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“After Justice” in the Progressive Post-Truth World

CATHOLIC CHALLENGES
TO PROGRESSIVE CULTURE

With a philosophical prescience, Dietrich von Hildebrandt once cautioned that,

one of the most ominous features of the present epoch is undoubtedly the dethronement of truth.¹

From his times in the 1940s through subsequent decades, he perceived that certain social, political, and cultural forces are fomenting the denial of objective truth. Hildebrandt was principally concerned with Nazism, Socialism and Communism, but his warnings certainly apply to movements which arose after his death in 1977, such as postmodernism, political correctness, cancel culture and “The WOKE.”

In fact, because of the extent to which these more current movements share epistemological subjectivism, moral relativism, and the enthronement of ideology over philosophy and science, these movements can be included together as derivative versions or forms of an overarching Progressivism. It is such

¹ See Dietrich von Hildebrandt, *The Dethronement of Truth* (Steubenville, OH: Hildebrand Press, 2021).]

Progressivism which is transforming what we have known and valued traditionally as truth and morality into the constructs of a post-truth world.

What is the origin of Progressivism? To answer this question in broad strokes it began as a philosophy in the 18th and 19th centuries with such philosophers and works as Marquis de Condorcet's *Outlines of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795), Auguste Comte's *Course on Positive Philosophy* (six volumes 1830–1842) and Comte's friend, John Stewart Mill in the later editions of his *Principles of Political Economy and Some of the Applications of Social Philosophy* (original edition 1840, "Chapters on Socialism," 1874).

Despite certain differences, all of these works have in common the view that their versions of "progressive" principles can engineer a much better, perhaps even a utopian society in which economic socialism and social justice prevail.

In the early 20th century Progressivism abandoned all pretense of being a philosophy and became a thoroughgoing ideology. It was even a short-lived official political party at that time called The American Progressive Party. In fact, the Progressive Congressional Caucus still exists today in the US Congress with over 100 members, mostly in the House of Representatives.

As the ideology it has become, Progressivism is a leftist populism that seeks social justice above all else. Each of the various more current versions or derivative forms of Progressivism that were mentioned above has its own set of ideas and specific agenda, but for all of them the social justice goal is paramount. These forms are also becoming more and more authoritarian and extreme. Postmodernism, which is not as vital today as it was in previous decades, established its legacy as a complete epistemological subjectivism: it bequeathed to civilization the post-truth world.

The Politically Correct and Cancel Culture forms have become dictatorial with the advance of their unassailable, absolute social justice standards of moral righteousness. The WOKE Mentality especially manipulates the power of the incessant "echo cham-

ber” of social media (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Tic Tok, Snap Chat etc.) and mainstream media (TV and radio streaming stations) to transform the “people” into a conformist, hive-minded ruling mob that recognizes and imposes only its brand of social justice.

It has reached the point that what we commonly and historically believed about justice is being fundamentally transformed into something entirely different. It is not a matter of the traditional virtue of justice as fairness; we are confronting what is “after justice,” namely whatever “fairness” standard suits the Progressives’ ideological social agenda to fundamentally transform civilization. “Fairness” is merely a stratagem for executing the Progressive revolution.

It is truly fortunate, however, that the rich, spiritually grounded Catholic Christian Tradition of faith and reason offers us a most solid foundation for challenging the post-truth of contemporary Progressivism. That foundation is realism in its essential facets:

1. **Metaphysical Realism** – There is an objective design to the entirety of God’s creation. The natural universe is governed, ordered by laws and principles; the universe is not chaotic or anarchic, nor is it the mere mental projection or construct of what humans believe or want it to be. Man is NOT the measure of all things! The measures of what is lay before us and we can discover, not simply invent, the measured design of what is.
2. **Epistemological Realism** – It is possible to know truths of objective reality. All knowledge is not merely one’s subjective perspective. With our cognitive abilities and reasoning we can discover and affirm truths about ourselves as human beings, about our society, and about the natural world in which we exist. This is the true meaning of “Science is Real”.
3. The “real science” Progressives advance is politicized: they claim it is real because it serves their revolutionary purposes, such as with climate science, gender science, embryological science, and epidemiological science. When alternative science is advanced, especially in these areas, it is cancelled,

snuffed out, and those who advance an alternative are derided, abused, and sometimes even arrested.

