously consider their willingness to be a slave to another.

4. Oppressive Society

When liberty thrives, society is orderly; people respect each other's personal freedom. Conversely, when oppression dominates society, a kind of entropy corrupts things. Liberty then is natural and oppression degenerate. Or, to put it more clearly, liberty constitutes the innate core of all idealism and oppression is a political deformity interrupting the process of fulfilling this. For anything to be morally wrong it must be predicated on false inferences and oppression conforms to this expectation by trying to justify itself through hypocrisies; which then leads the oppressor to impose laws and advocate rules purely for others.

Whether or not a society is oppressive can't be determined simply by taking the world around us at face value. Many totalitarian regimes have existed where injustice was manifestly apparent but, far more often, the injustices of an oppressive society are hidden or disguised. Within the confines of their pathological ideals, the successful agents of oppression tend to be rational actors so this is unsurprising; it's far harder for the oppressed to resist or organize a counter offensive against their exploitation when the real nature of said exploitation is obscured from them. Sophisticated oppression then aspires to invisibility.

In so far as oppression has to hide itself, it tends to take root in ambiguity. Who can say for sure why a judge ruled one way or another, why a bank provided or declined a loan, why a politician voted for or against a given piece of legislation? The fairer society seems on the surface, the more effectively oppression can be orchestrated. Where people are conscious of being exploited, they're more likely to refuse to participate in the social structures the oppressor uses to further their own ambitions. A slave after all generally has to be guarded so they won't escape and their labor output will tend towards the bare minimum needed to evade punishment and injurious deprivation; an employee conversely who believes that integrity and hard work are rewarded will usually try to maximize their own labor output in the hope of personal gain. The situation is analogous to a casino; patrons bet more the more they think they can win and so the casino will adjust the odds of its own games to be as pragmatically unfair as possible; to maximize the likely amount of money that can be siphoned from said patrons. A sophisticated system of oppression likewise will feed the oppressed an assortment of lies so as to incentive them to behave fairly and optimistically, using the hopes of the oppressed against them. Here we see the essence of their hypocrisy; the oppressor creates games with rules they themselves refuse to follow. Or, more literally, they promote social expectations which they do not abide by. The oppressor says everyone should earn whatever it is they get and then they conceal their own thieving under the cover of this rancid piety. No compromise then can be made with people so deficient in integrity. A true liberation of the oppressed entails the oppressor's destruction.

Given the impossibility of hiding oppression entirely, those engaged in the business of oppressing the masses will use diversion and distortion to conceal the real sources of oppression and their own culpability. So called "representational democracy" is an excellent system to use in this regard. Elected executives and legislatures can be directed to serve the oppressor's schemes until the public outrage and lack of confidence in them reaches dangerous levels; then

the elected are disposed of and a new assembly of treacherous politicians is delegated the task of swindling people with calculated promises of fidelity and reform. And given how effective this is, it can come as no surprise that the same methods are used in other areas of society. In the corporate world for example, a CEO can easily be used as a puppet by leading shareholders for some socially unpopular enterprise and then dispensed with to protect the company's continued value to said shareholders. In fact, given the extremely fluid nature of capital in the global economy, corporations themselves can be sacrificed by the wealthy in the service of class warfare. The way a corporation shields its owners from liability means the public can be left with no one to hold accountable regardless of the magnitude and evidence of the crimes the corporation was used to commit. Like a squid fleeing behind a cloud of ink, the abstraction of an abandoned company is left behind to be punished while the individual's responsible transfer their capital elsewhere and evade all personal repercussions.

Oppression as such is a destabilizing force in society. Not only does it create resentment and frustration among those it exploits, it invariably erodes the fabric of social cooperation. People are generally slow to catch on to their being the victims of mass deception but, once they understand what's happened to them, a deep and lasting mistrust will result. Then either they'll engage in the same behavior they've just received a lesson in or they'll become cynical about participating in things and deprive society of the full contribution they could make. In each case, society as a whole suffers. Although it's unlikely they'd care much if they understood the consequences of their actions, what the oppressor generally fails to realize is that their behavior undermines the society which they themselves depend on for their welfare. It's like the branches of a tree strangling its own roots; while this may gratify the branch in the short term, it is unsustainable over time. Yet it is those with the greatest wealth and privilege, those who benefit most from society, who do the most to bring about its ruin.

