

By Murray Rundus

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Liberalism has been the dominant force in modern political society for nearly two hundred years. Its ideas inspired revolutions in practically every European nation, established a new status quo based on its premises rather than those of Christendom, and it has largely served as the foundation and ideology for the American Empire. But what is too often neglected is what comes after Liberalism. 21st-century man is slowly being freed from the Liberal stranglehold that Liberal thought held in the previous century. It is obvious that in those 'second world' countries that had to reckon with governing in a post-Soviet world, namely Russia, China, and Iran, we have seen a shift away from Liberal ideals and towards more 'traditional' social alternatives ranging from Neo-Confucianism, to Orthodoxy to Islamism.^[i] But even in the West, that bastion of Liberal Democracy, we have seen a noticeable movement away from those values that were once so emblematic of Liberalism. 'Liberal' parties no longer preach their erroneous freedom of expression but promote censorship, they have ceased preaching 'freedom of religion' and now demand freedom *from* religion altogether. The Left is no longer Liberal because Liberalism was doomed to fail.

The Liberal Elite No Longer Popular

I believe that the watershed mark in the consensus turning away from Liberalism was when Dr. Jordan Peterson was made an academic pariah in 2016 after criticizing the Canadian Bill C-16 which made denying another's gender identity or expression a *human rights* violation.^[ii] Dr. Peterson, notwithstanding his tremendous contributions acting as a type of stepping stone for those on their way to Catholicism (myself included), is by every means a Liberal in the classical sense, promoting nearly absolute freedom of expression, and the separation of Church and State while holding to frustratingly agnostic positions about the existence of God.^[iii] In past eras, a man who held the ideas of Dr. Peterson would be considered a Liberal Radical, a threat to the foundation of Christendom with God at the center, and a darling for the radicals promoting humanism unrestrained by 'old superstition.' And yet Dr. Peterson found himself at odds with the existing order of intelligentsia over the question of human rights, and since he was sane enough to realize the absurdity of reconciling a system that claims to be Liberal and the imposition of mandatory speech and use of strange pronouns, he was considered *persona non grata* by the establishment.

Dr. Peterson's mistake was failing to realize that the very foundation of Western Liberalism

was a foundation made up of sand. Liberalism predicates itself on certain human rights common to all men and the Liberty of all men to live out those rights. Those living in the West are constantly acquainted with the idea of *rights*. We hear of 'certain inalienable rights', the 'Rights of Man', and the 'Civil Rights Movement' but so often Westerners are not quite sure where those 'Rights' come from, especially for a society that endlessly seeks to liberate itself from God and the Church. Catholics are not the only ones to notice this apparent confusion, but it has been the topic of the current academic establishment. One of the darlings of the progressive Left, Yuval Harari, has been the subject of much fame and adulation for his ideas concerning the existence of human rights, or rather the absence of their existence at all. His book 'Sapiens' is a New York Times Best Seller, his podcast appearances frequently receive millions of views, but arguably the most impactful of all has been his 'Ted Talk' lectures. There Harari proposes that:

"[H]uman rights are just like heaven and like God: It's just a fictional story that we've invented and spread around. ... It is not a biological reality, just as jellyfish and woodpeckers and ostriches have no rights, Homo sapiens have no rights. ... Take a human, cut him open, look inside — you find their blood, and you find the heart and lungs and kidneys, but you don't find there any rights. The only place you find rights is in the fictional stories that humans have invented and spread around."[\[iv\]](#)

The language that Harari uses here is very strong and evocative which naturally produces a negative reaction, especially from the Classical Liberal crowd. There were cries that human rights were 'self-evident' to human knowledge or as Dr. Peterson said "built into the structure of human being."[\[v\]](#) This strikes me as odd, as it was certainly not self-evident to pre-Christian civilization, it would have been exceedingly difficult to convince the Aztecs of their 'self-evident human right' to life, much less their right to freedom of speech. Early Liberals realized that existence of human rights needed to be demonstrated to justify them, and in understanding their shortcomings, we can see how exactly Harari could make such an audacious statement and also find the Catholic understanding of what a 'right' is.

