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The return to history? The erosion of liberal democracy and the rise of *new* totalitarianism

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Professor Nicola de Jager, Department of Political Science, Stellenbosch University

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Introduction

“There always is this fallacious belief: ‘It would not be the same here; here such things are impossible.’ Alas, all the evil of the twentieth century is possible everywhere on earth.”

— Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918–1956*

Writing just prior to the imminent fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, signifying the apparent end of communism, Francis Fukuyama optimistically asked whether global affairs had reached ‘the end of history?’.¹ The twentieth century had been characterized by the rise and fall of totalitarian regimes, and the accompanying democide (death by government) of over one hundred million people.² The end of the Cold War, signaled for Fukuyama the ‘unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism’.³ Liberalism thus had triumphed over fascism and communism; the ideologies that ushered in totalitarian regimes. He argued that humanity had reached the end point of its ideological journey with the victory having been attained in the realm of ideas (while still to be completed in the real world). He theorized that more and more countries would embrace liberal democracy with its underlying principles of liberty and equality. As the so-called third wave of democratization⁴ spread from Portugal and Spain in the 1970s to Latin America, Asia, Eastern Europe and then Africa, spanning the 1980s and 1990s, it appeared that Fukuyama’s theory was manifesting in the real world.

Fukuyama built on the German philosopher Friedrich Hegel’s defining of ‘History’ as the progressive evolution of human societies from tribal systems built on slavery, to subsistence agriculture through to monarchies, feudal systems, centrally controlled totalitarian systems and then into liberal democracy.⁵ The expectation is that society is progressively improving. Karl Marx, a student of Hegel, was amongst the first to argue for the ‘end of history’, but he understood it as the triumph of socialism over capitalism with the establishment of the communist utopia. While for Fukuyama, the progress of history was rather the achievement of liberal democracy, following the ideological evolutionary endpoint of liberalism. Fukuyama leaned further on the ideas of Hegel; recognizing the importance of overarching values,

¹ Fukuyama, F. 1989. *The End of History?* *The National Interest*, Summer 1989, p. 4.

² Rummel, R.J. 1994. *Death by government*. Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick and New Jersey; Satter, D. 2017. ‘100 Years of Communism—and 100 Million Dead’. *Wall Street Journal*, November 6, 2017.

³ Fukuyama, 1989, p. 3.

⁴ Huntington, S.P. 1991. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. University of Oklahoma Press: Norman and London.

⁵ Fukuyama, F. 1992. ‘Introduction’. *The end of history and the Last Man*. Penguin.

which laid the foundations for broader ideologies. Fukuyama's understanding of ideologies was not limited to political doctrines, but included religion, culture, and moral values underlying a society.⁶ For Hegel the sphere of consciousness (in other words, ideology) would eventually manifest in the material world. (Marx would invert Hegel's point by arguing for the superstructure of the material world determining the consciousness). Fukuyama, in agreement with Hegel, argued that economic and political behaviour presupposed 'a prior state of consciousness' to make them possible.⁷ It was ideas and culture that drove material outcomes.

In the declaration of the final evolution of political governance, Fukuyama was considering a very specific type of democracy- liberal democracy. In the classical liberal tradition, these liberal democracies are understood to be 'manifestations of human freedom'.⁸ Thus the recognition of human equality (irrespective of social markers), and liberty are cornerstone values, which preceded the political system. In 1984 Samuel Huntington poignantly noted that 'the future of democracy is closely associated with *freedom* in the world' [emphasis mine].⁹ Hence, noting the 'temperature' of freedom would be a good indication of the health of the liberal democratic regime.

In this paper I put forward a thesis – *the return to history*. Rather than society being on an inevitable path towards human progress, it has the potential to reverse and repeat historical mistakes. In agreement with Fukuyama a liberal democratic political system remains the imperfect ideal (the end of history), but society's recognition of this is not inevitable. Instead, humankind remain susceptible to the lure of the impossible perfect (utopias), and the ideas which precede them. This should not be surprising as Martin Malia in his study of the Soviet Union poignantly had warned that the threat of totalitarianism did not disappear with the Soviet regime, but that 'utopian attempts to enforce *social and economic equality* either in the name of mankind's "common good" or for the liberation of some oppressed group will continue as long as inequality exists in the world, whether or not they call themselves the communists' [emphasis mine].¹⁰ Since humans remain creative, innovative, risk-taking while having differing interests and capabilities on the one hand, and devious, thieving, and unjust on the other hand – being human – there will always be inequality, some fair and some unfair, and thus there will always be the potential for totalitarianism to arise under the guise

⁶ Fukuyama, 1989: 3.

⁷ Fukuyama, 1989: 8.

⁸ Welzel, C. and Inglehart, R. 2005. Liberalism, Postmaterialism, and the Growth of Freedom. *International Review of Sociology*, 15(1): 81-108, p. 87.

⁹Huntington, S.P. 1984. Will More Countries Become Democratic? *Political Science Quarterly*, 99 (2):193-218, p. 193-4.

¹⁰ Malia cited in Guo, S. 1998. The Totalitarian Model. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 31 (3):271-285, p. 274.

of the promise of a new utopia. 'It would be foolish to conclude that because the greatest utopia of our age has ended in disaster, utopian politics as such are finished.'¹¹

The paper is set out as follows: firstly, a brief explanation of the comparative research approach. Secondly, liberal democracy is described together with its underlying values, and the current trends. This is followed by a description of totalitarianism, and the identification of its underlying ideologies and values. Thirdly, the paper answers whether there is a contemporary shift in values and who or what is driving it. The points of the paper are finally summarized in a comparative framework with identifiers and values for the liberal democratic regime vis-à-vis the (new) totalitarian regime. It is not argued that totalitarianism has replaced liberal democratic regimes (yet), but rather that there is evidence of a shift in the 'sphere of consciousness' or in the realm of ideas. Society does not necessarily progress in a linear fashion but has the potential to revert and return to history. The aim of the paper is thus to present a thesis.

Approach of the paper

Model or theory creators offer a 'tentative list of characteristics derived from observations of some examples'.¹² Since the comparative method is employed, reference points for comparative purposes are needed. Comparative research is 'the systematic study of the world's political systems. It seeks to explain differences between as well as similarities among countries.... [it] is particularly interested in exploring patterns, processes, and regularities among political systems'.¹³ This paper presents and compares two regime types: liberal democratic systems and totalitarian systems. A regime type is understood as a means of organising the relationship between society and the state. According to Lawson regime change is the fundamental change in or abandonment of the principles and norms central to the nature of the regime.¹⁴ Similarly, Krasner notes that a 'change of regime involves alteration of norms and principles'.¹⁵ According to Fukuyama's theory, values and ideologies are the foundations for the manifestations in the political realm. Thus, if there is a decline in the liberal democratic regime, then it presupposes an initial decline in its foundational values – freedom and equality of human value, together with a change in state-society relations. This paper thus presents a thesis – *with the decline of civil and political liberties, the value of the*

¹¹ Malia, M. 1994. *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991*. The Free Press, New York, p. 516.

