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# ILLIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND THE STRUGGLE ON THE RIGHT

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One of the biggest challenges to democracy today is posed by the dramatic change in the political-party landscape, especially in Europe but in some other parts of the world as well. Attention understandably has focused on the rise of a variety of populist candidates and movements, but what has enabled their rise is the drastic decline in support for the parties that had long dominated the political scene. Without grossly exaggerating, one can say that for decades the modal configuration of Western political systems has featured strong center-left and center-right parties or coalitions that support the basic principles and institutions of liberal democracy but compete with each other in regard to a variety of specific issues within this larger framework. The primary cleavage separating these parties has been economic, with center-left parties typically favoring more government spending and allying themselves with trade unions, and center-right parties leaning toward more friendliness to the private sector and market-oriented policies. These days, however, virtually every new round of elections indicates that this longstanding pattern of dominance by the center-left and center-right is losing its hold.

Although the United States and Britain, with their first-past-the-post electoral systems, have so far resisted this trend, it can be observed in numerous countries in Europe and Latin America. In France's 2017 elections, both the Socialists and the center-right Republicans failed to make the presidential runoff, and the recently formed centrist "En Marche" movement of newly elected president Emmanuel Macron won an absolute majority in the National Assembly. In Germany, both the Christian Democratic Union and the Social Democrats have been hemorrhaging

support, a trend that has accelerated in elections at the state level in Bavaria and elsewhere in 2018, and that has made the far-right Alternative for Germany the third-largest party in the Bundestag. In Italy's 2018 elections, the center-right and the center-left each received less than a fifth of the vote, leading to a coalition government between two populist formations, the Five Star Movement and the Northern League (running under the less regional-sounding label of just "Lega").

Similar results have been seen in Latin America. In Brazil, for example, the weakening of the Workers' Party and the implosion of the center-right led to the 2018 presidential victory of far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro. In Costa Rica, meanwhile, neither of the two long-dominant parties (the National Liberation Party and the Social Christian Unity Party) made the 2018 presidential runoff, and for the first time they account between them for fewer than half the seats in the Legislative Assembly.

Overall, it is the parties of the center-left (mostly socialist or social-democratic) that have been experiencing the steepest decline, and there are signs that the commitment to liberal democracy of some emerging forces on the left is questionable. But at the moment I believe the graver threat to liberal democracy is that it will wind up being abandoned by substantial segments of the right. I am not referring here to small extremist groups such as the "alt-right" in the United States, which have always been present in one form or another, but have previously never been able to attain real electoral significance. Instead I am concerned with the threat that mainstream center-right parties will be captured by tendencies that are indifferent or even hostile to liberal democracy. I believe that the struggle of these tendencies to win over the right will be the most consequential development affecting the future of democracy in the period ahead. And it increasingly appears that this battle will be fought out not only in the arena of party competition but also in the realm of political thought.

Since much of the coming contest on the right will be a battle over terminology, let me begin by offering brief and generally accepted definitions of the key terms at issue. "Liberal democracy" is the most common way of labeling the form of government that has long prevailed in the United States and Western Europe, and that since the mid-1970s many countries throughout the world have tried to establish. It combines two constituent elements that often go together and yet are sometimes in tension with each other—a *democratic* element and a *liberal* element.

Each of those words has a long and complex history, and each has taken on different meanings in different eras and places. "Democracy" is derived from a Greek word meaning rule by the people, while "liberal" and "liberalism" derive from a Latin word meaning free. Today, however, democracy often is used as shorthand for liberal democracy and thus is thought also to incorporate the protection of individual free-

dom. Consequently, features such as the rule of law and the freedoms of speech, assembly, religion, and the press, though more properly categorized as liberal, are often regarded as hallmarks of democracy.

Further confusion stems from the fact that the term liberalism, in addition to the broad sense conveyed by the expression liberal democracy (or liberal education, meaning literally the education befitting a free person), also is used in a more narrowly political sense: In the United States, “liberalism” denotes support for an activist government and is typically regarded as the opposite of conservatism. To compound the confusion, in Europe the term liberal has been applied to parties that support the free market and a more limited role for government. Moreover, especially outside the United States, figures on the left pin the label of “neoliberalism” on those they regard as too friendly to market capitalism.

