

Reclaiming America from the Tyranny of Progressivism

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America was founded on specific principles which were embodied in our Constitution. Yet Progressives — essentially Statists — have been trying to steer American away from those principles for nearly a century. Mark Levin’s book, *Rediscovering Americanism: And the Tyranny of Progressivism*, explains the significance of our founding principles and the reasons why progressives have so dogmatically tried to abrogate them.

In his book, *Liberty and Tyranny*, Levin wrote:

So distant is America today from its founding principles that it is difficult to precisely describe the nature of American government. It is not strictly a constitutional republic, because the Constitution has been and continues to be easily altered by a judicial oligarchy that mostly enforces, if not expands, the Statists’ agenda. It is not strictly a representative republic, because so many edicts are produced by a maze of administrative departments that are unknown to the public and detached from its sentiment. It is not strictly a federal republic, because the states that gave the central government life now live at its behest. What, then, is it? It is a society steadily transitioning toward statism.

AMERICA’S FOUNDING PRINCIPLE: NATURAL LAW

America was founded on the universal principle of *natural law*. Our Declaration of Independence inextricably references *natural law*:

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume among the

powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the *Laws of Nature* and of *Nature’s God* entitle them... We hold these truths to be *self-evident*, that *all men are created equal*, that they are *endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights*, that among these are *Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness*. (Italics added)

English philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) strongly influenced thinking during the revolutionary period. He wrote that there is a natural circle of freedom that surrounds all people at birth. This natural right is divine and eternal and is unalterable by mankind.

REDISCOVERING AMERICANISM: And the Tyranny of Progressivism

by Mark R. Levin
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Levin notes that the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BC), the Roman philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BC), and the Italian philosopher Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) all explored the true nature of man. Philosopher Shirley Robin Letwin wrote that Aristotle described:

...the twofold character of law... which he calls ‘particular’ and ‘universal.’ Particular law ‘is that which each community lays down and applies to its own members’; universal law is ‘the law of nature.’

Thus the principle of natural law, recognized by Aristotle, was incorporated into the Declaration of Independence as immutable “Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God.” Levin observes:

Again, it is the *foundation* of human morality on which republics are built, including

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and especially the American republic. The principle of natural law permeated American thought from the beginning of our republic and well before.

Levin concludes that “The abandonment of Natural Law is the adoption of tyranny in one form or another, because there is no humane or benevolent alternative to Natural Law.”

Yet if the Constitution is interpreted according to progressives as a malleable “living, breathing” document, then there is a distinct likelihood that the concept of natural law might take its last breath.

IMPORTING PROGRESSIVISM

Levin describes American progressivism, which was imported from Europe, as an “elitist-driven counter-revolution to the American Revolution” in which America’s founding principles would be cast aside for an agenda characterized as “human progress.” Levin writes:

Progressivism is the idea of the inevitability of historical progress and the perfectibility of man — and his self-realization — through the national community or collective....

Moreover, for progressives there are no absolute or permanent truths, only passing and distant historical events. Thus even values are said to be relative to time and circumstances; there is no eternal moral order — that is, what was true and good in 1776 and before is not necessarily true and good today. Consequently, the very purpose of America’s founding is debased.

On July 13, 2012, President Barack Obama echoed this progressive sentiment, saying: “[I]f you’ve been successful, you didn’t get there on your own...” What a marked contrast to America’s founding precepts of individual effort and responsibility!

Under the progressive paradigm, America’s heritage and outmoded founding principles must be cast aside in order to facilitate the evolution of human progress. Levin writes that under progressivism the old notion of individualism, paramount under the Declaration of Independence, must give way to a new individualism — where the individual is subjugated to the power of the state, all for the greater good. Levin writes:

... for the progressive, historical progress is said to be a process of never-ending cultural and societal adjustments intended to address the unique circumstances of the time, the ultimate goal of which is economic egalitarianism and the material liberation of “the masses.” Unlike most of Europe, the American attitude, experience, and governing sys-

tem were not compatible with the progressive ideology.

EVOLUTION OF PROGRESSIVISM IN AMERICA

Levin examines the philosophies of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), and Karl Marx (1818–1883), noting that Rousseau and Hegel vehemently dismissed the importance of eternal natural law. Levin comments that familiarity with Plato’s *Republic*, Thomas More’s *Utopia*, Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, and Karl Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* are essential to understanding the nature of utopian statism.