¹² Guo, S. 1998. The Totalitarian Model. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 31 (3): 271-285.

¹³ Wiarda, H.J. 2000. *Introduction to comparative politics*. Fort Worth: Texas, p. 7.

¹⁴ Lawson, S. 1993. Conceptual issues in the comparative study of regime change and democratization. *Comparative Politics*, 25 (2): 183–204.

¹⁵ Krasner, S.D. 1983. *International Regimes*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca, p.5.

individual, pluralism and the distinction between the public and private realms, liberal democracy as a regime type is in retreat. On the other hand, with the return of equity (social justice), identity politics (atomizing society into group identities), ideological conformism, and the intrusion of the public into the private there is the potential for the reversion to an adapted form of the totalitarian regime.

Liberal democracy, its underlying values, and current trends

The use of elections, as opposed to monarchical or chieftainship succession, military overthrows, and violence, as the means to accessing political power has become commonplace. As has adult suffrage. At its most fundamental level, a democratic regime is one in which political power is accessed through the electoral mechanism. The demos (people) rule through representatives they select at elections. In principle this means that those in political authority govern at the consent of the governed. They are not rulers, but public servants. But we forget that this is a modern, recent development. In 1900, less than 13% of the world's adult population enjoyed the legal right to vote, but by 2020 99% enjoy de jure suffrage (according to V-Dem data, see Figure 1). Even so, suffrage and regular elections are not sufficient to protect civil and political liberties.

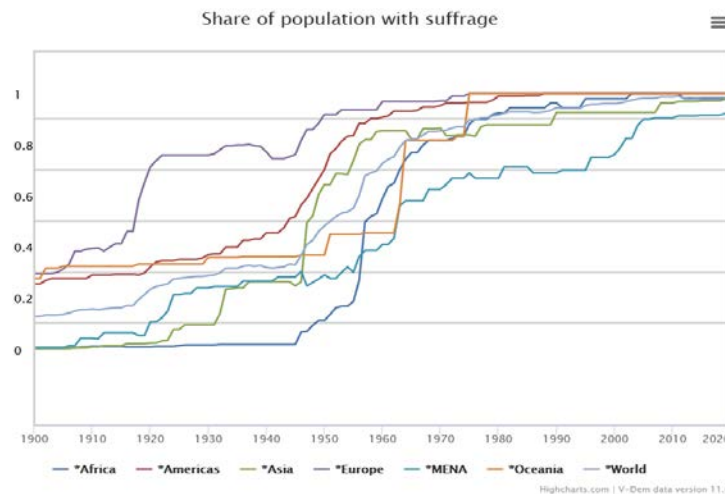


Figure 1: Share of the world's population with suffrage, 1990-2020. Derived by author from V-Dem data (2020). The scores reflect de jure provisions of suffrage in percentage of the adult population.

Protective democracy, the democratic idea of the 17th and 18th centuries, was the forerunner of the more contemporary liberal democracy.¹⁶ Democracy was seen less as a mechanism through which people could participate, than as a device through which people

¹⁶ Heywood, A. 2019. *Politics*, 5th edition. Bloomsbury.

could protect themselves from the encroachments of political authority; it was a response to unrestrained monarchical rule, and thus intricately linked with the concept of liberty. This form of government was influenced by the ideas of the 17th century philosopher and founding father of classical liberalism, John Locke. Locke argued for widespread liberties based on God-given natural rights, where these rights were to be outside the reach of the state. The grounds for these rights were provided for by natural law – ‘a universal moral code binding on all men and ultimately ordained by God’.¹⁷ This understanding of democracy involved a cautious view of political power– recognizing that unlimited and unrestrained power had been used for malevolent purposes. This ‘negative’ view of political power insofar as it judges the quality of democracy by the limits placed on government and the protection of individual liberties is evident in the classical liberal understanding of liberal democracy. It is democracy ‘limited by the fear of tyranny and the principle of individual rights. Historically, liberals have feared any government—democratic or not—that claims unlimited scope for its decisions. Unlimited government is nascently tyrannical.’¹⁸ The adjective ‘liberal’ thus denotes a concern for the individual and hence the need to limit the power of the state.¹⁹

19th century philosopher, John Stuart Mill, gleaned from Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* (1835) the warning that there needed to be a guarding against democracy ‘degenerating into the only despotism of which, in the modern world, there is real danger – the absolute rule of the head of the executive over a congregation of isolated individuals, all equals but all slaves’ [emphasis mine].²⁰ This danger emanated from a return to increasing centralisation of executive power. From this Mill derived the importance of intermediary institutions between the state and the individual. Tocqueville had noted, with admiration, in the early days of America’s democracy that it was characterised by a decentralized administration, effective local self-government, many Protestant churches and numerous voluntary associations.²¹ From his observations was developed a theory of pluralism. Democracy thus being an interplay between independent groups, the state and the individual.²² ‘On prudential grounds, therefore, liberal regimes typically feature multiple, often competing centers of power.’²³ These multiple sources of power create cross-pressures and accountability, limiting and exposing abusive power. Engagement becomes

¹⁷ Holden, B. 1988. *Understanding liberal democracy*. Philip Alan Publishers: Oxford, p.13.

¹⁸ Galston, W.A. 2020. The Enduring Vulnerability of Liberal Democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 31(3): 8-24.

¹⁹ Holden, B. 1988. *Understanding liberal democracy*. Philip Alan Publishers: Oxford.

²⁰ Quoted in Crick, B. 2002. *Democracy: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 58.

²¹ De Tocqueville, A. First published 1835 (republished 2000). *Democracy in America*. Vols. I and II. New York: Bantam Books, pp. 4-6.

²² Crick, B. 2002. *Democracy: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.65.

²³ Galston, W.A. 2020. The Enduring Vulnerability of Liberal Democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 31(3): 8-24.

characterised by debate, protest, negotiation and compromise. On the other hand, where 'absolute Power exists, interests become polarized, a culture of violence develops, and war and democide result'.²⁴ Furthermore, deriving from Locke's natural rights and Mill's pluralism is the necessary separation between the public and the private spheres. A democracy, unlike other regimes, is 'a system of separations', for without them there will be no liberty.²⁵ Amongst these separations is the separation between the state and society; where the former's sphere of public authority is limited, and the latter's sphere of personal autonomy is protected. And this separation, and thus restraint on the government from intruding into the personal, is key to distinguishing liberal democracies from totalitarian systems.