Democracy and liberalism may be understood as addressing two different questions: *Democracy* is an answer to the question of who rules. It requires that the people be sovereign. If they do not rule directly, as they did in the ancient Greek *polis*, they must at least be able to choose their representatives in free and fair elections. *Liberalism*, by contrast, prescribes not how rulers are chosen but what the limits to their power are once they are in office. These limits, which are ultimately designed to protect the rights of the individual, demand the rule of law and are usually set forth in a written constitution (hence “constitutional democracy” sometimes serves as an alternative term for liberal democracy).

Although democracy was typically conjoined with liberalism in the twentieth-century West, the two are not inseparably linked. Premodern democracies were not liberal, and historically there have been liberal societies (some European constitutional monarchies in the nineteenth century, and Hong Kong under British rule in the twentieth) that were not governed democratically. The fact that liberalism and democracy do not inevitably go together is reflected in the current debate about *illiberal* democracy.

The central figure in this debate is Hungary’s Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who is arguably the most influential figure today on the European right. By seeking to embrace democracy and at the same time to jettison liberalism, Orbán is blazing a trail that he hopes to lure others on the right to follow. It is useful to review the strange history of the term “illiberal democracy” in order to understand how Orbán has tried to wield it for his own purposes.

### The Strange History of “Illiberal Democracy”

The distinction between the liberal and the democratic aspects of liberal democracy has long been a topic of scholarly discussion, but the term “illiberal democracy” is not so old. It was first introduced by Fa-

reed Zakaria in 1997, in an influential article that he wrote for *Foreign Affairs*.<sup>1</sup> Zakaria argued that in the past virtually all modern democracies were liberal democracies. In fact, in most Western democracies a commitment to constitutionalism, the rule of law, and individual rights had preceded the broadening of the franchise to encompass universal suffrage. Thus the world's leading democratic regimes had been liberal *before* they became democratic.

But, Zakaria argued, as a result of the "third wave" of democratization that began in the mid-1970s, democracy in the form of free elections spread to countries that wholly lacked a liberal tradition. The result was the emergence of many regimes that, although they had adopted the democratic mechanism of elections, were not liberal and hence could not be considered genuine liberal democracies.

The policy implication that Zakaria drew from his analysis was that prematurely introducing elections in such countries would actually *reduce* the chances of their evolving into liberal democracies. The path through "liberal autocracy," he suggested, might be a surer route than the path through illiberal democracy for reaching the ultimate goal of liberal democracy.

Two key aspects of Zakaria's essay are worth emphasizing here: First, he agreed that liberal democracy was the most desirable political regime—the debate that his essay sought to ignite was over the most effective way of achieving this ultimate goal. Second, Zakaria made it clear that he regarded a liberal political order as an unmixed good; by contrast, democracy, the choosing of political leaders via free elections, was good only if it fostered and was accompanied by liberalism.

It is a sign of the time at which the essay was written that almost no critics objected to the privileged status that Zakaria assigned to liberalism. During the years preceding 1989, liberalism and free markets had already experienced a remarkable intellectual and political revival. The demise of European communism accelerated a growing global consensus that constitutionalism, the rule of law, the protection of individual and minority rights, and even market economies were universally desirable, even if they were not easily achievable in countries with long histories of authoritarian rule.

Writing in 1999, I noted that this exaltation of liberalism had been accompanied by "a clear weakening of the view that popular majorities should play a more active role in deciding on governmental policies." This heightened suspicion of popular majorities was reflected in the global spread of judicial review and the rise of independent agencies (such as central banks) explicitly intended to be insulated from the branches of government most responsive to popular sentiment. As I concluded then, "the popularity of the attack on illiberal democracy may itself be regarded as a sign of the triumph of liberalism."<sup>2</sup>

For there was no question that Zakaria intended "illiberal democracy"

to be a term of disparagement. It designated countries that had initiated a transition away from authoritarian rule and had adopted free elections, but had failed to build the liberal institutions that could guarantee individual rights. To be no more than an “illiberal democracy” was a mark of failure. It was not a label that any regime sought, much less a banner that national leaders would proudly fly.

### Viktor Orbán Transforms the Debate

By the 2010s, however, the global landscape had changed. Following the 2008 financial crisis, market economies were no longer in such high repute, and the travails of Western democracies, together with the rise of China, were attenuating the appeal of liberalism. The “liberal consensus” that had prevailed in Central Europe was visibly weakening already, as had been demonstrated by the 2005–2007 first tour in power (as part of a coalition government) of the Law and Justice (PiS) party in Poland and then by the sweeping triumph of Orbán’s Fidesz party in Hungary in 2010. A formerly center-left formation that had moved to the right, Fidesz won 53 percent of the vote, but that was enough to give it a two-thirds majority in parliament, enabling it to radically revise Hungary’s constitution. Fidesz’s numerous and far-reaching changes to the basic law had the effect of weakening checks on majority rule and entrenching Fidesz’s control of the courts, other independent agencies, and the media.

