Stalking the Therapeutic State

The Strange Death of Marxism: The European Left in the New Millenium, by Paul Edward Gottfried (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005). (SDM)

Multiculturalism and the Politics of Guilt: Toward a Secular Theocracy, by Paul Edward Gottfried (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002). (MPG)

After Liberalism: Mass Democracy in the Managerial State, by Paul Edward Gottfried (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). (AL)

Where are we today, and how did we get here? The political, social, and moral world around us is very different from what most adult Westerners remember from their younger days. Older accounts of our political life, that it is based on the will of the people or negotiations among interest groups, no longer ring quite true, while newer slogans like "tolerance" conceal more than they reveal. To most of us it is not clear what has happened or why. How did "inclusiveness" become the highest virtue? Ordinary sexual morality bigotry? What could "celebrating diversity" possibly mean, when to celebrate a thing is to celebrate its special and particular qualities? And why does "pluralism" mean that everything has to be the same?

The owl of Minerva flies at dusk, so new developments are always something of a mystery. Nonetheless, the political order now ascendant has special features that make its nature and

meaning particularly difficult to understand. It claims to be democratic while treating popular cohesion as oppressive and the understandings that order popular discussion as "deeply rooted social stereotypes" that are presumptively illegitimate. It justifies itself by combining condemnation of the past, and fear of its return, with shifting claims of principled continuity that are summed up in phrases like "the living Constitution." Most basically, perhaps, it rules by pretending not to rule. We are given to understand that the essence of government is caring. It is simply here to serve us, by promoting our interests, looking after our well-being, and keeping us from hurting each other. The role of compulsion becomes invisible, and with it the possibility of opposition that is not simply misunderstanding, psychological disorder, or arbitrary violence.

Implicit denial that government rests on force must rely on falsehood. The things treated as basic today are the opposite of what they claim to be. Tolerance is now bigoted, expertise mindless, equality elitist, freedom administered, and diversity rigidly uniform. The basic principles of today's political thought require obfuscation. John Rawls said that pluralism is the necessary result of democratic institutions, Max Horkheimer that we are living through a "narrowing of rationality."[1] The two comments relate to the same state of affairs. A great many things necessary for carrying on life are not decidable by the scanty resources reason and discussion are now thought to provide. As a result, public peace is thought to depend on avoiding basic questions that lead to conflicts that cannot be resolved. Such questions must be answered silently and by default, before they can even be raised. Liberal society has therefore developed features—suppression of distinctions, multiplication of distractions, hardening of political moralism, professionalization of discussion—that keep serious questions from arising.

Liberal political theory conceals the necessity for decision and the exercise of power. Since it presumes reason can say very little it resolves issues using arbitrary principles that pretend to make no assertions. John Rawls, for example, has articulated a

way of suppressing fundamental disputes by forcing a very few highly abstract principles, said to involve only simple reasonableness, to settle all basic political and social issues.[2] He resolves questions like the nature of the good by pretending to leave them undecided. Schemes such as his bear little relation to ordinary ways of looking at things, and their formulation and application is a highly specialized business. Political fundamentals and their ever-ramifying implications thus become the special concern of a complex of judges, academics, and other professionals whose position as functionaries requires them to understand and apply the principles consistently enough to preserve the appearance of objectivity. The people can only do what they are told, since they are not experts and their participation would disorder the logic of the governing doctrine. A theory that claims to develop and apply democratic principle thus comes to justify the abolition of actual self-government.

Not everyone accepts all aspects of the political and moral understandings now ascendant, but they thoroughly dominate respectable discussion and public policy. Current views of knowledge and rationality make them difficult to contest. People today play down the individual, informal and transcendent aspects of knowledge, and identify it with public testability, expert consensus and the ability to achieve goals. As a result, the truth present in transcendent faith and nonrationalized tradition becomes invisible. Serious public affairs come to depend ever more heavily on formalized public knowledge, and thus the word of experts. Further, since knowledge is thought to be power then thinkers become indifferent to speculative truth: what matters at bottom is getting what you want. If the academic and media institutions that define what counts as true are allied with other centers of power then in the absence of concern for speculative truth they adjust their interpretations and conclusions to the needs of the governing alliance of which they are part.

In such a situation, it becomes all but impossible to criticize dominant understandings in any fundamental way and seem rational. The experts who occupy the positions of authority in the

formal public institutions that now order social life will say you are wrong and do not understand the issues. How can you reasonably reject what they say? And in any case, the current notion of reason in ethics is that the good is simply what people want and the just simply equality, anything else would be an arbitrary imposition, so how could the goal of political, social, and moral order be anything but maximum equal satisfaction of preferences? Since the outlook now dominant takes that and technical rationality as its guideposts, it seems that no one could reject it without choosing oppression and irrationality.

To be conservative in the traditionalist sense is nonetheless to reject the views now dominant. It is to recognize that not everything can be formalized and rationalized, and that the habits and understandings that grow up among a people and attract their attachment are indispensable to social, moral, and political order. Conservatism thus stands for tradition and faith in a way that appears irrational today given conventions of public discussion that demand explicitness and rational universality in serious matters.[3] To remain true to their views, conservatives must therefore put themselves at odds with current public understandings and authorities. That creates severe problems for them. They do not like theorizing, and have trouble dealing with a situation in which they cannot accept established institutions and practices on their own terms. They prefer to be loyal to their society and its institutions and use existing practice as a guide.

It has therefore been difficult for conservatives to respond coherently to the progress of liberalism. They alternate between outrage at liberalism as it evolves and attempts to restore inner equilibrium by telling themselves that at bottom all must be well. Many believe that their country must always be good. As a result, they are likely to treat things like political correctness or suppression of recognition of the family as a distinct and fundamental social institution as temporary excesses that will go away with the aid of common sense, ridicule, and perhaps a few simple measures that no doubt will be adopted when people realize what is going on. Nonetheless, such things in general do not go away but only go

farther. When that happens conservatives are at a loss and end by either pretending nothing has happened or treating the new *status quo* as a permanent condition that must be accepted and may not be so bad after all. By that time some greater outrage will have come up that seems more pressing and makes earlier enormities seem tolerable by comparison.

To deal with our situation in a more coherent way, and avoid a continuation of what at bottom has been a uniform string of defeats, something different is needed. Conservatism is concerned with traditional habits and understandings not just because they are familiar but because they make goods available that can not otherwise be had. Its concern is with principles of order that were once settled but are now under attack and treated as discredited because they are oriented toward something other than technique, satisfaction, and equality, and so are irrational and oppressive from the standpoint now publicly accepted. It follows that conservatism cannot simply be based on what is established, because destruction of traditional habits and understandings has itself become an established institution. To defend and advance the things they care about conservatives need to become more philosophical and analytical. They must understand established beliefs and institutions better than those things understand themselves. They must, in a sense, become radical.

Identifying our situation

Conservatives need an understanding of the political and social situation, and of social process and function, that is independent of the liberal self-understandings and self-justifications now dominant. To attain such an understanding requires historical and comparative study of the current state of affairs: when, where, and how it arose, what it grew out of, its bases, strengths and weaknesses, and how it is affected in different settings. In these three books Paul Gottfried does an enormous amount to advance that study. They should be read by anyone who wants to understand the political and moral order now dominant from a perspective other than that of its promoters.