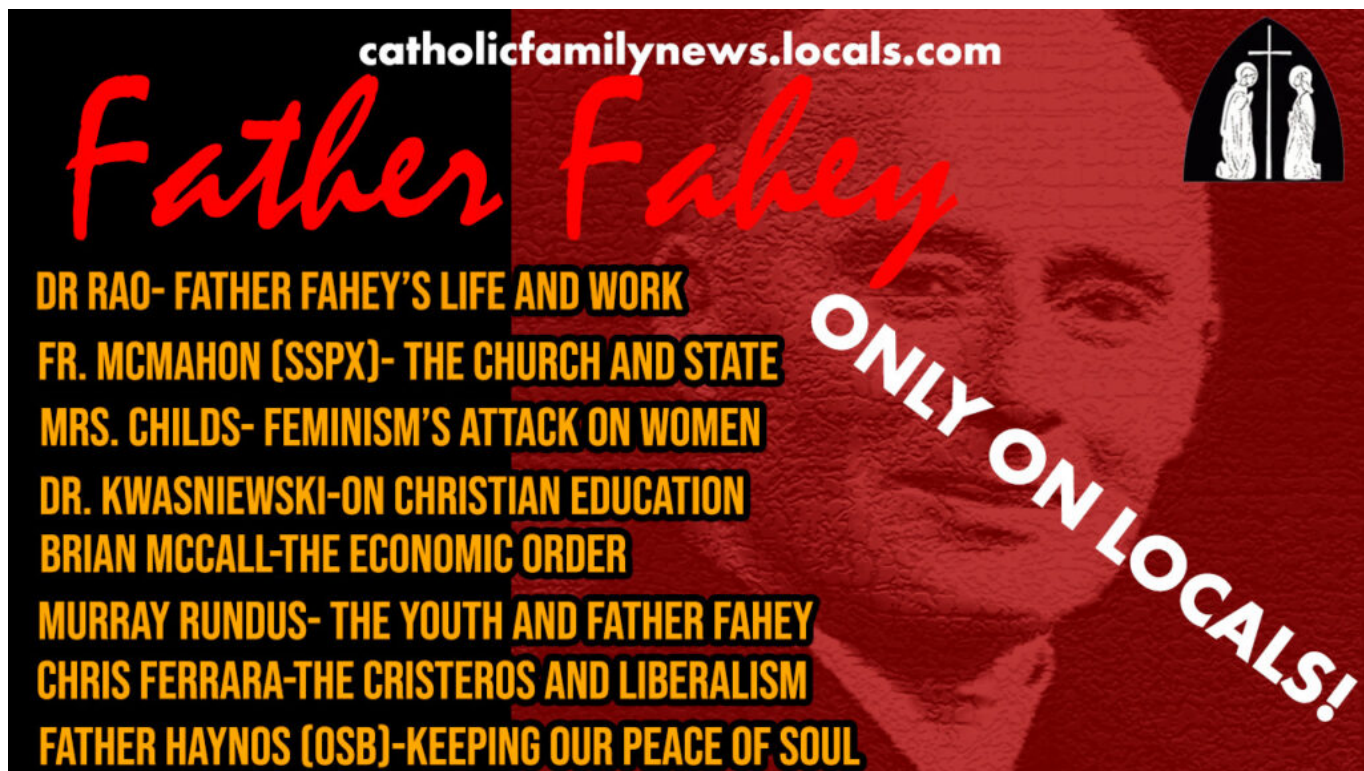
The Philosophical Basis of Liberalism

Liberalism is ultimately the political application of a philosophical system which views all aspects of life through that lens. Liberalism is influenced by two strains of Enlightenment Philosophy, Empiricism and Idealism, both ending in roughly the same place. Harari, as shown above, falls into the Empiricist camp, doubting everything that he can't detect from his senses directly. We see this frequently in conversations with Atheists who say that they won't believe in God unless he can scientifically examine Him with the five senses. Idealism is on the other end of the spectrum. In Paul Glenn's excellent *Introduction to Philosophy* he defined Idealism as a "blanket-term for all doctrines (and their name is

legion) which in any way minimize reality and tend to turn things into thoughts or mental images.”[\[vi\]](#) Idealism doubts the senses but relies on reason and the world of ideas. Oftentimes Enlightenment philosophers would struggle with both, such as one of the founders of Liberal thought, John Locke, whose philosophical inquiry was characterized by Voltaire as saying

