

A Critique of Contemporary Leftist Liberalism

Socrates Ebo

PhD. Deputy Director, Center for Continuing Education; Senior Lecturer in Philosophy, Federal University Otuoke, Nigeria

E-mail: ebosocrates@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

From the ancient times to the contemporary era, man has been striving to devise a system of governance that would bequeath him more freedoms and more personal powers to pursue his fancies. History has shown a gradual but steady shift from absolute authoritarianism to public consensus seeking in the management of public affairs. This struggle for change has been playing out in history in a dialectical process of enthroning and dethroning of political paradigms. Each age, building on the achievements of previous eras, is presented with its situation, its class interests, its problems and its peculiar way of dealing with its issues. However, the problem is maintaining the perennial mean. Often, when what is sought after it achieved, it quickly or gradually develops its own unsavory dimensions thereby triggering a fresh struggle for another paradigm. Such has been the case of leftist liberalism which previously struggled for progressively desired liberal ideals but has now thrown up its peculiarities, problems, values and ideals which even liberals find unsettling. Although leftists are often found in the liberal party, some of their principles in practice sometimes run counter to the heart of the liberal ideology. This work meticulously critiques the leftist-liberal dialectics using the analytic philosophical methodology. It brings out the brightest and the grayest of leftist ideology.

I. Introduction

It is an ontological fact that man is forever evolving. Although man as a biological species may have reached his apogee in the evolutionary ladder, his social and political institutions continue to evolve. Beyond these, man's knowledge of himself and the world around him continues to evolve. From the evolution from solitary hunting and gathering to the formation of the society, man has always striven to improve the leadership of group activities which eventually grew so large and so complex to become the state. The state at inception always had a founding leadership whose authority was accepted by all. As they passed away, their descendants assumed this authority and continued to pass it on to their lineage in a system of government that came to be known as the monarchy. It was a system of royals versus the subjects. The king was the ultimate power, the owner of the state. The citizens were the subjects. Of course, even the original leading founder of the state couldn't have administered it alone. There were men who assisted him in administering the state. They were the ruling class; the aristocrats. Like the descendants of the monarch, the descendants of the aristocrats also inherited the status of their progenitors. The rest of the citizenry became members of the lesser class – serfs, artisans, merchants, slaves or whatever the society in question chose to designate them.

The political establishment described above was stoutly challenged after the enlightenment and the explosion of the progressive thoughts that came with the renaissance. Citizens began to question the

inequalities of the social formation and the long touted divine right of kings to rule. There was tension in the land; notably in England. Thomas Hobbes rose in strong intellectual defense of the monarchy, introducing a novel political concept – the social contract. With the concept which he espoused in the *Leviathan*, he described a mythical pact between the sovereign and the citizenry, where the citizens, willfully surrendered their unregulated liberty to the sovereign in exchange for the protection and general well-being of the state (Hobbes, 1651; Kavka, 1986).

The doctrine of social contract espoused by Hobbes had unintended consequences. For the first time in that era, it was acknowledged that power did not flow from the king to the people but from the people to the king. That acknowledgement set off a deluge of liberal ideas. Thus Hobbes set out to defend the monarchy but ended up becoming the first liberal. He set the intellectual foundations for challenging absolute monarchy. Of course, John Locke challenged Hobbes aggressively but he only became more liberal. The critical factor is that Locke as well as Hobbes espoused that power originates in the people. The sovereign only holds it on trust for the people. It is irrelevant that they described differently, how man fared in the state of nature. Whether life was nasty or blissful in their respective states of nature is not the issue. The issue is that the citizens freely surrendered their liberty to the sovereign to be exercised for them on trust. Of course, both differed significantly on how the sovereign should exercise that mandate. One was definitely more liberal than the other. Politics would continue to follow the liberal trend progressively, especially in the West until the leftist ideologies started bringing a new vista to liberalism.