In July 2012, the *Journal of Democracy* published a set of articles analyzing “Hungary’s Illiberal Turn.”<sup>3</sup> Although Orbán’s party initially was inclined to counter charges that it was governing in an illiberal fashion, at some point Orbán decided to accept (and later even to embrace) the idea that Fidesz had turned against liberalism. In a speech he delivered in July 2014 at an annual summer program held at Băile Tușnad in a part of Romania that has long had a large ethnic-Hungarian population, Orbán offered the first positive endorsement of illiberal democracy of which I am aware.<sup>4</sup>

Although his remarks at the time seemed shocking coming from the leader of an EU member state, Orbán’s language was somewhat cautious—according to the official English translation of his speech, he never actually used the precise phrase “illiberal democracy.” Nonetheless, he surely implied that this was the concept he was endorsing. Citing the economic success of Singapore, China, India, Russia, and Turkey under “systems that are not Western, not liberal, not liberal democracies and perhaps not even democracies,” he went on to state that “a democracy does not necessarily have to be liberal. Just because a state is not liberal, it can still be a democracy.” And he added that “the new state that we are constructing in Hungary is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state.” Despite his seeming reluctance to adopt the phrase “illiberal democracy,” Orbán

openly stated that his intent was to break with “dogmas and ideologies that have been adopted by the West,” and there was little doubt about the antiliberal direction in which his thought was heading.

In the ensuing years, especially with the global surge of populism, the theme of illiberal democracy has received growing attention. Populism, after all, is an outlook that emphatically claims to be democratic and that relies for its legitimacy on elections as expressions of the popular will. Yet when populists come to power, they tend to infringe upon the rule of law, the independence of the courts and the media, and the rights of individuals and minorities, as has been the case in Hungary. Moreover, these illiberal aspects of populism had begun to surface not just in countries lacking a liberal tradition but even in longstanding Western democracies. So discussions of illiberal democracy flourished anew among political theorists (a subject to which I will return later in this essay).<sup>5</sup>

Then, on 28 July 2018 (at the same venue where he gave his 2014 speech), Orbán emphatically and unequivocally expressed his support for illiberal democracy.<sup>6</sup> He contended, first, that “there is an alternative to liberal democracy: it is called Christian democracy.” But he underlined that Christian democracy as he understands it “is not about defending religious articles of faith.” Instead, it seeks to protect “the ways of life springing from Christian culture.” And this, he added, means defending “human dignity, the family and the nation.”

Orbán then went on to warn his listeners to avoid an “intellectual trap”—namely, “the claim that Christian democracy can also, in fact, be liberal.” For to accept this argument, he told his partisans, is tantamount to surrendering in the battle of ideas. Therefore, he urged his listeners, “Let us confidently declare that Christian democracy is not liberal. Liberal democracy is liberal, while Christian democracy is, by definition, not liberal: it is, if you like, illiberal.”

Why does Orbán insist that his brand of “Christian democracy” cannot be liberal? He addresses this question by citing three key issues on which the two differ: 1) Liberal democracy favors multiculturalism, while Christian democracy “gives priority to Christian culture”; 2) liberal democracy “is pro-immigration, while Christian democracy is anti-immigration”; and 3) liberal democracy “sides with adaptable family models” rather than the Christian family model. With respect to each of these three issues, Orbán emphatically states that the Christian view can be categorized as an “illiberal concept.”

What is Orbán’s purpose in drawing such a sharp and unbridgeable distinction between liberal democracy and Christian democracy? And why is he so concerned with refuting the view that Christian democracy can also be liberal—a claim that would seem to be borne out by the crucial contribution that Christian Democratic parties have made to liberal democracy in Europe since the end of the Second World War?

Part of the answer is broadly ideological. Orbán wishes to make sup-

port for liberal democracy seem inseparable from support for multiculturalism, open immigration policies, and nontraditional family structures such as gay marriage. Historically, of course, this has not typically been the case. Until the last half-century, many liberal democracies tended to be fairly strict in terms of family law. Apart from settler countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia, they were not very welcoming toward immigrants, and the countries that did accept large-scale immigration tended to favor assimilationist rather than multicultural approaches to integrating newcomers.

