

LUISS



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Double Degree Program in **Politics: Philosophy and Economics**

Courses of **Political Philosophy** and **International Relations**

**In Defence of Democracy:
The Worst Form of Government, Except for All the Others.**

Explaining the Russia-Ukraine War by the Belligerents' Domestic Regimes.

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“Time is the one gift that not even the most grateful heart can ever return.”

— Lucius Annaeus Seneca¹

Indeed.

The first thought that comes to my mind, in writing these words, is that I am sorry. I am sorry, for I know that not in a thousand lives will I ever be able to give back, to so many who so deserve, a small part of what I have been given – of what, to them, I owe. And that is not time “alone.” It is all that, within it, was shared – support, presence, patience, love.

For their support in producing this work – and their role as co-relators – I wish to mention Professors Dario Battistella – whose lectures have been the absolute highlight of this last year at Sciences Po, and whose knowledge, guidance, active help, and availability were as precious as anything could be – and Sebastiano Maffettone – whose standing, sapience, passion for teaching, and genuine care for his students were constant sources of inspiration and motivation throughout this “journey.” I can think of no greater academic privilege than having had them as mentors. My heartfelt gratitude goes out to them both. I also wish to thank Professor Nicola Lupo for all the advice he has given me, whenever I asked.

At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from someone else.² I owe more than I can ever say to those who have kept that flame alive – at times when it flickered, almost going out in that bleak hospital room – and helped me see through the shadow when my own eyes could not, lending me their light when I had none of my own. Indeed, I have found that it is the small everyday deeds of “ordinary folk” – whose quiet goodness carries, in truth, nothing of the ordinary, and everything of the noble – that keep the darkness at bay – small, enormous acts of friendship, kindness, and love.

Those “ordinary folk,” I have the good fortune – indeed, the honour – of being able to call my extraordinary friends and my amazing family.

¹ Seneca. (ca. 65 CE). *Letters to Lucilius* (Letter 1,3).

² Adapted from Schweitzer, A. (1924). *Memoirs of childhood and youth* (C. T. Campion, Trans., Ch. 5, p. 90). George Allen & Unwin. [https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.\\$b471057&seq=96](https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.$b471057&seq=96);

To my “brothers” Alessandro and Riccardo, to Costanza, you already know more than what a thousand pages could tell you, you make me glad to be alive. Thank you for existing.

To Leonardo, Francesco and Vittorio, my oldest friends, it is from you I learned what the word “friendship” means.

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To my dear companions in my most recent French “adventure,” my memories of Bordeaux would not have been so happy without you. The same applies to all the great people that I have met and engaged with at LUISS, and among the Ethos community.

In other words, to the people I love – *and you know who you are* – I have no way to list you all without failing to do you justice.

If there is one thing that I know I am good at – a talent above any other worth having – that thing is knowing how to wisely choose whom to walk beside. And you remind me of that, every single day.

To my family, now.

If I have had the merit of choosing – and having been chosen by – the right friends, then the truest fortune of my life was never a choice of mine at all: it was the stroke of luck of being born into a family that has stood by me – always, always, always.

Mother, Father – “*Chicca e Ale*” – I have often difficulty, as you may know, to express it plainly, in spoken words, but – perhaps luckily – it would seem that I have a knack for writing, and, besides, as they say, “*verba volant, scripta manent*,” so, well, there it goes. I love you. I am grateful for you – for all you do. I hope you know. I hope to live up to you, one day.

Pietro, I am so proud of you – of the way you have grown, and of the way you remain so completely and unapologetically yourself. At times, I genuinely begin to question whether I am, in fact, still the clever one between us... We have often clashed over the years – as brothers are perhaps destined to do – but I believe, I hope, that we have learned – and indeed we are still learning – how to also be friends.

Vittoria, my little sister, you are my joy. I cannot wait to see you grow into the smart, kind, and beautiful person you are going to be. I know you will not let me down.

To Paola, Veronica and Giuseppe, to Marco, Alessandra and Livio, to Simona, Andrea, Flavia, Valentina and Matteo, to Francesca, Stefano, Elena, Olga and Dario, to Roberto, Adelaide, Sofia and Caterina – I am lucky to have you all.

What I have – all of this – I do not take for granted. One indeed cannot take it for granted. A family as close-knit as mine is, in truth, something extraordinarily, and now sadly, rare. It is an exceptional thing. But this exception is not the work of blind fortune, nor chance, nor any god or unseen force – no. It is the result of strength, care, determination, commitment, affection, and love poured in, day after day, by people – no, by pillars – upon whom the entire structure rests – my grandparents, whom I would like to call by their full name.

Maria Dolores “Loli” Cabané Fité. What more meaningful or eloquent thing could I say, Nonna, than to reveal what I used to call you as a child? “Mamma Nonna.” That alone might be enough – and yet, you have been, and have become, far more than that. You have been a friend and, more than that, you have been a rock – always. You cared not only for me, but for all of us, with unwavering love, tenderness, and joy. In these last years, you gave yourself completely in caring for Nonno. You stayed by his side, kept him at home, tended to him, comforted him – just as you always did for us. You gave him the best final years he could have had, and your strength became our strength. For that, and for everything else, thank you. I love you.

Livio Zoffoli. Oh Nonno, I believe you knew – or at least sensed it. I believe that, in some quiet corner of your spirit, when you handed me that beautiful pen so many years ago – knowing my fascination for such objects – and said, “This is my gift for your graduation; see that you remember it,” you already knew that you would not be here to place it in my hands on that day. I say “place it in my hands” – not “be there” – because no one truly departs so long as they stay alive in the hearts of those who love them – of those who remember. And remember I do. But that pen, precious though it is, was never the greatest gift you gave me. Far beyond it were your affection, your good-humoured scoldings (which, more often than not, I deserved), and those summer afternoons at sea, when – against the protests of Mum and Grandma – you would open the throttle as we met the waves head-on, sending us flying at the bow, shouting, laughing, weightless. But more enduring than all this, more intimate still, is what you gave me without words – you gave me Music. You gifted me your burning passion for it. You gave me the most faithful companion one can hope for in life – and the knowledge that, even in the face of difficulty, once the darkness lifts and the stars retreat, “*all'alba vincerò*.”³

³ “*at dawn, I shall overcome*.” Lauri Volpi, G. (Performer), & García Navarro, L. A. (Conductor). (1972). *Nessun Dorma* [Video]. Gran Teatre del Liceu. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zzz7DcXGi3k>;

Rosanna Baldelli. What can I say? I owe you everything. If I have a mere pinch of sense, a sliver of intellectual acumen, if I possess a shred of wisdom or sound judgement – well, all of that I owe to you. Blessed, brilliant, wise, wonderful human being. From those afternoons after school, so many years ago, to our swims out to that red buoy (which, if there were any justice in this world, really ought to be named after you by now!), through all your stories and tales, the long nights spent on the phone between Virgil, Seneca, and Dante, and all our endless conversations – about everything and nothing, from the serious to the trivial – you have been a shining beacon for as long as I can remember. And you will remain so, for as long as I will. Nothing, I have ever achieved – if ever I have – and nothing I have ever managed could have been done without you. You are my best friend, Nonna, but not only –

*“Tu se’ lo mio maestro e ’l mio autore,
tu se’ solo colui da cu’ io tolsi
lo bello stilo che m’ha fatto onore.”*⁴

Onesto Sforza. What a scare you gave me! For a moment, I feared the worst – I admit it. And maybe, just maybe, that was the first time I truly understood the meaning of that phrase I have heard you say so often – *“I parenti sono come le scarpe: più sono stretti e più fanno male.”*⁵ I had never been hurt by family before October. It would’ve been the height of irony if, to keep the trend going, it had been you – my best friend – who always jokes about this sort of thing, knowing full well how mad it drives me (and everyone else who loves you). But no, thank goodness. Stubborn, gruff, tough, kind, gentle, loving. I could go on and on. Every time I call you, every time I come to visit you and Nonna, when the time comes to say goodbye, you both thank me – as if seeing me, hearing my voice, were a gift I was giving you. And every time, I repeat what I hope by now you both know – that if something doesn’t bring me joy, I don’t do it. The truth is, the gift is always yours to me. With your affection. Your complicity. Your understanding. Your wisdom. Your advice. Your love. Making you proud has always been the fuel in my engine, Nonno, and it always will be, for as long as I have strength in me. Knowing that I make you happy, proud, in whatever small way I can – that is the only reward I will ever need. You are the person I respect most in this beautiful world, and bearing your name is my greatest honour. I love you.

⁴ “*Thou art my master and my guiding star, thou only art the one from whom I drew the gracious style that brought me honour.*” Dante Alighieri. (1321). *Divina Commedia: Inferno* (Canto I, vv. 85-87).

⁵ “*Kin are like shoes – the tighter the fit, the greater the pain.*” Sforza, O. *Proverbi e detti di una vita (la nostra)*.

Words are, in my opinion, one of our two most inexhaustible sources of magic.

The other is Music. Without Music, we cannot really understand. Without Music, we do not wonder. We do not weep. We do not believe. Without Music, life itself would be a mistake.⁶ Hence, it is through Music that I want to end this section and try to transmit that which is the core message this work wants to spread. There is some good in this world, dear reader. And it is worth fighting for.

Liberté

*Liberté, Liberté,
Qu'as-tu fait, Liberté,
Pour ceux-là qui voulaient te défendre ?
Les voilà, tes amis :
Ils étaient trop petits,
Et demain le bourreau va les pendre.*

*Ils aimaient bien leurs enfants,
Ils aimaient bien leurs parents,
Et pas qu'un peu le vin rouge et l'amour.
Mais quelque chose manquait,
Qu'ils ne pouvaient expliquer,
Et c'était toi, Liberté des beaux jours.*

*Avec une rose au chapeau,
Bien plus jolie qu'un drapeau,
Droit devant eux, un jour, s'en sont allés.
Mais ils n'ont pas fait quatre pas
Que les sergents étaient là,
Qui les tenaient au bout des pistolets.*

*N'as-tu pas de visage, Liberté,
L'un joyeux, l'autre grave ?*

*Liberté, Liberté,
Qu'as-tu fait, Liberté,
De ceux-là qui l'ont crue sur parole ?*

*Ils ne l'ont jamais vue,
Ils ne te verront plus,
Liberté, jameux rêve des hommes.
Ils ne parlaient que de toi,
Ils ne vivaient que de toi,
Et c'est pour toi qu'ils prieront dans le ciel.*

*Rien n'a changé dans leur cœur,
Ils n'ont pas froid, n'ont pas peur,
C'est toujours toi, Liberté, leur soleil.
Et quand on les a condamnés,
Ils ont salué sans pleurer,
Et l'un l'autre, ils se sont embrassés.*

*Ils ont crié : « Vive le roi,
Vive la reine et la loi,
Mais vive aussi, vive la Liberté ! »*

— Charles Aznavour⁷

⁶Adapted from Nietzsche, F. (2024). *Twilight of the Idols: or, How to Philosophize with a Hammer* (Vol. 42). Minerva Heritage Press.

⁷ Aznavour, C. (1960). *Liberté* [Song]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymBsylbbf5w>; see Annex C: Liberté.

Notes by the Author

The following, brief remarks are intended to clarify, contextualise or explain certain choices made throughout the present work.

Foremost, some words of the role of footnotes.

This work follows an approach where footnotes serve not only as references but as an integral part of the analysis. Rather than acting as mere citations, they provide key elaborations, counterpoints, and supplementary discussions that are crucial to the full understanding of the thesis. **Footnotes are therefore to be regarded as an extension of the main text, carrying equal argumentative weight**. Readers are advised to consult them diligently, as omitting them would risk an incomplete comprehension of the ideas presented.

Next, some on terminology, vocabulary and stylistic choices.

The term “liberal” – along with its derivatives, such as “liberalism” – is used, throughout the opera, in its older, European sense, today commonly addressed as “classical liberalism,” quite different, in some of its traits, from the contemporary meaning the word has acquired in United States politics.

On vocabulary and style, the author acknowledges and vindicates the deliberate use of often sonorous, grave, brusque or dramatic vocabulary, as well as that of at times high-sounding rhetoric. Such acknowledgement is though accompanied by the promise that every effort has been made to ensure that similar stylistic choices be backed by consistency, rigour, and substantive conceptual and argumentative justification, rather than flourish for its own sake.

Finally, some avowals in what regards the posture adopted throughout this work.

No claim is here made – nor should be inferred – to moral ambiguity, neutrality, or relativism. This work does not feign any such stance. The vocabulary employed carries the weight of conviction, and that conviction rests, in turn, upon arguments documented, reasoned, and submitted in good faith, with scrupulous referencing and due conceptual accountability. Where judgment is expressed, it is never arbitrary; where ideals are upheld, they are never unmoored from empirical grounding; and where the tone may appear assertive, even defiant, it is born of a conscious ethical stance.