II. The Development of Liberal Thoughts in Ancient Times

Liberalism as a political ideology was not entirely unknown in the ancient times. Although it was not espoused as a distinct political ideology, liberal principles were writ large in the writings of a few classical philosophers. The *Republic* attributed to Plato fascinates in the thoughts it espoused which today form parts of the core of the liberal ideology. It is fascinating that Plato did in fact argue for the equality of men and women and did demand that women be given the same training as men in the gymnasium and be assessed on merit, not by sex (Plato, c. 375 BC). The leftists would also embrace same document to support their desire for state intervention in economic and social affairs to give weaker citizens their fair share. Even communists would find support for their desired utopia in same document (Mondal, n.d).

In the *Apologia*, we see the attempt of the state to give Socrates a fair hearing and the setting up of a jury to try him rather than pronouncing him guilty by fiat. In the same *Apologia* we see the practice of representative democracy and traces of periodic elections (Plato, c.399 BC). These are practices the renaissance and early modern liberal activists fought hard for. However, the classical society was a slave owning society. The rights and liberties often applied to freeborn adult males. Citizenship was exclusive to them. The political rights were not extended to non citizens even if they were freeborn (Garland, 2020). Classical Greek societies had fairly reasonable checks and balances.

III. The Doctrine of Social Contract

Evens in the 17th century England gave rise to the doctrine of social contract. It was the watershed in the formation of modern political ideologies. The excesses of the monarchy were becoming increasingly unbearable. There were no remedies as the monarchies then were absolute

monarchies. They were the law unto themselves. The rise of the mercantile class presented a dialectical clash to the mostly feudal system on which the monarchy rested. War became the necessary tool to resolve the conflicts. In the heat of the conflicts, serious questions were raised on the authority of the kings to rule. Where did the monarchy derive its legitimacy from? Why must does it keep ruling from generation to generation? What set the royalty apart from the rest of the citizenry? Ontologically, what confers superiority on them? What makes their authority unquestionable?

The usual answer of the divine right of kings to rule was no longer acceptable. Even the authority of the pope over temporal affairs has been jettisoned. Consequently the kings couldn't claim absolute authority over temporal affairs by laying claim to a supposed divine approval. That was the milieu Hobbes tried to address by writing the *Leviathan*. He spiritedly argued that men surrendered their liberty to the king so that the king would protect them from being killed or being divested of their property by other men. His conclusion was that the citizens should accept the king because in the supposed pact, they bequeathed him their liberty in exchange for protection. Sovereignty according to Hobbes appropriately belonged to the king. He had saved man from a state of nature in which life was hellish (Hobbes, 1651).

Locke would describe the state of nature as blissful, contrary to Hobbes' violent jungle. For Locke, man did indeed bequeath his liberty to the king, not that he should serve the king but that the king should serve him (Locke, 1689). Consequently, sovereignty lay not in the king but in the citizens. The king was a servant the people could fire any day they considered his services unsatisfactory. The essence of the king was to protect the liberties of the citizens from infringement, not to confiscate them. Locke radically called for civil disobedience and outright rebellion should the king deviate from these mandates.

These conflicting expositions of the social contract made some thinkers to categorize Hobbes as an illiberal political philosopher. But as stated earlier, the fact that Hobbes located the origin of power in the people makes him a liberal political philosopher. Ultimately, the Lockean version of the social contract prevailed. The Industrial Revolution would throw up a political milieu that would warrant even more demand for liberal policies and liberal politics.

IV. The Industrial Revolution and the Rise of Leftist Liberalism

The Industrial Revolution of the mid nineteenth century changed the political landscape of Europe starting from Britain. The merchants successfully dislodged the aristocrats. The mechanization of production made land owners to become further irrelevant in the sociopolitical formation. Industries sprang in the big cities attracting large populations of the workforce to the urban areas. The merchants who had largely transformed into factory owners became the new overlords. Workers were underpaid; their living and working conditions were poor. There arose a new agitation for better pay, better working conditions and improved living conditions. The liberal economy that inspired the industrial revolution was anchored on the principle of *laissez faire* – letting the market forces drive the economy without interference by the government; otherwise known as the free market.