It is true that in most democratic countries today there is considerable support, especially on the left, for accepting multiculturalism, high rates of immigration, and gay marriage. In some places such policies now are backed by popular national majorities and have been enacted into law. At the same time, sizeable portions of the voting public take a different view, even among those who remain firm adherents of liberal democracy.

In the past it was generally accepted that citizens may take opposing views on these matters without ceasing to be good liberal democrats, and that policies regarding such controversial issues should be decided on the basis of a free and open political process. Orbán, however, is attempting to convince Europeans who find themselves on the conservative side of these social issues that they are being ill treated and disrespected in contemporary liberal democracies. What is more, he warns them that they are in danger of losing out demographically and ideologically in the future. He seeks to equate the term liberal as it is used in the phrase “liberal democracy” with the term liberal as it is used to characterize the left side of the political spectrum in the United States—that is, to denote “progressives” as opposed to “conservatives.” Orbán’s effort to blur these two different meanings of liberalism gains some purchase from the fact that the “Brussels elites” he is so fond of attacking tend to hold views close to those of U.S. liberals on social and cultural issues.

The attempt to identify liberal democracy as such with U.S.-style progressivism also fits neatly with Orbán’s efforts to demonize Hungarian-born U.S. billionaire George Soros. Soros is a strong supporter of liberal democracy but also of U.S.-style political liberalism. Thus, at the same time that his philanthropies make generous grants to organizations working on behalf of freedom and against authoritarianism around the world, they are also among the largest funders of the U.S. Democratic Party and of nongovernmental organizations on the left.

## **The Upcoming Electoral Battle in Europe**

Orbán seeks to use the dissatisfaction of conservatives with “liberal” social and cultural policies to pry them away from their fundamental commitment to liberal democracy. But his motives are also more narrowly partisan, as he candidly revealed both in his July 28 speech and



in an earlier speech delivered on June 16 at a conference honoring the memory of Helmut Kohl, the Christian Democrat who served as German chancellor from 1982 to 1998.<sup>7</sup> Orbán made it clear that his goal is to take over the mainstream European right and to shape its future direction.

In his memorial address for Kohl, who died in 2017, Orbán states that “it would be easy” to establish a new far-right grouping of European parties drawn from those opposing immigration. But he advocates resisting this “temptation” and opting instead to stick with and to renew the European People’s Party (EPP). This is the center-right grouping that has long had the largest bloc in the European Parliament and that has been home to Fidesz since Kohl invited it to join in 2000. The EPP, a strongly pro-EU formation with deep Christian Democratic roots, has within its ranks some of the EU’s top leaders, including Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and Council President Donald Tusk.

Within the EPP, the continuing membership of Fidesz has been a source of great controversy, with some EPP members calling for its expulsion in light of the illiberal policies and rhetoric that it has adopted. Orbán so far has successfully defended Fidesz against these attempts, but the two speeches cited above suggested that he was preparing to go on the offensive and try to redirect the EPP’s orientation.

In his Kohl memorial speech, Orbán characterized the EPP’s current—and, in his view, failing—strategy as one of forming an “antipopulist front” that seeks to work together with all the traditional European parties (from Communists and Greens to social democrats, liberals, and Christian Democrats) to oppose the “emerging new parties” (that is, the populists). Instead, Orbán advocates the strategy that he says has been successfully followed by the parties in power in Austria and Hungary—in effect, borrowing from the playbook of their far-right competitors in addressing issues such as immigration.

Orbán characterizes Fidesz as occupying the right wing of the EPP, comparing its situation to that of the Bavarian Christian Social Union in relation to German chancellor Angela Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union. Orbán’s goal is for Fidesz to lead a right-wing takeover of the EPP and to steer it toward Fidesz-style policies at the European level. What is more, in his speech of 28 July 2018, he recommended a plan of action to his followers: to “concentrate all our efforts on the 2019 European Parliament elections.”

Orbán acknowledges that elections for the European Parliament generally are not taken seriously by voters, who often cast their ballots, if they turn out to vote at all, on the basis of national political issues rather than Europe-wide concerns. But he suggests that the upcoming May 2019 contest will be different for two reasons—the growing right-wing sentiment in Europe and the rise of immigration as an issue that can motivate voters across the EU.

In short, Orbán's calculation is that the composition of the European Parliament can be significantly altered by mobilizing anti-immigration sentiment. This would lead to a new balance of forces within and around the EPP, with rightist tendencies and parties such as Fidesz gaining greatly expanded influence. It could also lead to a new composition of the EU leadership, with current European elites (whom Orbán calls "liberal" but who prominently include moderate Christian Democrats) giving way to a new generation of populist leaders like himself.