What is more, a certain idealism shall be observed across the pages of this work, especially towards their end. It is no accident, nor is it *naïveté*. It is, rather, an idealism of the kind defended by renown Holocaust-survivor and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl. As wonderfully put by the man himself – “*we have to be idealist, in*

*a way, because then we wind up as the true – the real – realists.”*⁸ For “*when we take people merely as they are, [...] we make them worse; when we treat them as if they were what they should be, we improve them as far as they can be improved.*”⁹ The normative trajectory outlined herein resists, therefore, the inertia of resignation and aspires, instead to that which ought to be possible. Just as the expert thrower, who, conscious of gravity’s force – unyielding – indeed knows better than to aim directly at his mark, but far above it, so as to overcome the downward pull of the world, so too knows the flight of the ideal that its wing shall bend to winds of reality. Hence it cannot but act accordingly, and, in full awareness, fly higher still. So does this work proceed, in what it prescribes, content to indulge in such sensible form of idealism as may keep the weight of the world from crushing the hopes that it shall dare to put forth.

⁸ Frankl, V. (1972, May). *Why believe in others* [Video]. TED Conferences.

https://www.ted.com/talks/viktor_frankl_why_believe_in_others

⁹ Goethe, J. W. von. (1795–1796). *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (Book VIII, Chapter IV, p. 111).

<https://archive.org/details/wilhelmmeistersa02goetuoft/page/111/mode/1up>

Introduction

The defence of democracy is as necessary as it is possible only through the preservation of the classical liberal values that ushered it in its constitutional, republican and secular form. It is a do-or-die situation and the challenge of the present time. Liberal democracy is the only bastion that guards the security and freedom of the people of the West, aye, from external threats, but similarly from those among themselves that are too ideologically zealous or historically amnesic in forgetting – be it ignorance or *mala fides* – that liberal democracy itself is the foundation of the freedoms they themselves enjoy and the very framework (of values and institutions) that allows for their preservation in providing safeguard-mechanisms shielding them from external enmities, menaces and rivalries (Putin's Russia, Iran and Jihadist Groups, China, and so forth...).

The starting point of the work shall be the example of the Russo-Ukrainian War, through the case study “*Explaining the Russia-Ukraine War by the Belligerents' Domestic Regimes*,” showing how the lack of a robust domestic liberal framework¹⁰ has enabled Vladimir Putin to shape Russia into what it is today, and how the consequent and stark divergence between liberal-democratic and autocratic regimes has proven decisive in favouring the decision to cause the war and shaping the international response to it. This shall serve to highlight how democracy, imperfect as it may be, still stands as the only thing keeping the West safe from personalist and war-mongering dynamics such as those seen in Russia and other illiberal states. Liberalism enabled democracies to constitute a *Foedus Pacificum* of states (who shall not wage war among themselves) and to defend it through Liberal Interventionism, protecting the liberal-democratic attributes among which are pluralism, an individualistic¹¹ approach to life, individual political freedom, individual rights and liberty, rights to property, self-determination, the separation of powers, and a respected rule of law. These dynamics must be preserved, especially face to such rising anti-western and illiberal sentiments from both the left and right sides of the political spectrum, all “*threats to acquired values*,”¹² vowed and prone to railroading liberalism in taking hold of society and institutions by exploiting democratic procedures.

After having gone through the Case Study, conclusions shall be drawn regarding how such precious treasures that liberalism offers are though as fragile as liberal democracy itself is, without an efficient mechanism of self-preservation. Democracy must have the right and power to protect itself

¹⁰ Of both thought and structure. “Framework” is here utilised in both its philosophical and political/constitutional sense.

¹¹ Not to be conflated with egoism, individualism upholds personal autonomy, responsibility, and voluntary cooperation rather than selfish isolation. Tocqueville and Mill argued that it fosters civic engagement, while Hayek and Mises emphasized its role in sustaining social order and economic prosperity. Rand, though advocating “rational egoism,” distinguished it from reckless self-interest, framing it as a principled pursuit of one's values without coercion.

¹² “*Security, in an objective sense, measures the absence of threats to acquired values, in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked.*” Wolfers, Arnold. *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962.

actively from its enemies both from the outside and the inside. Should this not be the case, the result shall bring, at best, appeasement toward external meddling and threats (reminiscent of the shameful 1938 Munich Conference) or, at worst, the gradual encroachment of such threats and the internal tumbling of the very liberal values and institutions that, by allowing illiberal forces to take control of them, will have permitted democracy to destroy itself. History has heretofore proven – infamously in 1922 and 1933, respectively in Italy and Germany, among other more recent instances of regression to illiberalism – that even democracies collapse when they allow illiberal elements and actors to erode their principles from within. This fragility has been too big a vulnerability, a shatter-point, and for far too long a time.

The error has been to have allowed illiberal forces to find this *vulnus*, to have allowed them to exploit it over and over again, to justify their propaganda under the guise of “free speech” and the very liberty they endanger, and to reach such proximity to power (even in the once-champion of liberalism, the United States, now back at the mercy of Donald Trump’s whims)¹³ that liberal values – and with them their security mechanisms crucial to the defence of the “Free World” – in democratic countries seem to be more at stake now than they have been in a thankfully long time. But such error will not become a mistake until the refusal to correct it.

The right to vote cannot include the right to abolish the system that guarantees it, nor the values that ushered it. If a system in which the dogmatic respect of democratic processes allows illiberal groups to exploit such processes and, at best, endanger, or, at worst, even destroy democracy itself, then such system is neither a functional one nor a truly democratic one, but a fetish, and empty idol, an obsession, and a sick one at that.

Liberal values gave democracy life, they permitted it and they, even now, allow democracy to protect itself. They should in turn be protected by it. Should this not be the case, then they must rise to protect themselves from it. Should democracy be swayed to betray its principles, to betray liberty, to strangle its

¹³ Should any of his expressed ambitions towards Greenland or Canada materialise in active interference/aggression – or, as dishearteningly seems to be the case, his statements and positions on the Russia-Ukraine War result in a strong pivot towards the Kremlin (therefore, away from European democracies) and appeasement positions in the United States’ foreign policy – this would **not** amount to the falsification of the Liberal Democratic Peace Theory, but “merely” indicate that the United States of America are, under Trump, themselves experiencing the phenomenon (of which this work warns against) of regression toward illiberalism, therefore toward the erosion of American democracy, corroborating the theses that are supported throughout these pages, as well as underlining the urgency of what they recommend. **In order to clarify future points, let it be clear that the “status” consideration that may be accorded to countries throughout this work – following a liberal-therefore-democratic or illiberal-therefore-non-democratic approach (as rule-of-thumb) – shall be determined by putting a heavy weight indeed on the direction that a country has undertaken (whether it is one of positive longing for and progression toward liberalism, such as that of Ukraine, or one of worrying regression toward illiberalism, such as that of the United States under Trump), rather than an exclusively matter-of-fact approach on the situation the country is in.** This mind-set allows to better discriminate between countries such as Hungary, now effectively illiberal, and Ukraine itself, that – despite its numerous issues and imperfections causing it to be labelled a *quasi*-democracy – does present that very longing for freedom and integration into the Western world (that resulted in it being aggressed by its authoritarian neighbour), and is therefore capable of prompting the support of the community of liberal democratic states.

parent, then it must be disciplined. If democracy should wield the sword – or be it a sickle – against itself, liberty must be swift in staying its hand – or severing it. Strip democracy of liberalism, and all that makes it worth defending will already have been lost. It will have become a loaded gun in the hands of the mob; better to seize it before it fires. **For freedom is no servant to a democracy that would see it undone. For it is better to have a wounded democracy than a dead liberty. For democracy can either be liberal, or be it cannot.**

§1. Why Democracy Matters: The Russia-Ukraine War as a Case Study

§1.1 Introduction to the Case Study

The aim of this study is to explain the Russia-Ukraine war focusing on the opposition that characterises the belligerents' domestic regimes. In the firm belief that understanding the history of both states' political development is crucial to understand the role of their regimes' opposition, the study will thoroughly navigate through said history and the historical background of the conflict, retracing the key steps and mechanisms that saw the above-mentioned opposition come into being, to then analyse such dynamics through the lenses of the Liberal theories of International Relations.

After having considered Ukraine and Russia's most ancient, shared yet contested heritage as the seed of the future regime divergence between the two countries, the first section of the case study shall respectively explore the more "recent" history of both states, *id est*, their political transformation – from Ukraine's post-independence evolution into a *quasi*-democratic country to Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin's rise, paving the road to Russia's latest (and, some might say, unsurprising) descent into autocracy and personalism – and how such starkly diverging paths led all the way to the 2022 Russian full-scale invasion and the subsequent war.

The second section of the study shall then embark into the endeavour of exploring the aforementioned liberal theories (*Interwar Idealism*, Michael Doyle's *Liberal Democratic Peace Theory* and Andrew Moravcsik's *New Liberalism's Preferences' Derivation*), that shall constitute the medium through which both countries' behaviour and the later outburst of the conflict shall be explained, arguing that it was not (merely) Putin's imperial ideology that brought to the conflict, but the type of regime he shaped, that permitted it.

§1.2 History of the Political Development of Russia and Ukraine

§1.2.1 A Shared Heritage: from Diverse Influences to Opposing Regimes

Both states' historical lineage, whatever narrative may be built upon such truth, is carved in stone as clearly as it is written on history books as a shared heritage.

The Kievan Rus' was a "federation" formed of peoples of Viking derivation¹⁴ and Slavic tribes centred in Kyiv, that developed a shared Eastern Orthodox Christian cultural identity starting from the 9th century and later fragmenting into regional principalities by the 12th century, from which respectively Russians and Ukrainians (and Belarusians) rightly claim their ancestry. After the Kyivan principality was struck down by the mid-13th century Mongol invasions (and their largely indirect and short-lived rule)¹⁵ – though the Ruthenians (Ukrainians and Belarusians) infused the "new" governance with Slavic practices and language (Rusyn) – Ukrainian territories were ruled by the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland, later constitutionally unified as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth,¹⁶ undergoing significant exposure to Catholicism, Renaissance and Reformation ideas, political culture and legal traditions.

Under Polish-Lithuanian dominance, much of Ukraine was placed under Poland, intensifying Catholic dominance, facilitating the assimilation of the Ukrainian nobility, yet also exacerbating serfdom-driven conflict. Meanwhile, the rise of Cossack communities¹⁷ – culminating in the 1648 Khmelnytsky uprising¹⁸ with the formation of the Cossack Hetmanate¹⁹ and its subsequent alliances vowed to resist the Polish, the Ottomans and, later, the Tsardom of Russia itself (despite their former and, in hindsight, ironic alliance, which really was a proto-annexation)²⁰ – reshaped the region, ultimately leading to the Hetman state being divided between Polish and Muscovite control,²¹ internal chaos and, without letting this study

¹⁴ Varangian Vikings arrived from Scandinavian regions (which would now correspond to Finland and Sweden) into the region of Kyiv, where Volodymyr I asked for their collaboration in establishing a polity (that of the Kievan Rus'); "Rus'" is in itself a word of Varangian derivation (meaning "the men who row," from the activity performed by the Varangians in descending the rivers of Eastern Europe).

¹⁵ Soon to be expelled by the region;

¹⁶ 1569, Union of Lublin; <https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Ukraine>

¹⁷ In support of Orthodoxy and shielding its revival. Though valuable to Poland's military campaigns, efforts to limit their autonomy and numbers provoked repeated Cossack revolts; <https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Ukraine>

¹⁸ Mounting social, religious, and Cossack grievances erupted in 1648 under Bohdan Khmelnytsky, a minor noble wronged by Polish officials, whose uprising reshaped Ukraine, even coming to envision an independent Ukrainian polity, through an unprecedented war against Polish rule; <https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Ukraine>

¹⁹ Consisted of most of central Ukraine, i.e., the territory of the former Kyiv voivodeship, Bratslav voivodeship, Chernihiv voivodeship, and part of Volhynia voivodeship, as well as part of Belarus;

<https://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CH%5CE%5CHetmanstate.htm>;

²⁰ 1654 Pereyaslav agreement with Khmelnytsky, aligning Ukraine (the Hetmanate) with the Tsardom of Russia (under Alexis I) as a vassal of Muscovy; <https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Ukraine>

²¹ 1667 Treaty of Andrusovo; effective distribution of Ukrainian land between the Polish-Lithuanians and the Russians. The left bank of the Dnieper River included in Russian territory and the right bank to the Polish-Lithuanians. From this moment there was a great Russification of these Ukrainian territory, losing part of its essential identity signs; César García Andrés,

delve even more irreparably further down the rabbit hole of history, the slow but surely gradual Russian encroachment, final with the late 18th century extinction of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in three partitions, the first of which officialised the annexation of Galicia (west Ukrainian territory) by the “comparatively liberal”²² Habsburg Austria – allowing for cultural and linguistic expression as well as prolonged interaction with Western European political culture – while the last two effectively transferred nearly all other Ukrainian territories to Russian control and its Russification policies.²³

While the principality of Kyiv fell under the Mongols and concurrently with the Ukrainian vicissitudes under different rules and rulers, the north-eastern principality of Moscow – once but a modest town – managed to expel the Mongolian invaders and rose to prominence in the 14th and 15th centuries as the heirs of the Rus’ people and their traditions – following leaders soon to adopt the title of “Tzar of All Russians” and the quest to pursue their Imperial destiny, directly inherited from the myth of Rome²⁴ – up to the moment of “reunion” under Catherine “The Great” – marked with the above-mentioned incorporation of Ukrainian (and Belarusian) lands in the Russian Empire (after having annexed Crimea²⁵ as well in 1783) – and, much later, to the latest attempt – dated February 24, 2022 and decided by Mr. Vladimir Putin – at “repairing” the post-soviet 1991 Ukrainian independence “hiccup.”