5. Signs of Decay

In the section introducing liberty, it was asserted that societies have political lifecycles which move towards collapse or revolution. Setting aside specific questions regarding these for the moment, the matter of what we can look for as far as indicators of this process being underway is worth considering. Of course the exact manner in which a society decays is contingent on its unique characteristics; that said, regardless of how it does transpire, the trends which bring this about will fall within certain general categories and these can be used to assess the condition of our own society. Anyone who can read a sky can see a storm coming.

Since human relationships are grounded in trust, at minimum simply being able to expect reasonable behavior from others, the loss of such trust in the prevailing culture has to be regarded as ominous. The question of whether collapse or revolution is more imminent will depend here on what part of society corruption has taken root in; when only those who hold positions of eminence are the ones primarily responsible for corruption, revolution is more likely. When corruption has become a pervasive phenomenon though, when suspicion and paranoia govern public discourse and people succumb to the habit of distrusting each other automatically,

then the threat of widespread social collapse must be acknowledged. The third possibility implied here, an impossibility really, that a state might exist in which those in power were virtuous and the masses corrupt, is so absurd it hardly needs to be condemned. Corruption spreads from the top down because group behaviors are determined by their leaders. Leaders set an example which the rest of the group generally strive to emulate; this is true regardless of the kind of behavior in question. Only when the eminent hide their true nature can any disparity emerge between them and the rest of society. That said, it has long been the favorite opinion of the exploiter to believe that those they take advantage of are worse than them since they can use this to justify their exploitation. The language of greed has no word for shame.

The distribution of resources and a society's attitudes towards consumption are obviously matters of great importance in the welfare of said society. Ideally, all the legal and economic structures in place will incentivize productivity and creativity by rewarding these; people who contribute the most to society will be most accommodated and only those who prove themselves to be best at using public resources in the public interest will be entrusted with doing so. Above all, a system should not be tolerated in which one class of individuals is allowed to live in luxury beyond the level they themselves contribute; not only does this reward people for not contributing, it punishes those who do since the latter must now work to gratify the former at personal expense. While there is a moral obligation for society to take care of the necessities of those unable to provide for themselves for whatever reason, no one should be burdened by the avarice of others. People won't long endure being exploited like this either and so the more such a reality becomes apparent, the greater the instability in society becomes. Evidence of social decay in this respect can therefore be gauged according to a simple principle; social decay is prevalent in proportion to how incommensurately people are rewarded. When those who work hard, live honestly, and create things of value are rewarded, society thrives. When those who delegate and lie and thief are rewarded, society degenerates.

The divorce of merit from compensation is actually part of a deeper erosion of values. Civilization only progresses through the seriousness of human enterprise; the vast difficulties involved in solving major problems and making fundamental advances means that only when people have substance and character and purpose are they capable of fulfilling this. What is truly valued will determine the ultimate unfolding of events in the context of society; where the loss of real values prevails then nothing good can come. What is required consequently is a culture of virtues; where a culture is instead devoted to triviality and empty indulgence it has no future. What is needed is a valuing of vitality with an accompanying consciousness of this and the willingness to take action; without all of these, we lay the foundations for our own ruin.

To summarize a little and point out some things that weren't explicitly addressed, the following are signs of decay; increasingly reckless exploitation, a cult of consumption, lack of meritocracy, normalization of fraud, institutional contempt for the law, apathy to virtue, glorifying trivialities, the erosion of personal sacrifice, pathological abstraction, artificial dependency, antagonism towards the working class, celebrating the grotesque through spectacle, general desensitization, economic segregation, a decrease in substantive discourse, and the privatization of public resources. All reveal a critical deterioration occurring.

6. The Necessity of Action

When confronted with the specter of widespread social problems, a majority of people will feel overwhelmed at the immensity of these challenges. This fact helps account for the prevalence of exploitation throughout history; even those with the best intentions are easily discouraged in the face of the apparently inconsequential impact made by individual concrete actions. After all, who's going to make any effort to bail a sinking ship if all they have to use is their bare hands? Even the degree of impending danger becomes irrelevant when nothing can be done about it. Fortunately, this attitude is wrong; unfortunately, it's deeply entrenched in the public consciousness and nothing can be achieved until it's been addressed. Worse still, the problems which inspire the most resignation tend to be those that are most fundamental and therefore the most serious in the long run. Left alone, there's no natural force which will intervene to counter these so the situation can only deteriorate.