The application of this principle in the hiring and pricing of the workforce triggered a dialectical tension between factory owners and workers. Workers, naturally reacted by taking up unionism which became a game changer. The mode of production had changed from the agrarian economy to the industrial economy. The bulk of the adult population was no longer subsistence or feudal farmers but

workers. The unions had the numbers; therefore they had the political momentum. They argued for government interventions in the free market economy to protect the lower class from economic disadvantages and exploitation by the rich. Thus was born the seed of leftist liberalism.

Liberalism had been anchored on strong aversions to government interference with the invisible hand that regulates the economy. Now, the concept of minimum wage and multiple protections for the national workforce had to be finagled through the socioeconomic formation with the backing of the state by way of statutes. It ran counter to laissez faire which is the backbone of liberalism. Trade unionism became the primary driver of the leftist ideology. It transcended national boundaries to form an international solidarity of the working class, thereby giving trade unions, far reaching political leverages. They would influence national and international politics for many decades.

V. Historical Origins of the Left as a Distinct Political Bloc

The French Revolution of 1789 is generally acclaimed to be the watershed of the distinction between the left and the right. During the revolution, the parliamentarians that sat to the right of the presiding member were called the right while those that sat to the left of the presiding member were called the left (Augustyn, 2020). The distinction was not just about sitting arrangements; it was very much about the ideology, the interests and policies the respective groups of members pursued. Those that sat to the right of the presiding officer were mostly conservatives who supported the monarchy, the role of the Church in state affairs and conservative values generally. Those on the left hand side of the presiding officer opposed the monarchy, rooted for the republic and advocated the excising of the Church from the management of state affairs. That was the left versus the right in France.

In Britain however, the ideological cleavages between the left and the right were not dramatized in sitting arrangements but in the policies the parliamentarians pushed and the class they represented. At first, it was liberals versus conservatives. Liberals were mostly the merchants and factory owners. They wanted free trade; minimal government intervention in trade. They wanted an expanded horizon for private enterprises. They spoke for the emerging middleclass in mid nineteenth century Britain. The right were still clinging to the old order; the way of the aristocracy. But among the liberals emerged a subgroup known as the leftists. They represented the workers and wanted protection not just from the dying aristocracy but from the emerging power and influence of the bourgeoisie. They wanted strategic government interventions in the economy to favor the lower class, protect the working class and reduce social inequalities. With time, the left expanded their demands. In the United States, among other things the left demanded for environmental regulations, abortion rights, redistribution of wealth, socialized medicine, LGBTQ rights and different kinds of personal and social liberties. The left in Eastern Europe on the hand preoccupied themselves with the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, public ownership of the means of production, and the enthronement of a classless society that would ultimately become a stateless society.

VI. Principles and Policies of contemporary Leftism

Leftist liberalism through the course of history has metamorphosed into several political ideologies such as capitalism, communism, socialism and welfarism. However, the focus of this work is the ideologies and activities of leftist liberalism in capitalist democracies. The principles and policies of leftist liberalism are x-rayed in the following subheadings below.

VI.I. Regulation of the Environment

Leftists are vocal advocates of climate change and global warming. They place so much premiums on the hotly contested claim that the rise in earth's mean temperature otherwise known as the global warming is caused by anthropogenic factors. Accordingly, they demand government intervention to cut down carbon dioxide emission in industrial production. They propose carbon tax on the affected industries and outright phasing out of fossil fuels. The belief in the anthropogenic causes in climate change has been a great point of divergence between the left and the right even in the scientific community. While some scientists argue that the earth's temperature by default is meant to rise as the earth ages irrespective of human activities, some single out carbon dioxide emission, especially the use of fossil fuels as scientifically proven cause of global warming. But there is a third school of thought that holds that the earth's temperature has been fairly constant over the years; and that the illusion of global warming is based on faulty and fraudulent data.

