

Against the Managerial Therapeutic Regime

Book Review by Mark Wegierski

The Professor Paul Edward Gottfried, who teaches at Elizabethtown College, Pennsylvania, is a longstanding veteran of the raging political and culture wars in America. His other books include, *Conservative Millenarians: The Romantic Experience in Bavaria* (1979), a work which attests to his early-found métier in complex intellectual history; *The Search for Historical Meaning: Hegel and the Postwar American Right* (1986), a work which combines his interests in Continental European political theory and American right-wing politics; the two editions of *The Conservative Movement* (1988 and 1993) on postwar American conservatism; as well as *Carl Schmitt: Politics and Theory* (1990), a highly nuanced work about the controversial yet often acute German right-wing theorist. Paul Gottfried is today probably the leading political theorist of the so-called “paleoconservative” grouping (in fact, he is credited with coining that term), and could be called one of the leading “white generals” in the American “counterrevolution.” He has been a senior editor of *The World & I*, and is currently a senior editor at *Telos*, a scholarly journal of eclectic political criticism, and a contributing editor to *Humanitas* as well as *Chronicles*. He is also editor-in-chief of *This World*. *After Liberalism*, which has been published by Princeton University Press as the lead title in a major new series, “New Forum Books,” presenting original scholarship focusing on the juncture of culture, law and politics.

Referencing the 1996 American election, the author

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relates it to the main concepts discussed in the work – notably the high degree of success and seeming inevitability of managerial ideology today. As long as the current-day regime is able to guarantee material prosperity and all the attractions of consumerism, “caring,” and sexual “free expression,” it will be largely unchallengeable. Gottfried notes that capitalist economic expansion and the expansion of the welfare state have, for the last few decades, occurred at the same time.

The main idea of this book is that current-day Western societies (and especially America) have moved in a postliberal and postdemocratic direction. They have moved in the direction of a “regime” of public administration that has little in common with nineteenth-century liberalism.

Chapter One, “In Search of a Liberal Essence” moves through various historical and contemporary definitions of “liberalism,” looking at

the “semantic problem” of liberalism, and examining its “continuities and discontinuities.” The conclusion is that the term “liberalism” cannot be truly applied to most current-day thinking claiming that term.

Professor Gottfried then sets out to disentangle the meanings of “Liberalism vs. Democracy.” Anti-democratic liberals (such as the nineteenth-century French statesman Francois Guizot), liberals who wished to cooperate with nationalist democracy (such as the early-twentieth-century Vilfredo Pareto), and those liberals who advanced along the main lines of progress (such as John Stuart Mill) are looked at. What emerged in the twentieth century is characterized as “the intertwining of mass democracy and public administration.”

In “Public Administration and Liberal Democracy” Gottfried looks at the processes of “building the welfare state” through “the politics of socialization,” leading to the “liberal democratic model” — which is neither truly

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in the Managerial
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liberal nor democratic.

The author then examines the administrative “new class” and its values. “Pluralism” — as defined by the New Class — is one of the central values of the late modern regime. It is the justification for the “war against dissent” — the categorizing of persons who think differently from the New Class as bigots or hatemongers, who have to receive either “sensitivity-training” or be silenced by social ostracism, professional marginalization, substantial fines, or even jail-terms. “Pluralism” and other approaches (such as the pretense to “scientific objectivity” and the deriding of metaphysics and religion) are simply seen as tropes for the attempt to exclude and eradicate “illiberal” views in society. In the process of its triumph in most Western societies, the managerial-therapeutic regime is tending in the direction of “a world democratic empire” — since the very existence of “illiberal” regimes is seen as a challenge to the proclaimed “universality” of “liberal democratic values.”

He considers “the populist alternative” to the managerial-therapeutic regime, which ironically arises partly as a result of the dynamics of mass-democracy. This is probably the best brief analysis available in English of such tendencies as Le Pen's *Front National*, the Italian *Legha Nord*, and the Continental European “postmodern Right” (including the *Nouvelle Ecole* led by Alain de Benoist).