The books take an historical and multinational approach that brings together a diversity of materials unknown to most American conservatives and permit a survey of the terrain here and in Europe from several vantage points. Especially useful for Americans are the discussions of managerial and therapeutic liberalism in Europe, where entitlements came in earlier than here but therapeutic initiatives mostly later, and the prehistory of the current regime on both sides of the Atlantic. Each volume pursues the inquiry in a different setting. The first, *After Liberalism*, gives an overall view of the nature and development of what currently counts as liberalism, emphasizing its origins in mass democracy and in the growth of entitlements and the administrative state. It also emphasizes the tendencies, such as the decline of self-government in favor of the ideology and practice of pluralism, that have made liberalism today so much at odds with what was classically so called that in the author's view it is misleading to call it by the same name. Finally, it raises the possibility of a populist alternative to the managerial regime under which we now live.

The second and third might have been called *"After Protestantism"* and "*After Marxism*." The former, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Guilt*, emphasizes the evolution and refinement of the managerial regime, its turning toward less direct forms of control, and its change of emphasis from further extension of entitlements toward control of attitudes and behavior. It thus concentrates on the tendency of the current regime to treat social inequalities and maladjustments as impurities that must be cleansed or pathologies that must be cured, and in particular the use it makes of Protestant themes of guilt, public confession, purification, redemption, and the suffering victim. The author argues that the prevalence of such themes, along with the tendency toward individualism and away from communal institutions that can resist the state, helps account for the greater susceptibility of Protestant countries to the therapeutic form of managerial liberalism. He observes, however, that the crusade for a new and sensitized world that therapeutic liberalism proposes has not

been limited to the countries in which it seems most at home. Although it began primarily in America, the therapeutic regime has also triumphed throughout Western Europe, among Latin Catholics as well as Nordic Protestants, and the countries where it is established are now promoting it globally. Populists, especially in non-Protestant countries, may complain that the current version of "democracy" is radically opposed to the self-rule of actual peoples, but so far they have made little headway and their prospects are not encouraging.

The last of the three volumes, *The Strange Death of Marxism*, deals with postwar transformations of the European Left that have ended in something identical in substance to the therapeutic liberalism we have in America, but rhetorically more vicious and much more ready to use criminal law against its opponents. It depicts the post-war history of European Marxism as a series of attempts to give coherence to a movement composed of proletarians who wanted identity, solidarity, and material goods, and intellectuals who wanted to give themselves an orientation in life and place in the world. On the side of theory, those attempts early featured emphasis on materialist orthodoxy, then ventured into issues such as colonialism, consciousness, and epistemology, and finally settled on acceptance of postmodern capitalism, insistence on non-discrimination and lifestyle freedoms, and enforcement of reeducation and behavior modification to overcome ever more comprehensively a presumed fascist past. As a result of these changes the current European Left is no more concerned with classical Marxist themes such as class struggle and historical materialism than current American liberals with self-government and the limited state. It has lost social as well as intellectual continuity as proletarians have lost their class identity and the parties that once embraced them have become the parties of Euro-yuppies and ethnic and lifestyle minorities. Even so, old Leftist pieties remain and even gain in importance as the post-Marxist Left—including social democrats who opposed communism during the Cold War—continues to stake its legitimacy on antifascism and the evils of anti-communism.

The three volumes thus deal with the transformation of three major systems of thought, belief, and commitment that have shaped the modern world—liberalism, Protestantism, and Marxism—into what amounts to a single common outlook that proposes a single vision of government, society, and human life. They thus concern a major historical transformation. In spite of what were once profound oppositions that have been central to the modern history of the West, all significant traditions of public life, American constitutionalism and Catholic Christianity as well as those just mentioned, have dissipated, been suppressed, or transformed themselves into the same thing. In each case the tradition has turned into something substantively very different from what it was that nonetheless presents itself as the true representative of its former self and carries forward, with a radically changed practical meaning, many of its historic symbols. All roads have led to a sort of anti-Rome, allegiance to which, in the name of freedom and diversity, has become universally compulsory.

The author emphasizes the novel features of the current situation and the inadequacy of the usual descriptions presented by its official interpreters and most of its critics. It is not liberal or democratic in what was once the usual sense, since it neither limits government nor lets the people rule. It decisively subordinates the institutions of civil society, and even popular opinions, attitudes, and customs, to the state, which is responsible for their supervision, transformation, and reconstruction on inclusivist lines. It denies and indeed tries to destroy the connection between government and any particular people with common habits, outlook and loyalties that make possible effective common deliberation and participation in government. In the absence of a people capable of acting, democratic citizenship loses its connection to self-government and becomes at bottom a matter of eligibility for social benefits designed and administered by expert functionaries.

Democratic citizenship as now understood does, however, have duties. In particular, it includes what the Germans call *Verfassungspatriotismus*—active attachment to the regime and

its goals, and in particular readiness to reject aspects of social identity that cannot be reduced to categories the current regime finds necessary, such as money, formal qualifications, and bureaucratic position. The contemporary state is thus no mere provider of services or clearing house for the demands of interest groups. It rejects the lukewarm relativism of conservative legend. It stands in fact for a developing and ever more moralistic and absolute social project that enforces compliance with an ever-broadening range of demands that ultimately require the control and transformation of all social relations everywhere. Multiculturalism for the Serbs, the secular democratic state for the Arabs, and gender equity for the Afghans have become actual war cries. Nonetheless, the self-depiction of the present-day Western state as democratic and service-oriented, and the acceptance of that depiction by cooperative expert and media functionaries, make it seem to care only about giving people what they want and protecting them from oppression, while the universality of its demands allow it to present them as identical to rationality itself. (AL, 74) In spite of its aggressive imperialism it thus seems to disappear as a system of power and becomes impossible to question or resist as such.

The Nature of the Regime

Our current form of political society disarms criticism by claiming to be democratic and egalitarian and denying that what it exercises is power. Gottfried's response is to emphasize power and its exercise, and to look at the social functions and class interests behind institutions and ideology. His views have thus been described as "Marxism leaning right." (SDM, 145, n. 2) He denounces as misleading and useless a "social criticism which is suspended in mid-air" that features complaints about present-day life that emphasize cultural and spiritual issues but ignores institutions and the distribution of power. He believes that such criticism is dominant among neo-conservatives who denounce the cultural influence of New Class verbalists and foreign intellec-

tuals but ignore or make excuses for political institutions, as well as old Right traditionalists who write profusely about the "state of the soul" and "corruption of the imagination" but not about cruder realities. (AL, 72 ff., 139; MPG, 5, 81 ff.)