In America, Walter Weyl expressed the essence of progressivism in his 1912 book, *The New Democracy*:

Our newer democracy demands, not that the people forever conform to a rigid, hard-charging Constitution, but that the Constitution change to conform to the people. *The Constitution is the political wisdom of dead America.* (Emphasis added)

Herbert Croly (1869–1930) was a leading progressive thinker who condemned America’s Constitution

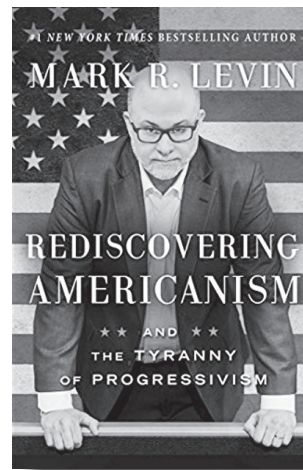
and separation of powers because it lacked direct popular voting. Levin ironically points out that this separation of powers is essential to avoiding centralized tyranny, yet the centralized state that surrounds us today is all but immune from the popular vote.

Incredibly, President Theodore Roosevelt was a Croly admirer. Roosevelt used Croly’s phrase “The New Nationalism” in a

1910 speech. Roosevelt’s attack on federalism, couched in populism, culminated in his forming of a third party — the Progressive Party.

Democrat Woodrow Wilson became one of the leading proponents of progressivism — even more so than Roosevelt. Yet President Calvin Coolidge subsequently admonished Wilson’s Progressivism, stating that:

... the Declaration of Independence is a great spiritual document.... Equality, liberty, popular sovereignty, the rights of man — these are not elements which we can see and touch. They are ideals. They have their source and their roots in the religious convictions. About the Declaration there is a finality that is



exceedingly restful... If governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, that is final. No advance, no progress can be made beyond these propositions....

Levin observes, “Yet for Wilson and the progressives, the American founding was simply a historical event distinct to its own moment and condition.”

John Dewey (1859–1952) was among the foremost progressive thinkers, claiming that progressivism was essentially science-based pragmatism. Dewey acknowledged Marx’s influence on progressivism in his 1930 book, *Individualism Old and New*. He insisted that progressive ideology is more than simple governance; *it must fully infuse all of society*.

Progressives abide by the premise that social experimentation is continuous and sweeping. Today that premise is an implicit component of the Democrat party’s agenda.

TYRANNY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE STATE

America’s bureaucratic administrative state regulates practically every aspect of our lives, from commerce to education.

Levin writes that “By stripping the individual of his uniqueness and spirit, the democracy transitions into an omnipresent state.” He contends that this overarching administrative state directly impinges on America’s founding principles:

America’s founding principles are eternal principles. They are principles that instruct humanity today and tomorrow, as they did yesterday. These principles are born of intuition, faith, experience, and right reason. They are the foundation on which the civil society is built and the individual is cherished; they are the basis of freedom, moral order, happiness, and prosperity.

Levin explains how progressives must necessarily strive to undermine those founding principles which impede their desired “progress”:

Since the principles undergirding America’s founding are beyond mortal law, they are beyond the reach of the progressives and the administrative state. Hence the war on the founding values, beliefs, and traditions was and is intended to, among other things, stop legitimate inquiry into and teaching of first principles or purposes. They are to be made intellectually and culturally off-limits.

Levin examines the concept of freedom as embodied in the Bill of Rights in the context of *positive liberty* and *negative liberty* as defined by philosopher Isaiah Berlin (1909–1997). Levin points out that the Bill of Rights

is essentially a set of negative liberty directives *to the federal government*, preventing or limiting certain actions, as opposed to positive liberty directives giving specific rights and permissions to the populace. He notes that tyrannical regimes are based on notions of coercive positive liberty, stating that “For the progressive, the answer is the centralized administrative state, where the individual is coerced in infinite ways, as willed by the machinery of the state.” Levin observes that positivism as such constitutes an implicit rejection of natural law.

Levin emphases that virtue was an integral component of the nation our Founders created:

Hence, for Jefferson, and most of the Founders, virtue was an essential element of liberty; if the people lack virtue, no form of government can rescue them from tyranny. Again, it must be remembered that the Founders relied on the wisdom of such thinkers as Aristotle, Cicero, and Locke and were influenced by such contemporaries as Edmund Burke and Adam Smith... And the Founders returned repeatedly to the importance of natural law, eternal truths, and *transcendent moral order*, including virtue.