Of course, the Russian framing of these shared origins between the two countries serves – today as much as it did at the time of the “reunion” as well as at the time when Tsarist policies suppressed Ukrainian language, culture and autonomy,²⁶ and again at the time when, after World War I, the region was branded as “Little Russia”²⁷ – to legitimise any right over Ukraine any Russian leader should feel – nostalgic of past “glory,” entitled or interested to claim, and to assert once more the allegedly inescapable

“Historical Evolution of Ukraine and its Post-Communist Challenges”, Revista de Stiinte Politice N° 58 2018, p. 84-96;

https://cis01.ucv.ro/revistadestiintepolitice/files/numarul58_2018/8.pdf

²² “The comparatively liberal Habsburgs tolerated the Ukrainian national movement—even providing support for Ukrainian forces who fought against Russia during World War I and helping Ukraine achieve a brief independence after the Russian Empire collapsed.”;

<https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-war-ukraine-identity-history-and-conflict>

²³ Polish rule in Ukrainian territories came to an end with the extinction of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in three partitions—in 1772, 1793, and 1795. In the first partition, Galicia (a western Ukrainian territory) was annexed by Habsburg Austria. In the second, Russia took the Right Bank and eastern Volhynia; it absorbed the rest of Volhynia in the third; <https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Ukraine>

²⁴ “Tsar” can often be found written in the form of “Czar”, derived by “Caesar”, under the claim that would see Russia as the “Third Rome”, legitimising their imperial quest as defenders of Orthodoxy;

²⁵ Starting here, the Crimean Tatars, indigenous to Crimea, faced persecution following Catherine the Great's annexation, mass deportation under Stalin in 1944, decades of exile, only partial return (as a de-facto minority due to the strong presence of ethnic Russians on the territory) in the late Soviet era, and renewed repression after having opposed Russia's 2014 annexation.

²⁶ Russian authorities argued that Ukrainian nationalism was an artificial creation of Vienna aimed at the disruption of the Russian tribe. A decree was issued in 1863 banning publication and instruction in the Ukrainian language that remained in force until 1905. Ukrainian writers and activists were arrested and exiled. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-war-ukraine-identity-history-and-conflict>

²⁷ “As for Ukraine, it does not exist. Even the word is artificial and a foreign import. There is a Little Russia, there is no Ukraine . . . The Ukrainian movement is nothing but a reaction against the abuses of the bureaucracy and of Bolshivism.” Sergei Sazonov, Russian former Foreign Minister, Paris Peace Conference, 1919. Mr. Putin has himself adopted the term “Little Russia” when referring to Ukraine. He sees it as one of the three “Russian entities” (“Great Russia,” Belarus, and Ukraine), constituting, together, “Eternal Russia.” <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-war-ukraine-identity-history-and-conflict>

truth that sees Ukrainians and Russians as “One,”²⁸ “*offshoots of the same people sharing a common historical legacy, a common Orthodox faith, and, therefore, a common national destiny,*” perfectly following the “Unity Paradigm” described by historian Zenon Kohut.²⁹

On the obverse of the coin – especially after having undergone about two centuries under Russian yoke and having experienced the sharp contrast between exposure to Western-European political culture under Polish, Lithuanian and Habsburg rule vis-à-vis 19th century Russification and 20th century USSR abuses including a genocide framed as mere tragedy³⁰ – the Ukrainians highlight Kyiv’s role as the political and cultural heart of the Kievan Rus’, stressing that theirs was a pluralistic polity, thus rejecting Russia’s claim to sole heritage and instead presenting themselves, the Ukrainians, as Kyiv’s legacy’s direct inheritors. Furthermore, Ukrainian identity is nowadays, rightly yet perhaps conveniently, linked to the Cossack tradition of self-governance and resistance to foreign domination, while its prolonged exposure to European influences – with Ukrainian elites often being integrated into European intellectual and political frameworks (and other elements such as the respect for cultural autonomy enjoyed under Habsburg rule) allowing for a more pluralistic and decentralised ethos compared to the Muscovite autocracy – can be regarded as pivotal in laying the groundwork for its distinct post-1991 political development towards Europeanisation. Here, a parallel is in order and might perhaps be drawn in how these “ancient” differences can reflect the development of both states into the nowadays opposition between the quasi-democratic Ukrainian regime and Vladimir Putin’s highly personalist and autocratic one, a difference that, this study will go on to argue, is central in explaining the Russian-Ukrainian war.

²⁸ Russians and Ukrainians as “One People”; “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians”; Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, July 12, 2021; <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>

²⁹ Kohut, Z.E. (2001). Origins of the Unity Paradigm: Ukraine and the Construction of Russian National History (1620-1860). *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35(1), 70-76. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/ecs.2001.0060>.

³⁰ 1932–33, Holodomor; Man-made famine during Stalin’s rule, causing millions of deaths in Ukraine. Ukrainians and Western institutions such as the EU, the Council of Europe and the U.S. widely consider this genocide, while Russia frames it as a broader Soviet tragedy; <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20221209IPR64427/holodomor-parliament-recognises-soviet-starvation-of-ukrainians-as-genocide>; <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-resolution/105>;

§1.2.2 Ukraine: Independence, Democratisation and the Struggle to Survive

Before delving into the theory and explanation of the conflict by the belligerents' opposite regimes and having navigated through the convoluted origins of such contrast, an overview is in order of how this antagonism was reawakened from the rubble and ashes of the Soviet Union, which were the cradle to Ukraine's independence, approved on August 24, 1991 – mere days after the failed coup by Soviet conservatives against Mikhail Gorbachev and his reforms – under the de-facto new USSR leadership of the emerging and “too liberal” Boris Yeltsin (supervening upon Gorbachev himself, soon to resign especially due to the failed coup). Albeit unsuccessful, the coup did manage to railroad and abort the New Union Treaty,³¹ having the Soviet republics' governments lose faith in the central authorities and start submitting declarations of independence to the Supreme Councils.

Ukraine underwent – by the end of August, through December of 1991 (on the first day of which overwhelming support in favour of independence was shown via referendum) and in the years following – strong decommunisation efforts,³² prompting a hopeful (perhaps too hopeful) optimism³³ and anticipating a trajectory of sweeping cultural, social and political evolutions. Such evolutions – albeit in a flawed way and not exactly corresponding to the visionary and “wishful” expectations – did in fact manifest, following the deeply intertwined processes of democratisation and Europeanisation, and the ambitious (perhaps too ambitious) one of marketization.

Ukraine's post-Independence economic development has since the very beginning been oriented towards liberalisation and the transformation into a free market economy for a wealthy society.³⁴ This process has proven to be a protracted one – wading through the early '90s economic crisis, the irregular bursts of economic growth between 2002 and 2007, and an unstable stagnation for the rest of the time – and, much like political liberty and policy shifts between pro-Western and pro-Russian periods, economic freedom has oscillated between extremes due to early privatization initiatives often devolved into insider deals that enriched a small group of oligarchs, perpetuating entrenched economic inefficiencies and inequalities. The marketization dream of 1991 remains thus incomplete, though obstinately moving

³¹ New treaty to reshape the USSR into a more decentralized federation (sometimes called a “renovated Union”). In March 1991, a referendum had shown that a majority of Soviet citizens (and 71% of Ukrainians who voted) wanted to preserve some form of the Soviet Union. The coup, though unsuccessful, completely derailed this plan;

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/three-decades-ukraines-independence>

³² “[...] *The Communist Party of Ukraine was dissolved, its property was nationalized, and the KGB was banned, while party and ideological pluralism was established and all individuals living on the soil of the Ukrainian socialist republic were granted citizenship in the emerging independent state.*”; <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/three-decades-ukraines-independence>;

³³ Expectations were not strictly fact-based but heavily shaped by a collective desire for swift improvements in political freedom, governance, and living standards. Observers and citizens alike indulged in wishful thinking (1990's Deutsche Bank Report) that overlooked the complexities of transitioning from a command economy and authoritarian rule.;

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/three-decades-ukraines-independence>

³⁴ Tymofiy Mylovanov and Ilona Sologoub, “The Development of Ukraine's Private Sector,” in *From “The Ukraine” to Ukraine: A Contemporary History, 1991–2021*, ed. Mikhail Minakov et al. (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2021), 5394.

forward with the 2020-2021 launch of the Ukrainian energy sector³⁵ and agricultural land markets.³⁶ Still, despite some progress in human development and quality of life,³⁷ and in light of political troubles and the Russian “nuisances” between Crimea and the actual invasion, Ukraine’s marketization ambitions remain more or less unattended.

Post-Soviet democratisation implied having to overcome numerous obstacles, and has not gone by without travail. The establishment of a nation-state and the achievements of ideological pluralism, the full respect of individual rights, freedom of association and of the press, economic and market liberalisation, a multiparty system, free and fair elections, the upholding of the rule of law, and a strong civil society have not been immediate and many of the cited features of the quintessential liberal democratic country have still not been completely attained. Still, treaties were signed, pacts and concessions³⁸ were made, thirty years of democratisation have passed, and – while still not being regarded as a full-fledged democracy,³⁹ and its domestic politics unevenly oscillating between more and less free – Ukraine has stood as a fully recognised, independent and sovereign state – its “orbit” similarly swinging at times towards “the West,” when echoing past exposure to its ways under the Polish and the Habsburgs, at times towards “Mother” Russia, when its “gravitational pull” managed to sway notable figures to its side, plague elections with fraud⁴⁰ or leverage the populace’s sentiments (especially capitalising on the East-West voting divide, that mirrored and carried on the aftereffects and influence of the past split of Ukraine that saw its central and western lands under the Cossacks, Polish-Lithuanians and Habsburgs, and the eastern territories’ experience of Russian encroachment) – only to see that very sovereignty being threatened and those very pacts be broken by the illegal Russian annexation of Crimea, the following military conflicts in Donbass and, ultimately, the full-scale invasion perpetrated on Mr. Putin’s command.

One of the main assurances that similar happenings would **not** have ensued was the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, consequence of the Ukrainian agreement to relinquish their Soviet-inherited nuclear arsenal under the Lisbon Protocol. The signatories of the memorandum – the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Russian Federation – pledged to respect Ukraine’s territorial

³⁵ <https://razumkov.org.ua/en/articles/improving-the-wholesale-electricity-market-model-in-ukraine>;

³⁶ <https://www.agroberichtenbuitenland.nl/actueel/nieuws/2021/07/01/ukraine-land-market>;

³⁷ <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/standard-of-living-by-country>;

³⁸ Ukrainian commitment to nuclear disarmament and transfer of former Soviet nuclear warheads back to Russia under the 1992 Lisbon Protocol is an example of the concessions that were needed in order to achieve independence, international credibility under the Non-proliferation Treaty and the chance to democratise;
<https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/lisbon-protocol-glance#:~:text=May%2023%2C%201992%3A%20Russia%2C,in%20the%20shortest%20possible%20time.%E2%80%9D>

³⁹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ukraine>;

⁴⁰ The 2004 Presidential Election results in favour of Viktor Yanukovich (candidate from the Pro-Russian Party of Regions, later President from 2010 until his ousting by the Ukrainian Parliament in 2014, since when he lives in exile in Russia) were declared as falsified by the Ukrainian Supreme Court; https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/europe-july-dec04-ukraine_12-03; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viktor_Yanukovich;

integrity and inviolability of its borders, and to refrain from the use or threat of military force against them.⁴¹

Between 1992 and 1995, the phenomenon of Crimean separatism both “appeared”⁴² and was “resolved” with “relatively closer to Russia” President Leonid Kuchma’s 1994 election appeasing Crimean claims, and the 1996 new Constitution of Ukraine declaring Crimea’s unchallengeable belonging to Ukraine.⁴³

Albeit having joined the Council of Europe in 1995 – thus officially committing Ukraine to European rule of law and democratic standards – a “multi-vector” geopolitical approach⁴⁴ became influential under Kuchma during the mid-to-late ‘90s – balancing Western ties with Russian ones amongst increasing public discontent with governance – and up to the November 2004 presidential election, which – marked by the declaration of Putin-endorsed Viktor Yanukovich as winner amidst fraud allegations and the dioxin poisoning of pro-European opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko – led to the outbreak of the Orange⁴⁵ Revolution, that saw orange-clad protestors reversed into the streets. After nearly two weeks of demonstrations demanding fair elections, the Supreme Court ruled the election invalid and ordered a new runoff which saw Yushchenko defeat Yanukovich and the start of his presidency, characterised by European and U.S. oriented foreign policies, intensified pro-EU rhetoric (yet no formal membership negotiations), a limited success in reducing oligarchic influence and some feeble democratisation gains (media freedom), affected by numerous stalls due to parliamentary infighting with Yanukovich himself (who even served as Prime Minister for a time of cohabitation) and the persistence of the east-west split reminiscent of the past.