Like the Marxist Left, the author takes as his reference point bourgeois civilization, understood as the rule of the upper middle classes exercised in conjunction with inherited religious standards, cultural distinctions, and sex roles. He presents the therapeutic managerial order as the outcome of a long-term movement, which indeed still continues, against that civilization. In his view, the public order now dominant is largely an expression of the outlook, interests and power of the state and its hangers on, whose interests put them in opposition to the older cultural, religious, proprietary, and patriarchal authorities who dominated bourgeois life. (AL, 30-33; MPG, 9) The state is no longer a bourgeois state representing some class outside itself, but an independent actor dedicated to suppressing institutions such as the bourgeois family and the bourgeois conception of property. "Smash the state" has therefore become old-fashioned as a Leftist slogan. Those who favor relaxation of the traditional distinctions and disciplines that ordered bourgeois society try above all to induce government action. (MPG, 83)

Although he sympathizes with some lines of thought found among Marxist thinkers, the author has no general theory of historical change and prefers particular history and analysis to grand speculations. The causal and conceptual accounts he gives are often loose and varying, and sometimes point in different directions, qualities that make these books useful for exploring issues but often difficult to summarize. On some issues he speaks decisively, however. He attributes the managerial liberalism that replaced the bourgeois regime quite definitively to mass democracy, mass production and mass consumption. (AL, ch. 2-3) Those things have made entitlement programs absolutely central to politics in the West. Once the people at large had become the controlling force, and absolute scarcity less of a problem, politics became a matter of satisfying the simple and universal desires of

individuals in an efficient and reliable way. Above all, the liberated and enfranchised people wanted government to satisfy their material needs.

Classical liberals feared universal suffrage would mean socialism, since the people could vote themselves money from whomever had it. Instead it has meant that the people put themselves into the hands of caretakers. Consumerist mass democracy means a single-minded emphasis on individual material comfort, safety, and well-being, which has made effective management and reliable supply of services, and not self-rule or moral tradition, the basic political standards. Acceptance of the caretaker state set up the other aspects of contemporary liberalism. (MPG, 7) Once the state had general administrative power over social life, and was liberated from supervision by a coherent public, it increasingly became an independent actor. The mass of voters, who had no deep interest in public life, could easily be manipulated and bought off by the administrators who control the machinery of government and deliver public benefits. Public officials could then arrange things to suit themselves.

The caretakers now running things did not necessarily do what their charges would have them do, but arranged things in line with what they thought made most sense. Not surprisingly, the system they constructed was designed as much as possible to make social life manageable by professionals and accessible to their interventions. It thus undercut traditional self-operating institutions like the family and authoritative particular culture, which are opaque to supervision and resistant to control, in favor of bureaucratically manageable institutions like childcare centers and sensitivity training. The process has ended in a demand, articulated by professionals and backed by state power, for the comprehensive transformation of social relationships and ultimately human nature itself, through interventions that are presented as therapy and protection of the weak and victimized provided by experts, guardians, and facilitators. The uniform effect of the interventions is to supplant informal, traditional, and autonomous ar-

rangements by more formal institutions that can be supervised and brought into compliance with professional standards of efficiency and equality.

Since the state claims not to exert power but only to help, protect, and heal, opposition is understood as pathological, so that appeals to older conceptions of limited government and civil liberty seem beside the point. (MPG, 78 ff.) One does not engage with pathology rationally or worry about its rights; one diagnoses and cures it, or at least keeps it from spreading or affecting social life in general. The basic justification proposed for comprehensive state intervention is that the autonomy of the individual requires wide-ranging state action to free him from social constraints. As the author points out, "without the successful appeal to decontextualized and aggrieved individuals, administrative government would not have gained its present strength." (MPG, 22) Whether that justification is persuasive or not, it seems clear that removal of social constraints on the individual eliminates political constraints on the state. If all the connections of individuals lose their force except their connections to the state there will be very little to keep the state from doing whatever it chooses.

On Gottfried's account, which I find on the whole quite persuasive, the therapeutic managerial state is thus an enormously effective system of power deeply rooted in present-day forms of social life and in a system of feeling and belief that, as he observes, amounts to a political religion. It comes to seem an unstoppable juggernaut whose victory is irreversible. The author observes that despite claims that capitalism and freedom have triumphed over socialism, decade by decade, and usually year by year, state participation in economic and social life has continued to expand throughout the West. (MPG, 18ff.) Beyond that, he sees a "natural progression from a mass democracy featuring entitlements and an expanding list of 'human rights' to a regime that sets out to reeducate world opinion." (MPG, 9)

The situation Gottfried describes amounts, in fact, to a civilizational black hole in which the sole authoritative social institution is the state, which by its comprehensive supervision

and control of society leaves no foothold for autonomous institutions or initiatives. Even the theoretical legitimacy of such things has been eliminated. After all, any independent venture or formation would have boundaries and leave out some things, otherwise it would be an indistinguishable aspect or component of the established order. It would be divisive and exclusive, and so would violate what is now understood as the most basic principle of morality. For such reasons a Catholic political party, for example, or even an institution of higher learning that does not treat "diversity" as a basic goal, has become impossible to imagine as legitimate.

Explanations and Particularities

The triumph of the therapeutic managerial regime throughout the West and its extension worldwide, the depth, breadth, and ubiquity of the tendencies that have led to it, and the sweeping nature of the transformations it has brought seem to demand an explanation on a similarly grand scale. The author, however, is not inclined in that direction. He has little sympathy with grand theories and instead emphasizes particular observations and interpretive themes that always have exceptions. His discussion, while always interesting and relevant, at times seems rather miscellaneous. He tends to view political regimes, including our own, more as a collection of historical formations that are whatever circumstances have made them, than as an arrangement of structures that follow a definite overall logic that orders them in their successive forms. He thus views the therapeutic form of the managerial state as quite contingent. (AL, 49 ff.; MPG, 131 ff.) He points out that in the past managerial society has sometimes adopted a quite different social morality, as in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, and to all appearances it might have taken a different turn among us as well.

The author believes it important to take seriously aspects of ideology not determined by social functions. (AL, 63 ff.) His dislike of grand explanations, and perhaps his tendency to view ideology as the "fantasy aspect" of a regime, (MPG, 149) nonethe-

less leads him to emphasize ideological arbitrariness and discontinuities that were much less prominent in the eyes of those involved. Rawls and Marcuse considered their work a natural development of liberal and Marxist tradition, (SDM, 9) and Christian revisionists believe that they are truly carrying forward essential Christianity. Gottfried tends to treat people with such views as confused or even disingenuous. (AL, ch. 1) He speaks of a "patricide" of the older by the newer liberalism (AL, xi) and argues that it is largely happenstance or polemical opportunism that ever since the early 19th century the word "liberal" has been used for a series of intellectual and political formations that most participants understood as basically continuous, even though their development involved intense disagreements as to appropriate direction.

In some respects he is willing to recognize continuity within change. He says that it is important to distinguish long-term beliefs from short-term variables that can lead liberals to change position on issues such as segregation, (AL, 77) and is willing to admit that those who find something constant at work through the various transformations of liberalism may have a point. For example, he mentions Max Weber and Joseph Schumpeter, who thought that bourgeois liberalism brought in abstract standards like freedom and rationalization that eventually killed it, Panajotis Kodylis, who considered bourgeois ideology a sort of halfway house that was destroyed by further advance of the Enlightenment tradition on which it depended, and Louis Dumont, who interpreted the modern West as the outcome of a very long term movement toward this-worldly expressive individualism. (AL, 31 ff.) Nonetheless, he adamantly opposes the view that continuing factors are enough to mark a continuing liberal tradition deserving of a common name. Similarly, his account of postwar Marxism emphasizes the gaps within it: the thin relation between classical Marxist dogma and actual Marxists and their beliefs and motivations, and the discontinuities with regard to theory, policy, and social affiliation between the old and the post-Marxist Left.

