

Critical Social Sciences

Studies in

Milan Zafirovski

Liberal  
Modernity  
*Freedom, Liberalism*  
and Its  
*and Anti-Liberalism*  
Adversaries  
*in the 21st Century*

Brill

# Liberal Modernity and Its Adversaries

# Studies in Critical Social Sciences

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# Liberal Modernity and Its Adversaries

Freedom, Liberalism and Anti-Liberalism  
in the 21st Century

*by*

Milan Zafirovski



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## Chapter One

# Introduction

### **Studying Liberal Society and Modernity**

The following is a comparative-historical sociological analysis of modern liberal society and its adversaries. This study of liberal society and modernity, i.e. simply liberalism, has two major interlinked objectives. First, this is to argue and demonstrate that liberal society and modernity is a free as well as equal and just social system and historical period, and to that extent the most appropriate, compatible and desirable Durkheimian societal type within, as Comte would put it, contemporary civilization or humanity.

At first sight, this may look like a redundant tautological objective, as is within the framework of liberalism as the principle and social system of liberty as well as equality and justice (Dahrendorf 1979; Habermas 2001; Mannheim 1986; Van Dyke 1995). Yet, it is not in general, given anti-liberal, especially conservative, including fascist, claims and accusations condemning and attacking liberal society and modernity as almost the exact opposite to such a social system, especially in America under neo-conservatism (viz. attacks on modern US liberals for creating or supporting repressive “big government”, “regulation”, “tax and spend” policy, etc.). In particular, the objective is to present and substantiate the above argument in respect with contemporary

democratic Western civilization and history since at least the Enlightenment and the 1789 French Revolution commonly considered as ushering in liberal society and modernity. This is to posit and document that within modern Western civilization, liberal society as a rule has been and remains the social system or project of liberty, equality and justice, and conversely, its illiberal, including conservative, fascist and communist alternatives, systems of unfreedom, inequality and injustice.

The second objective is to argue and demonstrate that contemporary civilization during its relatively *long durée* (Braudel 1979) of two centuries since the 18th century Enlightenment and the French Revolution, and perhaps before (the late 15th century Renaissance) has essentially moved in the direction of liberal society and liberalism via societal liberalization, liberation and human emancipation. This holds true primarily of Western Europe and secondarily America, albeit with a myriad of anti-liberal reactions, interruptions, enemies, contestations, subversions or threats, ranging from medievalist traditionalism and religious orthodoxy, including theocracy, and arch-conservatism to fascism and communism and to neo-conservatism, the new theocratic fundamentalism and neo-fascism.

The second objective may also seem redundant or tautological in view of the frequent observation that the Enlightenment, for example, begot and ushered in liberal-democratic society and modernity, i.e. liberalism, as its child (Habermas 2001). However, it is less so in light of the fact that this child from the very birth up to the 21st century has been vehemently condemned, attacked and temporarily “exorcised” in the sense of Puritan “Salem with witches” (Putnam 2000: 355) as “illegitimate”, “evil” and “witch” by anti-liberalism. These attacks started from medievalist arch-conservatism in the wake of the French Revolution, continued with fascism and communism in interwar Europe, and resumed with neo-conservatism in America and Great Britain and neo-fascism in Western and other societies during the 1980s–2000s.

Liberal-democratic society and modernity, while an evident hallmark of contemporary Enlightenment-based Western civilization, has always been contested and assailed, albeit never completely destroyed, by anti-liberal forces arising in negative reaction, persisting and even occasionally, as in Germany in the 1920s–30s and America during the 1980s–2000s, resurrecting and reinforcing since. In this sense, the history of contemporary Western civilization since the Enlightenment, if not the Renaissance as its prelude, has

been, as Comte, Spencer, J. S. Mill, Durkheim and other sociologists (Beck 2000; Giddens 2000; Habermas 2001) imply, the story of the struggle between liberal free, open, society and its adversaries and detractors (Popper 1966). Particularly, it has been the history of a battle between liberalism and conservatism, including fascism, as what Mannheim (1936) calls immediate and subsequently perennial antagonists, more precisely, of the genesis, development and extension of liberal society and modernity, and the adverse reaction and continuous hostility to and attacks on it by conservative-fascist forces. The battle between liberal society and its adversaries and detractors, notably conservatism and its extreme offspring fascism, continues in various forms and degrees, including culture, temperance and violent wars, though to a lesser extent in Western Europe than America (Bell 2002), by the 21st century, just as it started in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and enfolded subsequently.