The “multi-vector” policy surfaced again between 2010 and 2014, with a strongly more Russian oriented flavour, due to the return of Yanukovich and his 2010 election as President (thanks to a moderation of his pro-Russian tones, to be deemed, *ex-post*, deceitful to say the least). His term was marked by accuses of reversing Orange-era democratic improvements and intensified favouritisms toward oligarchs. In November 2013, Yanukovich bowed to intense “pressure”⁴⁶ from Moscow and a planned association

⁴¹ <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/publications/budapest-memorandum-25-between-past-and-future>;

⁴² “*Since Ukraine’s independence Russia announced that the cession of the Crimea to the country should be reviewed. This fact served the separatists of the Peninsula to organize a referendum in favour of independence*,” which was declared in 1992. “*When relations between the two sides appeared to be calm, 1994 saw a return to criminal separatism with a new declaration of independence*,” before another turntable that “*must be seen in conjunction with the presidential elections held in 1994*.” César García Andrés, “*Historical Evolution of Ukraine and its Post-Communist Challenges*”, Revista de Stiinte Politice N° 58 2018, p. 84-96; https://cis01.ucv.ro/revistadestiintepolitice/files/numarul58_2018/8.pdf

⁴³ “*Ukraine is composed of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, [...]*”; 1996 Ukrainian Constitution, Art. 133;

“*The Autonomous Republic of Crimea is an inseparable constituent part of Ukraine [...]*”; 1996 Ukrainian Constitution, Art. 134; https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Ukraine_2016;

⁴⁴ Shyrokykh, Karina. (2018). The Evolution of the Foreign Policy of Ukraine: External Actors and Domestic Factors. Europe Asia Studies. 70. 832-850. 10.1080/09668136.2018.1479734.

⁴⁵ Yushchenko’s campaign colour;

⁴⁶ Russia offered to cut the price of natural gas and purchase \$15 billion in Ukrainian bonds to prop up the country’s faltering economy;

agreement that would have more closely integrated political and economic ties between the EU and Ukraine was abruptly halted just days before it was scheduled to be signed. This sparked numerous riots in Kyiv and especially in Maidan Nezalezhnosti (“Independence Square”, from which the protests were baptised “Euromaidan”) where crowds were violently dispersed by the police. Bloody clashes and killings ensued, buildings were occupied,⁴⁷ anti-protest laws were signed by Yanukovych⁴⁸ and the demonstrations soon extended to eastern Ukraine, the very regions that traditionally entertained closer ties with Russia. The Euromaidan protests culminated in February 2014 with President Yanukovych fleeing to Russia after an EU-brokered agreement, parliamentary reforms reducing presidential power, and charges of mass murder against him. New elections were scheduled for May 2014.⁴⁹

In March 2014, unidentified armed forces – widely recognized as backed by Moscow – seized control of Crimea, staged a disputed referendum claiming nearly 97% support for “unification,” and unilaterally annexed the peninsula into the Russian Federation. Mr. Putin has, in so doing, to all intents and purposes violated the Budapest Memorandum and effectively heralded a new time of war, the beginning of which the Western world has, at best, noticed with woeful delay or, at worst, begun to consider with its due gravity and seriousness, only in the later 2022. Meanwhile, unrest in the Donbass regions of Donetsk and Luhansk morphed into full-blown separatist movements supported by Russian arms and personnel, despite official denials from the Kremlin. Petro Poroshenko, elected president in May 2014, pushed Ukraine further toward European integration. Post-Maidan Kyiv took a decisive turn towards Europeanisation and sought Western assistance, manifested through sanctions imposed on Moscow for its role in the crises and, further in time, the 2017 EU Association Agreement.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, violence persisted in the eastern Donbass. Over the next years, half-measured cease-fires, such as those outlined in the OSCE⁵¹-brokered Minsk agreements,⁵² repeatedly broke down, and the conflict festered with periodic outbreaks of heavy fighting. By 2019, ex-actor and political novice **Volodymyr Zelensky**’s landslide electoral victory promised to reshape Ukraine’s political landscape. As president, he sought to overhaul governance by combatting corruption, to advance EU integration and pursue NATO membership,⁵³ and resolve the Donbass conflict. He took swift control over the presidency, cabinet, and parliament. However, reforms stalled amid inexperience within his team, resistance from radical groups and entrenched oligarchic clans, and lingering authoritarian tendencies, such as media restrictions and

⁴⁷ Among which the very city hall and the ministry of justice in Kyiv;

⁴⁸ Hastily repealed by the parliament.

⁴⁹ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine/The-Orange-Revolution-and-the-Yushchenko-presidency#ref986649>;
<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/three-decades-ukraines-independence>;
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ukraine-crisis>;

⁵⁰ <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/evropejska-integraciya/ugoda-pro-asociaciyu>;

⁵¹ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

⁵² 2014 Minsk I & 2015 Minsk II, respectively calling for ceasefire and withdrawal of heavy weaponry, and including special autonomy for separatist regions.

⁵³ In 2018, the Ukrainian Parliament voted to enshrine the goal of NATO membership in the Constitution.

judicial interference. Popular support for EU membership remained high, reflected in intensifying dialogue with European institutions and a notable surge in labour migration, yet, deeper integration was hampered by internal political fragmentation and the EU's own constraints. Economic and political vulnerabilities were further exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring Ukraine's continued reliance on Western security and financial backing. Russia's mounting military aggression finally culminated in the February 2022 invasion, thrusting Ukraine's fragile progress towards "Europeanization" into a full-blown existential struggle.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Minakov, M. (2020). *Democratisation and Europeanisation in 21st century Ukraine*. CEPS-led '3DCFTAs' project. Retrieved from <http://www.3dcftas.eu/>; <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine/The-Maidan-protest-movement>; <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/three-decades-ukraines-independence>;

§1.2.3 Russia: Putin, Personalism and Overt Aggression

Moving forth after the above in-depth dive into Ukrainian post-1991 history and its long, tangled and tormented path towards becoming the *quasi*-democratic state it is today, the time has now come to analyse the Russian Federation's descent into the new yet familiar⁵⁵ depths of autocracy and personalism that brought to its aggression to Ukraine.

After the USSR's collapse, massive mobilisations for democracy took place under the unsteady governance of Boris Yeltsin. Ironically enough, those very mass demonstrations created a fertile environment for oligarchs and regional bosses to gain unchecked power, paving the way for a new authoritarianism to take shape. The state's judicial and legislative branches remained underdeveloped, local governors ran their territories like fiefdoms, corruption blossomed and flourished. Even the nominally democratic processes of the 1990s concealed pervasive electoral biases that prevented the development of mechanisms essential for democratic consolidation. From the early rounds of competitive elections in 1993 and 1995, the unpopular economic liberalization policies led to sustained attacks on key democratic institutions, such as a free press, political rights, and a competitive party system. By 2011, Russia had institutionalized an electoral authoritarian regime, where elections were controlled, and limited competition further obstructed democratic development. Many of the informal tactics of political control that became hallmarks of Russia's personalist rule – such as electoral fraud, the creation of loyal opposition parties, the misuse of state resources for campaigns, and the co-optation of opposition in legislatures – were, in fact, already established during Yeltsin's presidency.⁵⁶

Yeltsin himself and his “Family” – a tight group of advisors who assumed key influence as the President's health deteriorated – bypassed hundreds of high-ranking senior secret police officers to appoint as FSB⁵⁷ director a then-low-rank, ex-KGB, FSB lieutenant colonel, who had shown a basic competence in administration and demonstrated “loyalty,”⁵⁸ in hopes he would protect the Family's interests “and maybe those of Russia as well.”⁵⁹ It was 1998. The following year, he was appointed first acting Prime Minister of the Russian Federation. Then, as Yeltsin resigned, he was acting President. He proceeded to win the

⁵⁵ “[...] the country is back in a familiar place, a one-man regime.” Kotkin, S. (2015). The Resistible Rise of Vladimir Putin: Russia's Nightmare Dressed Like a Daydream. *Foreign Affairs*, 94(2), 140–153. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24483492>

⁵⁶ “From the first rounds of competitive elections in 1993 and 1995, ... sustained assaults on the auxiliary mechanism of democracy ... blocked the formation of a competitive party system.” Smyth, Regina. 2014. “The Putin Factor: Personalism, Protest, and Regime Stability in Russia.” *Politics & Policy* 42(4): 567–592. <https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12080>;

⁵⁷ Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, principal security agency of Russia and the main successor agency to the Soviet Union's KGB.

⁵⁸ That is, to the “Family;”

⁵⁹ Kotkin, S. (2015). The Resistible Rise of Vladimir Putin: Russia's Nightmare Dressed Like a Daydream. (p.4). *Foreign Affairs*, 94(2), 140–153. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24483492>

March 2000 presidential election through media control⁶⁰, manipulation of the Chechen terrorist threat and, allegedly, some fraud. **His name was Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin.**

Though initially holding little effective power, he would, “*bit by bit, using stealth and dirty tricks [... reassert] central control over the levers of power within the country.*”⁶¹ Putin projected himself as the antidote to the 1990s’ domestic climate of anarchy, and many Russians seemed to accept a trade-off of freedoms for perceived stability⁶² especially in light of the ~7% annual economic growth from 1999 to 2008 – doubling the GDP (in Ruble terms)⁶³ and increasing the Real individual income by ~250% – and the consequent transformation of the country’s society,⁶⁴ all permitted (alongside oil windfalls, whose credit for the growth is estimated, at most, to 40-50%) thanks to a flurry of liberalising and anti-inflationary measures, land-marketisation, tax cuts incentives to work and reduced incentives to hide income, simplification of licensing and, wholly, a sensible macroeconomic policy facilitating investments. A new, grateful Russian middle class was born.⁶⁵

Putin’s “issue satisfaction” advantage bolstered trust in him, as citizens who are satisfied with policy outcomes often extend that trust personally to the leader (in this case, Putin), rather than to other political agents or structural factors.⁶⁶ This phenomenon added to his reputation of being an “effective manager” of both his party (whom he managed to completely reinvent and make symbol of his control over the political system)⁶⁷ and the country, and was ulteriorly reinforced by a carefully cultivated “Cult of Personality” that went way beyond mere policy competence. Putin instituted idolising youth groups (e.g., Putin’s Army, Nashi...), staged well-publicised stunts, acted out historical memory and feats of masculinity (e.g., shirtless on horseback), linking himself to national heroes and presenting his person as the ideal Russian man, embodying the *katechon* (“the gatekeeper of chaos”) and promoting distinct values

⁶⁰ He took control of the country’s main television station, Channel One (thanks to Boris Berezovsky, a secondary member of the Family);

⁶¹ “...the TV stations, the gas industry, the oil industry, the regions. It was a cunning feat of state rebuilding, aided by Putin’s healthy contrast to the infirm Yeltsin, hyped fears of a Russian state dissolution, well-crafted appeals to patriotism, and the bumbling of some oligarchs. Some fear of authority was necessary to tame the utter lawlessness into which the country had sunk.” Kotkin, S. (2015). The Resistible Rise of Vladimir Putin: Russia’s Nightmare Dressed Like a Daydream. (p. 4). *Foreign Affairs*, 94(2), 140–153. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24483492>

⁶² “Yet the absence of credible choice can only go so far in explaining overwhelming popular support—votes and ratings—for Mr. Putin ... From the start, the Putin regime rejected a clear programmatic linkage to its voters in favor of personalist appeals.” Smyth, Regina. 2014. “The Putin Factor: Personalism, Protest, and Regime Stability in Russia.” (p. 570). *Politics & Policy* 42(4): 567–592. <https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12080>;

⁶³ “In dollar terms, because of the Ruble’s appreciation over time, the increase in GDP was exceptionally vivid: from a nadir of around \$196 billion in 1999 to around \$2.1 trillion in 2013.” Kotkin, S. (2015). The Resistible Rise of Vladimir Putin: Russia’s Nightmare Dressed Like a Daydream. (p. 5). *Foreign Affairs*, 94(2), 140–153. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24483492>

⁶⁴ Cell-phone penetration increased from 0% to 100%, unemployment dropped from 12.9% to 6.3%, the poverty rate fell from 29% to 13%, wages rose, pensions were distributed, the immense national debt accumulated by previous leaders was paid off early, and Russia’s stock market increased 20-fold; Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Smyth, Regina. 2014. “The Putin Factor: Personalism, Protest, and Regime Stability in Russia.” (p. 581-583). *Politics & Policy* 42(4): 567–592. <https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12080>;

⁶⁷ Unlike typical personalist regimes that rely on weak institutions, Putin’s United Russia became a dominant force, coordinating policies and maintaining electoral dominance across the country.