He is much less insistent on the opposition between classical

and what might be called post-Christian Christianity, emphasizing instead the continuities between the views now ascendant and longstanding Christian and especially Protestant tendencies. The difference of approach might be surprising, since the transformation is at least as obvious and profound as in the other cases. (MPG, 5-6) Beyond that, classical Christianity has a much stronger continuing presence among those who call themselves Christians than classical liberalism has among liberals or classical Marxism among Marxists, so there are a great many voices insisting that revisionist Christianity is not Christianity at all. In this as some other respects the author may show a contrarian streak that perhaps is to be expected in an academic conservative today.[4]

Gottfried never makes clear what is really at issue in his insistence that there is no coherent liberal tradition. If programs and doctrines are different even though there are common fundamental principles at work, it is not clear why it matters so much whether the fundamental principles behind the transformations are taken to define "liberalism" or something else, presumably a broader tendency that includes both classical and (for example) Rawlsian liberalism. His stated objections to grand explanations are that they fall short of actuality, (AL, 22 ff.) and do not account for distinctions that are often more striking than commonalities. (AL, 38) Such objections seem beside the point, since every explanation that can be offered for any phase of human life fails to account for many distinctions and so falls short of actuality. The question should not be whether an explanation accounts for human affairs in all their concrete complexity but whether it accounts for important aspects of a variety of situations.

In fact, as "probing critics" (AL, 37 ff.) of the current regime have suggested, the continuity from classical to managerial to therapeutic liberalism seems evident. All three slight settled substantive goods in favor of the freedom of individuals to pursue self-defined goals. All call for replacement of inherited nonrationalized or transcendent authorities with institutions that

can be justified on the grounds that they facilitate individual pursuit of preferences on an equal basis. All tend to treat the political and social order as a matter of agreement, or at least of what would be agreed to if men were social and rational, where "social and rational" mainly imply willingness to pursue one's interests within an order that allows others equally to do the same. The concrete implications of such basic principles have of course changed as they have been applied to more and more aspects of life and as experience has revealed opportunities and pitfalls. The principle of equal freedom initially applied especially to thought and religion, then more broadly to politics and economics, and now to the whole of social, cultural, and moral life. At each stage experience has led to adjustments. Elected legislatures have been supplemented by regulatory agencies, judges, and now transnational institutions for the sake of putting liberal principle into effect in a more comprehensive and coherent way. *Laissez faire* has been replaced by experiments with public ownership as a way of facilitating equality and preference satisfaction and then, when the inefficiency of socialism became clear, by a combination of privatization, regulation, and globalization. State education has been supplemented first by support for various aspects of cultural life and then by ever broader interventions intended to transform public attitudes and habits to make them more consistent with a thoroughgoing regime of equal freedom. Throughout, however, similar ultimate concerns have been at work.

Gottfried further insists on the specifically American features of managerial and therapeutic liberalism. To some extent the insistence is justified as a counter to attempts to present advanced liberalism in America as the special project of a small elite with an outlook alien to American institutions, disconnected from that of their fellow citizens, and overly influenced by foreign thinkers. As the author correctly points out, it is misleading to oppose the bad liberal elites to the good American people and their constitutional regime. The current therapeutic regime is as American as the Big Mac. While it depends on the autonomy of the state with respect to the rest of society, it is the American people who empower

government by demanding that it provide above all for their material interests, and their government, with the acquiescence and to some extent support of its people, which defines and enforces therapeutic demands. (MPG, 4-5) Opinion polls and election results suggest that self-government and traditional cultural understandings count for less in American politics than entitlements and the fight against discrimination. While immigration is a popular concern, that seems to be less because of its effect on cultural coherence and the possibility of self-government than concerns about economics, public order, and (after September 11) national security. (AL, Introduction)

However, the author goes beyond saying that America and its people are responsible for their own problems to attributing to American influence what has happened to the West generally. In a sort of inverted triumphalism, he says that the therapeutic managerialism that has won out is "recognizably American." (AL, 66) Its success elsewhere has depended "on the possibility of transferring distinctly American values and attitudes." (MPG, 132-133; see also SDM, 10 ff.) While the forerunners of the current regime include foreign thinkers and observers, such as the Myrdals, the Frankfort School, and others who contributed to *The Authoritarian Personality*, in the land of Herbert Croly such people found eager listeners and promoters. In spite of complaints about "cultural Marxism," the author believes, the present situation reflects John Dewey far more than Karl Marx. He points to particular features of American society that predispose America to the therapeutic regime: the mobility of life and consequent fluidity of relationships and attitudes; the weakness of common culture and communal loyalties; and the problem of race, which led many to embrace managerial control and resocialization as the solution to a problem apparently intrinsic to the informal autonomous functioning of American society. In the author's telling the therapeutic form of the managerial regime started here on account of such conditions and then spread to the West in general, backed in Germany by the reeducation campaign that followed the Second World War and everywhere by American military and

economic power supported by the messianic aspects of the American outlook. (AL, 68 ff., 74 ff.) All the American liberation movements have their European imitators, who have come collectively to dominate politics in their respective homelands. (SDM, 12-13) The American regime, according to the author, has become a guidepost for a European Left that has embraced cosmopolitanism and social radicalism and with them conscious pro-Americanism. (MPG, 129; SDM, 88 ff.)

Grander Thoughts Needed

The richness and diversity of the material Gottfried presents is extremely helpful in gaining perspective on our situation. The emphasis on therapeutic liberalism as a system of power intimately tied to the functioning of social institutions, and consequent refusal to treat it as something that will blow over because it is absurd and unconnected to fundamental tendencies in American life, is necessary. However, the broad perspectives he presents, which show that everything throughout the West has ended up much the same, suggest that in the end the specifics he discusses may not be so important. Further, attributing the therapeutic regime to liberal Protestantism or American peculiarities says very little about how to deal with it.

The author seems tempted to make larger points than he is willing to assert. For example, he implicitly proposes classical liberalism as a political standard, but never says why it should be accepted as such. He spends many pages arguing that today's liberalism is at odds with liberalism as formerly understood, but it is not clear why anyone should care that a word's meaning has changed unless it is explained why the old meaning was so valuable. While he speaks of a civic duty of honesty about what is happening, (AL, xiv) it seems that the importance of a duty depends on the importance of the subject matter. If what is happening is bad it is important to understand what is bad about it, what would be better, and why. One cannot be a moral witness, which seems to be a large part of what civic duty demands, without presenting a definite moral perspective.