Besides the potential tyrannical consequences, following Locke's natural law, classical liberals also make a principled case for limited government. Individuals are morally equal; each person, as a human being has innate value and thus possesses rights and responsibilities that no government can or should be able to take away. Liberal democracy in recent history thus came to enjoy a privileged position as the preferred type of political regime because it uniquely recognizes the moral agency and dignity of human beings, and thus their right to determine their individual fates.²⁶ Each person is of 'equal moral worth individually, whatever his or her social utility'.²⁷ Thus human value is innate and irrespective of sex, gender, social status or ethnicity. Specific to a liberal regime the state recognises and treats people as moral and political equals, thus rendering equal concern and respect (an impartial state). This also implies autonomy of the individual – to pursue interests independent of and different to that of the state or broader society. Democracy, in its liberal form, is distinguishable from its authoritarian and totalitarian counterparts, in that liberty and the freedom of the individual are considered peculiar virtues of this political system. In such political regimes society comprises citizens with rights and responsibilities, as opposed to being subjects with obligations to tyrannical authorities, which intrude into the personal.

To summarise, liberal democracy as a regime type is distinctive in its state-society relations in that it moves from the assumptions of the moral dignity of every person and that the state's authority is based on the consent of the governed. Public servants of the state are expected to respect individual autonomy, act in the broader interest of the public and not

²⁴ Rummel, R.J. 1994. (Reprinted 2009). *Death by government*. Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick and New Jersey, p. 23.

²⁵ Manent, P. 2003. Modern Democracy as a System of Separations. *Journal of Democracy*, 14(1): 114-125, 116.

²⁶ Howard, R.E. and Donnelly, J. 1986. Human Dignity, Human Rights, and Political Regimes. *The American Political Science Review*, 80 (3): 801-817.

²⁷ Howard and Donnelly, 1986, p. 803.

transform society according to narrow special interests. From this is derived the importance of liberty and the recognition of pluralism, and hence the need to limit state power, which has the potential to infringe on both. Furthermore, these cornerstone values of equality and liberty, translate into political and civil freedoms. A key means of restraining centralised power is through creating a system of spheres of sovereignty – where the state, civil society and the individual have demarcated jurisdictions and autonomy. Paramount to a liberal democratic regime is thus respecting the private-public divide.

While the 1970s to the 1990s saw several democratizations, many did not consolidate, and together with this there has been a recent decline in consolidated liberal democracies. According to V-Dem (a multidimensional and disaggregated dataset, which aims to measure the complexity of the concept of democracy) liberal democracies, understood as a regime which limits government power through constitutionally protected civil liberties, rule of law, an independent judiciary, and effective checks and balances, have declined from their peak of 44 countries in 2014 to 32 in 2020 (see Figure 2).²⁸ This is in accord with Freedom House's (a non-profit organization that conducts research on democracy, political freedom, and human rights) measurements of civil and political liberties. The organization marked 2021 as the 16th consecutive year of the global decline in freedom.²⁹ Freedom House recognises that we are living in a less free world with 8 out of 10 people living in countries ranked as 'partly free' or 'not free'.³⁰

²⁸ V-dem. 2021. Autocratization Turns Viral: Democracy Report 2021. Available at: https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/74/8c/748c68ad-f224-4cd7-87f9-8794add5c60f/dr_2021_updated.pdf; Coppedge, M. *et al.* 2020. 'V-Dem Dataset v10'. Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project. <https://doi.org/10.23696/vdemds20>

²⁹ Freedom House. 2021. <https://freedomhouse.org/> Accessed 26 April 2021.

³⁰ Freedom House. 2022. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2022/global-expansion-authoritarian-rule>. Accessed 6 October 2022.

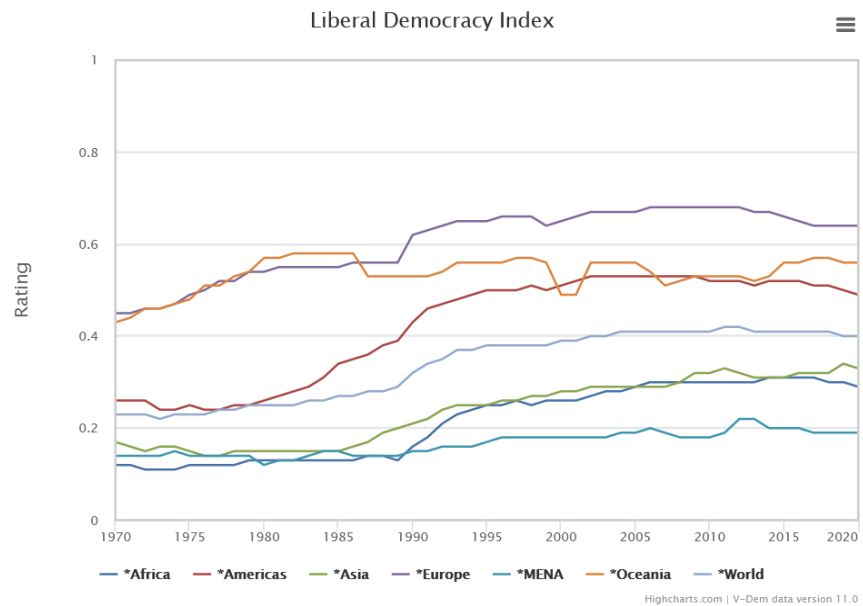


Figure 2: Figure 2: Liberal democracy index, 1970-2020. Derived by author from V-Dem data (2020)

The advent of the covid-19 crisis and the severe, and often draconian responses from governments, including those in the supposedly free world, have further contributed to this retreat in global freedom. Most of the ‘free’ world, with the exception of Sweden, followed the authoritarian Chinese regime’s severe lockdown approach to the pandemic. Viable other options in response to the pandemic, such as the Focused Protection approach of The Great Barrington Declaration,³¹ were effectively silenced through the domination of the narrative, the use of delegitimising language and then employing ‘fact-checkers’ to ensure only the ‘correct’ ideas were heard. Laura Dodsworth’s *A State of Fear* exposes how the British government used nudge units – tools of behavioural psychology – to induce fear into its population.³² The bottom line is liberal democracy and its underlying ideas of liberty and innate human value are in retreat.

³¹ The Great Barrington Declaration was drafted by three professors from the universities of Harvard, Stanford and Oxford, and signed by nearly one million doctors and public health specialists. It noted the devastating short and long-term public health consequences of blanket lockdowns. See: <https://gbdeclaration.org/>

³² Dodsworth, L. 2021. *A state of fear*. Pinter and Martin: UK.

The totalitarian regime and its underlying values

The opposite of liberal is not conservative, but rather total.³³ Anne Applebaum defines the totalitarian system as a regime 'which bans all institutions apart from those it has officially approved'.³⁴ Such a regime is characterised by one political party, a centralised educational system, and a single moral code. Typical of totalitarian regimes is the 'progressive destruction of civil society and absorption of all forms of social life by the state'.³⁵ The destruction of other sources of influence and the establishment of a single, centralised power under elite-control. This is epitomised in the fascist Italian leader, Benito Mussolini's proclamation: 'Everything within the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state'.³⁶ As a further example, the Soviet Union was ruled as a one-party state under the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Civil and political liberties were suppressed and those who did contend found themselves in the Gulag labour camps. The Soviet state ensured there was no freedom of religion, and that atheism was imposed. The arts, science and education were strictly censored and subject to ideological scrutiny. The Soviet dissidents, including Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, would be elaborately discredited, their literature confiscated, their employment terminated, exiled or incarcerated in prisons and even mental institutions. This regime type was thus evidenced in the abolition of the individual, state-centredness, social control and the mass murder.