The study argues that liberal-democratic society and modernity in general and in the long run has been and is expected to ultimately become victorious in this protracted conflict over its adversaries or remains resilient to anti-liberal assaults, denials and reversals. In particular, the objective is to present and substantiate this argument with regard to contemporary advanced and democratic Western societies since WW II, especially the late 20th and early 21st century. This is to posit and document that by the 21st century most Western societies continue, or resume and reinforce their long-run movement toward liberal modernity and liberalism through renewed and reinforcing processes of liberalization (Inglehart and Baker 2000), though with salient exceptions or deviations, above all America under anti-liberal neo-conservatism during the 1980s–2000s.

In sum, the twin objective of this study is to elaborate on and demonstrate that liberal society and modernity is free, equal and just social system and historical time, and has been and continues to be the primary reality, trend or blueprint of contemporary Western civilization. The second argument is qualified by recognizing secondary exceptions, aberrations or diversions, as epitomized by America's both celebrated and deplored (Lipset 1996) anti-liberal exceptionalism due to the historical and continuing prevalence of conservatism, notably religious fundamentalism represented by Protestant sectarianism.

The study proposes that liberal society and modernity satisfies human civilization's perennial quest and craving for the "good society" typically defined

and identified (“proven”) by, as Adam Smith suggests, the triangle and triple “plan” of liberty, equality and justice in, as Mannheim (1986) emphasizes, conjunction and mutual reinforcement. It also proposes that liberal modernity is, as Weber implies by describing capitalism as the “most fateful force in our modern lives”, the most likely “fate” and eventual “destiny” of Western civilization and global society (Inglehart 2004). This proposition is in turn qualified by taking account of or envisioning some persisting and probable exceptions, ranging from America under anti-liberal conservatism (e.g. “Bible Belt” evangelicalism) to conservative Catholic societies and theocratic states (Ireland, Poland, the Vatican) and to Islamic theocracies.

At this juncture, a methodological disclaimer is perhaps in order. The preceding and ensuing discussion fully accords with Durkheim-Weber’s precept for value-free sociological analysis of social phenomena as “things” and “data”, involving statements of fact, rather than value judgments. For example, stating that liberal society and modernity has been in the past, actually constitutes and is likely to become the social system and historical reality of liberty, a modern instance of the “good society”, is a factual statement of historical processes, empirical facts and expected future tendencies, not a value judgment and evaluation. It is a non-evaluative statement of fact by simply saying “what has been and is”, and not what “should be or have been”, with “good” referring to what Durkheim calls collective representations and human ideals of the “good society”, not to analysts own concept of “goodness” and evaluation.

In accordance with Thomas’s (1951) sociological theorem (also Merton 1995), it refers to people’s “definitions of the situation” called the “good society”, i.e. their “social constructions of reality” (Berger and Luckman 1966), within modern Western civilization since the Enlightenment, as Durkheimian “things” and data in their own right. In Weber’s terms, “good” refers to social actors’ subjective valuations (value judgments) and “normative ideals” of what they conceive and expect as the “good” society, including economy, and its “cultural significance” for their ends-means scheme, “pursuit of happiness” and ultimately lives. In this sense, the present, like other reasonably value-free sociological, analysis treats these human values and ideals concerning the “good society” as its subject-matter and objective data a la Durkheim’s “things”, rather than intrinsic or indispensable to it – nothing more, nothing less. It is, as Weber suggests, basically immaterial whether actor values coin-

cide or not with those of the analyst so long as the latter takes and analyzes them as scientific facts and simply given but does not judge and pronounce on them by making value, necessarily subjective, judgments.<sup>1</sup>

Also essentially non-evaluative, value-free is the statement that contemporary Western civilization during its *long durée* has since the Enlightenment, if not the Renaissance, tended and continues to develop in the direction of liberal modernity and society. It is in virtue of registering and identifying what historically “has been” and actually “is”, and in part prospectively “will be”, in view of relevant historical processes and present-time trends rather than proposing and urging what “should have been” and “ought to be” in this respect. In short, it is a reasonably objective diagnosis of, not a subjective prescription for, liberal society and modernity, i.e. liberalism. And, not only “liberals”, but also anti-liberals (cf. Deutsch and Soffer 1987; Dunn and Woodard 1996) can and do make such diagnoses, but, of course, unlike the first, deny prescriptions in this sense.