of Orthodox (faith of which he claims to be the protector) and traditional derivation. These mechanisms of trust through both Charismatic⁶⁸ personalist appeals, along the other Non-Charismatic⁶⁹ ones, can allow one to conceive of citizens who, even if unsatisfied or unconcerned with policy or outcomes, nonetheless reward the leader because of their perception of his type.⁷⁰

Proceeding through the late 2000s, as the Kremlin reined in oligarchs and forced governors into compliance, any potential checks over presidential power were progressively and systematically eroded, with the Duma being reduced to the function of propaganda machine⁷¹ and “rubber-stamping” presidential decrees. Elections, though still held, saw a drastic increase in manipulation, the institutionalisation of advantages for the incumbent and limiting factors towards any competition, mechanisms of informal control on vote counts, and, eventually, episodic intimidations, threats, use of violence and direct coercion towards the opposition. With time passing, the regime’s ferocity towards opposers and protesters increased. When the December 2011 parliamentary elections sparked outrage amidst alleged falsification, drawing tens of thousands to the streets, the Kremlin started pushing a more nationalistic, conservative brand of personalist appeal. Putin’s speeches invoked moral responsibility, patriotism, and Russia’s cultural heritage, tying them to his continued leadership. The pro-Putin propaganda⁷² rallies, or “Putings,” became platforms to reaffirm Putin as the moral and cultural bulwark of the country. As Aleksey Naval’nyj’s call for protesters to “*vote for anyone but Mr. Putin*” threatened the regime’s electoral outcomes’ “security,” the Kremlin escalated its crackdown on dissent – culminating in Naval’nyj’s repeated arrests, poisoning, and eventual imprisonments, which would eventually lead to his “death” – while the personalist dynamic fuelling Putin’s hold on power drove an increasingly aggressive foreign policy towards Ukraine (foreshadowing 2014 to 2022), having external militarization and progressive aggravation of the repression of dissent converge and correlate under Putin’s rule.⁷³

Some hopes for liberalisation were raised by Dmitry Medvedev’s presidency – an episode that followed Putin’s decision to formally respect the constitutional limit of two consecutive terms – and his timid moves toward economic diversification, re-democratization, and the improved relations with the United

⁶⁸ Based on Putin’s carefully crafted image and personal qualities. Citizens trust him because of who he is, not necessarily what he does.

⁶⁹ Focused on his perceived competence in managing the economy and political system, regardless of personal charisma.

⁷⁰ Smyth, Regina. 2014. “The Putin Factor: Personalism, Protest, and Regime Stability in Russia.” (p. 581-583). *Politics & Policy* 42(4): 567–592. <https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12080>;

⁷¹ Exemplar testimony of this are the recent (and preposterous) declarations of Duma deputy Andrei Kolesnik: “*Europe [...] is starting to fear the Armed Forces of Ukraine because they have been armed to the teeth. [...] Only Russia can protect Europe from the Ukrainian army. If they are friends with Russia, then everything will be fine*”; <https://aif.ru/politics/deputat-kolesnik-tolko-moskva-smozhet-zashchitit-evropu-ot-armii-ukrainy>;

⁷² Propaganda, useful tool for any regime, reaches new levels of strength and effectiveness thanks to the particular geographical configuration of Russia, which results in political awareness being found and possible only in large cities, while it is difficult to create a sense of community in the vast, isolated, and disconnected peripheries.

⁷³ Smyth, Regina. 2014. “The Putin Factor: Personalism, Protest, and Regime Stability in Russia.” (p. 581-583). *Politics & Policy* 42(4): 567–592. <https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12080>;

States.⁷⁴ During his time, “Teddy Bear”⁷⁵ was urged multiple times by his entourage and various powerful interest groups to dismiss Putin from the prime-ministership. He had the full authority to do so, to deny him access to state resources for his campaigns, and to declare his own intention to run again for President. All that never happened. By 2012, Putin had returned to his chair.⁷⁶ Ultimately, the regime’s centralizing logic continued uninterrupted.

Around 2012, the Kremlin, with Putin at its helm, started its pivot towards an increasingly overt and aggressive foreign policy, commencing with the 2014 annexation of Crimea, insisting with the subsequent interference in Donbass, and climaxing with the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Mr. Putin’s justifications for such bold moves have various connotations, spanning from denazification and liberation missions of oppressed peoples, “fighting Satanists to protect Christendom,” and historical narratives of unity, to more “reasonable” geopolitical ones of security vis-à-vis NATO “expansionism”⁷⁷ (with Zelensky’s rapid pivot toward the EU and NATO membership conveniently contributing in aggravating Putin’s claims about “encirclement”), all soaked in Russian imperial rhetoric and imbued with the nationalist reminiscences of past “glory.”

While many former empires the likes of France and Great Britain faced (and still are facing) significant reckonings vis-à-vis imperial nostalgia, vowed to the de-legitimization and criminalisation of expansionist wars and their colonial past, Russia stands unique in its lack of anti-Imperial sentiment. Evidently, the idea of reconquering lost territories could – and perhaps can still – resonate with elites and parts of the public.⁷⁸ Still – all other Kremlin justifications for its warmongering in Ukraine having been debunked⁷⁹ – Russian Imperialism alone cannot be the fundamental explanation of why Moscow opted (and of **how** it could have opted) for such a far-reaching armed conflict and decided to wage war.

⁷⁴ “One could even implausibly assume that all of that was brilliant manipulation by remarkably clever and effective puppet masters in order to fool the Russian people and the West.” Kotkin, S. (2015). The Resistible Rise of Vladimir Putin: Russia’s Nightmare Dressed Like a Daydream. (p. 8). *Foreign Affairs*, 94(2), 140–153. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24483492>

⁷⁵ Derisive nickname for Medvedev;

⁷⁶ Kotkin, S. (2015). The Resistible Rise of Vladimir Putin: Russia’s Nightmare Dressed Like a Daydream. *Foreign Affairs*, 94(2), 140–153. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24483492>

⁷⁷ Disinformation on NATO has been thoroughly debunked (see the following links); also, considering how Finland’s accession to NATO has not caused any “tantrum” in Mr. Putin, why would the possibility of Ukraine’s accession (that of a people defined – by the Russians themselves – as “stupid” and “lazy”) make him feel so threatened? Consider “Putin’s Philosopher” Aleksandr Dugin’s words about the resisting Ukrainians to the Russian aggression in Donbass – “...this is a race of bastards that emerged from the sewer manholes... We should clean up Ukraine from the idiots. The genocide of the cretins is due and inevitable.” Thinking ill of someone may be a sin, but one that is often proved right and justified in so doing by the harsh truths of reality. <https://www.sciencespo.fr/cepi/fr/content/dossiersducepi/long-ongoing-war-putin-s-imaginary-ukrainians-and-mythic-russian-identity>; <https://www.nato.int/cps/pt/natohq/115204.htm>;

⁷⁸ Sonin, Konstantin. 2024. “Modern Imperialisms and the Origins of the Russia-Ukraine War.” (p. 3) Becker Friedman Institute Working Paper No. 2024-115. <https://bfi.uchicago.edu/working-papers/modern-imperialisms-and-the-origins-of-the-russia-ukraine-war/>.

⁷⁹ <https://blog.prif.org/2023/07/26/russian-self-defense-fact-checking-arguments-on-the-russo-ukrainian-war-by-john-j-mearsheimer-and-others/>; https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/disinformation-about-russias-invasion-ukraine-debunking-seven-myths-spread-russia_en?s=166; <https://www.ejiltalk.org/putins-war-against-ukraine-mocking-international-law/>;

The reason of the insufficiency of the imperial sentiment alone is straightforward. While nostalgic views and sentiments towards their lost colonies may have at times persisted in above-mentioned former European empires, they did so and were resisted, without plunging said states into new neo-colonial wars. After the end of World War II, a number of powers that had lost their overseas colonies did not try to restore the *status quo* by force.⁸⁰

Russia did.

What makes Russia distinct is the fact that the imperial sentiment persisted and **did** become the justification for the meddling in the political affairs of a neighbouring sovereign state, the actual annexation of one of its territories, and then the full-on invasion of said state.

For imperial ideology to become a “plausible” excuse and driving force for a state to pursue a war of conquest in the 21st century, a fundamentally different political system is required from that of the countries in which imperial aspirations have been stunted by liberal democratic institutions, checks and values. For something of the sort, the primitive, de-institutionalised and archaic organisation of a personalist regime such as that of Vladimir Putin was necessary, and it is from this fundamental assertion that this study will proceed with its scrutiny of the dynamics that led to the war and the explanation of the conflict through the lenses of Interwar Idealism, Liberal Democratic Peace Theory and New Liberalism's State Preferences' Derivation.⁸¹

⁸⁰ The one event approximating an exception being Margaret Thatcher's actions to defend the Falkland Islands (or “Las Malvinas”), yet, limited in scale and cost, a victorious (**defensive towards not colonial, but actual state territory**) military operation could be rationalized. A large-scale war of conquest is a whole different story.

⁸¹ Sonin, Konstantin. 2024. "Modern Imperialisms and the Origins of the Russia-Ukraine War." (p. 3) Becker Friedman Institute Working Paper No. 2024-115. <https://bfi.uchicago.edu/working-papers/modern-imperialisms-and-the-origins-of-the-russia-ukraine-war/>.

§1.3 Explaining the Russia-Ukraine War by the Belligerents' Domestic Regimes

Before rushing into the particulars of each theory, a very brief synthesis of three significant points that tend to be shared by all Liberal theories may turn out to be useful in setting the stage. Firstly, the conviction that interdependence among societies is to be regarded as more important than the independence of political units and actors. Second, that people can be rational (not to be taken for granted), which makes cooperation among states possible or, at least, conceivable. Third, that man can learn from its mistakes and its past, therefore making progress towards peace something not-as-far-fetched as it may appear under different sets of assumptions or beliefs.

§2 will, in presenting the core tenets and philosophical roots of liberalism, recall most of these and of the following concepts for a clearer philosophical contextualisation and in order to set the stage for further elaboration.

§1.3.1 Interwar Idealism

The first perspective that is going to prove useful in order to understand the dynamics that surrounded and followed the Russian aggression of Ukraine is Interwar Idealism. It builds its precepts on the past political philosophies of the (17th-)19th century and presents itself as an “updated” version of them. Idealism’s “father” may be identified in the person of Woodrow Wilson. He presented to the world a new idea of how Global Politics should be handled and – keeping in mind the historical context and regime opposition that this study has been concerned with so far – surely the reader will notice how closely the following propositions and ideas apply to the events that have brought to and unfolded after the breakout of the Russian-Ukrainian War.

Wilson saw “*Universal Law and not equilibrium, national trustworthiness and not national self-assertion as the foundations of international order, [...] binding arbitration, not force*”⁸² as the method to solve international disputes. Crucially to our analysis, Idealists saw the state – while, yes, still the main actor – in a pluralistic dimension, recognising the strong influence of its domestic actors and dynamics on its external behaviour. From this follows that “*the foreign policies of democracies are morally superior because the people are inherently peace-loving. Foreign policy should reflect the same moral standards as personal ethics. The state has no right to claim a separate morality for itself.*”⁸³ In fewer words, a state’s domestic political philosophy shall be reflected by its behaviour on the international stage. In the case of democracies, the people – those who actually bear the costs of war – will be reluctant to wage them unless a moral impetus – such as defending their or some other democratic state’s right to self-determination – should compel them to do so and intervene vis-à-vis those who “*are not under the ties of the common law of reason and have no other rule but that of force and violence.*”⁸⁴ This dynamic corresponds to Liberal Interventionism, a concept extracted from the Lockean belief in the “Right to War” (which will be re-proposed, as anticipated, in §2) and echoed by Wilson himself:

“...to lead this great peaceful people into war, into the most terrible and disastrous of all wars, civilization itself seeming to be in the balance. **But right is more precious than peace, and we shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts, for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free.**”⁸⁵

Even considering war an atrocity, Wilson argues that liberal democratic states have a duty to intervene in support of other democracies against autocratic aggressors, which has been the case since the Russian invasion of 2022. Western powers did engage in vigorous support of “*the rights and liberties*” of “a small nation” through the sending of arms, multi-billion dollars’ aid packages⁸⁶ and the imposition of sanctions

⁸² H. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 1994 (p. 45)

⁸³ H. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 1994 (p. 46)

⁸⁴ Quote that will be re-proposed further. Locke, J. Two Treatises of Government. Book II. Chapters II, III. 1689.

⁸⁵ W. Wilson, *Address to Joint Session of Congress*, April 2, 1917;

⁸⁶ <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/>

towards the aggressor. They did so not only in order to keep binding promises by others broken (the Budapest Memorandum), but also due to Ukraine's long political evolution that brought it closer and closer to its coveted dream of democracy.