We have to look to ourselves for a solution here. A maturity of spirit and political enlightenment in such circumstances will find its truest expression only in the voluntary embracing of social responsibility by the populace as a whole. The welfare of society can't be the exclusive business of a small party of insiders if democracy is going to exist in anything but name only. Taking responsibility is of the greatest imperative and this means action. Not symposiums, not marches, not petitions, but direct political action that actually transfers power away from the control of the corrupt and into the possession of a sufficiently prepared public. Without this, any progress made will be superficial and easily undone; how many times for example have financial crises led to legislation being passed which is then diluted and or repealed at a later date? Progress that isn't permanent is illusory and likewise actions that don't yield lasting achievements aren't genuine actions at all. Wisdom though can only come from experience so the people must act first, acting out of conscience and hope, and learn from the consequences of this. In the realm of political education there can be no substitute for fighting on behalf of a righteous cause. Nothing can improve us more either.

7. The Individual as a Redeeming Agent

"We live in a nightmare of falsehoods, and there are few who are sufficiently awake and aware to see things as they are. Our first duty is to clear away illusions and recover a sense of reality."

– Berdyaev

Revolutions can only be achieved when many are united in a purpose together, but they also begin in the hearts of individual people. In fact this is why all revolutions up to this point have failed to fulfill the visions behind them for final social change; the English, American, French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions for example all, despite different initial characteristic and idealistic ambitions, quickly succumbed to similar systems of oligarchic exploitation. What the

revolutionaries in these cases attempted was to fundamentally change the direction their societies were taking without adequately addressing the ultimately decisive factors; their own characters and that of the populace. The former has priority of course since people who are defective in character certainly can't provide the necessary leadership in this regard. The principle at work here was summarized quite adeptly in ancient times. To paraphrase; *remove the splinter from your own eye before you go looking for the speck in someone else's.*

Those who would serve the cause of liberty must first cultivate within themselves the virtues of someone capable of doing so. They would do best to free themselves of all delusions and false desires, so the virtue they must obtain from the start is a ruthless passion for the truth. With this they can eliminate their own hypocrisies and misconceptions while also guarding themselves against erring inferences about the world. There is no power without truth; the victim of a lie is a slave to a false reality. And that is already a kind of death; the oppressor as such plunges their initial attack with the intent to murder the spirit of those they oppress.

A people who've been defeated in their minds are totally defeated. No reform or progress is possible in an atmosphere of pessimism; one of the most important tasks for the revolutionary then is to combat this attitude and awaken society to the possibility of fundamental political change. Again, they must first develop the needed transformation within themselves and then find a way to use it to inspire others. It has to be acknowledged that doing so is incredibly difficult and, on top of overcoming the already prevailing inertia in a politically pessimistic society, the revolutionary will have to contend with all the resources of the oppressive establishment arrayed against them as soon as their efforts begin to have any effect. Success then requires favorable conditions and these are beyond contriving. With the right circumstances and a generous amount of luck however, the individual can, like a scrap of lit kindling, ignite the masses.

8. Finding the Moral Self

It's one thing to recognize that fundamental social change requires that people make individual commitments to personal transformation; it's another to outline what this would look like and how it could be achieved. If we allow ourselves to be truly guided by our own ideals however – these still being liberty and justice – they should provide us with a clear enough direction that we can begin developing methods capable of turning them into realities. So long as our ambitions are clarified, they'll impose their own demands on us; it's uncertainty really that thwarts ambition. Our task then must start by answering all the questions that are relevant to what we hope to achieve; so what do we want? The transformation of the individual right? Their liberation from falsity, their empowerment through the acquisition of new ideals, and their ability to fulfill these with the strength of their own character.