## Hungary on Trial

In September 2018, Orbán's project suffered an apparent setback when the European Parliament narrowly achieved the two-thirds majority needed to initiate so-called Article 7 proceedings against Hungary. These proceedings invoke a provision in the Treaty on European Union that provides for disciplinary action against a member state when it has been found to present a "clear risk of a serious breach" of EU values.

It is also noteworthy that Fidesz failed to win majority support within the EPP; those EPP members of parliament who were present (the EPP controls 219 seats in the 750-member body) approved the report charging Hungary with breaching EU values by a vote of 114 to 57 (with 28 abstentions). In an additional setback for Orbán, the vote against Hungary was backed by some of his previous key supporters, including Austrian chancellor Sebastian Kurz and Bavarian politician Manfred Weber, the leader of the EPP in the European Parliament.

The document that the parliamentarians approved was compiled by rapporteur Judith Sargentini, a Dutch MEP from the GreenLeft party. Her report alleges a very wide range of violations of EU values by the Fidesz government.<sup>8</sup> Some of these strike at the most basic components of liberal democracy, including the independence of the judiciary and the freedoms of expression and religion. Others, however, stray into areas of social and cultural policy (for example, family law, immigration policy, the extent of welfare benefits) whose relationship to liberal-democratic principles is by no means obvious. As policy analyst Dalibor Rohac persuasively argues, the report mixes "two issues, social conservatism and authoritarianism," in a way that is likely to undermine the EU's credibility among conservatives and to divide the opposition to Hungary's genuinely illiberal policies.<sup>9</sup>

The approval of Sargentini's report launched a drawn-out process that is still going on at the time of this writing in December 2018. In principle, this process could result in Hungary having its EU voting rights suspended, but a later stage of the proceedings will require unanimity among the member states, and PiS-governed Poland has already indicated that it will not give its approval. In any case, the inquiry will not produce results anytime soon.

At the EPP Congress held in Helsinki in early November, the delegates approved some “emergency resolutions” intended to make Fidesz commit itself to supporting European values. The first of these resolutions, on “Protecting EU Values and Safeguarding Democracy,” includes strong endorsements of democracy, the rule of law, and individual freedom, but the word liberal occurs only once (in the phrase “liberal democracy”) in a historical reference in the preamble. The fourth resolution (on “A Prosperous and Secure Europe”) states that “EU taxpayers’ money should not be spent in countries where fundamental EU values and the rule of law are not respected.” It was reported that this sentence initially contained the words “liberal democracy” instead of “the rule of law,” and that the change was made at the request of Fidesz.<sup>10</sup> So while Orbán felt compelled to support these resolutions, he did manage to avoid openly endorsing liberal democracy.

In all likelihood, no further significant steps against Fidesz will be taken by either the European Parliament or the EPP until after the May elections. And if Orbán and other populist forces do well in those elections, the possibility of a move against Fidesz will drastically diminish.

From a practical point of view, then, the heart of European political competition in the coming year will be the struggle for control of the center-right. The 2019 elections for the European Parliament will be genuinely consequential. If the center-right holds, the prospects for the survival of liberal democracy in Europe remain strong. But if the center-right is instead captured or defeated by the populists, Orbán-style illiberal democracy, with its tendency to slide into authoritarianism, may be the wave of the future in Europe. As Orbán himself put it in his July 28 speech, “The opportunity is here. Next May we can wave goodbye . . . to liberal democracy and the liberal non-democratic system that has been built on its foundations.”

## The Conflict in the Realm of Political Theory

Signs of the emerging partisan and ideological struggle over the future of the center-right are also evident in some recent writings by political theorists identified with the conservative side of the political spectrum. One prominent example is *The Demon in Democracy: Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies*, a book by Ryszard Legutko (originally published in Polish in 2012) that appeared in English translation in 2016.<sup>11</sup> Legutko, a professor of political theory at Jagiellonian University in Kraków and a onetime member of Solidarity, has also been active in current Polish politics, having served as minister of education and as an elected senator, both on behalf of PiS. Currently he is a member of the European Parliament, where he is the cochair of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group, whose most prominent parties are his own PiS and the British Conservative Party.