4. Moral Realism – We can know the difference between right and wrong. Moral Relativism, however, skeptically questions: Who’s to say what is really right and wrong? Isn’t it all just relative to your opinion? Such relativism is presently used as a Progressive rhetorical device to trick us into accepting their so-called “tolerant” views on morality. The tactic is that after we are befuddled by the constant skepticism, we are rendered vulnerable to accepting the Progressives’ relativism as the truth because with it we have at least something to believe in. But with moral realism we know that rational inquiry can enable us to discover, again, not invent, what is virtuous as opposed to vicious.

Realism gives us hope. It is the hope that the truth can be learned. Hope edifies us to affirm that the truth makes sense within the order of God’s creation; and though with our limited human abilities we might not be able to discover the whole truth all of the time, we persevere and take joy in what truth we have grasped. Only Realism can engender and support such hope and joy, and challenge the post-truth world.

That challenge should best begin with understanding the Progressives’ revolutionary agenda in order to identify the contours of its ideology. As a starting point, it is important to contrast Progressive ideology with the Traditional view of the crucial influence of religion and morality on culture. Andrew Breitbart, a 20th century political philosopher, believed that politics is downstream from culture, and culture is downstream from religion.²

² This Traditional view of Andrew Breitbart is referenced in: Christopher Chantrill, “An American Manifesto,” October 2017, 2010s<https://americanmanifestobook.blogspot.com/2017/10/politics-is-downstream-from-culture-is.html>. Dan McLaughlin, “Politics is Still Downstream of Culture,” May 2016, https://redstate.com/dan_mclaughlin/2016/05/04/politics-stilldownstream-culture-n5881

To expand on this Traditional view, culture, especially morality, flows from religion, and politics and economics flow from culture.

Breitbart’s Traditional view is simply expressing what numerous others, including the founders of the USA, asserted. George Washington, the first US President, in his *Farewell Address* stated that,

Of all the dispositions which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. These [are the] great pillars of human happiness. [Where] is the security for prosperity, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation deserts us... [Let] us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion.

Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of a peculiar structure, reason, and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle. It is substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. The rule indeed extends with more or less force to every species of free government.³

For Washington morality rooted in religion is a necessary condition for maintaining within culture a national morality which is held firmly by the nation’s people. This is the only type of culture which can sustain a free government.

John Adams, the second President, stated,

It is religion and morality alone which can establish the principles upon which freedom can securely stand.⁴

³ George Washington, *Farewell Address*, 1796, <https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/Washingtons-Farewell-Address.pdf>, pp. 16–17.

⁴ John Adams, *Letter to Zabdiel Adams*, 21 June 1776. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-02-001>

As with Washington, Adams emphasizes the vital importance religion and morality have on securing freedom and maintaining a democratic Republic.

Richard John Neuhaus, a 21st century culture commentator, observed that,

Politics is chiefly a function of culture, at the heart of culture is morality and at the heart of morality is religion.⁵

Neuhaus is unambiguous in his explanation of the way religion is the soil for the healthy growth of morality, culture, and politics.

The Traditional view, then, can be capsulized as: religion spawns morality which influences culture, which in turn shapes politics and economics. Religion, through its morality, is the principal driver of a nation's politics and economics. This, however, is turned upside down by the Progressive aims to command and control culture through their politics and economics.

The late U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan analyzed the difference between Traditionalism (conservatism) and Progressivism (liberalism) as such,

The central conservative truth is that it is culture, not politics that determines the success of a society. The central liberal truth is that politics can change a culture and save it from itself.⁶

Moynihan recognized that in the Traditional view, culture is the driver of social success.

⁵ This well-known quote from Richard John Neuhaus is often cited in “quotable quotes” sorts of sites, <https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/8122.1>.