But as Shorten recognises this description of totalitarianism posits the end goal as statist and thus only structural.³⁷ Instead, he argues for understanding totalitarianism as ideological, as expressed in Hitler's Reich and Stalin's Soviet Union, embodied in values, beliefs and outlooks. In this Shorten is arguing that there is an intellectual foundation to the practical outworking of the totalitarian regime. This aligns with Fukuyama's recognition of political systems emanating from spheres of consciousness. But we need to also recognise that there are ideas that even precede these ideologies – the assumption that perfection is possible; power will be used benignly; and human nature can (and should) be re-engineered. Historically, Nazism presented a utopia of the perfect nation– the Arian race, while Communism presented a utopia of the perfect class – the working class. For both, the individual was a necessary sacrifice, and the preferred group was considered of higher value,

³³ Galston, 2020.

³⁴ Applebaum, A. 2012. *Iron Curtain: The crushing of Eastern Europe 1944-1956*. Allen Lane: London, p. xxiii.

³⁵ Kolakowski, L. 2005. *Main Currents of Marxism*. London, p. 794.

³⁶ Benito Mussolini, 'The Doctrine of Fascism' quoted in Ball, T. and Dagger, R. (eds.) 1991. *Ideals and Ideologies*. New York, pp. 288-6.

³⁷ Shorten, R. 2015. Rethinking Totalitarian Ideology: Insights from the Anti-Totalitarian canon. *History of Political Thought*, 36(4): 726-761.

while in the interest of the 'greater good' other groups were sufficiently dehumanised to justify their persecution and extermination. The nationalist-socialist and the communist party-state were committed to the total, revolutionary transformation of social and personal life. Centralised power was deemed necessary to transform society into the envisaged perfection.

Historically it has been the ideologies of fascism and communism that have provided the bedrocks of totalitarian regimes. Fascism revolved around a strong state which embodied a 'new' people under ultra-nationalist exclusivism.³⁸ Society became subjects of the state – required to be loyal and obedient, without question.³⁹ The 'good' of the collective body was to supersede the good of the individual. The fascist leader held unlimited authority over the all-powerful state. Effectively eradicating the private in favour of the public.⁴⁰ Fascism was rather characterised by corporatism - a binding together of the state and big business. Communism was typified by collectivisation or communal ownership, the rejection of private ownership and the eradication of classes.⁴¹ Its ideological roots can be traced back to the German philosopher Hegel who developed a dialectical scheme, by which he meant that society was progressing towards a utopia but needed a revolution to arrive there. Karl Marx, taken with Hegel's ideas, but a materialist – argued that society was divided into the oppressed and the oppressor, where the rich oppressed the poor. According to Marx, utopia could only be attained through the revolution of the poor against the rich, and then the establishment of the dictatorship of the working class over the rest. According to this ideology, the dictatorship of the state by the proletariat was necessary for correcting the social inequalities and disparities between the bourgeois and the working class.⁴² In its striving towards a utopian end-goal, the state should not be impartial but partisan in favouring special interests.⁴³

Polish philosopher and once ardent communist, Leszek Kolakowski refers to fascism and communism as 'forms of totalitarian socialism', while the former was nationalist in its aspiration and the latter internationalist, both converged around the idea of 'social control

³⁸ Fukuyama, F. 1989. The End of History? *The National Interest*, Summer 1989, p. 9.

³⁹ Heywood, A. 2012. *Political Ideologies: An introduction*. 5th Edition. Palgrave Macmillan: Hampshire, p. 211.

⁴⁰ Arendt, H. 1963. *On Revolution*. Faber and Faber: London, p. 130.

⁴¹ Heywood, A. 2012. *Political Ideologies: An introduction*. 5th Edition. Palgrave Macmillan: Hampshire, p. 116.

⁴² Filatova, I. and Davidson, A. 2013. *The Hidden Thread: Russia and South Africa in the Soviet Era*. United Kingdom: Jonathan Ball Publishers, p. 221.

⁴³ Fredericks, J. and de Jager, N. 2022. An Analysis of the Historical roots of Partisan Governance within the ANC: Understanding the Road to State Capture. *Politikon*, 49 (1): 21-42.

of production for the common good'.⁴⁴ Accordingly 'totalitarianism is inseparably linked with the history of socialist ideas and movements'.⁴⁵ Writing in 1983 he noted:

Socialism was essentially about 'social justice,' even though there has never been an agreement on the meaning of this vague term. All versions of socialism implied a belief in social control of production and distribution of material goods... All predicted that social control would secure the welfare of all, prevent waste, increase efficiency... Yet in those versions of socialism that relied upon the power of the state to achieve a just and efficient economy, intimations of a totalitarian philosophy can be found, at least in hindsight.

As opposed to placing political ideologies along a linear continuum with communism on the far left and fascism on the far right, the horseshoe theory,⁴⁶ a term attributed to French writer Jean-Pierre Faye, recognises that these ideologies curve around to share common features and ultimately result in totalitarian regimes. Shared similarities between the extremes of the left and right include, institutionally: highly centralised executives – these systems are elite-driven, information is tightly controlled, dissent and opposition are not tolerated, and the public consumes the personal. Ideationally: extreme collectivism with individuals not having value in and of themselves; specified social groups as having more value than other groups; and having a single, acceptable narrative. Goals: social transformation in accordance with a single ideology; transforming society through controlling thinking and the conscience. At its core, totalitarianism is the social engineering of society in accordance with a utopian vision.

The totalitarian regime holds the expectation that over 'time they can "cure" the false consciousness of almost everyone'⁴⁷ and create a perfect monolithic society. These tyrannies are often brought about on the idealistic assumption that harmony amongst social values is both desirable and attainable. Totalitarianism has at its core the aspiration of complete domination, where control extends beyond the public sphere into the private lives of society

⁴⁴ Kolakowski, L. 1983. Totalitarianism & the Lie. <https://www.commentary.org/articles/leszek-kolakowski/totalitarianism-the-lie/> Accessed 7 October 2022.

⁴⁵ Kolakowski, L. 1983. Totalitarianism & the Lie. <https://www.commentary.org/articles/leszek-kolakowski/totalitarianism-the-lie/> Accessed 7 October 2022.

⁴⁶ Heywood, A. 2012. *Political Ideologies: An introduction*. 5th Edition. Palgrave Macmillan: Hampshire, p. 17.

⁴⁷ Kirkpatrick, J.J. 1979. *Dictatorships & Double Standards*. https://www.commentary.org/articles/jeane-kirkpatrick/dictatorships-double-standards/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=SocialSnap&fbclid=IwAR0IRnCNBn2CkbW7SOsodAX74uSd0b0rRCT2EI-g7yslAkpzg17ocMCR7w Accessed 26 August 2021.

with the imposition of a single belief-system.⁴⁸ In other words, the destruction of the private in favour of the public. As Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued ‘those who control a people’s opinions control its actions’.⁴⁹ But in his estimation and that of utopian advocates, such total control of the private was necessary for the perfect society to arise.