We are born into a poisoned atmosphere; falsehoods like smog are continuously billowing out of every mouthpiece of the establishment. The extent of the deception is so great that the dishonesty is often perpetrated without even a consciousness of the original fraud; people regurgitate the lies they are fed throughout their lives, repeatedly reinforcing the apparatus of

untruths that allow for the very system that oppresses them to endure. In such a world, fresh air will naturally be greeted with paranoia. It being alien alone will make it suspect. Only in the upper echelons of the ruling hierarchy and the farthest outer fringes of the resistance will radical truths find immediate recognition; among the former as anathema, among the latter as salvation. Those who would save themselves then, those who crave freedom from all forms of oppression, must genuinely empty their minds of every preconception. It's not enough to simply clear ourselves of a specific false ideology; the beliefs that allowed for the adoption of such an ideology, and indeed the desires which provided the basis for such beliefs to take hold, must all be eliminated. The individual needs to completely rid themselves of everything corrupt within them before they can begin to reconstruct themselves. Otherwise their aspiration to liberty will be sabotaged by the lingering corruption within them perverting this. What is required here is obviously an extreme commitment to the truth but this shouldn't be discouraging. Anyone who truly hopes to be free, to purify themselves of the illusions that hold them in bondage, that suppress their real potential and steal the life from them they ought to have, already has it within themselves to make this happen because that spirit, that hunger, by itself is a power greater than all the lies in existence and, once it's fully awakened, there's nothing that can overpower it.

What next then? What values should the individual try to cultivate within themselves after they've cleared away the beliefs and desires that serve their oppression? What can make them into moral individuals capable of advancing the cause of justice? It may come as a profound and wonderful surprise to discover that the very hope which led them to free themselves from the various falsehoods dominating their lives itself contains the essence of all the ideals they should now strive after; like a ray of white light encompassing all the colors of the spectrum, so too the desire for liberty by itself is made up of all the political ideals needed for its fulfillment. Moral fanaticism for example is critical here because only a people who are firm in their convictions can hope to have the clarity and tenacity needed to bring fruition to a revolution; and said commitment to morality is already expressed in the preceding willingness to renounce the existing corruption within oneself. Likewise, for the values of self-sufficiency with regards to our personal responsibilities, preference for material austerity, pragmatic flexibility, the passion for truth and knowledge, bravery, tough mindedness, fortitude in the face of death, empathy, and generosity; all these values contribute to the fulfillment of liberty and so reside within it in some ultimate sense. That which comes from the seed of liberty is itself liberty and can only have as its purpose the continuous spread of liberty. Let us then allow for liberty to be reborn in us in all aspects of our lives; this alone will be enough to provide for us.

In order for our new ideals to be permanently incorporated within us though, they must be given time to take root and flourish. And they must be nurtured. Since time isn't something we can artificially manipulate, our responsibility then resides in supporting our ideals in a manner that provides them with the greatest chance of thriving. This will be done, and can only be done, through practice. It is incumbent on the individual then to seek out opportunities to exercise their convictions in a way that challenges them to live up to these. Just as building muscle mass and athletic skill requires continuous training and trial, so too transforming ourselves in accordance with our ideals demands repeated exposure to opposition because only in the act of confronting serious difficulties can the character required here actually be formed. Just as the metal in a

katana blade has to be folded and beaten over and over again in order for it to be imbued with durability, so too the human spirit needs a period of tempering by adversity, an overcoming of increasingly strenuous predicaments, for it to reach its full potential. The moral potential within everyone waits to be unleashed but even where it emerges it can soon be buried again by worldly forces and internal weaknesses. Consider for example the trait of generosity, essential to the development of a true soldier of liberty since this will unite them most profoundly with their revolutionary comrades and with oppressed people as a whole; to simply desire generosity is not enough. Being effectively generous often demands pragmatic acumen. After all, many people give to charity simply to assuage their own guilt and this kind of generosity, although not wholly without merit, does little to make permanent change happen. No act of genuine kindness should be looked down upon but, if we really want to do good in this world, we should take care to make sure our actions are maximized to that effect. Again, this is why practice is important. Only by a continuous engagement with the world can we hope to acquire any wisdom from it. We must look to experience for enlightenment or, as Shakespeare would say, "*The whips and scorns of time.*" These instruct us. These bestow us with virtues.