One might wonder whether America today has lost its inherent moral order, and whether such a loss has been orchestrated by the progressive agenda.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Iconic French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859) feared for the death of American individualism and republicanism in his two-volume book, *Democracy in America*, writing:

It is indeed difficult to conceive how men who have entirely given up the habit of self-government should succeed in making a proper choice of those by whom they are to be governed; and no one will ever believe that a liberal, wise, and energetic government can spring from the suffrages of a subservient people.

Today, America is moving ever more quickly to a statist form of government control which the Founders could not have imagined possible. This dominance has transgressed from administrative oversight to the ominous agenda of transforming man and society.

Philosopher Karl Popper wrote in his 1957 book, *The Poverty of Historicism*, that the human factor must be controlled:

...by institutional means, and to extend his program so as to embrace not only the transformation of society... but also the transformation of man. The political problem, therefore, is to organize human impulses in

such a way that they will direct their energy to the right strategic points, and steer the total process of development in the desired direction.

Popper continues:

It seems to escape the well-meaning Utopianist that his program implies an admission of failure, even before he launches. For it substitutes for his demand that we build a new society, fit for men and women to live in, the demand that we 'mould' these men and women to fit into the new society.

Marx criticized education as promoting the status quo. Similarly, Dewey advocated reconstructing our educational system in order to incorporate progressive ideology into the public school system — an agenda now visibly accomplished.

Levin writes that “The American founding was... an effort to ensure that the individual can prosper in a just and stable environment.... It is one thing for the individual to be all he can be, but it is quite another thing for the government to be all it can be.”

Mark Levin is an astute and insightful analyst and author. In his book, *Liberty and Tyranny*, he presents a manifesto of policies and actions that could contribute to improving our society.

In *The Liberty Amendments*, Levin argues for using Article V of the Constitution to bring together a convention of the states, thus bypassing the federal Leviathan altogether in order to enable the states to consider constitutional avenues for restoring republican government.

In *Plunder and Deceit*, he highlighted the extent to which the federal government is pushing the nation toward the abyss of unfettered spending and borrowing.

All of the actions recommended in his books would require both an informed public and the political will to engage on these actions. At this point, the certainty of either is questionable.

While the book *Rediscovering Americanism: And the Tyranny of Progressivism* covers a lot of ground, it is well organized and well written. Levin presents a substantive historical perspective, and his penetrating analysis is especially relevant in light of today's political environment. Highly recommended reading. ■

Rediscovering Americanism

Excerpts from Epilogue of Rediscovering Americanism by Mark R. Levin

Suffice it to say that America's founding principles are eternal principles. They are principles that instruct humanity today and tomorrow, as they did yesterday. These principles are born of intuition, faith, experience, and right reason. They are the foundation on which the civil society is built and the individual is cherished; they are the basis of freedom, moral order, happiness, and prosperity.

Yet these principles are apparently so grievous and abhorrent that they are mostly ignored or even ridiculed today by academia, the media, and politicians — that is, the ruling elite and its surrogates. They reject history's lessons and instead are absorbed with their own conceit and aggrandizement in the relentless pursuit of a diabolical project, the final outcome of which is an oppression of mind and soul. Indeed our ears are pierced with the shrill and constant chorus of promises and shibboleths about utopian statism, which, of course, serve the purposes of a sterile, scientific project and its centralized administrative-state masterminds. The equality they envision, but dare not honestly proclaim, is life on the hamster wheel, where one individual is indistinguishable from the next.

In many respects, the progressive has succeeded in his primary objective: the deconstruction of the American republic for concentrated, centralized power — the exact opposite of the Founders' intentions. During the last century or so, American began the transformation into a kind of pseudo-constitutional or post-constitutional republic, in which the natural law truths of the Declaration of Independence and the justice and security of the Constitution are typically and repeatedly abused to, paradoxically, enshrine in law and justify as legitimate the progressive's autocratic and egalitarian agenda.

[L]est we forget: It is one thing for the individual to be all he can be, but it is quite another thing for the government to be all it can be. The former was born to be free; the latter was established with limits. ■