To understand what has happened, why it matters and what to do about it, we must go from particular histories and from description and analysis of specifics to overarching explanations. To propose such explanations is to risk error, but we must run the hazard if we are to understand and deal with our situation. In politics we cannot dispense with grand perspectives: what is good and bad; how good and bad things come about; and the relevance of such considerations to the situation at hand. In order to act reasonably we must grasp our situation in thought and therefore accept, at least implicitly, a particular explanation of that situation. If we refuse to come to definite conclusions, because judgment is uncertain, we will implicitly adopt an explanation of some sort as a basis for action, but a less thoughtful one.

Since politics involve human actions and conflicts, the natural tendency is to explain events by reference to the tendencies and actions of particular groups of people. Thus, the communists blamed everything on the bourgeoisie, liberals find bigots and racists behind every tree, and right-wingers and populists have variously blamed what ails the world on bureaucrats, intellectuals, the New Class, the Masons, international bankers, and many others. It appears that the tendency in these books is to blame Americans. At first the author tells us it was secular Jews and lapsed Calvinists among us who invented pluralism, (AL, 102) then American liberal Protestants who were behind therapeutic sensitivity. (MPG, esp. 132) At length it turns out that Catholics push multiculturalism as much as Protestants, (SDM, 142) so perhaps it was not the Protestants after all, but the position still remains that the "lifestyle radical" with "a bulging stock portfolio," who is the Leftist type now dominant in Europe, is traceable to "a distinctively American culture." (SDM, 146)

A problem with explanations that emphasize particular actors and conditions (liberal Protestants, New Class intellectuals, American imperialists, the heritage of Nazism, slavery or segregation) is that they do not explain why throughout the West all major public traditions and political and social arrangements

have ended up so much the same. Local and historical particularities may color rhetoric and affect the timing of developments but they do not seem to affect the ultimate outcome, which is only marginally different in different settings. What is presented at first as a way of dealing with a particular local situation is soon made compulsory everywhere. (See MPG, 94 ff.) Race was an American dilemma with roots in the South's Peculiar Institution but today the English and French are as worried about racism as we are. The Holocaust was very specifically a Nazi, German, and European event, and we are told it was unique and one of a kind, but we now have a Holocaust Museum on the Washington Mall. Alpine Catholics resist the New Order, but so do Southern Baptists, and neither make much headway against the dominant tendencies of their own societies. If all roads lead to Rome, this is not due to the peculiarities of particular roads and landscapes but to something more general.

It is not persuasive to interpret the managerial liberal regime as an American particularity that got exported, or American dominance as the explanation for its spread. European thinkers were extremely important in its creation, and the Europeans, including reflexively anti-American Marxists, have outdone us in some respects. A grander, or at least less personal and particular, explanation is needed. We contributed to what has happened, for example by pioneering the theory and practice of pluralism, which requires continuous reeducation and managerial control of social relations and thus sets the scene for the therapeutic state. (AL, ch. 4) Nonetheless, the therapeutic regime's triumph in Europe, in the face of longstanding resistance to Americanization, demonstrates that native conditions powerfully support it there.

The author's discussion mentions more Europeans than Americans among the intellectual forebears and penetrating diagnosticians of the present regime. Even if one puts aside the Frankfort School and Swedish social policy, John Stuart Mill proposed scientific social management, reeducation of the people, and protection of alternate lifestyles long before *The New Republic*. (AL, 47-48) The Europeans instituted the welfare state and

family policies before we did; and such things, as they develop, naturally lead to what we have now. The Europeans also have gone beyond us in applying our innovations, other than mass immigration.[5] They enforce inclusiveness ideology more energetically than we do. They use gender quotas more freely and suppress thought crimes like criticism of homosexuality or Islam much more vigorously. If American receptivity to Myrdal and Adorno shows something about America, German receptivity to reeducation shows at least as much about Germany. As Gottfried observes, American reeducation of the Germans lasted only a short time (SDM, 110), and his descriptions of those who carried it out makes it clear that they were not supermen. (SDM, 104 ff.) Nonetheless, 15 years later the Germans brought reeducation back and extended it. (SDM, 112 ff.) To say America caused the second and more enduring and radical round of reeducation is to stretch causality. Nor are other European countries less politically correct on inclusiveness issues than Germany. The Scandinavian countries are more so in most respects. Historically Catholic France and Belgium, the former of which is famed for its prickly independence, now have gender quotas in elections. Japan in contrast went through American-imposed reeducation, and has otherwise been exposed to American power, without following a similar route.

As *The Strange Death of Marxism* demonstrates, the therapeutic regime had no more trouble finding traditions to colonize and convert to its purposes in Europe than America. Appeals to the Enlightenment and antifascism support it no less effectively than appeals to managerial knowhow and liberal Protestantism. As Gottfried observes, "those who advocate this new Marxism... are driven by revulsion for bourgeois Christian civilization." (SDM, 10) Opposition to bourgeois society is not specifically American, nor are non-traditional lifestyles or third-worldism. Pro-American statements from the European Left are evidently opportunistic and are continuously tailored to the Left's own goals and needs. Besides, America has been Europeanized no less than Europe Americanized, and the Americans who most favor

the therapeutic managerial regime are the ones who feel the most kinship to the Europeans and the most aversion to the particularities of their own fellow countrymen.

In any event, timing does not settle causation. When similar conditions lead to similar results, the transition is almost certain to come first in some particular place and appear to spread from there. That does not mean the result has an essential connection to the place it first appeared, although particular histories naturally affect stylistic matters and the like. It is true that power matters. Victory over the Nazis was followed by construction of the welfare state, and victory over the communists by the universalization of compulsory "inclusiveness." It matters that the sole victorious superpower is committed to therapeutic managerial liberalism. That does not only mean that power supports the success of the regime, however. Rather, the success of the regime is also part of what supports the power of those who commit to it: the fascist and communist regimes destroyed themselves by their own violent irrationality, so the managerial regime survives only in a liberal form that, as the claims of social management and equal freedom expand without limit, tends toward the therapeutic.

The Importance of Principle

Gottfried observes that contemporary liberals believe their own ideology is entirely true, (AL, 63 ff., 73-74; MPG, 97 ff.) but does not explain the basis of the belief or how it comes about. Other things he says make it difficult for him to do much with the notion. For him present-day liberalism has no conceptual coherence, and its principles and goals are vague and arbitrary. It is adrift, and must live by conjuring up demons, because it has abandoned its original organizing principles. (AL, 5) He compares it contemptuously to court Zoroastrianism (AL, 102, 104) and refers to its ideal elements as its "fantasy aspect." (MPG, 149)

It is clear then that the author finds it very difficult to take the currently dominant ideology seriously as a system of belief. On this point at least he is no contrarian among conservatives. The

apparent reason he is unable to make sense of liberalism as a whole is that he is inclined to view it somewhat single-mindedly, as either a single uniform self-consistent thing or as a jumble of unrelated things bearing a common name. Nonetheless, it is possible to view it as a complex formation drawing considerable coherence through a discernible inner logic and capable of attracting the sincere faith of intelligent people. The author notes that the fact some liberals once embraced segregation does not exclude continuity of principle with our current regime. Similarly, the fact that liberalism first embraced and then rejected *laissez faire* does not exclude continuity at a more fundamental level, nor do other apparent contradictions within liberalism that conservatives make so much of.