On the other hand, "*a regime built institutionally and personally to preserve power and [...] ideology*"⁸⁷ reflecting on its foreign policy the same moral standards as its political philosophy or personal ethics would easily dismiss any liberal moral constraints. So did Putin's. So did Russia, by giving into its imperial fantasies – something that might not have happened if liberal institutions, separation of powers, and accountability mechanisms were in place – and launching a war on its neighbour under the Russian traditional guise of "*protecting one's own interests*."⁸⁸ In the Russian case, any (classically liberal) moral or universalist standard is hollowed out by the lack of any "*open and conscious refusal of expansion and agitation against 'foreign wars'*"⁸⁹ and any question over the illogicity or cost of a "*contrary to rational logic*"⁹⁰ war effort is either overlooked, overruled, or not even asked in light of Putin's personalist authoritarianism.

⁸⁷ Sonin, Konstantin. 2024. "Modern Imperialisms and the Origins of the Russia-Ukraine War." (p. 3) Becker Friedman Institute Working Paper No. 2024-115. <https://bfi.uchicago.edu/working-papers/modern-imperialisms-and-the-origins-of-the-russia-ukraine-war/>

⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 7.

⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 7.

⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 3.

§1.3.2 Doyle's Liberal Democratic Peace Theory

Arguably the most useful theoretical framework to understand the conflict between Russia and Ukraine by looking at the opposition between their domestic regimes is Michael Doyle's Liberal Democratic Peace Theory.

The fundamental claim it asserts is that liberal democracies are more peaceful and law-abiding than other political systems, in perfect harmony with and continuation of Wilsonian and Idealist observations. The argument is not that democracies never go to war. In fact, democracies have gone to war as often as have non-democracies. The point here is that they do not fight each other. These observations were first articulated by Immanuel Kant in the late eighteenth century in reference to republican states rather than democracies. Doyle bases his argument on the classical liberal treatment of the subject by Kant, echoing the configuration of the three conditions he identified as necessary to attain "Perpetual Peace" – respectively Republicanism, the *Foedus Pacificum* and Cosmopolitan Law – in a modern-day revisitation of the so-called Kantian Tripod. Doyle replaces each of these conditions with their contemporary and evolved form. Democracy, International Organisations and Complex Interdependence.

First, democratic political cultures favour peaceful conflict resolution at home and abroad, since citizens who bear the costs of war are more than unlikely to support aggression against other democracies. Of course, most liberals are well aware of the fragility that characterises any democratisation process, as seen in the case of Ukraine. Liberal democratic norms must be ingrained in a country's politics before the domestic basis of the democratic peace will be secure, and such development of the political culture usually takes a long time. There will more than likely be setbacks and difficulties to be overcome – such as the Yanukovych parentheses and the east-west identity (and voting) divide in Ukraine – and, while some countries do reach "sufficiently democratic" results, others will revert to non-democratic forms of government, which is the case of Russia taking a step backwards in 2004, now being classified as a 'Not Free' country,⁹¹ and, perhaps soon (though hopefully never), that of the United States of America under Donald Trump. Russia's institutional breakdown – with "rubber-stamping" Duma having become a shadow of what a functioning parliament should be, a deficient and corrupt judicial system towards high-profile cases, and "*not enough law with a capital L*"⁹² to acknowledge any serious attempt at upholding any semblable thing to the rule of law – having prohibited any pushback to the infamous decision to launch the invasion.

⁹¹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/russia>

⁹² <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/vladimir-putin-and-the-rule-law-russia>

Second, shared political and at times moral values among democracies have indeed brought them to create some sorts of “pacific unions” – whether they be international organisations, intergovernmental or supranational entities or even military alliances – that – through peaceful methods of dispute settlement (“*binding arbitration*”) and widespread freedom of expression – encourage mutual respect and – through a united front in the face of illiberal and undemocratic threats such as Russia and its lack of democratic caution – allow for liberal interventionism, which is exactly what is happening in support of Ukraine.

Third, economic cooperation and interdependence have further reinforced peace (even with non-democracies), with the Kantian “spirit of commerce” aligning reciprocal economic benefits with the broader goals of avoiding conflict.^{93 94}

Doyle reinforces his theory by highlighting two other liberal traditions in addition to the Kantian Internationalist one, respectively, Schumpeter’s Liberal Pacifism (closely tied to the third pillar of the Tripod) and Machiavelli’s Liberal Imperialism.

Schumpeter’s tradition (and thoughts on democracy itself, that will as well be considered in §2) attributes a strongly pacifist disposition to capitalist democracies, whose economic configurations tend to disincentivise imperial tendencies, defined as “*objectless dispositions of a state toward unlimited forcible expansion*,”⁹⁵ the only beneficiaries of which would be war profiteers and military aristocrats, vis-à-vis burdens on the citizenry in the forms of taxes and conscription. This perspective helps to capitalize on the contrast between the Ukrainian *pseudo*-democracy seeking marketisation and Putin’s regime disregarding any cost-based check (towards the populace) in favour of (the **unattended** expectation of) him and his “narrow circle” reaping the envisaged benefits of waging a large-scale war of conquest that required the waste of hundreds of thousands of soldiers (therefore, of human lives), thousands of pieces of equipment, filtration camps and a permanent occupation administration, making it almost impossible to justify as a rational choice. Among the other several possible explanations as to why dictators start wars more often than democratic leaders and wage them less successfully – some of which have already been thoroughly mentioned⁹⁶ – is the fact that, due to the very structure of their regimes, they are simply more likely to make risky, poorly informed decisions (more on this in the next section).⁹⁷

⁹³ Kant (Immanuel), *Perpetual Peace* (1795), Sections 1 & 2.

⁹⁴ Jackson, Robert, and Georg Sorensen. *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*. 5th ed., Oxford University Press, 2013.

⁹⁵ Schumpeter, Joseph. *Imperialism and Social Classes*. (p. 6) Originally published in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, Vol. 46, 1919, and Vol. 57, 1927.

⁹⁶ Dictators are less accountable to citizens than citizens of democracies and, accordingly, are more easily able to make decisions that serve their personal interests only.

⁹⁷ Sonin, Konstantin. 2024. "Modern Imperialisms and the Origins of the Russia-Ukraine War." (p. 4-5) Becker Friedman Institute Working Paper No. 2024-115. <https://bfi.uchicago.edu/working-papers/modern-imperialisms-and-the-origins-of-the-russia-ukraine-war/>

Doyle's reference to Machiavelli points to the fact that even liberal states⁹⁸ can indulge in "expansionist" tendencies, especially versus their illiberal homologues and if they believe such "imperial pursuits" are necessary for their security (or glory) when facing internal threats – fighting internal factionalism and preventing domestic disunion by channelling society's energies outwards – or external ones, the perfect undemocratic target unto which to bestow and unleash their liberal "might". This "liberally imperial" argument helps to shed some more light on the previously mentioned phenomenon of liberal interventionism, and, in some way, manages to present **realpolitik as not necessarily contradictory to liberal values, rather, the contrary.** In light of Russia, an authoritarian regime, sitting outside the "zone of liberal peace" among liberal democratic states (and Ukraine laying on its edge) and having given legitimate cause to western democracies to invoke their Right to War, the involvement in the conflict by actors such as NATO and the European Union is also better contextualised. Russia's actions are instead better explained by its use of **illiberal** Machiavellian logic as justification and, as is now clear, **the complete backwardness and primitivity of its regime, one so personalist and unhinged that it could be allowed to act based on one's desires and ideology alone, without anyone stopping him.**^{99 100}

⁹⁸ Seen not as pure democracies, but as mixed republics, displayed as preventing any one group from becoming overly dominant and threatening the freedoms of others through a balance of power within themselves, either between institutions, social classes, or regions.

⁹⁹ Ibid p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ Michael W. Doyle; *Liberalism and World Politics*; The American Political Science Review, Vol. 80, No. 4. (Dec., 1986), pp. 1151-1169.

§1.3.3 Moravcsik's New Liberalism and the Determination of State Preferences:

A final, useful, and explanatory medium to understand the dynamics of the conflict by the regime opposition that characterises Russia and Ukraine can be found in Andrew Moravcsik's New Liberalism, with a particular focus on how crucial the nature of the internal political organisation of a state is in determining said state's behaviour on the international arena, as it reflects which group or individuals' preferences it shall mirror.

Moravcsik's theory sees in individuals and private groups the fundamental political actors. He accords to them the main characteristics of rationality¹⁰¹ (though, at times, a bounded one), risk-aversion, and a tendency towards competition, given the constraints of resource scarcity and differentiation. Politics starts from the bottom up. It means that state preferences – that constitute the effective interests of the state, not mere positions or fleeting bargaining strategies (such as what a hypothetical “peace” in Ukraine, with the Russian annexation of occupied territories, would constitute),¹⁰² across different possible outcomes – emerge from diverse economic, ideational or group-based interests, which shape the demands on the state.

The state, and, crucially, its institutions, are in turn the very “transmission belt”¹⁰³ that aggregates the varied preferences of those individuals and groups. It is therefore the form and character of those very institutions – whether democratic, oligarchic, autocratic, personalistic... – that determine, as anticipated shortly before, which individuals, societal faction or classes get their interests and policy preferences reflected in foreign policy.

Once each state has formed its preferences, international politics becomes the process of trying to realise such preferences through constrained interaction with other states, which are likewise and in turn pursuing their own interests. The resulting pattern of policy interdependence – *id est*, how one state's pursuit of its preferences contrasts or complements another's preferences – thus establishes whether the types of interstate relations will manifest in the form of conflict, competition, cooperation, or some middle ground in between. Where underlying preferences align, harmonious or cooperative outcomes arise more easily; where preferences are “deadlocked,”¹⁰⁴ the likelihood of conflict increases. This is to say that variation in ends and purposes matters more than variation in means and capabilities, once again

¹⁰¹ Max Weber differentiates between instrumental, value-based, affectual, and traditional rationality. Moravcsik's model seems to avoid excessively privileging one over another, though, in light of his Ideational, Commercial, and Republican variations of liberalism, instrumental and value-based rationalities seem to have a slight upper-hand.

¹⁰² Given the initial purposes of “denazification” and “liberation of the oppressed peoples of Donbass” stated by Mr. Putin and Russia not recognising Ukraine's statehood, such kind of “peace” would maybe amount to a mere and temporary truce. This perspective makes Donald Trump's ambitions of brokering such “peace” all the more worrisome, especially given the fact that Mr. Putin does not appear to be willing to either respect or take any proposed ceasefire seriously.

¹⁰³ Moravcsik (Andrew), “Taking Preferences Seriously. A Liberal Theory of International Politics”, *International Organization*, 51 (4), 1997, p. 518.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 521.

explaining western involvement in support of Ukraine. Russia's (Putin's) "state" preference is Ukraine. The whole of it. Ukraine's preference was Europeanisation, now it's survival as well. Western preferences are the preservation of Ukraine's independence as a strategic partner, the defence of liberal democratic values and the international order, and the reduction of Russia's military potential (perchance in hopes of destabilising Putin's regime as well).

Furthermore, Moravcsik stresses that three main variations of Liberalism exist – Ideational, Commercial, and Republican – and that, taken together, they form a robust framework to explain international relations phenomena. They will prove in this case instrumental to interpret the dynamics of the Russian-Ukrainian War.

Ideational Liberalism "*focuses on the compatibility of social preferences across fundamental collective goods like national unity, legitimate political institutions, and socioeconomic regulation.*"¹⁰⁵ It explains how social identities (ideas, norms, and values) can shape the perception of elements such as, among others, political legitimacy (domestic beliefs regarding "legitimate" institutions can breed external conflict if irreconcilable across states), cultural values, nationhood and rightful borders. If borders do not match national self-understandings, if culture is repressed, and nationhood not recognised (see pages 15-16)¹⁰⁶, "*tension and zero-sum conflict is more likely.*"¹⁰⁷ Such is the case of Russia versus Ukraine. The very fact that identities – in this case, the conviction that Ukraine "is not a real state" in forming a core preference – powerfully shape societal demands explains how imperialism provided the (useful yet insufficient) impetus for – the "Why" of – Russia's aggression, its regime providing the "How" instead, which is to be seen as the main enabling condition of the invasion. On the other side, as already stated, where underlying identities (and interests) align – see the Ukrainian struggle for democratisation and the liberal democratic identity of EU and Western states – cooperation and support emerge. Ironically enough, the war has even accelerated Ukraine's Western integration.

Commercial Liberalism asserts that "*changes in the structure of the domestic and global economy alter the costs and benefits of transnational economic exchange, creating pressure on domestic governments.*"¹⁰⁸ It explains the behaviour of states based on patterns of market incentives that face domestic and transnational actors. Aggregate welfare gains from trade will encourage governments to liberalise, but (as will be covered below by applying this dynamic to Russia) powerful rent-seeking industries or monopolistic firms (**or dictators**) may lobby to block or distort free trade (through war, in this case, *or tariffs, in other ones...*) if they bear (*or if they think that they bear*) the costs of global competition, or have important gains to make (*or plans to fulfil*).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 524.

¹⁰⁶ Ukraine as "Little Russia" ...

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 525.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 528

The proposition is widely known that, as production becomes more specialized and integrated across borders, coercive conquest tends to start yielding diminishing returns, thus making peaceful economic exchange more attractive, yet, where distributional conflict is acute (such as the asymmetry on the matter between the Russian populace and its elites), state behaviour may still be conflictual.

