

# Reason, Revelation, and Identity Politics

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*By refusing to take seriously the questions that underlie modern rationality, the West continues to undermine itself, to increase its own doubting and internal self-loathing. It makes its politics, its education, and its societies welcoming arenas for the atheism of unreason as mere subjectivity becomes the arbiter of what is ethical and good for man to do. The pathologies of reason and religion with which is plagued should not then be surprising. But the path forward is really the path of recovery of philosophical realism, the rebuilding of biblical faith, and the reawakening of love for constitutional republics.*

American and Spanish conservatives share several points of continuity in their fight against an ideological enemy whose aims include the following:

- Undermining constitutional foundations;
- Repudiating each country's unique history, culture, and religion;
- Oppressing the populace with transgender ideology and its war on the givenness of human nature and sexuality; and
- Denying the very idea of national citizenship.

VOX party co-founder Santiago Abascal gave an enlightening interview in *The European Conservative* that underlined these points. Moreover, Abascal's observations about the nature of the internal threats Spain must defeat if it is to flourish as a country should resonate with American conservatives—and the struggle they are in to defend their constitutional republic. Specifically, Abascal referred to “the ideological project of the Left: a project set against the middle classes of the West, against our roots, and against our sovereignty.”<sup>1</sup>

In referring to his decision to be one of the founders of VOX, he states: “We only reacted. I am not saying this as an ultimate judge of the matter, but as a simple Spanish citizen who is concerned about the suicidal course they [the Left] intend to impose on this nation.”<sup>2</sup>

## Points of Continuity

*The European Conservative* interview contained multiple points of continuity Americans and Spaniards share in defending against the crusade launched by identity politics and its enforcement arm in cancel culture.

**Scapegoating Men.** VOX opposes the law recently codified that treats the same acts of domestic violence perpetrated by men against women in a different category from those perpetrated by women. VOX draws the correct conclusion from this law: It is meant to demonize men as innately violent persons who seek to exercise a certain despotism over women. This is one of the tenets of identity politics that is operative, it seems, in both countries: Insist that male heterosexuals be treated as original sinners to be constantly scapegoated by gender and racial minorities.

**Transgenderism.** Other points of similarity include VOX's opposition to gender-ideology classes in schoolrooms. Transgender ideology repudiates any notion that humans are embodied creatures. That is, transgender ideology insists that bodies can be manipulated and reformed according to medical techniques and the desires of human will. In this, American conservatives, primarily in their role as parents, are slowly making inroads in removing this ideology from the classroom.

**Controlling Thought and Speech.** Finally, VOX's opposition to the Orwellian-named “Law of Historical Memory” resonates with American conservatives, who face an onslaught of postmodern historical narratives designed to destroy the moral foundation of American constitutionalism. Historian Stanley Payne has referred to Spain's “Law of Historical Memory” as “the most dramatic, arbitrary, and punitive proposal concerning discussions of history anywhere in the Western World.”<sup>3</sup>

In preventing the public expression of sympathy for former Spanish leader General Francisco Franco, for example, the law, backed by the threat of civil and criminal penalties, aims to control thought and speech on a very broad scale. After all, if you were to find positive aspects or consequences of Franco's rule, would you state it? Why risk it? And that is the real point of the law: to control minds and speech.

Abascal's comments here are wise: "In the US, as in Spain, statues are torn down, and people deny their own history. Many Western nations today face the same threat: the aim is to erase their roots, their traditions, and their history."<sup>4</sup>

Abascal adds:

What the Left is essentially trying to do is use our history as a weapon in which their crimes are whitewashed and in which their representatives are presented as democrats—which, in reality, they never were. It is not a question of opinion. They intend to impose their own exclusive vision of history on everyone else—and since it is a false vision, they try to eliminate any debate. It is the old totalitarian format, shared by the Soviets and the Taliban alike: that of promoting the destruction of monuments with dynamite and the desecration of tombs.<sup>5</sup>

Another term for this style of politics is wokeism, which poses the first serious challenge to American and Spanish constitutional democracies since communism.