In sum, stating that liberal society and modernity is the social system and historical time of liberty differs from, by involving factual statements, recommending that it “should be”, as liberals advocate, or “should not be”, as do anti-liberals, such a system. Also, stating that liberal modernity is a prime long-run historical process in Western civilization differs from advising that it “ought to be” as “good, as for liberalism, or ought not to be” as “bad”, as per anti-liberalism, such a trend. Both cases involve statements of fact and refrain from making value judgments in Weber’s sense. Even “liberal society and modernity is the social system and historical time of liberty as well as equality and justice” is a statement of fact and tendency, rather than, as it might seem at first sight, value judgment. It is so given that liberty, equality and justice have different and even opposite meanings and treatments in liberalism by contrast to anti-liberalism, including conservatism, and hence are understood

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<sup>1</sup> To recall, Weber cautions in his methodological considerations that sociology and other science “offers the following advice to those who turn to science for “normative ideals” [or values]: ‘Be whatever you are.’” Formally, for the reason of space and economy, and assuming the familiarity with Weber’s and other classical sociologists’ and economists’ writings, their full references are not provided, by analogy to the standard citation practice with respect to classical philosophers or physical scientists, from Plato and Aristotle to Machiavelli and Hobbes to Descartes and Bacon to Kant and Hegel.

in an objective value-free, neutral fashion, in Weber's words, as "beyond good and bad".

Specifically, the same statement comprising "liberty, equality and justice" means a positive evaluation of praise, approbation and "goodness" in liberal society and modernity (liberalism), yet the negative of condemnation, reprobation and "evil" in its anti-liberal alternatives, including authoritarian conservatism, especially totalitarian fascism, and in part anti-egalitarian economic "libertarianism". Liberals and anti-liberals read and interpret such statements in mutually contradicting and antagonistic terms, and to that extent neither can accuse the author of making concrete value judgments by using these evidently value-laden principles and terms, yet considered like other values, as Weber and Durkheim suggest, "objective facts" and given "data".

As so often in social life and emphasized by Simmel,<sup>2</sup> what is, such as individual liberty, equality and justice, a "virtue", "cure", "panacea", "benefit" or high value to liberalism, is a "vice", "poison", "danger", "cost" or low value to anti-liberalism like conservatism and fascism, and conversely (e.g. coercion, repression, discipline, "law and order"). This is useful to stress, because the present study is a conceptualization of liberal society/modernity as a social system and historical time of freedom, and its identification and rediscovery as a master historical process, rather than its positive or negative evaluation in any of these ways. It is a diagnosis, and when possible likely prediction of realities and trends, not a prescription or proscription of a societal heaven for liberals and "hell" for anti-liberals, including conservatives, fascists and communists.

Before proceeding further, another disclaimer is in order. Substantively or ideologically, this book is not and cannot be described neither in terms of the "left" nor the "right"; at least, this would be the worst description of it. US and other conservatives, fascists and other "right" anti-liberals will likely dismiss and designate this book, like any other focusing on liberal society and modernity, as "leftist", and orthodox Marxists, post-modernists and others on the anti-liberal "left" as "rightist". A preemptive answer and "consolation prize" to anti-liberal US and other conservatives is that this is a book that probably

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Simmel remarks that what is a (fatherly) king for some groups is a tyrant for others instead.

Tocqueville, classified by Parsons<sup>3</sup> (1937: viii) among the “conservatives” of the French sociological tradition (together with de Maistre and Bonald), even seen as the “patron saint” (Putnam 2000: 24; also Lipset 1996) of American conservatism and communitarianism, would probably have come close to writing in terms of substantive argument (not form) and evidence if he lived, notably visited America again, during the early 21st century (as implied in Lipset and Marks 2000). So would *mutatis mutandis* other (mis)perceived conservative heroes in sociology and economics like Comte, Spencer, Smith, Mill, Marshall, Weber, Durkheim, Pareto, Parsons and others. By analogy, such an answer and “consolation prize” can be given to Marxist, post-modernist and other “leftist” anti-liberals in respect with Marx and notably his sophisticated or partial disciples like Michels and Mannheim (as suggested by Dahrendorf-Habermas’ neo-Marxian “liberalism”, for example). In short, this is a book in the spirit and substance, though, of course, not the letter and form, of both Tocqueville and Mannheim, which denies and preempts its designation as either “leftist” or “rightist”.

### **Liberal Modernity: Realization of the Perennial Quest for Liberty**

In principle and reality, liberal society and modernity is a free as well as egalitarian, open, just, rational, secular, inclusive, universalistic and humane social system and historical period. To that extent, it represents the sociological and historical realization or expression of the perennial human quest, ideal or dream of the free, open or generally “good society” as defined, in people’s collective representations, definitions and constructions of reality, by liberty as well as equality, justice, joined with rationalism, secularism, inclusion, universalism, and humanism.