Finally, Republican Liberalism focuses on how domestic political institutions do aggregate or bias societal demands. As already stated, “*the key variable is the mode of domestic political representation, which determines whose social preferences are institutionally privileged.*”¹⁰⁹ When political representation is biased – the case of the Russian system after having undergone its transformation into autocracy and personalism – in favour of particularistic groups (Putin and his “circle”), they tend to “capture” government and legislative institutions (see what the Duma’s actual function has been reduced to) and employ them for their ends alone, systematically passing on the costs and risks (of war, in this case) to others. Echoing the previously tackled theoretical frameworks, under broader representation – not necessarily perfect liberal democracy (*exempli gratia*, Ukraine’s *quasi*-democracy) – war imposes high net costs or risks on the majority, rendering aggression more likely to be avoided.

Consequent to this reasoning – and taking into careful consideration the summation of these three strands of Liberalism – is the assertion that Russia’s foreign policy in attacking Ukraine was nothing else than the manifestation of Putin’s regime mirroring the preferences of those whose preferences it was carefully engineered and built to privilege, that is, none other than Putin himself.

In fact, Russian political scientist Vladimir Gel’man proposed – in order to explain the functioning and organisation of the 21st century Russian state – the theory of “Bad Governance,” according to which state institutions and political practices are designed in such a way to perpetrate “*a system aimed at rent-seeking as a major goal and purpose of governing the country.*”¹¹⁰ The maximisation of the “rent” extracted by individuals in power is the driving factor that guides practical decisions made at all levels of government, while “*the interests of the country and its citizens are taken into account only to the extent that this does not contradict the enrichment of people in power and their families.*”¹¹¹ This reshaping of the state has effectively managed to break the “transmission belt” from society to policymaking, with ordinary citizens being excluded from foreign-policy decision making and with them any hope of resistance to the decision to invade. Furthermore, rather than seeking welfare gains from trade, Russia has increasingly undertaken policies that hamper it,¹¹² in favour of such a “bad governance” equilibrium that permits funnelling large sums into the country’s

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 530

¹¹⁰ Gel’man, Vladimir. (2021) The Evolution of Putinism: Constitutional Change and Regime Stability. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1bh9J-SmEM>

¹¹¹ Sonin, Konstantin. 2024. "Modern Imperialisms and the Origins of the Russia-Ukraine War." (p. 3) Becker Friedman Institute Working Paper No. 2024-115. <https://bfi.uchicago.edu/working-papers/modern-imperialisms-and-the-origins-of-the-russia-ukraine-war/>.

¹¹² Such as countersanctions or import-substitution to reduce interdependence;

defence budget and its defence-industrial and security related sectors. Military spending and the budgets attached to these sectors are in fact the least transparent and accountable for society, making it extremely easy to profit from proximity to power. In Putin's Russia, enterprising businessmen expected to receive their significant share of the distributed national wealth, which, in turn, contributed to the creation of a stable military-industrial complex lobby.¹¹³ The peaceful logic of trade has been short-circuited by these kinds of domestic interests profiting from the arms sector and the corruption around it, rendering the lack of resistance to Putin's decision to invade – and its illogicity – more understandable. Even though the highly predictable troubles and broader economic losses – consequence of the conflict – did not (at the time) dislodge the pro-war preference at the top – because of the very extractive and rent-seeking institutions in place having led the most optimistic among the elite to believe they would have just reaped the profit, and the most pessimistic and contrary of them being reduced to inaction and reluctant yet inevitable silence, due to their dependence on that very system and subordination to Putin – in hindsight, it probably should have. Russia's problems (including grave economic ones) are gargantuan – hundreds of billions of dollars in direct and (in decades of development even greater) indirect losses as a result of the war are guaranteed – and will, by any reasonable estimates, further exacerbate in the future. Such losses are and will continue to be suffered not only (as was probably taken into account by the Russian leadership) by the common citizenry, but (to their tacit and non-manifestable displeasure) by Putin's elite as well, which renders the situation all the more ironic in light of their incapacity (the reasons for which will be explained in the following paragraph) to see the aforementioned predictability of it and therefore to effectively push back against it.

In fact, that the Russian army and remaining state institutions proved to be almost completely unprepared for the war effort is yet another testimony of the ineffectiveness of the decision-making mechanism of Putin's regime.¹¹⁴ This can be ascribed to the “reverse selection” in appointing top positions inside the Russian personalist machine. Rather than competence, the main selection criteria were the strength of one's allegiance to the leader and his connections, resulting in an administration composed of incompetent and corrupt loyalists or spineless and similarly corrupt “technocrats”. The horizontal accountability or checks that might have prevented a high-cost war were non-existent. This and the absence of genuine parliamentary oversight¹¹⁵ made it so that Putin could indulge in his primordial desires of glory and pursue Russia's “historical mission” with “*nobody in government [who] could challenge the war decision effectively.*”^{116 117}

¹¹³ Ibid. p. 11.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p. 2-3.

¹¹⁵ “*The 2011-2024 parliaments, elected with significant irregularities or outright electoral fraud that exclude the presence of political opposition, consist only of people approved personally by Putin or his administration.*” Ibid. (p. 9)

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. p. 9-14.

§1.4 Conclusions

In light of all that has been examined, it emerges with little ambiguity that the present war transcends the mere matters of territorial reconfiguration or “historical claims,” indeed constituting a collision between two states whose internal orders are shaped by diametrically opposed philosophies of governance. As argued throughout these pages, Ukraine’s turbulent yet persistent aspiration towards democratic consolidation and broader European integration stands in stark contrast to the Russian Federation’s regression into a personalistic autocracy, wherein power and policy preferences are effectively monopolized by Mr. Putin and (in rare circumstances, as, to their great yet acquiescent displeasure, the war was an initiative of Putin alone) his chosen circle of oligarchs and loyalists (most times they themselves mirroring Mr. Putin’s preferences). Whereas Ukraine’s system – however flawed – has striven, to some extent, to reflect plural interests and uphold at least the fundamentals of liberal democratic norms, Russia’s one has ossified into a structure that precludes genuine accountability, thus enabling the adventurist decision to launch an overt war of conquest.

Under the liberal theoretical lenses employed – Interwar Idealism, Doyle’s Liberal Democratic Peace, and Moravcsik’s New Liberalism – such divergence of domestic regimes emerges as crucial to fully explaining the outbreak and nature of the conflict. From the Idealist call for “binding arbitration” and morally guided state conduct, to Doyle’s insight into the mutual restraint typical of liberal democracies and their willingness to unite against illiberal aggressors, and Moravcsik’s contention that foreign policy inevitably mirrors the constellation of domestic interests, these strands concur in locating the deeper cause of this war in the distance between a *quasi*-democracy’s pursuit of self-determination and an autocratic machine insulated from the everyday costs of its own aggression.

Ukraine’s European vocation and imperfect commitment to liberal values have opened the door to international solidarity, buttressed by moral and legal arguments reminiscent of earlier Western pledges. Conversely, Russia’s “bad governance” equilibrium – engineered to serve autocratic rent-seeking rather than societal well-being – has shown how historical romanticism, when filtered through personalist decision-making, can lead to costly and seemingly irrational large-scale aggression. Indeed, the same archaic logic of empire, which modern liberal states have largely disavowed, still resonates robustly in a domestic setting where the impulses and ambitions of one man can determine the fate of millions with minimal institutional restraint.

Finally, the war’s evolution itself has underscored a vital lesson. The domestic framework of any given polity remains a central determinant of whether it will wage or eschew hostilities, and how it shall enlist (or repel) the help of other nations. In this regard, the struggle unfolding on Ukrainian soil testifies to the extent to which illiberal regimes – untrammelled by participatory checks or demands for accountability –

can, under the right ideological impetus, pursue imperial fantasies long since repudiated by the more “normalized” states of our era.

Without the ideology, Putin would not have had the desire to start a war, yet, **without a degenerate autocratic and personalist regime, that decision could not have been made.**

§2. Democracy Under Fire: The Imperative of Self-Defence

Having traced the war's roots in clashing regime types, the time has come to go beyond foreign policy behaviour as an illustration of the significance and impact of liberalism, therefore, to reflect on liberal democracy itself and on its future in grasping its essence, its logic, its preciousness, and its fragility in order to understand why and how these core principles must be fiercely defended.

§2.1 Liberalism and Liberal Democracy: Principles and Lockean Roots

Giovanni Sartori defined liberalism as “*the theory and practice of the juridical defence, through the constitutional state, of individual political freedom, of individual liberty.*”¹¹⁸ It follows that liberal democracy is a system that cannot be reduced to majority rule, but one that *reasonably*¹¹⁹ fuses it with a robust constitutional and philosophical order that shelters individual rights and safeguards the very freedoms that enabled real self-governance in the first place. To do so in an effective manner, it must rest not merely on voting procedures, but on the classical liberal principles that anchor the system against co-optation (or monopolisation) by illiberal forces and agents. Those amongst such perils that come from the outside, external threats to liberty and democracies, are wrestled with through interventionism on the international arena (*exempli gratia*, the case covered in §1 or, another mainstream example, the very resistance and opposition to Nazi Germany by the British under Sir Winston Churchill’s guidance). Liberal Interventionism – the foremost column upon which freedom has stood throughout history – is, though, a mechanism that is only permitted under the same classical liberal values that defend the system from the above-mentioned illiberal threats and actors when they come from the inside, *id est*, internal threats that – at times through democracy itself – endanger, by their nature, democracy *per se*. Such classical liberal values include (but are not limited to, as already listed in previous sections) individual liberty, equality before the law, private property, economic liberty, the separation of powers, respect for the rule of law, the various freedoms of conscience, speech, press and association, and, importantly, self-preservation and the protection of the minority vis-à-vis the tyranny of the majority, in perfect coherence with the classical proposition that one’s freedom can only extend as far as it does not infringe upon another’s.

Most of the above classical liberal principles (upon which are built the liberal theories of international relations that have constituted the main lenses of analysis in §1) which allowed democracy in his best and only true possible form¹²⁰ – that is no direct democracy, but its liberal, republican, constitutional and secular form – have evolved from (among innumerable others such as Immanuel Kant, as has been already explored in what concerned Doyle’s Liberal Democratic Peace Theory) John Locke’s philosophy and ideas on the human nature and the transition from the State of Nature to organised and civil government. An overview of such ideas and how they shaped contemporary liberal theories is in order.

¹¹⁸ Sartori, G. (2016). The theory of democracy revisited. In *Democracy: A Reader* (pp. 192-196). Columbia University Press.

¹¹⁹ More on this in §2.2

¹²⁰ As is argued throughout this work.

§2.1.1 John Locke: From the Law of Nature, Liberalism

Locke's state of nature is portrayed as a condition of natural liberty, *id est*, a perfect freedom for men to conduct their actions, manage their persons and dispose of their possession as they themselves see fit, needing not to ask permission to act in such way, nor being subjected to or subjugated by anything but the bounds of natural law, consisting not in mere self-preservation to reach by means of rationality (the Hobbesian definition of it), but in moral law discoverable through reason, from which to derive that all men are equal and independent by virtue of them being all God's creatures, no one having license to harm another's liberty, life or possessions.

The first claim that Locke makes is, in fact, that all men are born equal, none enjoying any kind of inherent subordination or superiority, "*unless the lord and master of them all should, by any manifest declaration of his will, set one above another, and confer on him, by an evident and clear appointment, an undoubted right to dominion and sovereignty*"¹²¹. The idea of equality, contrary to the use Hobbes makes of it, is employed in arguing that men, being equal by nature, should – utilising that which is also the golden rule in the ethics of reciprocity¹²² – do unto others as they themselves would have such others do unto them, thus resulting in a condition of mutual love and justice among individuals.

Consequential to this is, as anticipated, that the aforementioned natural liberty does not encompass the license to inflict harm upon others nor upon oneself unless in such cases where self-preservation is at peril, in respect of the aforesaid natural law, reflecting the rational order of the world. Such rational order hence demands that everyone be entitled to the right of enforcement of the law of nature, on such occasion that it has been violated, through punishment of the offender proportionate to the crime, with dual purpose of reparation (a right rooted in natural law) of his losses to the injured party and of restraint of the offender, to prevent future harm. Of course, it is acknowledged that the victim of an offender investing himself of the authority to judge that very wrongdoer may become problematic, for bias and self-love may sway their adjudication, yet it is maintained that this eventuality in the state of nature still results highly preferable to the absolute rule of one man acting as a judge without accountability. Locke holds, in fact, that Civil government indeed is a remedy for such inconveniences, under the condition that individuals do retain the ability to challenge unjust rule.

Locke furthermore argues that not only the state of nature he describes has always existed and that it still does in the declination of independent political communities, but that Sovereigns and rulers of independent governments are themselves, living in such state of nature vis-à-vis one another. Contemplating the existence of men (or states) who "*are not under the ties of the common law of reason, have no*

¹²¹ Locke, J. *Two Treatises of Government*. Book II. Chapters II, III. 1689.