9. Hope and Meaning

Obviously it's easier for anyone who isn't being utterly crushed by oppression to choose to not fight against it. If you belong to one of the more fortunate groups of the exploited and you are only unfairly taxed a little by those in power, then you have a strong incentive not to do anything. To engage in open resistance on the other hand and take up the cause of revolution means you will become an enemy to individuals of terrible malevolence and you will be singled out by them for retribution. The masters play for keeps and they are very talented at this. Why do it then? Why fight? This is a question everyone has to answer for themselves but even those who are relatively well off within the existing social order would do a disservice to themselves if they never gave serious thought to their capitulation. Is it really better to be comfortable in circumstances that deprive people of the liberty necessary for them to fulfill their true potential? Some may find contentment as slaves in silks but they are fools if they think they sacrifice nothing. Their peace is bought at the cost of a confinement of their spirit in a prison; they trade the full measure of their hope for a reduced indulgence by authority and let the meaning of their lives be subordinated to the whims of a hostile regime.

The urge for safety is the most common reason those who have liberty abandon it. Often a cunning enemy will come along to take advantage of a desperate situation and convince the people they need to give up their own power to protect themselves; anyone who does this though, whatever their excuse, can only have evil intent. Just as a parent facilitates their child's growth by giving them increasing freedom and responsibility, so too the moral obligation of those who have power is to strive to empower others, not to personally accumulate it. Doing so goes against the natural direction of progress and is by itself proof of malevolence; we can use this then to identify our true friends and enemies. Also, we must remain conscious of it as a criterion for our own actions. All sincere political friendships then involve mutual strengthening; conversely when individuals or groups seek power at the expense of another, this is enmity.

Most people are socially conscientious. They seek only their own liberty and the natural opportunities that arise from this. It's always been a small minority of individuals meanwhile, typically belonging to some form of plutocracy or another, whose ambitions involve the mass exploitation of their fellow human beings; however, because of their intensely developed sense of class consciousness and the carefully cultivated group organizational superiority, political sophistication, and ruthlessness that result from this, individuals of this sort have managed to stay in control for almost the entire course of civilization. In fact, their power relative to the masses has been increasing as of late as technological developments proceed to funnel more power into fewer hands. The dire reality of this trend though, its threat of a permanent subjugation of the many to a tyrannical few, can actually be a source of hope because finally a danger has arrived in which the masses must act or risk being utterly overwhelmed. There is a fight on the horizon that will decide the fate of humanity for all time and everyone must now play a part in this. Choice defines the essence of our nature and meaning of our lives, we have no existence except through liberty, and the world of today confronts us with a choice equally brutal in its clarity and significance; either we choose to take up the cause of human liberation whole heartedly or we acquiesce to a world of permanent despotism.

"Destroy the seed of evil or it will grow into your ruin."

– Aesop

10. Sacrifice Above All

If there's nothing in your life worth dying for then you live in the worst sort of poverty. A parent's life has meaning when they'll die for their children; a soldier's life has meaning when they'll die for their country; a philosopher's life has meaning when they'll die for the truth; what would you die for? Many of us are probably hard pressed to find something in our own lives more important to us than self-preservation. As such we may prolong our existence but to what end? What kind of quality can such lives even have? Mere longevity doesn't increase something's value so a life that only adds length to its own mediocrity is certainly missing something about life. An eternity of timid safety after all would itself be a kind of hell.

Not only does the willingness to die give us a criterion for determining what has real value, it also provides a means for assessing the vitality of a society. The welfare of any society runs parallel to the amount of sacrifice its members are prepared to make for it; their devotion emanating from some promise said society holds. This can mean many things – justice, prosperity, security, etc – but, regardless of the specifics, it always means a vision of a better future. Whether we are considering individual groups or whole civilizations, their vitality rests in the degree of their inspirational power, in their capacity to move people to greater effort and creativity on behalf of the common good. Clearly it is only through this that any society can thrive and, when the opposite is true, when the existing social ideals are no longer capable of inspiring socially productive action, a society will inevitably wither.