In this utopian vision of totalitarian systems, the individual with plural identities disappears and is replaced by the ‘collective political subject’. As Shorten notes, in totalitarianism the collective political subject was defined as the ‘oppressed’.⁵⁰ Together with this identification is ‘to trace all the ills of existing society back to a single source’.⁵¹ To achieve the utopian state of happiness, away from oppression, is a return to the ‘true’ self, as embodied in for example Marx’s New Man⁵² or fascism’s new nation. The ‘true self’ though is defined collectively and not individually. The interests of an identified collective are considered to be more important than those of the individual. And, those who would contend or bring in ‘unwanted’ difference are identified as the ‘enemies of the people’. These enemies are broadly defined in terms of ‘categories or groups within society’.⁵³

Totalitarian systems seek to access and transform the most personal – the heart and the mind. And this to the point where they expect their subjects to conform to and even affirm lies. The distance between reality and ideology resulted in communist parties ‘spouting meaningless slogans’.⁵⁴ In such a landscape ‘truth disappeared...and was replaced by that of power’.⁵⁵ Endemic to totalitarian regimes, as identified by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn⁵⁶ Hannah Arendt and others were lies. The root of totalitarianism at the individual level was to knowingly falsify your speech and action. Through compelling society to repeat falsehoods, they cast aside their integrity and became bound to the leader and party by shame and complicity. Totalitarianism requires complete control, but this can only be achieved if it ‘succeeds in eliminating the resistance of both natural and mental reality, i.e., in cancelling

⁴⁸ Magstadt, T.M. 2016. *Understanding politics: Ideas, Institutions and Issues*, 12th edition. Cengage Learning, Inc, p. 132.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Shorten, p. 751.

⁵⁰ Shorten, p. 748.

⁵¹ Shorten, p. 749.

⁵² Shorten, p. 748.

⁵³ Magstadt, 2016, p. 132.

⁵⁴ Applebaum, A. 2012. *Iron Curtain: The crushing of Eastern Europe 1944-1956*. Allen Lane: London.

⁵⁵ Roger Scruton quoted in Applebaum, A. 2012. *Iron Curtain: The crushing of Eastern Europe 1944-1956*. Allen Lane: London, p. 494.

⁵⁶ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was a Soviet Union dissident, who spoke out against communism and exposed the atrocities of the Soviet Union’s labour camps in his book *The Gulag Archipelago*.

reality altogether'.⁵⁷ This is pointedly illustrated in the words of George Orwell, in his classic, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: 'The Party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential command'.⁵⁸

But why totalitarianism and not authoritarianism? In contrast to totalitarian systems, the rulers of authoritarian systems aspire to maintain political power without the intention of transforming society. Limited contestation and participation are somewhat tolerated with political enemies being more narrowly defined. Leaders in authoritarian systems identify enemies as those individuals who seek to challenge their power and authority, whereas in totalitarian systems groups or individuals with beliefs or ideas contra to their single ideology are perceived to be the threat. Furthermore, authoritarian systems intimidate independent media that would dare to criticize it, while totalitarian systems monopolise the media and use it to spread their propaganda – a single narrative. Totalitarian systems tend to have utopian aspirations and make claims of holding absolute truth or the ability to create a 'new type of social life'.⁵⁹ Such regimes attempt to intrude into people's thinking and control their beliefs. Thus, authoritarian regimes seek to maintain political power and control, whereas totalitarian regimes seek to transform society through the imposition of a single ideology. While both consider members of society to be subjects rather than citizens, authoritarian regimes do not require conformity in the way their subjects live or believe.

Differing from both authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, liberal democracies embody governments based on the consent of the governed underpinned by the expectation that ordinary people are 'capable of using freedom, knowing their own interest' and choosing their own rulers.⁶⁰ Those who govern are there to represent the interests of those who elected them, it is not their role to transform society in accordance with special interests. A further key distinction between democracies and authoritarian systems are crucial information flows. There is feedback, ensuring a 'balance-of-power' arrangement.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Kolakowski, L. 1983. Totalitarianism & the Lie. <https://www.commentary.org/articles/leszek-kolakowski/totalitarianism-the-lie/> Accessed 7 October 2022.

⁵⁸ Orwell, G. 1983. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, p. 62.

⁵⁹ Guo, S. 1998. The Totalitarian Model Revisited. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 31 (3):271-285.

⁶⁰ Kirkpatrick, J.J. 1979. *Dictatorships & Double Standards*. https://www.commentary.org/articles/jeane-kirkpatrick/dictatorships-double-standards/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=SocialSnap&fbclid=IwAR0IRnCNBn2CkbW7SOsodAX74uSd0b0rRCT2El-g7yslAkpzg17ocMCR7w Accessed 26 August 2021.

⁶¹ Roll, R. and Talbott, J. 2003. Political Freedom, Economic Liberty, and Prosperity. *Journal of Democracy*, 14 (3): 75-89.

Pluralism in thought, and multiple sources of information and an independent media are considered paramount in such a free society.

The prior 'state of consciousness': The values shift and the return to history

Considering that the end of the Cold War was conceivably the victory of liberal democracy, and thus the underlying ideas of liberalism –civil and political liberties – what is the shift (return) in values, and who or what is driving the change? First, it is asserted that the seeds of the value shift from 'negative' rights to 'positive' rights were sown into the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the Soviet Union in the aftermath of the Second World War. And second it is contended that similar ideas have been growing in and disseminated through the academia in the form of the Marxist-inspired Critical Theory. In his 1989 *The End of History?* Fukuyama interestingly states that the pull of communism in Western societies had diminished to the point that in the intellectual environment it was no longer believed that the bourgeois society was 'something that ultimately need[ed] to be overcome', and that those who hold on to socialist ideals tend to be 'old' or 'marginal'.⁶² In considering recent trends in the sphere of ideology and ideas, it appears that there has been a resurgence of these ideas, and that they have largely been fermenting inside academic institutions and supranational institutions. It worth pointing out at the outset that the proponents of positive rights do not present their ideas as the subjection of the individual to the state and the eventual trampling of human rights, but rather as altruistic responses to societal shortcomings. Not unlike their totalitarian socialist predecessors, whose ideas emerged as the 'moral response of a few intellectuals to social misfortunes brought about by industrialization—the misery and hopelessness of working-class lives, marked by crises, unemployment, glaring inequalities, the dissolving of traditional communities'.⁶³

The values shift

There has been a shift in values from 'negative' freedom embodied in the inherent equality of every individual, the importance of liberty and pluralism, and the necessity of restraining political power through having a separation of the public and private. To 'positive' freedom as embodied in the value of social justice for identified social groups to be made possible through an extensive state. This value shift can be understood in the two understandings of

⁶² Fukuyama, F. 1989. *The End of History? The National Interest*, Summer 1989, p. 10.