The conceptual aspects of liberalism are in fact of extreme importance. They are central to its manner of ruling, which is based on common understandings that are able to survive and provide definite answers in the face of varied and changing circumstances. Gottfried sometimes speaks as if liberalism today meant whatever those in power say it means, but that cannot possibly be so. Contemporary liberalism has considerable autonomy with respect to any particular political actor. It can and does find fault with the powerful. There is no liberal central committee to make decisions and establish a party line, only a complex of actors and elites who must rely on common understandings to establish their right to rule and to coordinate their actions. It is the coherence and seeming unanswerability of liberal understandings that make the power of the contemporary liberal state seem to disappear, so that it can claim it is not exerting power when it controls everything. Their relative coherence is what enables those understandings to dominate the academy and the reason liberals find education so very important. Pathologizing dissent is not a sign of desperation, as the author suggests, (AL, 102) but is basic to the normal functioning of pluralism, which depends on universal agreements that precede all possible differences. In a regime that rules by claiming not to rule, it should be understood as a feature and not a bug.

Conservative denial of the considerable coherence of liberalism past and present may be due to dislike of liberalism, dislike of theoretical thinking, inability to articulate a coherent conservative response, the genuine tendency of liberalism toward obfuscation and ultimate incoherence, or loyalties to older forms of liberalism that would be called in question by an examination of the logic of what liberalism now is and its continuity with the liberalism of the past. Whatever its cause, this denial is a denial of the realities conservatives face, and they will have to get past it in order to understand what it is they are dealing with.

In particular, refusal to think in terms of grand concepts makes it difficult to understand just how we are ruled and consequently how the current regime must be dealt with. Intelligent and well-informed people today hold views on the issue that are radically different because contemporary liberalism is such a complex thing institutionally. As an overall system of power, it includes politicians, lawyers, journalists, financiers, academics, experts, educators, consultants, and even entertainers and artists. It also includes characteristic institutions and practices. Instead of kings or charismatic leaders, we are ruled by enabling acts, organizational charts, certified expertise, revolving doors, media coverage, techniques of publicity, and principles of constitutional law. And beyond the particulars, the therapeutic managerial regime is a cooperative venture involving a common vision of man and society that calls for comprehensive control and transformation of all social relations.

In his analysis of the situation, Gottfried attempts to gain clarity by paying attention to particulars and saying we are ruled by concrete institutions and classes rather than misty and (for him) confused and contradictory ideas. He emphasizes the state as an actor, and is inclined to say we are ruled by the state as such rather than the state as agent or representative of some other social power.[6] The "managerial state" for Gottfried is thus the state that manages us, rather than the state that represents a managerial class.[7]

The author observes that the power of the state rests on "an

underclass and now middle-class welfariate, a self-assertive public sector, and a vanguard of media and journalistic public defenders." (AL, 139) However, he does not develop a clear overall analysis of the relationship among the state, those classes, and political power. He tends, for example, to refer to journalists and intellectuals as the "intellectual" (AL, 128) or "media-academic" (MPG, 9) priesthood serving the administrative state and its political leaders, who are the rulers, and notes that members of that priesthood who "express sharply opposing views to those in positions of political leadership are cast out as extremists." (AL, 73) On the other hand, he also observes that political success depends on media treatment, (MPG, 84-85) and that it is intellectuals who define pluralist doctrine, "though public administrators and judges have assumed the duty of enforcing" it. (AL, 77) The author thus makes it uncertain which way the predominant influence flows. Who really rules whom?

In fact, an attempt to determine who our real rulers are is misplaced. Power in modern society is not at bottom personal or even altogether concretely institutional. It is true that the managerial state, with its autonomy with respect to the rest of society and control over so many aspects of life, is at the heart of contemporary liberalism, and that we are ruled most obviously by the institutions and persons who directly make and enforce laws and regulations. Further, an institution as powerful, coherent, and effective as the state develops its own interests and goals, and those who run it are numerous and distinct enough to become self-aware and capable of acting collectively. The claim that our ultimate ruler is the state as an institution, or perhaps state functionaries as a class, thus has some plausibility.

Nonetheless, it is mistaken to treat state functionaries as the ruling class or the interests of the state as the guiding principle of government. Particularly in the United States, career civil servants are functionaries and not leaders. They do not articulate their own theories or authorize themselves to do the things they do. It is mostly experts, academics, journalists, and policy entrepreneurs who do the former, elected officials and judges the

latter. Indeed, Gottfried describes the theoretical architects of the social services state as the ones who have taught politicians what they should do. (AL, 64 ff.) Such people feel perfectly free to criticize government and government officials when they ignore what they believe progress demands, and the criticisms are often taken quite seriously. Some such people are paid by the government, but most by persons and institutions not part of the state administration.

In his exploration of the development of the managerial and therapeutic state Gottfried does not emphasize the particular thoughts, interests, and actions of civil servants or analyze in any detail the nature, growth, and needs of the state as an institution. He pays more attention to various intellectual developments and to political tendencies aimed at control of the state from outside. He has good reason to place the emphasis where he does. We are subject less to the tyranny of the state itself, or of state administrators, than to an intellectual and spiritual tyranny. It is less a cohesive dominant class that rules us than an assemblage of elites related by a mode of cooperation that relies on a dominant scheme of concepts and standards. Such an abstract scheme confers authority on some persons, classes, and institutions rather than others, but it is not simply a front for those particular actors. It is something far more comprehensive that indeed provides a basis for criticizing, reforming, and sometimes ignoring or resisting the state and other institutions.

Conceptual and even philosophical and spiritual issues are thus fundamental to understanding the regime under which we live. It matters how things are classified and evaluated, and what is thought to be good and reasonable. It is because of the importance of such issues, for example, that the consciousness industry plays such an important role in contemporary liberal society, more important perhaps than that played by those who are directly responsible for government policy or arranging legal and financial relationships. Smart ambitious young people have a sense of where the power lies, and they do not aspire to be career civil servants. They want to take part in government or the

economy at the very top: to be staffers in Congress or the White House, law clerks in the courts, or lavishly paid professionals in law, investment banking or consulting. However, they are willing to accept much less with respect to status and compensation if they can be producers, functionaries or even hangers-on in the culture, knowledge, and information industries. It is there, they evidently believe, that the center of our life as a society can be found.

Our way of life thus has an immensely powerful symbolic and ideological component that is fundamental to contemporary liberalism. The power of particular classes and institutions is not its most fundamental principle. Like the old Marxist Left, Gottfried believes that the movements commonly called progressive base themselves specifically on opposition to bourgeois society. However, bourgeois society is largely dead while the movements still exist. Further, the current targets of the forces of "progress"—transcendent religion, historical community, particular culture, sexual distinctions and norms—were not invented as principles of social order by the middle classes. Contemporary liberalism, like Marxism, is aimed at something far older and more enduring than the bourgeois order: the belief that social order is naturally based on things that precede or transcend technical rationality and the satisfaction of preferences.