Leftists often claim that man-caused global warming is a scientific fact but the assumption fails the test of scientific methodology as they are not testable in a laboratory condition. The claim necessarily involves lots of assumptions. The earth might not be an eternal being after all. It could as well be fated to expire someday. There is arguably no verifiable evidence that humans suffer more now than they may have suffered from the earth's atmospheric conditions, say hundred years ago. Carbon dioxide is necessary in abundant quantity for the production of energy in plants. Besides, the volume of carbon dioxide that is claimed to have been caused by anthropogenic factors is far too insignificant compared to the volume occurring naturally in the atmosphere. Yet leftists propose sweeping changes with very expensive consequences on such a shaky science.

Many leftist politicians have pushed for the adoption of the Green New Deal, a leftist environmental policy document that calls for radical changes in the process of production, stringent population control, modification lifestyles and outright phasing out of so many industries.

VI.II. Government Sponsored Abortion

Almost all liberal leaning politicians support abortions but the left seems to have gone on the overdrive in their support for abortion. Many leftists support late term abortions, and are even pushing for legislations supporting postnatal abortions, all on government bill. The usual argument that a woman has exclusive right to do whatever she wants with her body makes no moral or biological sense. The left generally believe in population control on the assumption that the earth's resources are depleting and could possibly not feed the human population. Well, that is mere presumption. There has never been a time when the earth had not enough resources to feed its populations. Even if for the sake of argument, there would not be enough fertile lands for agriculture, technology rather than abortions would have been the answer. Abortion is a way of saving earth's resources is a negative response to an imagined futuristic problem.

Radical green activists on the left claim that human species is problematic to the environment because humans inhale oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide thereby increasing the volume of carbon in the environment. Plants on the other hand take in carbon dioxide and give out oxygen, thereby reducing the presence of carbon in the environment. Accordingly, they argue that the survival of humans in large quantity is inimical to the environment. They often make apocalyptic projections on the supposed destruction of life on earth because of a supposed impending climatic catastrophe to be induced by global warming. Accordingly, to save the earth, they argue that humans should stop making babies. To

that end, they promote unbridled abortions ostensibly to save the earth. Alexandria Cortez, a New York district representing congresswoman is prominent for this view (Hignett, 2019).

VI.III. Socialized Healthcare

Contemporary leftists often push for socialized healthcare. The Obamacare in the US is a prominent example. The left believes that healthcare should be universally provided by the government. It pushes mandatory medical insurance on the citizenry. It maintains that it is the government's responsibility to take care of the healthcare of its citizenry. This is a seemingly beautiful idea. However, in practice, it is very expensive to the government. Premiums increase, and at the end of the day, government is unable to provide much of the services it promised. In some cases, people have to stay in queue for months to get surgery performed on them. Government monopolies often lead to inefficiency.

VI.IV. Large Government and Mega Taxation

The left often promise heaven on earth. Unfortunately, unlike heaven where resources are unlimited, we deal with often severe limitations on earth. To fund what they promise, leftist governments often have to depend on heavy taxation which in turn places heavy burdens on businesses, consequently affecting the economy negatively. With almost no exception economic downturn has always been associated with radical implementation of the leftist liberal ideology.

Big government often adopted by leftists also put stress on the economy. Since the left often call for government intervention in the economy and much of social life, it necessarily expands government to see to such activities. The big government costs money to maintain; places so many administrative bottlenecks on the economy and the administration.

VI.V. Wealth Redistribution

Leftist often believe that the economic gap between the rich and the poor is unjust. They attribute the wealth of the rich to the unfairness of the economic system. They view the fact that the rich have far more economic power than the poor to be injustice in itself. Accordingly they call for the balancing of the gap by providing many social services for the poor, and taxing the rich heavily in other to pay for such services. They call for high minimum wages to reduce the gap between workers and owners of businesses. They advocate for inheritance tax to reduce the transfer of wealth from one generation of the rich to another.

Many leftist thinkers have argued that equality is nothing without economic equality. The government as a matter of policy should checkmate the wealth of the rich in order to regulate the gap between the rich and the poor. There can't be equal access to justice when a tiny minority has so much wealth in comparison to the rest of the citizens. However, the problem with wealth distribution is that not every citizen is motivated to create wealth. Wealth creation has more to do with individual endeavors than what someone else earns. Not everybody is interested in exerting the efforts necessary to create wealth. Not even everyone is interested in the discipline and hard work such efforts demand. Many would rather spend than invest. There is a price to pay even for success. Why penalize those who pay the price for success? Why try to slow them down to put them at par with those who might not even be interested in the discipline that success requires?