⁶³ Kolakowski, L. 1983. *Totalitarianism & the Lie*. <https://www.commentary.org/articles/leszek-kolakowski/totalitarianism-the-lie/> Accessed 7 October 2022.

'freedom' as put forward by Isaiah Berlin in his 'Two Concepts of Liberty'. Both of which have implications for the nature of state-society relations. Negative freedom refers to freedom from, constraints or interference, whereas positive freedom, implies a liberty to, a liberty to pursue one's goals.⁶⁴ Negative freedom (characterized by inherent individual value and human rights, limited state, clear separation between the public and private spheres, and pluralism) is evident in the ideas of the early or classical liberals. Negative freedom is thus at the heart of political and economic liberalism - where each individual is left alone, with freedom from interference and able to act and believe as they choose, so long as they do no harm to others. It translates into a restrained state that is limited in its scope and jurisdiction. Pluralism is thus expected and protected. There is therefore a clear public-private divide. The individual's heart and mind – their beliefs and thoughts are thus respected.

On the other hand, positive freedom is favoured in emancipatory theories, and implies having the relevant capacity to be one's own master and self-realisation. Positive rights constitutions have an extensive range of economic, social and cultural rights, thus causing the state to expand, because the provision of these rights is dependent on the economic and social resources available to the state. Socialism considers the importance of the state in creating 'social conditions' that enable people to achieve personal fulfilment.⁶⁵ There is no clear sphere sovereignty as the public begins to encroach into the private so as to provide the 'positive freedoms'. The distinction between negative and positive freedoms can be further understood by earlier writings.

Following the French Revolution, Benjamin Constant, had similarly distinguished between what he referred to as the 'liberty of the ancients' and the 'liberty of the moderns'. The liberty of ancients:

consisted in exercising collectively... But if this was what the ancients called liberty, they admitted as compatible with this collective freedom the complete subjection of the individual to the authority of the community... All private actions were submitted to a severe surveillance. No importance was given to individual independence, neither in relation to opinions, nor to labor, nor, above all, to religion. The right to choose one's own religious affiliation, a right which we regard as one of the most precious, would have seemed to the ancients a crime and a sacrilege. In the domains

⁶⁴ Schmitz, D. and Brennan, J. 2010. *A brief history of liberty*. Wiley-Blackwell: West Sussex.

⁶⁵ Heywood, A. 2012. *Political Ideologies: An introduction*. 5th Edition. Palgrave Macmillan: Hampshire, p. 53.

which seem to us the most useful, the authority of the social body interposed itself and obstructed the will of individuals.⁶⁶

Instead, Constant argued:

Individual liberty ... is the true modern liberty. Political liberty is its guarantee, consequently political liberty is indispensable. But to ask the peoples of our day to sacrifice, like those of the past, the whole of their individual liberty to political liberty, is the surest means of detaching them from the former and, once this result has been achieved, it would be only too easy to deprive them of the latter.⁶⁷

He noted the danger of each form of liberty, with ancient liberty, the focus on social power meant too little value was attached to individual rights, while with modern liberty is that as people became too immersed in their private interest, they may forget their role in inputting into and restraining political power, handing over too much control to political authorities. Constant argues there is a responsibility to remind public authority 'to keep within their limits. [To] confine themselves to being just'.⁶⁸

Berlin went further to recognize that these different understandings of liberty translated into rival political ideas with implications for the role and scope of government vis-a-vie society.⁶⁹ Thus these two conceptions of liberty would have political regime consequences. Berlin feared that positive liberty could translate into 'licensing socialism'; giving governments too much scope to force society to be 'free'.⁷⁰ Sharing Berlin's concern, Schmitz and Brennan, instead note that historically, societies with negative liberty have tended towards enabling people to achieve positive freedom.⁷¹ In other words, in a context of liberty and restrained government power, society tends to flourish of its own accord. Whereas a context of unrestrained government power results in the encroachment into civil liberties. Societies need to grapple with whether they wish 'to stand or fall by [their] own merit, or to be free

⁶⁶ Constant, B. 1819. The Liberty of Ancients Compared with that of Moderns. Available at: <http://coppetinstitute.org/benjamin-constant-the-liberty-of-ancients-compared-with-that-of-moderns-1819/> Accessed 3 October 2022.

⁶⁷ Constant, B. 1819. The Liberty of Ancients Compared with that of Moderns. Available at: <http://coppetinstitute.org/benjamin-constant-the-liberty-of-ancients-compared-with-that-of-moderns-1819/> Accessed 3 October 2022.

⁶⁸ Constant, B. 1819. The Liberty of Ancients Compared with that of Moderns. Available at: <http://coppetinstitute.org/benjamin-constant-the-liberty-of-ancients-compared-with-that-of-moderns-1819/> Accessed 3 October 2022.

⁶⁹ Schmitz, D. and Brennan, J. 2010. *A brief history of liberty*. Wiley-Blackwell: West Sussex.

⁷⁰ Schmitz, D. and Brennan, J. 2010. *A brief history of liberty*. Wiley-Blackwell: West Sussex, p. 17.

⁷¹ Schmitz, D. and Brennan, J. 2010. *A brief history of liberty*. Wiley-Blackwell: West Sussex, p. 17.

from the risks and costs that go with personal responsibility'.⁷² In an ideal world, with perfect people, positive freedom could be a strong consideration:

...if power didn't corrupt, if people were omniscient and unfailing altruistic, we might want to entrust government with a great deal of power. But, if people are corruptible, if power is above all what corrupts, if people's generosity depends very much on circumstances, and if those who hold power never know exactly what will happen when they implement a given policy, the kind of government we have reason to favor might be far more limited.⁷³

In the current context, I make the claim that there has been a shift in values – from negative rights – freedom from encroachment by other actors, especially the state, to positive rights – 'rights to be given things', such as housing, education, and other such social spending with an extension of the state to provide these benefits. This is the return to history – the return to Constant's social power of the 'liberty of ancients' and the return to the 20th century's economic and social promises of communism. Different from Fukuyama and Hegel's idea of societal progression, it rather appears that society returns and repeats.

Instead of civil and political rights, the 'Kremlin propaganda championed the Soviet system's guarantee of economic and social rights' – the hallmark of a socialist society.⁷⁴ This is important to understand as the Soviet Union presented and promoted a conception of human rights differing from that of the West. While Western legal theory advocated 'negative' rights – the rights of individuals, protected from an intrusive government. The Soviet system advocated for society as a whole, instead of individuals, to be the beneficiaries of 'positive' rights distributed from the state. It was the Soviet ideology that placed premium on 'positive' rights – economic and social benefits such as housing, employment, access to health, essentially evolving the Soviet state into a 'giant welfare state'.⁷⁵ For all its virtue-postulating, the realities of the Soviet system were the impoverishment of society in terms of ideas and innovation, and for those who did not conform to the social system, incarceration, or death. Despite Secretary General Leonid Brezhnev's pontification that the West had perverted democracy and human rights with its 'revisionist propaganda' while the Soviet Union had

⁷² Schmitz, D. and Brennan, J. 2010. *A brief history of liberty*. Wiley-Blackwell: West Sussex, p. 19.