Legutko is, to say the least, deeply disappointed in Poland's transition to liberal democracy. The burden of his book is to show the many respects in which the reign of liberal democracy in Poland resembles the preceding reign of communism. (He does grudgingly acknowledge that there are also differences between the two, especially with respect to individual freedoms). Chief among the similarities he cites is that both doctrines favor the ideas of "modernization" and of progress. He also makes the dubious claim that liberal democracy is animated by the same totalizing spirit as communism, citing as evidence various instances of groupthink and political correctness. Although he suggests that these aspects of liberal democracy have worsened markedly since it became infected with the liberationist ethos of the 1960s, his attack is directed not against the recent decline or the present condition of liberal democracy but against both liberalism and democracy as such. And his withering criticism does not spare those "classical liberals" (such as F.A. Hayek) who are heroes to much of the right.

This has not prevented many conservatives from praising Legutko's book. Its favorable reception among U.S. conservatives may have been aided by the fact that it carries a foreword by the distinguished British journalist John O'Sullivan, a former speechwriter and advisor to Margaret Thatcher who also has served as editor of *National Review* and other U.S.-based conservative publications. Yet it is doubtful whether O'Sullivan's interpretation of the book accurately reflects Legutko's own understanding. In O'Sullivan's view, Legutko is writing about the "transformation" of liberal democracy in recent decades: "The regime described here by Legutko," O'Sullivan remarks, "is not liberal democracy as it was understood by, say, Winston Churchill or FDR or John F. Kennedy or Ronald Reagan. That was essentially majoritarian democracy resting on constitutional liberal guarantees of free speech, free association, free media, and other liberties."<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, O'Sullivan goes on to say that Legutko "hyphenates liberal-democratic as an adjective in the book; maybe he should do the same with the noun 'liberal-democracy' to distinguish it from the liberal democracy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries." But I find no evidence in the book that Legutko himself sees his aim to be that of restoring liberal democracy to the healthier condition that it enjoyed in previous centuries. I think he wants it to be superseded by other kinds of governments and societies, presumably including those that PiS and its leader Jarosław Kaczyński are trying to build in Poland.

A more recent book in the spirit of Legutko's work is *Why Liberalism Failed* (2018) by Patrick Deneen, a professor of political theory at the University of Notre Dame.<sup>13</sup> Unlike Legutko's unmistakably European book, Deneen's is American through and through—he barely even mentions any other countries in the contemporary world.<sup>14</sup> Although his title and the conservative slant of his previous writings might lead readers

to expect that Deneen's critique is primarily directed at the left in the United States, he makes it clear that he is going after a bigger target. He calls contemporary progressivism and conservatism ("classical liberalism") two sides of "the same counterfeit coin,"<sup>15</sup> united by the fact that both accept the fundamental principles of the broader liberal tradition. The failure that Deneen's book indicts is that of liberal democracy as such.

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*The most interesting and consequential developments for the future of liberal democracy are likely to emerge from the internal struggles on the right.*

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Since the liberal tradition is so deeply rooted in the history and politics of the United States, it has typically been revered by American conservatives. An American thinker with a conservative disposition is naturally drawn to honor the accomplishments of the country's

Founding Fathers. Deneen, however, does not hesitate to attack the work and the thought of the Founders, including the U.S. Constitution and the *Federalist*. He also is quite explicit in his opposition to the entire liberal tradition, and especially its seminal thinker, John Locke.

Yet after all his efforts to demolish the foundations of liberalism, Deneen does not feel obliged to put forward an alternative theory. Instead, his occasionally eloquent jeremiad against liberalism weakly concludes with the following tepid and airy recommendations: "What we need today are practices fostered in local settings, focused on the creation of new and viable cultures, economics grounded in virtuosity within households, and the creation of civic polis [sic] life. Not a better theory but better practices." Nonetheless, his book not only has been given a sympathetic reception in many conservative quarters but also has been prominently and respectfully discussed in high-profile publications in the United States.<sup>16</sup>

Another author whose writings have recently attracted wide attention among conservative thinkers is the Israeli political theorist Yoram Hazony, whose book *The Virtue of Nationalism* has just been published.<sup>17</sup> As its title suggests, it offers a spirited defense of nationalism, which Hazony characterizes as "a principled standpoint that regards the world as governed best when nations are able to chart their own independent course, cultivating their own traditions and pursuing their own interests without interference." He labels the opposing viewpoint as "imperialism, which seeks to bring peace and prosperity to the world by uniting mankind, as much as possible, under a single political regime."<sup>18</sup>

The contemporary examples he gives of such imperial projects are the European Union and the post-Cold War effort of the United States to create a "world order" based upon its own hegemony.