Liberalism is part of a revolution against natural and transcendent order and thus at bottom has to do with social metaphysics. Like the Left, contemporary liberalism opposes bourgeois liberalism because it opposes things that bourgeois liberalism relied on even though it had implicitly rejected them in principle. A Leftist objection against bourgeois liberals was always that they were hypocritical. The fundamental principles bourgeois liberals shared with the Left did not support the traditional authorities and social distinctions on which their form of society relied. To be "radical" was simply to reject bourgeois hypocrisy and try to bring all social relations in line with the root principles of freedom and equality that both liberals and Leftists at bottom understood as correct.[8] Gottfried takes bourgeois civilization as a standard for

purposes of analysis but does not say what is so good about it or why it is so important to distinguish it categorically from contemporary liberalism. One reason for the failure to explain may be that classical liberalism was a transitional stage and relied on the tendencies that have brought about what we have now. Lacking the support of a transcendent principle, it could appeal only to the principles of perspicuous this-worldly reasoning that eventually betrayed it. Once its day had passed one either had to accept the implications of the principles behind it and go on to the liberalism we have now or abandon liberalism and accept something substantive beyond equal freedom as a final social standard. As a skeptical historian who deeply admires classical liberalism, (AL, 136) Gottfried may be reluctant to do either.

The fundamental question as to our current regime is the place in human life of transcendent authorities like tradition and revelation. Gottfried is right to object to social criticism that ignores social functioning, but spiritual issues nonetheless matter deeply. As he observes, contemporary therapeutic liberalism, like its European twin post-Marxism, is a political religion. That is not happenstance. Once liberalism had undermined religion it had to become religious itself, because religious questions are unavoidable. Every political order must be based on some ultimate understanding of what is rational, real and good. Contemporary liberalism of course claims to avoid ultimate understandings. What that claim means in practice is that it avoids ultimate understandings that are immediately identifiable as such. It tries to avoid ultimates as much as possible, and when forced to take a position it chooses the position that seems minimally substantive. It thereby hopes to make the basic commitments invisible that like other political religions it attempts to enforce on the whole of social life.

Contemporary liberalism thus tries to base politics and morality on Occam's Razor, the uniform preference for getting by with as few principles as possible. It tries to avoid going beyond modern natural science in its conception of what is rational and real, since science delivers results that are unquestionably real or

at least useful, and they might suffice for a description of the world. As to morality, it observes that human preference is unquestionably real, and confers value of a sort, so it applies Occam's Razor and refuses to recognize any good beyond the value preferences confer. When preferences or goods conflict, there must be some rule for arbitrating among them, so it chooses the simplest and most content-free rule, equality. Equal satisfaction of preferences, or equal freedom, implemented by perspicuously rational universal institutions that exclude the opacity of tradition and particularity, thus becomes the guiding principle of government and indeed morality in general. To propose anything else would be to ignore Occam's Razor and thus attempt to impose an arbitrary personal choice on others.

Nonetheless, the system as stated is not quite complete. While the transcendent is to be destroyed, people need to think of things in a setting, and in the end that requires something that functions as transcendent. Contemporary liberalism must therefore recognize a substitute this-worldly transcendent, something radically other than us, to which we are nonetheless connected and to which we owe obligations that give our moral and political world a reliable orientation. In contemporary liberalism third-world peoples and lifestyle minorities meet all those qualifications: they are different, they are connected to us by common inclusion in the universal system established by contemporary liberalism, and we owe them something that should override all other considerations, because they have a peremptory right to equality that is perpetually unsatisfied. The victimized multicultural Other thus functions as the transcendent for us and becomes a sort of God substitute.

The characteristics Gottfried sees in the current regime can thus be accounted for not only by reference to power, class interests, and institutional functioning but also by reference to the needs and implications of a system of understandings regarding reason and reality. Like other religions, that system has a great deal of coherence, and is closely enough connected to strong and enduring human motivations to arouse intense loyalty. Otherwise

it could not function as an overall explanation and ordering principle for social life. Naturally, it uses elements from existing religious traditions, but those traditions do not explain it. It puts them together in its own synthesis of symbol, observance, and doctrine that manifests its own fundamental orientation.

Current understandings of rationality thus powerfully support the therapeutic managerial order. Any fundamental modification to that order would, it is thought, deny reason and demonstrate either pathology or extreme ignorance. Nonetheless, for this very reason the therapeutic regime is based on opinion, and if opinion changes it will disappear. Gottfried is not wrong to emphasize institutional and functional aspects of the current order, or to point to theoretical contradictions within the outlook that supports it. His discussion falls short, however, by undervaluing the elements of theoretical coherence also present in the therapeutic managerial order that are fundamental to its power and manner of functioning and must be understood by its opponents. Effective resistance to that order will require, among other things, a basic change in understandings of what is rational and real—in other words, a philosophical and religious change. A political religion, when it is established, must be dealt with at least in part on the level of religion.

The Outlook

As a careful historian Gottfried is reluctant to go beyond what can be demonstrated from the evidence and so treats the future as unforeseeable. He accepts that history has not ended, and that the current order will be no more permanent than its predecessors. He also believes it clear that no reversion is possible to previous forms of social order, in particular to bourgeois liberalism. The social pre-requisites are simply not there. However, he is reluctant to suggest how or why the current regime will disappear or what will replace it. (AL, Conclusion)

A cautious attitude on such issues is of course prudent, and in many respects the future is quite unpredictable. Nonetheless, a grasp of fundamental issues has enabled men such as Burke,

Tocqueville, and J. S. Mill to make predictions of startling accuracy. An attempt to emulate such thinkers seems impossibly ambitious, but we have no choice but to make the effort. Intelligent action requires an understanding of dangers, opportunities, and likely consequences, and thus the ability to form expectations as to the future. The fact our expectations may turn out to be wrong cannot justify failure to try to form them intelligently. We will base our actions on expectations of some sort in any event.

Many have tried to understand history as the development of institutions, ways of life, and understandings behind them in accordance with some coherent principle. To the extent history can be so understood, it should be possible to predict the future from the implications of the principle governing historical development. If history is progress, then the future will bring more progress. Such a perspective is not helpful today. Even if its general validity is accepted, the current order appears to bring a history, that of the development and extension of the principles of freedom and equality, to a conclusion. While the belief in progress is still habitual and widespread, and forms the implicit background to most public thinking, it has dissipated intellectually as the further extension and realization of the principles on which it is based have become harder to imagine.

If the notion of progress provides no guidance, the simplest prediction is that things will stay as they are until something unexpected happens or some obvious practical problem becomes insurmountable. Gottfried tends toward such an approach. In general, he has great respect for managerial liberalism as a system of power (AL, 137) and views it as quite stable. In particular, he does not believe that growing ideological incoherence is likely to have important practical effects. Postmodernism may signal the end of liberalism in theory, but not in practice. (See AL, 128 ff.) While the author suggests that liberal theory is now in crisis, he observes that such a situation can continue indefinitely. (AL, 135) He notes the difficulty of total control over information and discussion in today's world, and the likelihood that people will notice when claims of freedom and rationality become too silly.