⁷³ Schmitz, D. and Brennan, J. 2010. *A brief history of liberty*. Wiley-Blackwell: West Sussex, p. 21.

⁷⁴ Patenaude, B.M. 2012. Regional perspectives on human rights: The USSR and Russia, Part One- The USSR. *Spice Digest*. Spice: Stanford.

⁷⁵ Patenaude, B.M. 2012. Regional perspectives on human rights: The USSR and Russia, Part One- The USSR. *Spice Digest*. Spice: Stanford.

offered ‘citizens of Socialist society the fullest and most realistic set of rights and duties’⁷⁶, truth eventually could no longer be suppressed, and the USSR collapsed in 1991.

The Soviet totalitarian system may have eventually collapsed, but it left a remnant in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The inclusion of economic and social rights in the Declaration actually received support from many Western democracies, while the USSR abstained from signing the UDHR as the wording could be ‘interpreted as relegating economic and social rights to second-class status’.⁷⁷ Furthermore the USSR did not want to endorse civil and political rights as it might have created the opportunity for Western interference in their country. Two documents would later emanate from the UDHR -the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The latter included a formidable list of obligations on the state. The social and economic rights provision was unmistakably socialist in its orientation. This is the return to history – the return to Constant’s social power of the ‘liberty of ancients’ and the return to the 20th century’s economic and social promises of communism.

The drivers of the current state of consciousness

The current change in the sphere of consciousness has arguably been driven by a cultural elite – the academia. The purpose of universities has historically been to seek out truth– the task of understanding *what is* through empirical research and academic debate. This has changed to include social activism with the pursuit of the normative approach of *what should be*. This is epitomized in the Critical Theory approach, which emanated from the Social Sciences. While called ‘Theory’ it is actually not a theory. Theories are presentations of possible explanations for phenomenon. Theories are tested and used to better understand or explain the world or a trend. They attempt to understand what is. Critical Theory does not seek to understand *what is* (empirical research). For example, it does not try to see *if* there is racism or sexism but moves from the assumption that there is, and it is systemic. Thus, it is normative in its approach, seeking to transform society according to what *should be*. This ‘transformation’ is the division of society into binaries - the oppressed and the oppressor, and the creating of awareness of one’s victimhood so as to engender a bitterness which can be harnessed towards a revolution or disruption, in order to eventually create a supposed utopia. The aim is thus to first deconstruct and then to transform. In its seeking to change society, it is an experiment in social engineering. As an approach, it justifies itself as

⁷⁶ Leonid Brezhnev quoted in Patenaude, B.M. 2012. Regional perspectives on human rights: The USSR and Russia, Part One- The USSR. *Spice Digest*. Spice: Stanford.

⁷⁷ Patenaude, B.M. 2012. Regional perspectives on human rights: The USSR and Russia, Part One- The USSR. *Spice Digest*. Spice: Stanford.

attempting to uncover underlying assumptions that hold society or certain identified sectors of society back from achieving social progression.⁷⁸

Critical Theory (CT) is a philosophy born out of German idealism and tied to the critical philosophy of Karl Marx. It holds that every society is divided into those who have power and those who do not, and those who have power, always oppress those who do not. In accordance with the typical Marxist-binaries the division between the oppressed and the oppressor is absolute and unbridgeable. Everything is seen through the prism of power. These categories are based on group identities, an expansion going beyond Marx's category of class and economic status to include: race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical ability, age, weight, and many other classifications.⁷⁹ CT's present a Matrix of Oppression⁸⁰ to show the division. The purpose of the matrix is to help others to better judge those around them according to these categories and accordingly rank people into the category of either oppressed or oppressor. They thus identify white, males, heterosexuals, the rich, Protestant Christians etc as the privileged oppressor group, while black, female, transgender, working class, Muslim etc are the oppressed. The members of the first group are considered to be permanently privileged and perpetrate various actions of oppression against the other group. The second group members are permanently disadvantaged victims of a society which is deliberately set up against them. According to this approach diversity is not understood as pluralism and diversity of views, but about elevating so-called 'lived experiences of oppression' and a uniform acceptance of these identified binaries. This approach moves from an assumption of systemic oppression and seeks to 'disrupt' the current structures and norms of society. The existing status quo is taken to constitute an oppressive state of affairs and thus it calls for this supposed 'hegemonic power arrangement' to be dismantled and culture rearranged. To do so, it ironically aims to set up its own hierarchy of power (just inverted), but not unlike communism before it, it centralises power around the state to transform society into the new utopian ideal.

The forerunner to Critical Theory is surely Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). He (and other communist theorists) sought to understand why the working class in Europe had not engaged in a socialist revolution like their Russian contemporaries, but instead had united

⁷⁸ Hannah Arendt (1963. *On Revolution*, p.58) recognised that Karl Marx had understood revolution in materialist terms. Revolution was not about freedom from oppression but freedom from scarcity. The aim was thus to achieve abundance now.

⁷⁹ The expansion of the classical Marxist critique from the issue of class and economics to these other categories is the shift from classical Marxism to cultural Marxism/ Critical Theory. Cultural Marxism is tied to the Marxist scholar Antonio Gramsci who called for the expansion of Marxist theory, to be applied to all aspects of culture for in his estimation a cultural revolution is required first before a political revolution can take place.

⁸⁰ Adams, M., Bell, L. A., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). 2007. *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*. 2nd edition. Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

as nations and fought alongside the gentry. It was argued that it was the society's culture (norms and values) that had made the working-class 'accomplices in their own exploitation'.⁸¹ He therefore argued that the class system was not only underpinned by unequal economic and political power, but also 'bourgeois' ideas and values spread through civil society, which he identified as the media, churches, and youth movements.⁸² It was this cultural 'hegemony' which stood in the way of the utopian classless society. He therefore advocated for a proletarian hegemony in the sphere of ideas to replace this bourgeois hegemony. In its stead he posited that '[s]ocialism is precisely the religion that must overwhelm Christianity. ... In the new order, Socialism will triumph by first capturing the culture via infiltration of schools, universities, churches and the media by *transforming the consciousness of society*' [emphasis mine].⁸³ These ideas were initially developed by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt in Germany. During World War II the Institute was relocated to the United States and is now more commonly known as the Frankfurt School.

Amongst the Critical Theorists was Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) who drew on Marxist, Hegelian and Freudian ideas to develop a utopian ideal of personal and sexual liberation, looking not to the working class but to minorities and those with grievances that could be mobilized. Due to the failure of Marx's prediction that capitalism would eventually be replaced by communism, some have argued that Marxism has become redundant. Yet, Critical Theory is prevalent in most academic institutions now and has also taken root in policy-making, school curriculums and the work environment. It manifests in the colloquially termed 'woke' culture. To be woke is to be alert and attuned to these supposed layers of oppression in society, and to disrupt the norms of society.