“At least confess your selves to be as ignorant as I. Neither your Imaginations nor mine are able to comprehend in what manner a Body is susceptible of Ideas; and do you conceive better in what manner a Substance, of what kind soever, is susceptible of them? As you cannot comprehend either Matter or Spirit, why will you presume to assert any thing?”[\[vii\]](#)

Voltaire rightly apprehends that Locke's philosophy was built on a radical skepticism, on doubting reality. This is why it is common for Empiricism and Idealism to both be grouped into one overarching philosophical system that we term *Subjectivism*, which makes the claim that truth is uncertain, whether by means of our senses or our intellect, and this is the system that is the driving force for Liberalism. It should be here noted that Liberalism did not start out of an honest philosophical wondering, akin to Socrates seeking an increase of knowledge with humility, as is so often claimed. In the West we are used to thinking of ‘enlightened men’ attempting to find the truth only to be met with the Inquisition. Rather, Liberalism developed and used philosophy as a way to justify a historical solution to the problem of violence in Europe.



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The Historical Foundation for Liberalism

Liberalism was largely borne out of mass civil unrest taking place after the Protestant Revolution. With there no longer being a source of unity within Christendom, Europe saw many bloody wars of religion. The Liberals saw that without the force of the Catholic faith, which was largely taken for granted to false, the aristocratic hierarchy lost much of its justification for existing, but the multitude of alternatives could never seem to setup a reasonable alternative. Liberalism offered a solution that promised peace and an end to the bloody wars. As we know with hindsight, despite the massive amounts of Liberal propaganda, this was a failed endeavor. Liberalism failed in bringing about peace, but the endless amounts of Liberal revolutions caused even more bloodshed. Further, wars of religion did not end but merely took on a new form with ideological conflicts, the worst of which were seen in the 20th century in the form of two World Wars.

The State of Nature: A Solution?

Now that we understand the philosophical justification for Liberalism, we can now examine what the Liberals saw as the primary means and center for justifying human rights and the Liberal system to protect them. There exists in every human a great desire for an origin story, or a creation myth. These have served as the bedrock for practically every civilization. As we know from Scripture there was in fact a true origin story, a *Genesis* of

mankind. The Liberals were often keen on dismissing such ideas as superstition, and yet they couldn't help constructing one of their own, something called 'the state of nature.' For the early Liberal thinkers, they needed a way to justify the existence of the State, the rights to be protected and ultimately the claim that all men were equal, rather than formed into natural hierarchies. The way they did this was by positing a hypothetical time where there was no State or society, where man was living among the beasts. These Liberals often disagreed and still do disagree as to what exactly man was like at this time, whether he was as Thomas Hobbes said, brutish and violent in nature or as Rousseau said a 'noble savage' who had his needs completely provided for and would seldom if ever even speak to other men. What they all agreed on is that all these pre-social men would collectively decide to enter a social contract with the State to have their needs and rights protected. What needs to be emphasized here is that this is a **complete fabrication**. Not only does this state of nature not answer the question as to the origin of human rights or why and how they are innate, but there was never a time of pre-social man because man is social by nature. Neither do modern archeological, sociological or historical accounts lend any sort of credence towards the belief that there was a pre-social, solitary man. There was never a time without hierarchy because man has always been hierarchical and lived with kings, chieftains, patriarchs and priests. And yet the entirety of the basis for Liberal thought is constructed on top of the assumption of this hypothetical and false 'state of nature.'[\[viii\]](#) Is there any surprise at all then, that such a faulty assumption is simply disregarded by modern thinkers? If a system is meant to replace the so-called 'superstition' of Catholic Christendom, what good is it if it simply constructs a myth of its own?

The Alternative to Liberalism

It is sometimes said that there is no alternative to the Liberal conception of human rights, or that the alternatives lead to insanity. But as we have seen from Harari, there are those who maintain a materialist point of view and dismiss the Liberal conception completely. Indeed, nowadays we see an increase of Marxist thought, viewing man through a historical-materialist lens of class against class, oppressor vs the oppressed. This vision of the world has no need for the Liberal constructs. But many seem to have an innate tendency to say that Yuval Harari is wrong for saying that there is nothing more to man's rights than there is the insides of a jellyfish. If Harari is also wrong, what is a true alternative?