Hazony's philosophical-historical account claims to find a solid

foundation for a nationalist order in what he calls the “Protestant construction” of the political world that was built in the seventeenth century and, he argues, was deeply influenced by the Hebrew Bible. But Hazony insists that this is something wholly different from the “liberal construction,” whose principal architect is John Locke. In fact, he devotes an entire brief chapter to a simplistic analysis of Locke’s political thought intended to show its “radical deficiency.”<sup>19</sup>

In a 2017 article entitled “What Is Conservatism?” (coauthored with his fellow Israeli political theorist Ofir Haivry), Hazony criticizes those conservatives who have risen “in defense of liberal democracy” and who have seen preserving and strengthening liberal democracy as the “historic task of American conservatism.”<sup>20</sup> Hazony regards this stance as confirmation that many conservative defenders of liberal democracy in the United States and Britain “see conservatism as a branch or species of liberalism—to their thinking, the ‘classical’ and most authentic form of liberalism,” with its foundations “in the thought of the great liberal icon John Locke.” According to Hazony, this view overlooks an authentically conservative Anglo-American tradition that can be identified with older British thinkers such as Sir John Fortescue, Richard Hooker, Sir John Selden, and Edmund Burke, who allegedly rejected the universalism and rationalism embraced by Locke.

Hazony, who unlike Deneen presents himself as an admirer of the U.S. Constitution, contends (unpersuasively) that support for limited government and the defense of individual freedoms can find firmer roots in this earlier Anglo-American conservative tradition than in liberalism. His argument, however, does not seem to leave room for conservatives to embrace the Declaration of Independence, with its unquestionably Lockean elements. Moreover, Haivry and Hazony try to claim Alexander Hamilton for their antiliberal conservative lineage even though Hamilton cowrote the *Federalist*, with its strong defense of Lockean-style liberalism. In any case, they argue that the supposedly genuine conservative tradition they have recovered provides a superior theoretical basis on which to defend nationalism and state support for religion, both of which they strongly endorse with regard to contemporary politics.

The three thinkers discussed above are in many ways very different. Among other things, Hazony explicitly draws upon Jewish and Protestant teachings, while Legutko and Deneen are both Catholics (though neither of their books especially appeals to Catholic teachings). Would any of them accept the label of *illiberal*? I suspect Legutko would do so, but I am less confident that Deneen would. As for Hazony, he bemoans the “intensive use of the term *illiberal* as an epithet to describe those who have strayed from the path of Lockean liberalism.”<sup>21</sup> Still, it seems fair to describe all three thinkers as engaged in a more theoretical version of the enterprise that Viktor Orbán is pursuing at the political level. The common goal is to conflate liberal democracy with contemporary

progressivism and thus to suggest that conservatives should have no interest in supporting or defending liberal democracy.

Many other conservatives, of course, including most of the still dominant center-right parties in Europe, remain committed to liberal democracy. But today's intellectual and political currents do not appear to be trending their way. The May 2019 elections to the European Parliament will be a key test for all European political groupings. But the most interesting and consequential developments for the future of liberal democracy are likely to emerge from the internal struggles on the right.

## NOTES

1. Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* 76 (November–December 1997): 22–43.

2. Marc F. Plattner, "From Liberalism to Liberal Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 10 (July 1999): 131, 132. See also my direct response to Zakaria's essay, Marc F. Plattner, "Liberalism and Democracy: Can't Have One Without the Other," *Foreign Affairs* 77 (March–April 1998): 171–80. In these two articles, I also sought to explain why liberalism is unlikely to survive in the contemporary world unless accompanied by democracy.

3. See the three essays published under the heading "Hungary's Illiberal Turn": Jacques Rupnik, "How Things Went Wrong," *Journal of Democracy* 23 (July 2012): 132–37; Miklós Bánkuti, Gábor Halmai, and Kim Lane Scheppele, "Disabling the Constitution," *Journal of Democracy* 23 (July 2012): 138–46; and Erin K. Jenne and Cas Mudde, "Can Outsiders Help?" *Journal of Democracy* 23 (July 2012): 147–55.

4. For an English translation of Orbán's speech on illiberal democracy of 26 July 2014, see [www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-25th-balvanyos-summer-free-university-and-student-camp](http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-25th-balvanyos-summer-free-university-and-student-camp).