## Wokeism

Wokeism aims to remake Western constitutionalism root and branch, to transform economics, politics, education, and other institutions and practices. The free and equal individual under the rule of law will be replaced with monolithic voices, united by perceived oppression, who demand a mutating law and politics that reward their grievances with punishments against alleged oppressors and redistributed resources for supposed "victims."

**Identity Politics.** The first thesis of wokeism is that persons are reducible to their affiliated identity, above all, race or gender. In this view, people are to understand themselves solely through these prisms and apply that understanding to others and to institutions.

The second thesis is that no person, no idea, and no historical account can be understood by independent human reason unfiltered by race, gender, and stories of interlocking oppression or, as the case may be, by the acts of oppression one has shared in as a member of the dominant group. Everything is either understood or projected through racial or gender identity.

The third thesis is that those who have identities that can be grouped under “persons of color” or under the LGBTQ label possess greater authority to speak in almost every sphere—owing to the various oppressions they have experienced and the cosmic redress required for justice and liberation—than “oppressor” groups.

**The 1619 Project.** America’s national DNA, according to *The New York Times*’ so-called 1619 Project—wokeism’s anti-American document par excellence—has been encoded with slavery and anti-black racism.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, America left the British Empire for the purposes of retaining the slavery regime, the project’s lead author Nikole Hannah-Jones proclaims—against historical evidence. White males stand as the grand artificer of this oppression, which has been transmitted throughout American history, informing constitutional documents, politics, and social structures.

The 1619 Project leaves no space or opportunity for redemption, for forgiveness, or for the statesmanship of America’s 16th President, Abraham Lincoln, who defeated the Confederate States of America to end slavery and defend the Constitution. The 1619 Project cannot understand the succession of witnesses in American history like Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and Martin Luther King Jr., who call upon Americans to understand in full the principles of their Constitution and union.

Consider that, while American soldiers were still fighting the Civil War, and much of the Democrat Party was arguing against the abolition of slavery, the 13th Amendment to the Constitution—outlawing slavery—was passed by Congress on January 31, 1865, and later ratified by the requisite number of states in December 1865. Its central premise stands on the equality language in the Declaration of Independence, the same principles that outlawed slavery in the lands regulated by the Northwest Ordinance of 1788. This, too, is part of America’s heritage.

## Personhood and Freedom

Western political institutions stand or fall ultimately by their ability to inculcate in citizens the habits of a free and virtuous people. Contrast this with the regime that wokeism would build. It rejects any notion of individual integrity or distinctive notion of personhood. Intellectual freedom is nonexistent. Speech would be filtered through a relentless and constantly evolving set of censors, who would punish or bless words according to ideological criteria.

Consequently, thinking and speaking would revolve around an endless loop of testimonies to oppression—either committed against an individual or by people with shared tribal traits. In the latter sense, people would

confess their shared guilt and accept whatever punishment is deemed necessary. Ibram X. Kendi, author of the best-selling book *How to Be an Antiracist*,<sup>7</sup> asserts that the point of being an anti-racist is not to refrain from discrimination but to know against whom to discriminate—largely whites and Asians in America—if the woke polity is to become a reality.

Under wokeism, the function of political institutions would not be to facilitate individual flourishing but to enforce individual sameness, subsuming all in an egalitarian stew of grievance, redistribution, and retribution. The traits that define a decent community, such as forgiveness, humility, and compromise, will not be possible, and those suggesting them will be accused of racism. Wokeism's social-justice constitution would fuel a state built for one purpose: the evisceration of the freedoms that Westerners currently enjoy.

If left-liberalism has always been at war with the rule of law and the constrained state, wokeism would destroy all fixed or limited notions of law. How could it be otherwise, when the operative principle is the elimination of all forms of oppression, as measured by an endlessly moving set of ideological markers? Man can attempt to organize the world without sufficient notions of virtue, justice, and freedom, to say nothing of the biblical God, but as theologian Henri de Lubac noted, when man does this, he organizes the world against himself.