When generations of corruption and fraud and exploitation have eroded the public's trust in their social institutions and political representatives, the end of a society is near. Those in power will subsequently have to resort, with greater frequency, to deception and acts of criminality just to keep the public complacent but, each time they do so, they only ensure there'll be a greater eruption to come. Here they shut the flood gates of the dam to preserve themselves from a deluge but this only guarantees that the waters build and build; meaning eventually they have to break free. So too the revelation about the truth of a corrupt society becomes increasingly apocalyptic the longer it's suppressed; meaning either revolution or collapse and each being proportional to the tension that's been built. This crisis however represents the greatest of moral opportunities; a chance to unleash a human potential that can only exist in mortal jeopardy. Nothing after all can inspire a passion for justice like the horrors of injustice and so nothing like oppression can do more to forge true revolutionaries. We need not even depend here on ostentatious violence from the regime in power; the insidiousness of their motives and the grotesqueness of the deceit will be sufficient to awaken outrage. All that's needed is that they're denounced and exposed to the public, but doing so means the person devoted to liberty must put themselves within reach of the oppressor's retribution.

This emphasizes the fact that, beyond sacrifice being the foundation of social vitality, it's also immensely important in the fulfillment of individual liberty. The voluntary choice to die is indeed the highest expression of liberty on account of the fact it expresses a total overcoming of the world's hold on the self – the truest realization of freedom then. The will to die for a mission represents nothing less than the culminating passion of an ideal and its ultimate dedication. Whether or not we should be prepared to give up our lives for any specific cause however depends on what it is we genuinely want to bring into being. Our ideals as such tell us the proper circumstances of when we should be prepared to sacrifice ourselves; we need only find something that can satisfy them. This however will always take the form of a higher realization of liberty because, no matter what we pursue, it's liberty itself that's striving and doing so to unleash itself in full. Likewise, what always holds it back is a lack of courage. As long as fear remains our master, we will never be free. To contend with our own mortality in a worthy cause then is the greatest hope we can aspire to; if we survive we'll have fulfilled the potential for life within us and, if we die, we die at our own liberty. We die as our best selves.

THE WORLD IN OUR TIME

Capitalism, Exploitation, and History

1. Class Warfare

In ancient Egypt it was the pharaonic dynasties, in Rome the patricians, in medieval Europe the nobility, and in other places and other times others but, regardless of the era or society considered, there have always been those who elevated themselves above their fellow human beings and worked together to exploit the people they collectively condemned as inferior. That class warfare has been a major social factor throughout the entirety of human history is obvious so the prevailing silence regarding it in mainstream culture hints at its continued presence; increased class consciousness after all can only serve to undermine a system of class based oppression. Clearly though the world is much more sophisticated now than it's ever been so membership in a social class is less likely to be explicit than it used to be and the exact means through which exploitation transpires will be similarly obscure. Convoluted even, because the harder to penetrate the more powerful. To understand class warfare as it exists now we must first establish the nature of class warfare in general and use this in an analysis of the present. The challenge we face is not so much that of things themselves being hidden from us but rather in discovering the true significance of events we've come to regard as ordinary.

Perhaps the best example of class warfare in history, or at least one that blatantly reveals the essence and true character of class conflict, is the relationship that existed between the Spartans and Helots. Spartan society was organized on the basis of war, Spartan men were

prepared from birth for military service and, like other military classes such as knights and samurai, this consumed most of their time and energy; so just as it was with these two groups, Spartans required others to farm and perform menial services for them. However, because Helots, unlike European serfs and Japanese peasants, didn't belong to the same ethnic group as their overlords, there was no need to disguise the ongoing class conflict. This also meant that there was no significant moral restraint to diminish the brutality of said conflict; the predictable result being that the Spartans waged open war on the Helots. Not haphazardly of course, that would have jeopardized their agricultural output. No, the Spartans declared war on the Helots annually and used this to exterminate troublesome individuals, to prevent the hoarding of arms or building of fortifications, and to keep the Helots in a state of abject subordination. Although the Spartans were eventually overwhelmed by more powerful external groups, these groups were basically organized on similar forms of exploitation and, despite all the social progress that's been made, the same class antagonism still continues in our own era. Today the conflict can be understood as consisting of two groups: the capitalist class and the working class.