5. While the concluding section of this essay focuses on political thinkers on the right, the relationship between liberalism and democracy has also recently been addressed by theorists on the center-left. See, for example, William A. Galston, "The Populist Challenge to Liberal Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 29 (April 2018): 5–19; and Yascha Mounk, "The Undemocratic Dilemma," *Journal of Democracy* 29 (April 2018): 98–112, as well as the books from which these articles were drawn: William A. Galston, *Anti-Pluralism: The Populist Threat to Liberal Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); and Yascha Mounk, *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018). A critique of the "thoughtless invocation of 'illiberal democracy'" by opponents of Orbán is offered by Jan-Werner Müller in *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 56. For a counterargument, see the review of Müller's book by Jeffrey C. Isaac: "What's in a Name?" *Journal of Democracy* 28 (April 2017): 170–74. In my view, "illiberal democracy" is a reasonable term for political scientists to use to describe regimes whose rulers win genuine elections but then violate liberal freedoms. I doubt, however, that illiberal democracy is a stable regime form. Although it can move back toward liberal democracy (as appears to be happening in Ecuador), it often becomes a way-station for authoritarianism, as it clearly has been in Russia, Venezuela, and Turkey.

6. For an English translation of Orbán's 28 July 2018 speech, see [www.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-speech-at-the-29th-balvanyos-summer-open-university-and-student-camp](http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-speech-at-the-29th-balvanyos-summer-open-university-and-student-camp).

7. For Orbán's Kohl memorial speech in English, see [www.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-speech-at-a-conference-held-in-memory-of-helmut-kohl](http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/prime-minister-viktor-orbans-speech-at-a-conference-held-in-memory-of-helmut-kohl).

8. Judith Sargentini, "Report on a Proposal Calling on the Council to Determine, Pursuant to Article 7(1) of the Treaty on European Union, the Existence of a Clear Risk of a Serious Breach by Hungary of the Values on Which the Union is Founded," European Parliament A8-0250/2018, 4 July 2018, [www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+REPORT+A8-2018-0250+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+REPORT+A8-2018-0250+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN).

9. Dalibor Rohac, "In Hungary, Social Conservatism and Authoritarianism Aren't the Same," *Foreign Policy*, 11 September 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/11/in-hungary-social-conservatism-and-authoritarianism-arent-the-same>.

10. "Protecting EU Values and Safeguarding Democracy," Emergency Resolution Adopted at the EPP Congress, 7–8 November 2018, [www.epp.eu/papers/protecting-eu-values-and-safeguarding-democracy](http://www.epp.eu/papers/protecting-eu-values-and-safeguarding-democracy); and "A Prosperous and Secure Europe: EPP Calls for a Timely Adoption of the EU Budget Post-2020," Emergency Resolution Adopted at the EPP Congress, 7–8 November 2018, [www.epp.eu/papers/a-prosperous-and-secure-europe-epp-calls-for-a-timely-adoption-of-the-eu-budget-post-2020](http://www.epp.eu/papers/a-prosperous-and-secure-europe-epp-calls-for-a-timely-adoption-of-the-eu-budget-post-2020). See also Gerardo Fortuna, "EPP Warns Orbán, but Fidesz Still Influences the Line," *EUROACTIV*, 8 November 2018, [www.euractiv.com/section/eu-elections-2019/news/epp-warned-orban-publicly-but-fidesz-still-influences-the-line](http://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-elections-2019/news/epp-warned-orban-publicly-but-fidesz-still-influences-the-line).

11. Ryszard Legutko, *The Demon in Democracy: Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies* (New York: Encounter, 2016).

12. John O'Sullivan, foreword to *Demon in Democracy*.

13. Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

14. In a mostly laudatory review of Deneen's book, Legutko suggests that there is something distinctively American in Deneen's "misplaced hope" that democracy can offer a solution to the problem posed by liberalism. Ryszard Legutko, "Can Democracy Save Us?" *American Affairs*, February 2018, <https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2018/02/can-democracy-save-us>.

15. Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed*, 18.

16. See, for example, Jennifer Szalai, "If Liberalism Is Dead, What Comes Next?" *New York Times*, 17 January 2018; and Hugo Drochon, "The Anti-Democratic Thinker Inspiring America's Conservative Elites," *Guardian*, 21 April 2018. For my own critical review of Deneen's book, see Marc F. Plattner, "Liberal Democracy Is Not the Problem," *Washington Monthly*, April–May–June 2018.

17. Yoram Hazony, *The Virtue of Nationalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2018).

18. Hazony, *Virtue of Nationalism*, 3.

19. Hazony, "John Locke and the Liberal Construction," in *Virtue of Nationalism*, 29–36.

20. Ofir Haivry and Yoram Hazony, "What Is Conservatism?" *American Affairs* 1 (Summer 2017), <https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2017/05/what-is-conservatism>.

21. Haivry and Hazony, "What Is Conservatism?"