## Marxism

When thinking about identity politics, it is clear its roots are in Marxism's epistemology, anthropology, and opposition to God. Freedom, according to Marxism, requires a comprehensive equality first. The individual is radically subordinate to the community. The freedom of the individual depends upon the structure of the whole community being transformed by the elimination of family, religion, the nation, and the military, among other vital institutions.

Identity politics continues this quest by relentless focus on historical memory, insisting that countries' characters must be subverted because they issue from the poisoned past of Western patriarchy, Western Christianity, capitalism, sexism, homophobia, etc. The realization of freedom, which requires restructuring human community, is obviously a lie about the human person. Who can truly believe that freedom will turn on the elimination of these institutions?

The first casualty of Marxist identity politics is the law itself as it is dissolved by this distorted spirit of emancipation, a kind of utopianism. The

present world is evil, and it must be replaced by superior planning, which becomes the source of the new law. But this inexorably demands that rule of law and its inherent reasonableness must give way to will, to the drive to organize a redeemed world by an immanentist spirit of progress that transforms the world with revolutionary goals.

Marx refused the posing of the question of the existence of God. The question itself was forbidden. God was utterly irrelevant to the closed material system he constructed to show man the path to this true liberation. Marx stands as the fulfillment of a culminating strand of modernist thought that placed man as a sovereign individual above God and prince, whose reason itself could create new governments and new possibilities for the individual. But if society is not a divine institution and is constructed by man, man can remake it if given absolute power. This is the fundamental move of modern rationalism. Marxism completes it.

## Polanyi's Analysis

Consider Michael Polanyi's tripartite breakdown of Marxist–Leninist scientific sociology that claimed to prove three things:

1. The total destruction of the existing society was the only method for achieving an essential improvement of society.
2. Nothing beyond this act of violence was required because it was unscientific to make any plans for the new society.
3. No moral restraints must be observed in the revolutionary seizure of power since this process was historically inevitable. As such, the process was beyond human control. Moreover, morality and truth were mere epiphenomena of class interests. Therefore, the only scientific meaning of morality, truth, and justice consisted in advancing those class interests that science had proved to be ascendant.<sup>8</sup>

This third criteria translates into the dismissal of any absolute condemnation of violence in the name of human dignity, as taught by the grand Western tradition in ethics and religion. These justifications were cover for capitalists' class interests in the continued domination of the working class—a class the capitalists, by appealing to religion and morality, were preventing from redressing their suffering with violence. The class interests that mattered were those of the proletariat, which science vindicated,

making revolutionary action not only possible, but required. These criteria for a violent Marxist–Leninist revolution transformed socialism from utopia into a science.

The Marxist–Leninist claim that revolution was scientific and empirically justified entailed that any “factual objection to the theory was repelled” as being “a reactionary attack against Socialism,” and could be dismissed as unscientific.<sup>9</sup> The moral motives of love for humanity, for egalitarianism, and of hatred for existing society now received a scientific cover that allowed Marxist–Leninists to advance against society and dismiss any objections as pathetic and backward. Of course, socialist revolutionaries embraced a pure naturalistic conception of man, per Polanyi. The only way their moral motives could advance was through such a pseudo-“scientific” patina justifying the destructive path being sought.

The naturalistic view of man held by Marxist ideology cuts man off from God and eternity. This is key because moral motives have no vertical dimension; they cannot be a participant in divine order or in a truth of the human soul. Moral motives are now immanent, demanding earthly perfection. Polanyi observes, “Once they are immanent, moral motives no longer speak in their own voice, and are no longer accessible to moral arguments; such is the structure of modern nihilistic fanaticism.”<sup>10</sup>

Polanyi’s analysis of Marxist–Leninism’s scientific sociology underscores that, for Marx, the only truth for man is that of changing the world, molding the world to a new future that man creates. Man, in effect, becomes God.