A capitalist is someone who derives the majority of their income from the management of capital and a working class individual is someone who derives most of their income from the labor or services they provide. Naturally this leaves a large variety of economic situations people can be in which don't exactly fit these categories but, for the purposes of the current political analysis, those are the only categories that need to be considered. This is because the question of oppression, of whether a society is oppressive and, if so, how oppression is sustained in it, is a question that only needs to address the basic power structure in a society. Who has control? How is that control used? Who is exploited? And these three questions are readily answered; the capitalists have control, they use this control to steal from the labor of others, and the people who are most stolen from are the working class. Of course the defenders of capitalism will say that people who receive the greatest benefits from capitalism are simply being rewarded for their hard work and ingenuity and that's not entirely untrue; it is however irrelevant. Thieves and charlatans can also exert themselves and be clever but that doesn't give them a right to exploit others. If our economy is fundamentally dishonest, if the social relationships its institutions establish depend on the exploitation of people, then a state of class warfare exists and those who are being assaulted have a right to defend themselves. To do this however they will first need to understand how it is they're being attacked.

The general purpose of oppression is to keep people in a state of subordination so they can be exploited. Naturally some of those who oppress others will derive sadistic satisfaction from this and will also use oppression to gratify their appetite here but, as a sociological phenomenon, oppression has primarily economic causes. Most individuals are perfectly happy living with moderate wealth; as long as their basic needs are taken care of and they have a few luxuries to enjoy they'll be content. Because they desire relatively little they are entirely able to satisfy themselves through their own labor. Even in the advanced capitalist nations of today, the consumption of the majority is fairly commensurate with their own productive capacity. It makes sense after all that the natural appetites of a human being would be proportional to their personal ability to satisfy these. Only a few people aren't like this. These people have pathological desires that are some combination of the following: they don't want to earn their livelihood and

they want more than they could ever provide for themselves on their own. The corruption of the former is easily appreciated but the perverse nature of the latter is obscured due to generations of indoctrination. The pathology of aspiring to things that require using the labor of others was normalized because it was only characteristic of the oppressor while the unwillingness to earn one's own livelihood occurs across all classes and had to retain its negative quality so it could be discouraged. Think about what it means though to want to build a pyramid for example. It means large numbers of people are going to have to haul massive stones from a quarry to satisfy someone else's desires. And it's not the sort of labor anyone wants to do so they're going to have to be coerced into it through some kind of leverage; usually either deprivation or violence. This is where the oppression becomes necessary; in order to have a labor force to satisfy its ambitions and sustain its affluence, the exploiting class must keep large numbers of people in a state of fear, debt, and dependency. Such a state of course is manufactured contrary to the will of the people and as such can only exist through the subversion of democracy. A system that's built then to organize society has to function as an instrument of class warfare while at the same time, to be most effective, it must maintain the illusion of justice.

When a sophisticated system of oppression implements a policy to exploit the masses it will present this as if it were a public good; the best way to get people to take poison after all is to convince them that it's medicine for an ailment they already have. The USA PATRIOT Act provides a notable example of this. At other times though the negative consequences of one of their actions can't be disguised so it'll have to be presented as if it were a general disaster occurring by accident. The 2008 Financial Crisis is an instance of this; characterized as a failure in the mainstream media that necessitated giving its perpetrators billions of dollars, an alternative explanation is that it was a completely successful plan to destroy wealth accumulated by the working class in order to keep them in a state of subordinate desperation while at the same time redistributing their saved wealth to the ruling class through asset confiscation and the bailout. And so it would follow that periodic economic depressions are in truth acts of class warfare comparable in their purpose to the annual wars waged by the Spartans against the Helots. If we reconsider past history and critically evaluate the news from this perspective, the world as we know it drastically changes. What was once innocuous becomes insidious and the true peril of our condition is revealed. We are at war and our enemy goes by the name of Capitalism.

2. What is Capitalism?

People who defend capitalism by extolling the virtues of the free market have no idea what they're talking about. Capitalism can exist without free markets and free markets can exist without capital; they're in no way correlated. In fact, in every capitalist society that's ever existed, markets have always been highly regulated. But the conflation of capitalism and freedom is no accident; it's something that's been deliberately orchestrated as part of a public propaganda campaign whose purpose was to protect a system of exploitation. The goal has been to place capitalism beyond critical examination so that its true nature wouldn't be revealed. Because capitalism isn't benign; the reality is that it's inherently evil. Capitalism itself corrupts those who participate in it and this is evident as soon as we understand how it actually works.

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