If everyone were to be equal in the economy, who would have to build the economy? Who would be the employers of labor? Talents and skills are never equally distributed in the economy; therefore outcomes will never be equal. There are no doubts that the rich often exploit the poor. Government's role has to be the provision of fairly level ground and equal access to opportunities that

would enable anyone who has a burning desire to succeed pull through.

VI. Massive Welfare Schemes

Leftist liberal governments often have elaborate welfare benefits systems, from disability to unemployment, homelessness to single parenthood. Leftist liberal governments always make heavy budgetary provisions for welfare. Accordingly they raise taxes in order to fund these welfare schemes. Massive welfare dependency is often propelled by the victimhood narrative. It downplays personal responsibility and hypes so called systemic injustice. When people look up to the government to shoulder their personal responsibilities for them, they seldom do anything else for themselves. Successful economies are built not by a freebies seeking citizenry but an enterprising, success driven populace. Welfare is good but ought not to be massive. Personal responsibility is the bedrock of enduring enterprises.

VI.VII. Irreligion

Leftist governments often exhibit anti-religious dispositions. In previous eras they agitated for the separation of religion from state affairs. But with the successful enthronement of communism, an outright hostility to religion ensued. Karl Marx had called religion the opium of the masses. One of Stalin's first actions in Soviet Union was the summary execution of about ten orthodox religious leaders (Kotljarchuk & Sundstrom, 2017).

The contemporary left does not kill religious leaders but relentlessly uses government policies to confine religious influences to the fringes of the society, far away from mainstream culture. Leftist liberalism seeks to erase God from the education of kids. Leftists often push for the radical secularization of the society. The leftist bias against religion is glaring in the shutting down of religious houses of worship in many liberal controlled states in the US during the Covid 19 lockdown of 2020, houses of worship were closed while strips clubs and abortion clinics were open.

VI.VIII. Open Borders

Leftist liberals often favor unlimited immigration and unrestricted flow of goods and services across borders. Liberals favor the gradual phasing out nationalism in favor of globalization. They also favor regional integration of nations into a regional government which makes the regional economic policies. Most leftist liberals are globalists. They push policies that will see the world as a global community where everyone is a citizen of the world, and policies are made with the world in view rather than individual nations.

People who criticize the globalism championed by the left often suggest that the globalist elites who push it do so to maximize economic and political power. It is sometimes suggested that globalists are trying to establish something akin to a world government. The second argument is that unregulated mass immigration would rob the host country of its indigenous civilization and cultural identity.

VI.IX. LGBTQ Fixation

Leftists played prominent roles in decriminalizing homosexuality and opening up sexual freedoms. Leftists however, seem to be fixated on LGBTQ issues. The leftist propaganda that there are more than two genders runs counter to every known scientific fact. It appears that leftists often condone pedophilia. It is also pertinent to note that leftist liberalism supports same sex marriage and same sex

child adoption. Conservatives have often criticized these policies by arguing that they destroy traditional family values. While granting the individual maximum sexual freedom is commendable, it is important to protect children from undue sexual abuse by adults in the name of woke liberalism. Sexual orientations ought to be confined as much as possible to the private domain. Singling out and celebrating a particular sexual orientation by the government is rather queer.

VII. Conclusion

There is no gainsaying that the liberal movement has given the world greater political freedoms. However, extreme liberalism denoted in this work as leftist liberalism seems to have gone overboard in the pursuit of what it deems as freedoms; and to remake the world according to these supposed freedoms. This often runs counter to practical common sense and the values of the larger society. Extremism of whatever hue is ultimately counter productive. Progress lies in the mean. The extremism of the left has often earned them the appellation “far left”. Society would be better served if policy makers toed the path of the Aristocratic mean.

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