In the words of Jefferson, the atypically (Archer 2001) Enlightenment-inspired founder of American liberalism and secularism – yet a secondary social force in American history and life dominated by political-religious conservatism, notably Protestant sectarianism since Puritanism (Lipset 1996) –

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<sup>3</sup> Parsons (1937: xiii–iv) comments that Tocqueville “represented the anxious nostalgia of the Ancien Regime” and describes him as “the apologist of a fully aristocratic society”. In turn, Hayek (1948: 4) includes Tocqueville among the early representatives of “true individualism” and by implication classical liberalism overall.

liberal society and modernity realizes or expresses the constant human search, ideal or dream of liberty, justice and equality, in the sense of “all men are created equal”, “for all”. Such Enlightenment-based ideas indicate that liberal society, in the sense of a Weberian pure or ideal type, is universalistic and inclusive in liberty, justice and equality on the assumption that these are inherently and ultimately universal, rather than particularistic, exclusive or closed as logical self-contradictions and practical perversions, and so to be universalized and “opened” to all individuals and groups. Thus, liberalism reveals its true libertarian, egalitarian and fairness universalism, inclusiveness and openness, as distinguished from anti-libertarian, anti-egalitarian and injustice particularism, exclusiveness or closure characteristic for anti-liberalism, especially conservatism and its “monster child” or ally fascism.

Modern liberal society is or strives to be not simply free, just and equal, as in the restricted and perverted sense of some social groups within society, plus societies in global terms, being “freer” and “more equal” than others, as in US anti-egalitarian economic “libertarianism” and (also) militarist-imperialistic neo-conservatism with its inherited invidious distinction between “American” and “un-American” or “foreign” persons and activities, manifesting what observers call “ascriptive” Americanism (King 1999; Turner 2002). Rather it is or aims to become universally and inclusively free, just and equal, albeit, as various critics would object, with many historical exceptions and actual deviations from this ideal-typical universalism and inclusion and openness in freedom, equality and justice in Western societies, including Jefferson’s America, such as exploitation, slavery, discrimination, segregation, racism, xenophobia, colonialism, imperialism, militarism, aggressive wars, occupation, and subjugation.

And these exceptions, while, as Pareto would remark, not confirming (as illogical) the “rule”, do not completely invalidate it in that they are usually secondary and historically diminishing – at least since WW II and during the 1990s–2000s – variations within the primary process, trend and blueprint of universalism in liberal society and modernity, by comparison with anti-liberalism like conservatism and fascism, where they typically occupy or play the prevalent place or role. As argued, most of these exceptions to universalism in liberty, equality and justice, from intra-social political repression to inter-social military aggression, have actually been and are likely to be the result of liberal society and modernity being invaded, contaminated, subverted and

even destroyed, as in interwar Europe and in part America during the 2000s, by extraneous anti- and pre-liberal, especially conservative, including fascist, forces and tendencies. To that extent, such exceptions in a sense “confirm” rather than invalidate the “rule” of universalistic liberty, equality and justice in liberal society and modernity as a social system and historical period. At least, universal liberty, justice and equality “for all”, if not always completely attained reality even at the threshold of the third millennium, was the original and remains the cardinal ideal (“I have a dream”) of liberal society and modernity as a social system and historical time, i.e. of liberalism as an ideological principle or utopia in Mannheim’s (1936) sense in contrast to anti-liberalism like conservatism that, as he puts it, has “no utopia” of universalism, and its derivative fascism.

In essence, as a sociological reality or historical ideal, liberal modernity is the modern epitome of the “good”, especially free and open, society (Popper 1966), realizing and manifesting the human seemingly eternal search and dream of liberty, equality and justice. Perhaps, as anti-liberals claim, not every “good” society and life is liberal, i.e. free, open, egalitarian and just, as indicated by despotic Catholic-based medievalism and theocratic Puritanism and other sectarian Protestantism, providing eternal models of “goodness” for European (Nisbet 1966) and American conservatism (Dunn and Woodard 1996; Lipset 1996), respectively. Yet, the converse is almost invariably true. Virtually any historical and existing liberal *cum* free and open society has been and is a type of the “good society” (Popper 1966) as represented by collective representations and defined by social definitions in these societies.

The above holds true at least within the framework of contemporary Western civilization, defined as and determined by liberal modernity (Habermas 2001), and even beyond (Inglehart 2004) during the early 21st century. It does so, with the predictable, persisting and admittedly “double-edged” (Lipset 1996) exception of America pervaded and even dominated yet again by resurrected religious conservatism, exemplified by what sociologists describe as “Bible Belt” evangelicalism and Islamic theocracies like Iran, which both condemn, attack and destroy liberal society and modernity as the “supreme evil” through “proto-totalitarian” alternatives to human liberty and life (Bauman 1997). Except for these deviant and other less salient and extreme cases, (e.g. Catholic Ireland and Poland, cf. Inglehart 2004) in contemporary Western and many other societies and for most people within them, liberal modernity, i.e.