⁶ The citation for this frequently referenced quote from Daniel Moynihan is: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/116754-the-central-conservative-truth-is-that-it-is-culture-not.>]

He also recognized that for liberals, politics rule so that a culture that is not driven by their Progressive politics is damned and must be reformed to save it from its own backwardness. His insight illumines a basic conviction of the Progressive revolutionary strategy that politics and economics can change culture and make it conform to the ideological ideals for an enlightened, WOKE society.

The full Progressive agenda can be expressed through the following summation: politics (through social justice morality) spawns economics. Altogether they spawn culture which in turn influences education, the justice system, and the media.

The Progressives’ ideological social justice morality is the basis of their politics which informs their economic socialism and ultimately defines their WOKE culture through dominating such areas as the education system, the justice system, and the media. These areas transmit, spread, and systemically develop the WOKE post-truth revolutionary agenda.

The Progressive agenda is devoid of religion. In the name of their supreme moral value of social justice, religion must be excluded. No influential moral force greater than their ideology can be admitted. They believe that the unenlightened morality of Traditional religions must be deconstructed and substituted with their politically constructed WOKE morality: a social justice morality that, for instance:

1. redefines vices as virtues as with sexual morality and abortion;
2. eliminates the merit of individual accomplishment to ensure that only marginalized groups receive the benefits they have been denied in the past, and
3. transforms personal civil rights into group entitlements which society and the government must fulfill. Entitlement is what equity, the Progressives’ watchword of social justice, is all about. The entitled believe that they do not merely deserve an equal opportunity to achieve an outcome, but society and government owe them the outcome.

Such guaranteed outcomes can include receiving a no cost or very low-cost college education, a decent paying job, complete coverage for health care, available transportation, housing, special treatment by the criminal justice system, and financial reparations for past injustices perpetrated against their group.

Progressive politics wages its revolution with the weapon of economics. Through socialist economic policies, they create antagonisms between classes, races, ethnicities, and genders. Progressives' favored groups are those who are oppressed victims by past inequalities and inequities. They are given or promised privileged status through various government policies and programs. These groups' allegiance to the Progressive agenda is fortified by such privileges.

Progressive socialist economics secures their politics and engenders the changes in culture they seek. They contend that without the social justice morality they promise, the nation will be overwhelmed by the many types of crises it faces. Only their political economic ideology will ensure true social justice. For example, Janet Yellen, President Biden's Cabinet Secretary for the Dept. of Treasury has bluntly stated this alarming warning,

The country is also facing a climate crisis, a crisis of systemic racism, and an economic crisis that has been building for fifty years... I believe economic policy can be a potent tool to improve society. We can—and should—use it to address inequality, racism, and climate change.⁷

The Progressive revolution against Traditional society is a war to dethrone truth and implant a post-truth world. It is presently mainly a cold war, but a war, nevertheless. Effective resistance begins with 1) understanding and appreciating what the Realism of the Catholic Christian faith Tradition offers, 2) comprehending

⁷ Janet Yellen, Quoted in *Catalyst*, Journal of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, Vol. 48, No. 5, June 2021, p. 8.

the revolution’s anatomy, and 3) recognizing and rejecting Progressive WOKE political strategies and leaders as abetted by educational institutions, the justice system, and the media. Progressives will not abandon their agenda, though knowledgeable resistance founded on a recovery of Realism and Traditional morality-based religion and culture could have salutary results in staving off the revolution.

Most of all, for Catholic Christians, we must open our souls so that our hope is in God and acknowledge that God cannot fail. “And we know that in all things God works for those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28) Christian faith teaches us that we should not solely base our hope for justice or happiness on any politician or politic.

As Curtis Hancock, a 21st century philosopher, reminds us,

Christianity is about transforming the heart and soul of an individual into a new person in Christ.⁸

In essence, Christianity is not a political project; it does not promise an earthly utopia by conquering all injustices. But through God’s grace, our faith and hope may nonetheless improve, to some extent, our profane world. ■

⁸ See Curtis Hancock’s review of my book *After Justice* titled, “Catholic Challenges to Progressivism” in *The Postil Magazine*, Feb. 1, 2023. <https://www.thepostil.com/the-catholic-challenge-to-progressivism>.