## Creating the Future

Every man is bound to have some belief. Marxism tries to incorporate belief into practical knowledge or the future society it is trying to create. In doing so, Marxism represents the purpose of man to be belief in what one makes. But as the late Pope Benedict XVI observed in *Introduction to Christianity*, not even Marxism can turn the idea of the “makable” as the purpose of life into something that can be known. It can only promise that such is the case.<sup>11</sup>

**Destruction from Within.** Returning to Polanyi’s tripartite discussion of Marxist–Leninism’s science, one can also see in it a similar justification for identity politics. Society must be destroyed from within, Polanyi observes. No other course of action is worthy if society is going to be improved. And nothing beyond this violence needs to be considered because science has not revealed the way forward.

And finally, no moral restraints must be observed in this objective pursuit of violence. Consider the observation that society must be destroyed from within. What else better describes the war that identity politics makes

upon key institutions in government, the economy, civil society, the family, national memory, and religion? The purpose in all these attacks is obviously to paralyze these institutions, turn people against one another, undermine moral credibility, and prepare the path for the makeover of constitutional republics with identity politics.

**Violence and Indoctrination.** The other two conditions concern violence, a necessary and scientific objective that must be pursued by revolutionaries without moral restraint. Has there been violence? In the U.S., yes. In 2020 alone, America had over 500 violent demonstrations. But short of violence, there is the virtual inability of conservatives to speak and advocate in educational institutions, media outlets, and social media.

Parents in certain jurisdictions are now being separated by courts from their children for not affirming their children’s “transgender” identity. Teachers routinely advocate and guide children toward affirming various sexual identities—and purposely exclude parents from these decisions. America’s vaunted military now struggles with recruitment goals, while at the same time inculcating critical race theory to officers, enlisted personnel, and service academy students. Why would anyone defend a country built on racism and slavery? These are a few examples of either violence or indoctrination sessions that do not permit disagreement but want to form new citizens in the service of identity politics whose goal is a socialist state.

## An Atheism of Unreason

There is more than Marx when it comes to the foundations of identity politics. One must also confront Jacques Derrida and Michael Foucault, the apostles of a relativism that denies it is relativism because it further denies there is any alternative to relativism. In short, there are no conclusive arguments underlying conservative assertions: Truth can only be what the relevant community of discourse agrees to say is true.

In identity politics, something like group actualization of gender and racial minorities is the end goal. Thus, arguments that claim to deal with truth are strategies for the exercise of the will and a quest for power. Truth is whatever will prove instrumental to projecting group identity. This conclusion is valid if you accept the premise that all of reality is constructed by the need to serve the will to power. Groups are therefore endlessly engaged in the “social construction of reality.”

In 1916, Antonio Gramsci wrote that a revolutionary consciousness must be formed as “a result of intelligent reflection, at first by just a few

people and later by a whole class, on why certain conditions exist and how best to convert the facts of vassalage into triggers of rebellion and social reconstruction.”

Gramsci asserted:

Every revolution has been preceded by an intense labor of criticism, by the diffusion of culture and the spread of ideas amongst masses of men who are at first resistant, and think only of solving their own immediate economic and political problems for themselves.<sup>12</sup>

Gramsci’s central idea was the Theory of Cultural Hegemony. In his view, the vanguard must destroy the society’s “hegemonic narrative” and replace it with a “counter-narrative.” This ultimately is to say that society faces an atheism of unreason, according to the late Father Richard Neuhaus—an atheism that is more dangerous because it is so insidious.

## Reason and Revelation

Is it possible to undermine the social construction of reality by identity politics? Conservatives must recover the essential way that both reason and revelation reinforce one another and lead to truth. This is essential Western heritage. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, the West needs to “stand-understand,” that is, one should entrust oneself to that which has not been made by oneself and never could be made and which supports all one’s making. The bestowal of authentic meaning comes by taking a stand in the totality of reality. Mankind would be homeless without it. This is a meaning that bears man up. It is something received, not made. This is meaning that is the ground on which existence as a totality can stand and live.