Catholicism provides an answer with the perspective of Revelation. For the Catholic, our rights do not find their origin in an artificial construct of pre-social man but in our current duties that we have, our final end. Man is not made to simply find material pleasure but to achieve union with his Creator in the vision that He has ordained. Man therefore is entitled to certain 'rights' which enable us to reach our final end. The Church has explicated some of

these, such as the right to develop an intellectual and moral life through education, the right to worship God, the right to a free choice of state of life and the right to material goods in view of one's personal duties and societal limits.[\[ix\]](#) These are fundamental rights of man that must be allowed him but also call him to live out his life in accordance with his end. Catholicism further explains that only truth and goodness have rights, error does not, a notion often confused since Vatican II. Catholicism reconciles that our rights can seem to 'disappear' as it divides rights into objective and subjective rights. Archbishop Lefebvre explains this as follows.

"Subjective right is the power of demanding, as rooted in the individual, regardless of its application; for instance the right to worship God, regardless of the type of worship. *Objective right* is, on the contrary, the specific object of the right: *this* particular worship, *this* specific education. So the solution is very simple: the objective right is alienable and the subjective right is inalienable. The reason is that the subjective right is based on a corresponding duty to be fulfilled-or, to put it another way-on the transcendental relation between a faculty (e.g., the will) and its object (e.g., to worship God or to educate one's children). That relation and that duty remains no matter what happens. On the contrary, the objective right, or the specific object of right, is based on the objective order of beings and their end; it disappears as soon as the individual, by his actions severs himself from that order."[\[x\]](#)

Man loses his objective rights when they are applied to error, because man is made for truth, goodness and beauty. On the other hand, certain evils may be *tolerated* for the preservation of the common good. Contrary to the notion that Catholic political theory is impractical due to being perfectionistic, Catholicism realizes that certain evils such as Muslim parents privately teaching their children to deny the Trinity, or a massive amount of the population publicly worshipping in a false religion, may be *tolerated* for the greater good (for example in order to prevent a civil war or in the case of a Muslim parent, we cannot take away their right to teach their children Islam without taking away their inviolable right to teach their children generally.) These tolerations may so much even constitute a civil right or law on the part of the State, but in no sense are these rights inviolable.



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Conclusion

The Liberal conception, or rather the incoherent lack of conception, regarding the foundation of human rights has proved to be false and incapable of sustaining a culture. Modern Western man is now faced with a choice, he may either turn to newer opinions which completely reject the conception of human rights and adopt a purely Materialist vision, viewing man as a mass of cells, a cog in the mechanical meatgrinder, or he may return to the culture and thought that sustained the West for centuries, Catholicism. There is simply no use in returning to the so-called ideals of the Enlightenment when the behind-the-scenes work that justified the system was faulty. Liberalism stands as an alluring but unstable façade with its promises of human rights and liberties, locking Western thought out of the cathedral where its true being resides. Catholicism, by contrast, is the cathedral itself, with a firm foundation, its truths everlasting, and its doors open for those who seek wisdom beyond the fleeting charms of the entrance.

[i] For more on this, see our YouTube interview with the Western Confucian Journal, and <https://catholicfamilynews.com/blog/2024/02/21/the-putin-tucker-interview-examined/>

[ii] https://web.archive.org/web/20170223083453/http://www.parl.gc.ca/content/hoc/Bills/421/Government/C-16/C-16_1/C-16_1.PDF

[iii] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mXE9ks7S43Q>

[iv] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZa4sdIwV04&t=697s>

[v] <https://x.com/jordanbpeterson/status/1749976936544186568>

[vi] Paul Glenn, Introduction to Philosophy

[vii] Letters concerning the English Nation/Letter XIII

[viii] For more on this see <https://www.lotuseaters.com/five-false-assumptions-of-liberalism-10-06-2022>

[ix] Summary taken from Archbishop Lefebvre's "Religious Liberty Questioned" page 12

[x] Religious Liberty Questioned p13