This approach presents itself as a movement for social justice, but it ostensibly weakens the people it claims to help. It creates binaries and polarises society. It tells certain identified groups that they are perpetually victims without agency except for rage and destruction, and others that they are perpetually oppressors because of social characteristics (race, sex) over which they have no control. A multi-billion-dollar industry⁸⁴ built on this ideological move has arisen with 'diversity' trainers in workplaces, institutions, and schools to show them their

⁸¹ Williams, Joanna. 2016. *Academic Freedom in an age of conformity*. Palgrave Macmillan.

⁸² Heywood, A. 2012. *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, 5th edition. Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke and New York, p.124.

⁸³ 'Audacia e Fide' in *Avanti!* reprinted in *Sotto la Mole* (1916-1920), p. 148.

⁸⁴ Robin DiAngelo the author of *White Fragility* charges approximately \$14 000 per diversity lecture hold that the path to social justice lies through retraining 'white' people so that they confess and atone for their sins. This is supposed to empower 'black' people who are typecast as silenced and oppressed by an overarching system of 'white supremacy'. And yet, there is no evidence to show that such training actually reduces racial resentment or contributes to "transformed" environments. See: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2020-10-07-does-anti-racist-training-work/>

conscious and unconscious biases. The ideas and positions of this movement – for example the assumption of systemic patriarchy - are presented as true and beyond reproach. It is the dogma of our current century. In her book, *How Woke Won*, Williams argues that ‘woke is the dominant ideology driving practice in all our institutions’.⁸⁵ This cultural movement has manifested in a burgeoning cancel culture – de-platforming speakers, censoring academics, causing people in the workplace to lose their employment, destroying people’s credibility, closing twitter accounts and deactivating civil society’s ability to receive money from supporters.⁸⁶ It is a purging society of those with ‘wrong-think’. It is no longer ‘a live and let live’ society of mutual respect. At the core of these current developments is a cultural shift – an attempt to change norms and values, to *transform* society. This is epitomized in the title of the 2022 Socialist Conference in Chicago, ‘*Change Everything*’.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Williams, J. 2022. Is woke real? In *The Spectator*. <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/is-woke-real->

⁸⁶ There has been a growing academic engagement with and attempts to better understand this cultural movement. Some referring to it as a whole or elements of it using terms such as Critical Society Justice, Cynical Theory, the Social Justice Movement, Political Correctness, identity politics, tribal politics, and a new religion. See: Pluckrose, H. and Lindsay, J. 2021. *Cynical Theories: How activist scholarship made everything about race, gender and identity*. Swift Publishing: Great Britain; Murray, D. 2019. *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity*. Bloomsbury Continuum; Williams, J. 2022. *How Woke Won: The Elitist Movement That Threatens Democracy, Tolerance and Reason*. Spiked: UK.

⁸⁷Mortazavi, S.H. 2022. Anything-and-Everything Socialism. *Quillette*. <https://quillette.com/2022/09/27/anything-and-everything-socialism/> Accessed 10 October 2022.

Comparative summary of the key characteristics and values of the Liberal Democratic and (New) Totalitarian Regimes

	LIBERAL DEMOCRACY	(NEW) TOTALITARIANISM
KEY IDEAS	Recognition of innate human value but also fallibility, thus limitation of political power and dispersion of power	Utopian ideals – human nature can be controlled and perfected through centralized political power
KEY VALUES	Equality and liberty	Social justice and equity (equality of outcome)
	Innate value of every individual (irrespective of social categories)	Social groups hierarchically categorized into the oppressed and oppressor, according to social categories – race, gender, social status
STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS	Negative freedom- restrained state power	Positive freedom- extensive state or global power
	Individual with inalienable rights from birth, with impartial state acting in the public interest	Group rights with partisan state promoting/ privileging special interests
	Sphere sovereignty – clear separation between the public-private realms	Total power – thus no distinction between the public and the private realms
	Access to multiple sources of information and news	Censored media and the dissemination of propaganda
	Competing centers of power – civil society, private enterprise	Centralised power
	Networks of engagement promoting social cohesion	Divisions based on closed social groups promoting polarization
ACADEMIC MANIFESTATIONS	Empirical research – understanding <i>what is</i> Debate, discussion, free speech	Normative research – seeking to transform society – social activism – what <i>should be</i> based on utopian ideals. ‘Bad’ ideas should be cancelled.
UNDERLYING IDEOLOGY/IES	Classical liberalism	Marxism/ Fascism/ Critical Theory

Table 1: Comparative summary of the key characteristics and values of the Liberal Democratic and (New) Totalitarian Regimes (by author)

Conclusion

Different from Fukuyama and Hegel's expectation of societal progression, and 'the end of history' it rather appears that society returns and repeats. The return to history is evident in the return to the state of consciousness which had underpinned the twentieth century totalitarianism of Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin and Mao. Civil liberties of individuals are being superseded by social claims of groups. Cultural elites advocate that state actors are expected to provide group demands on a partisan basis; a move that shifts individual and personal responsibility to centralized social power. As Schmidtz and Brennan warn 'civil rights...do not last, except where there is a general reverence for (negative) liberty and individualism'.⁸⁸ There is an increasing pervasiveness of a 'right' way of thinking or 'political correctness',⁸⁹ and an acceptability in shutting down voices and ideas that would contend. An oppressive cultural orthodoxy is becoming pervasive, driven not by charismatic leaders of states, but rather by social movements and activist academia that use the state machinery, including policies, law, education programs, and the corporate world to impose their ideology onto society. As Galston warns 'liberalism stands or falls with the distinction between the public realm governed by public principles and a private sphere in which beliefs and practices at odds with public norms are protected from them'.⁹⁰ The aim of providing material outcomes (rather than respecting freedoms) towards a utopian outcome, now called social justice, remains alluring. But to achieve this society (still) needs to be socially re-engineered. Thus, the goal of transforming society under a single, acceptable ideology persists. It is argued that the ideology remains at its source utopian and Marxist – the creation of a perfect society through external control. The drivers are thus different, and the methods adapted, but the underlying ideology and the intended outcomes are the same. What may have been forgotten is that the unintended regime outcomes will also be the same.

⁸⁸ Schmidtz, D. and Brennan, J. 2010. *A brief history of liberty*. Wiley-Blackwell: West Sussex, p.170.

⁸⁹ Kruger, D. 2020. *How to identify, debunk and dismantle dangerous ideas: Political Correctness does more harm than good*. Ambassador International: Greenville, USA.

⁹⁰ Galston, W.A. 2020. The Enduring Vulnerability of Liberal Democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 31(3): 8-24, p. 13.

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Author: Nicola de Jager, Department of Political Sciences, Stellenbosch University

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Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung NPC

60 Hume Rd

2196 Dunkeld

Johannesburg, South Africa

www.themidpoint.org.za

www.kas.de/southafrica

info.johannesburg@kas.de



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