The contrast here is not only with identity politics and its postmodernism, but with the modernist rationalist spirit that has cleared the way for it, which is largely positivistic, renouncing the quest for truth itself in favor of what works well. Positivism equates truth with what can be measured and demonstrated empirically. But does positivism function well for man? The end of positivism is to push to the side the perennial questions of human existence: Why is man here? What can be hoped for? What is truth? What is evil? What is sin? What is the good? If these questions cannot really be answered, why should they be asked? In the end, positivism cannot speak to a reason in man that wants understanding.

## Understanding Through Reason

The essential property of belief is understanding through reason. The human person craves meaning. If his deepest longings and questions are ignored, will they not seek expression in some form of truth that is accepted by authorities? Is this not the shape of left-liberal politics today? Western heritage has either not been taught or has been denied by various institutional authorities. What has replaced it? The autonomous will, and its close cousin, the collectivist will, find their completion in an ideology that promises to undermine a racist, sexist, unjust power structure. This is the calling of identity politics; moral motives again find a scientific way to advance themselves in a society largely unable to understand or believe in the religion and classical philosophy of the sinful past.

But what does it mean to stand and understand within a reality that mankind did not make? Truth is not only what can be made or measured. Pope Benedict XVI outlined in his 2006 Regensburg Address that modern scientific reason refuses to take seriously the question that emerges from its own method, a question which points beyond modern science and its methodology. That is, “scientific reason quite simply has to accept the rational structure of matter and the correspondence between our spirit and the prevailing rational structures of nature as a given, on which its methodology has to be based.”<sup>13</sup> Why? And does not this question point to philosophy and theology and a *rapprochement* between the two lodestars of the Western mind, Jerusalem and Athens, Faith and Reason? Moreover, the opening of St. John’s Gospel definitively announces this synthesis of faith and reason:

In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things came into being, not one thing came into being except through him.<sup>14</sup>

Reflecting on these verses, Pope Benedict XVI observes that God is *logos*, which means both reason and word—a reason that is creative and capable of self-communication precisely as reason. Consider also that God reveals himself to Moses from a burning bush, simply asserting that “I Am.” God is Being itself, transcendent from reality while upholding his existence. Thus, the biblical God is separate from and above the host of divinities that mark the ancient and classical world. He is the ground of existence, not a part of it or merely joined to it.

## What Is Truth?

What does Jesus Christ say before Pontius Pilate? “My kingship is not of this world.” Christ creates a thoroughly new kingship and holds up to Pilate that the power of His kingship is truth. And Pilate asks Him: What is truth? Is it merely the pragmatic attempt to hold onto power? This is, after all, the course of action that best describes Pilate’s action toward Christ. Moreover, the modern spirit seems to say two different things. There is the false presumption that man places himself above truth while making power and domination the objective of his thought. Or there is false humility that insists man does not have the capacity for truth. Even more nihilistic: Can truth mean nothing?

The classic definition of truth is conformity between the intellect and reality. Reality is what man takes in when his intellect reflects a thing as it is in itself. Of course, reality is immense; man can only take in so much at a given time. There is always more to know and reflect on. Consider Saint Thomas Aquinas’ argument: “Truth is in God’s intellect properly and firstly; in human intellect, it is present properly and derivatively.”<sup>15</sup>

God is truth itself, the sovereign and first truth. Pope Benedict adds that Jesus says his purpose was to come into the world and “bear witness to the truth.” And the conclusion, according to the late Pope, of the *logos* should be: “The world is ‘true’ to the extent it reflects God: the creative logic, the eternal reason that brought it to birth. Man becomes himself when he grows in God’s likeness. That is his proper nature.”<sup>16</sup>

## Conclusion

By refusing to take seriously the questions that underlie modern rationality, the West continues to undermine itself, to increase its own doubting and internal self-loathing. If the U.S. and Spain makes their politics, education, and society welcoming arenas for the atheism of unreason, mere subjectivity will become the arbiter of what is ethical and good for man to do. It should not then be surprising that society is plagued with pathologies of reason and religion. But the path forward is really the path of recovery of philosophical realism, rebuilding biblical faith, and reawakening love for constitutional republics.

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## Endnotes

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3. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
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16. Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week* (Ignatius Press, 2011), p. 193.