Gottfried argues that immigration policy is a major instrument, being used to expand the power of the managerial state. Massive, dissimilar immigration is one of the most salient aspects of the managerial regime. Traditional identities are broken down even further, and enthusiastic supporters and clients of the welfare-state are gained. However, excessive immigration creates frictions that may challenge the regime. The majority population is alienated from offering benefits to those with whom they have nothing in common; Gottfried rightly notes that some sense of commonality is highly important to the welfare state. It is only natural to resist offering outright “gifts” to those with whom we have nothing in common — the notion of “universal humanity” is not satisfactory enough for most people. Perhaps there is some hope that opposition to immigration may serve as a wedge to undermine the managerial regime. On the other hand, the inflow of immigration may be massive enough that groups from outside the West with “illiberal” outlooks may come to be a majority, and at some point

put an end to managerial “pluralism” and “relativism.” However, this would almost certainly mean the relegation of white Westerners to the status of pariahs in what were once their own societies.

Gottfried perhaps underplays what is likely to be the most tragic aspect of the managerial regime, and the greatest danger to the life and future of European societies — this mass, dissimilar immigration. First of all, European-descended Americans (and Canadians) are robbed of their traditional identities, so they see nothing worthwhile to preserve and fight for in terms of the continued existence of their own societies. Indeed, the managerial view seems to be that European nation-states are worthwhile mostly as receptacles for the continued existence and flourishing of those various precious minority cultures. (The visible minority population of Toronto, Canada's largest city, has gone from less than 3 percent in 1961, to over 50 percent today. Predictably, in public one is only allowed to *celebrate* this shift to diversity, and to deliberate on how the needs of minorities can be better addressed by government and society.) These demographic shifts are perhaps the most radical, indelible kinds of change that can be experienced by any society.

Theoretically speaking, there could always be the chance of a cultural, intellectual, moral, or religious restoration of a society after the collapse of the ruling managerial ideology (if that society had retained its native majority), but these drastic kinds of population changes become, after a certain point, utterly irreversible. Ironically, the effects of old-fashioned social democracy on society (concerned with waging the class-struggle on behalf of the native working classes), are comparatively trivial. The managerial regime appears to be in the process of practically destroying most Western societies, in the space of no more than a century (beginning with the 1950s). What is especially frightening today is how utterly beholden most Western societies are to the values of the New Class, and how very little real opposition is actually being raised. On virtually every important front one can think of — demographic, as well as cultural, intellectual, moral, and religious — Western traditionalism has been in pell-mell retreat for decades. Indeed, Western societies might be described as in the process of being progressively accelerated to oblivion.

After Liberalism ends on a rather somber note, where the varieties of opposition to the managerial-

therapeutic regime are not given much hope. The religious Right and the “archaic Right” are seen as incapable of mounting a challenge: the former is seen as largely embracing the administrative state in the forlorn hope it will promote “family values” — while the latter is seen as having simply abandoned politics in favor of theological or literary forms of argument. Indeed, among the strengths of Gottfried’s book is the fact that it does not fall into archaic modes of argumentation. The intellectual Left is also seen as not offering much hope. “Any serious appraisal of the managerial regime must consider first and foremost the extent of its control — and the relative powerlessness of its critics” (p. 141).

One major criticism of the book could be that it unduly narrows the conservative and traditionalist critique of late modernity by focusing too much on early liberalism and the *bourgeois* spirit, thus largely excluding such tendencies as traditionalist Catholicism, organic nationalism, and such figures as Nietzsche and the anticapitalist “politics of cultural despair.” While the defense of classical liberalism and the bourgeois spirit might appear especially congenial in an Anglo-American context, organic and Nietzschean outlooks might be more

evocative in Continental Europe, and might also constitute far deeper and more thoroughgoing types of critique. Indeed, perhaps all that can be achieved in late modernity is the maintenance of small but powerful niches of sharp political criticism — although one could also legitimately ask, to what final end? Some might argue that the conservative critique in late modernity should be as cultural, “fanciful,” creative-nihilist, and “utopian” as possible, dreaming of “new modes and new orders” — and focusing around Romanticism and Romantic nationalism.

After Liberalism is a very fine work, and it may indeed be the kind of book of analysis that George Orwell would have written, had he lived longer. As one reads the book, one can imagine one is reading our own world’s equivalent of Emmanuel Goldstein’s *Theory and Practice of Oligarchic Collectivism*. Gottfried’s highly theoretical and often sharply-phrased book could also be described as having a “right-wing Marxist” flavor to it. Indeed, it is the kind of critical book around which many future debates and discussions might well be structured.