(AL, 131) However, he does not expect important practical effects from the recognition. The claim that liberalism is no longer liberalism may be personally important to him, but he has no confidence it will matter to other people. While he seems to accept that a society needs a dominant system of belief, he also seems to believe that almost any system that can be patched together will serve. He is inclined in the end to deal with such issues by pointing to the popular support for the current regime:

> Traditionalist and populist opponents of the current welfare state…simply cannot convince a majority of people that those who provide, however ineptly, for their material needs are the enemies of democratic self-rule or are interfering unduly in family life. If people care little about such matters and are devoted to the present centralized system of social services, traditionalist and old-fashioned liberal or democratic arguments will not win the day. In this respect the political debate may already be over. (AL, ix)

Nor is he inclined to take seriously the effects of belief on personal conduct and commitment, at least in present-day society. In particular, he believes it unlikely that the loosening of social bonds and consequent moral disorder induced by the continuing advance of liberalism will have serious consequences for its survival. He suggests that such issues can be handled by administrative measures such as warehousing of offenders and the disaffected. If anything, breakdown of bourgeois moral order aids the managerial state by making it more necessary in dealing with everyday problems. (AL, 124 ff.)

His emphasis on power and the importance of popular support encourages him to take populism more seriously as a threat to the regime. Contemporary liberalism combines rationalized universalistic managerialism with an appeal to democratic legitimacy. The two do not combine easily. Populism, the attempt to base government directly on the outlook of ordinary people, drives a wedge between the two and appeals to a source of real power. Very

likely for that reason, Gottfried treats it as the most serious source of principled opposition to the managerial regime. (AL, ch. 5; MPG, ch. 5)

However, as he seems to agree, populism is unlikely to become a serious opponent. It is strongest in Catholic countries like Italy and Austria where the historical credentials of the state are weak, but even there is far from a majority position. Further, it suffers from intrinsic weaknesses that make long term success unlikely. A political movement cannot remain coherent and intelligent without a settled elite, and by definition populism lacks one. It therefore depends on charismatic leaders and tends toward opportunism. The popular success of the managerial system makes it difficult for populism to offer a clear practical alternative in any event. Recent populist movements have generally tended toward classical liberalism at first, as a way of reducing administrative interference with society, but have been induced by voter preferences to become primarily defenders of public safety and the welfare state against immigrants.

The basic problem for populism or any other challenger is that the established regime seems to take care of what most people care about most—securing their economic interests—better than any alternative. Social benefits and "promoting fairness" are bigger concerns among voters than self-government, integrity of family life, reverse discrimination, or cultural and moral tradition. There is no longer enough unity for appeals to family values, cultural tradition, and the like to get much traction. Such appeals have come to seem divisive or even fascist and become ever vaguer when made at all.

In the end, the author seems to view the main practical threat to the regime as the risk that massive immigration of antiliberal third-world populations could lead to an unmanageable populace and the collapse or overthrow of the regime. (AL, 126 ff.; MPG, 142 ff.) That risk is all the more serious because of the inability of our current rulers to recognize it as a threat or indeed view it as anything other than a benefit because of its tendency to increase diversity, support pluralism, and disrupt informal traditional

loyalties and institutions and so make them nonfunctional and therapeutic interventions indispensable.

Conclusions

Contemporary liberalism is so firmly established and so intertwined with current public understandings of what is rational that it seems to provide an absolute horizon for public discussion. Nonetheless, it is not eternal. The world does not conform to our expectations or to our notions of what is reasonable. It has reversals and discontinuities, so we cannot predict the future by assuming that current fundamentals will endure and current trends continue a while and then taper off.

The most basic question regarding the future of contemporary liberalism is whether it is sustainable in principle. If it is, then it is not clear why, for example, immigrant cultures should be so durably incompatible as to constitute an ultimate threat. The author suggests that attempts to "change the culture" have been remarkably successful (SDM, 144), and that as a result of the workings of the regime there may no longer be a core culture in America. (MPG, 7) There is, however, a mass culture that emphasizes self-indulgence and therapy. That culture, tailored to the current regime, has penetrated the whole world, and helped transform Europe and America into images of each other. It is not clear why such influences should not also disrupt and transform immigrant minority cultures. If the regime can dissolve majority cultures even outside its original homeland, and make them nonfunctional and incapable of self-defense, it seems it could do the same to the cultures of immigrant minorities. The latter, after all, are on the whole less successful than the cultures of the West, represent authorities and ways that have been left behind, and are much less well supported in their new home than their old. If class interests and social functions and not culture are what count for Americans and Europeans, it is not clear why the same should not come to apply to immigrants.[9]

It seems then that at bottom the issue as to contemporary liberalism is one of fundamental principle: whether a system that

makes satisfaction of preferences the supreme good, equality the supreme principle of right, and public administration the sole binding authority is sufficient to order social life. If it is, then the author's basic confidence in the solidity of therapeutic managerialism is well-founded. It has shown its ability to dissolve or convert all its opponents, at least in the West, so if it is sufficient to its own needs there seems no reason it should not last indefinitely. If desire and technology are enough for the needs of life, then culture can be dispensed with as an inefficient irrelevancy. On the other hand, if the resources of the therapeutic regime are not enough, then its progressive expansion into all aspects of life can be expected to destroy things necessary for social functioning and thus the regime itself. The future would then be determined by the permanent needs of human life rather than a continuation of present principles and tendencies. Indeed, present tendencies would if anything become counter-predictive. The more understandings now dominant slight some necessary consideration, the more prominent it is likely to become in compensation.

We shall see. The Right has traditionally held that liberalism cannot be self-supporting but is parasitic on inherited resources it consumes and cannot replenish. That view could be supported by indications as varied as the state of high culture and the failure of advanced liberal society to sustain itself demographically. On the other hand, predictions of the death of liberalism have been repeatedly falsified, and it is now stronger than ever. Arguments will therefore continue until events decide the issue one way or another. In the meantime, each of us must draw his conclusions, act accordingly, and hope for the best. These books, with their analysis of the nature and functioning of our current form of political society, are an outstanding aid in doing so.

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NOTES

1. Quoted at SDM, 143.

2. See, e.g., John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

3. As one would expect, modern attempts to make things totally rational have contributed to the growth of various sorts of irrationalism. However, the views now dominant license the irrationalism only to the extent it helps debunk established traditional institutions and the presuppositions of ordinary people, and so serves the cause of overall social rationalization and rule by experts.

4. The surprising nature of the difference in treatment may be the reason for it. The author apparently prefers to draw attention to things he believes have been too much ignored. Not many are scandalized by the transformation of the Left, which is skeptical of continuing essences and defines itself as a "movement" in any event, and only a few libertarians make a fuss about that of liberalism. For that reason, it may add more to current discussions, especially among conservatives, to insist on the changes within liberalism and the Left while downplaying those within Christianity, and indeed to emphasize the extent to which advanced liberalism picks up Christian themes.

5. Mass immigration, of course, has an historical background in America that long predates the therapeutic state.

6. See, for example, his favorable discussion of Rudolf Hilferding's later theory of the state. (MPG, 86 ff.)

7. Compare Samuel Francis's review of MPG, "Power Trip," *Occidental Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (Summer 2003).

8. Compare the views of Panajotis Kondylis as described at AL, 32 ff.

9. The situation would indeed be different if the distinctive qualities of immigrants were not simply cultural, but Gottfried does not suggest that.