¹²² Later echoed in Kant's categorical imperative. "*Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.*" Kant, I. (1964). *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: translated by HJ Paton*. Harper & Row.

*other rule but that of force and violence,*¹²³ thus their disposition to violate another's right to life, liberty or property, Locke defines the state of war as that condition of enmity and destruction that occurs when someone makes a deliberate attempt to violate, by either word or action, another person's above-mentioned rights, placing the target of such aggression in a position of defence, conferring unto him the right to vanquish its aggressor, for "*when all cannot be preserved, the safety of the innocent is to be preferred*", thus he "*may destroy a man who makes war upon him,*"¹²⁴ anticipating the aforementioned concept of liberal interventionism. Be it noted that the state of war is well extended to include such occasions in which one individual should attempt to exert dominion and control over another, effectively seeking to enslave him, thus depriving him of his liberty and by that threatening his life, "*for I have reason to conclude that he who would get me into his power without my consent would use me as he pleased when he had got me there, and destroy me too when he had a fancy to it.*"¹²⁵ The right to wage war is therefore justified and extended to those who seek the destruction of those who intend to do them harm, even if such exertion has not yet taken place.

Locke's conclusion is that the state of nature is not at all equivalent to the state of war. The former can indeed be peaceful, as long as individuals live reasonably. The state of war arises when someone violates natural law or his intention to do so becomes manifest. The absence of a common authority is not what causes war – for war is not a default condition of human nature – being on the contrary what ensues when natural law – reflected in human nature – is broken, that is, when someone stops acting as a rational human being but rather as "*a wolf or a lion*", beasts devoid of reason and moral. Locke concludes that one of the primary reasons men form political societies is to avoid the state of war. The existence of an authority capable of resolving disputes prevents conflicts from descending into violence, thus ensuring that natural rights are upheld. When there is no such authority to judge disputes impartially, men are rightly left to defend themselves, and the state of war persists. The state of nature thus leads men to create governments not to escape perpetual war, as instead per Hobbesian claim, but to avoid the injustices and inconveniences that arise from themselves acting as judges in their own cases.¹²⁶

¹²³ Locke, J. Two Treatises of Government. Book II. Chapters II, III. 1689.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

§2.1.2 Locke and the International Relations

Just as Hobbes' *Leviathan* and his overall philosophy on human nature can be regarded as the roots of Realist doctrines of the international relations, Locke's own philosophy similarly proves to be the fount of the Liberal ones.

Echoing §1, the main units of analysis under Liberalism are individuals, institutions, non-state actors as well as, of course, states, not anymore considered as unitary actors, instead being accorded with a pluralist dimension, thus making their interests derive no more from solely exogenous factors, but also from endogenous ones by means of incorporation of those preferences, in turn derived from internal dynamics, belonging to the subsets of society that are able to impose themselves through fair procedures.

Reflecting Lockean views, liberalism does believe individuals and, by extension, states to be capable of rationality and morality, necessary conditions for them to cooperate for their mutual benefit, something else that is not really conceivable under the “*zero-sum-game*” Realist worldview. Liberalism also shows some Idealist tendencies in sharing Lockean optimism towards the potential for progress through the rational development of institutions reflecting shared values of respect for state sovereignty as well as individual rights to freedom, life and property. Conflict is in fact seen as avoidable and not inherent to the international system, especially due to such complex political and economic interdependence of international actors, the result of the aforementioned cooperation among states looking for mutual gains through trade and diplomacy.

Consequently, just as natural law governs individuals in Locke's state of nature, international law and norms (should) guide state behaviour in the international chessboard (though state interest is indeed a pivotal factor), of which the stability is guarded by the establishment of international institutions (states consenting to international treaties and laws to regulate their interactions), mirroring Locke's ideal of forming a civil government (individuals consenting to form governments to protect their natural rights) in order to manage conflicts, facilitate the resolution of disputes (through adjudication by international courts and other arbitration bodies, embodying the Lockean solution to the inconveniences of the state of nature) and protect the rule of law.

Yet, just as individuals retain their right to overthrow any government they themselves have established, only in such cases where it should violate their natural rights (where “natural” might be translated to that which in contemporary times might correspond to “liberal”)¹²⁷, so the international community of states (or, in contemporary terms, a “Western” community of states, an alliance of aligned liberal democracies

¹²⁷ May it therefore be very clear that there is absolutely no such thing as moral equivalence between rebellion against an authoritarian state (or any entity in violation of liberal values and individual rights), and revolt against liberal institutions themselves by, say, radical left- or right-wing protesters putting forward a very “liberal” reinterpretation of the Lockean argument.

of idealist imprint, re-evoking Wilsonian commitment) has the right and obligation to intervene to the restoration of peace and order in such cases where they should be violated by any maverick state (or coalition) belonging to said community, reflecting Locke's belief in the Right to War in the ideal of liberal interventionism (that drove the actions of the liberal democratic states in support of Ukraine) where, in order to prevent human rights abuses, to support democratic movements and protect individual rights and freedoms, collective action is justified against tyrannical or non-democratic aggressive regimes, who, as explained by Doyle's Liberal Democratic Peace Theory, are (and, also yet not only thanks to Mr. Putin himself, have proven to be) the only plausible candidates for the gross violation of the international order vis-à-vis liberal counterparts, not presenting, unlike democracies, shared liberal norms and values functional to cooperation between states nor checks and balances or accountability mechanisms for the reduction of conflict.

§2.2 The Worst Form of Government, Except for All the Others

Of course, though Locke's philosophy – together with numerous others such as Kant's and Montesquieu's – can be argued to have been of foundational importance to liberalism and liberal democracy, there are other, numerous philosophers and thinkers who have analysed it, scrutinised it, contributed to its definition, identified fragilities as well, and advanced enlightening observations.

§2.2.1 Joseph Schumpeter: From Capitalism, Democracy

According to Joseph A. Schumpeter, modern democracy came to fruition alongside the rise of capitalism and of capitalist economies, whose emergent middle classes demanded broader political representation. It is, he argues, essentially a capitalist phenomenon, a product of the capitalist process.¹²⁸ In societies transitioning from feudal or autocratic forms, the liberal ideals of property rights, economic freedom, and personal autonomy provided the environment for universal suffrage and the development of parliamentary systems. Consequently, democracy's early breakthroughs were inextricably tied to bourgeois values of civic freedom, commercial exchange, and legal equity. Values that, once enshrined, extended well beyond the business-owning elites.

Schumpeter's theory, while recognising the merits of capitalism in ushering democracy, stresses that the same societal shifts which empower the middle classes can as well inadvertently enable competing groups and ideologies, thus broadening the democratic arena. He warns that capitalism's very success generates forces that threaten both economic and political liberalism. As capitalist economies mature, in fact, they cultivate a society accustomed to material security, where political demands shift from wealth creation to wealth redistribution.

The rise of mass democracy, combined with growing expectations for state intervention, fosters collectivist pressures that threaten the very bourgeois freedoms that enabled democracy in the first place. This is further reinforced, argues Schumpeter, by the role of the expanding class of intellectuals that capitalism produces. Despite benefitting from the system, these intellectuals – often alienated from direct economic production – turn to political and ideological activism, fostering discontent with both capitalism and liberal democracy and accelerating its susceptibility to collectivist movements, their voices being amplified through media and academia and therefore shaping public discourse in ways that delegitimise the very institutions that sustain democratic governance. In this sense, democracy, when left unchecked, risks evolving into a system in which elected leaders prioritize short-term popular approval over long-term economic and political stability, rendering the system increasingly vulnerable to socialist or bureaucratic encroachments.

In fact, Schumpeter warns that the notion of a homogeneously “enlightened” people uniting around a common good (in this case, liberalism) is overly idealistic. He describes democracy as a system of competitive leadership, where politicians vie for citizens' support in a context susceptible to manipulation through propaganda or manufactured opinion – rather than rational thought – likening political

¹²⁸ Elliott, J. E. (1994). Joseph A. Schumpeter and the theory of democracy. *Review of Social Economy*, 52(4), 280-300. p. 281

persuasion to commercial advertising. The above-mentioned expansion of the democratic arena, in light of the above new political demands, might thus cultivate challenges of – as just mentioned – manufactured opinion due to intense rivalry for votes, stressing further the need to distance the notion of “democracy” from the one of mere “majority rule,” and making it vital that liberal principles – such as, yes, free press and open debate, but also strong constitutional checks in defence of such values – act as counterweights against manipulation.

This susceptibility identifies democratic openness as democracy’s fragility, especially when undercut by illiberal actors seeking to harness mass discontent or exploit democratic processes through the manipulation and systematic shaping of public opinion to dismantle basic freedoms and undermine liberal democracy itself.

In some instances, Schumpeter argues, democracy has “surrendered to dictatorship” with culpable and “apparent ease”, such as the case of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

Schumpeter's analysis and approach are though exclusively diagnostic and descriptive ones – he does not offer a normative solution. Nevertheless, he does see the containment of mass political participation within a framework of leadership selection as a pragmatic one, with strong and capable elites functioning as necessary stabilising forces in democracy. He does not rely on an idealised rational and well-informed electorate and sees its role as best limited to selecting among competing, competent elites through institutionalised electoral processes. His model assumes that stable democratic governance depends on the existence of a political class with expertise, rather than expecting enlightened deliberation from the mass public.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Ibid.

§2.2.2 John Rawls: From Reasonableness, Consensus

Something that could be interpreted as a normative solution to this fragility can instead be found in John Rawls' "*Political Liberalism*." Rawls proposes that sustaining a pluralistic yet cohesive democracy demands the virtue of "*reasonableness*". The fact of pluralism – namely that different comprehensive doctrines simultaneously exist in the contemporary liberal democratic society,¹³⁰ that is, people inevitably hold divergent worldviews¹³¹ on most fields (religious, moral, philosophical...) – denies the presumption of a uniform convergence on liberal (be they Lockean, Kantian, or else) morals to maintain democratic unity. Rawls therefore shifts the focus from moral stability to political stability, allowing deep moral, religious and philosophical differences, emphasising though that these different doctrines can, under an "*overlapping consensus*," converge on liberal institutions for their own reasons. Democracies endure if citizens can therefore overlap on political essentials while retaining their own deeper convictions. Philosopher Sebastiano Maffettone underscores that Rawls labels "reasonable" those doctrines (and their supporters) that are willing to engage others through public reasons rather than coercive power or, one might add, the subversion of those liberal values that allowed pluralism in the first place – which inextricably intertwines reasonableness with toleration, thereby forging a consensus on constitutional rules despite profound disagreements belonging to the private sphere.¹³²

This perspective contributes to the definition of liberal democracy as more than an electoral process, *id est*, a political conception where classical liberal tenets are vital and must be protected by an ethic of reciprocity that spurs citizens to value pluralism without relinquishing them nor the public order. This civic ethos resonates with militant-democracy provisions¹³³ (*exempli gratia*, party bans under strict legal

¹³⁰ Maffettone, S. (2013). *Un mondo migliore: Giustizia globale tra Leviatano e Cosmopoli* (pp. 1-213). LUISS University Press. p. 126-127.

¹³¹ Worldviews that are complete and profound, in the belief that they are inspired by fundamental truths. Ibid.

¹³² Maffettone, S. (2004). Political Liberalism: Reasonableness and democratic practice. *Philosophy & social criticism*, 30(5-6), 541-577.

¹³³ Militant democracy was introduced by Karl Loewenstein, who, reflecting on the threat of fascism in the 1930s, argued the **need** for democracies **to abandon a neutral outlook** (more on this in §2.4) and adopt measures to counter those who exploited democratic freedoms to subvert them. Loewenstein analysed several European anti-fascist legislations as examples of this militant response. More recently, Jan-Werner Müller has taken up and updated the normative debate, assessing new justifications for militant democracy in light of contemporary challenges such as religious radicalism and new forms of authoritarianism (more on these challenges in §2.3 on anti-Western sentiments). Müller considers some paradoxes of militant democracy, such as the troubling one that the very attempt to save democracy might actually damage it (resolution of which culminates in §2.4.2 through the distinction between the quantitative-majoritarian and qualitative-liberal components of liberal democracy, with the consequent subordination of the quantitative element to the qualitative one), and the crucial question of who should decide and implement such restrictive measures. Giovanni Capoccia, on the other hand, focuses on the institutional foundations of militant democracy, analysing cross-national variation in restrictive norms and policies and linking them to country-specific historical contexts. A common point among these authors is the recognition that democracies have the right to defend themselves against actors who aim to destroy them, even through non-violent means. However, their peculiarities lie in their emphasis. Loewenstein was primarily focused on the immediate legislative response to the fascist threat in the inter-war period; Müller offers a broader and more contemporary normative perspective, examining the current challenges and theoretical implications of militant democracy; while Capoccia takes a more empirical and comparative approach, analysing concrete institutions and policies of militant democracy in different contexts. All three, however, emphasise the delicate tension between the need to protect democracy and the risk of undermining fundamental

safeguards), natural growths of the Lockean right of self-preservation, ensuring the system can defend itself, for instance, in branding some doctrines or movements as “*unreasonable*” without slipping into oppression.

rights and freedoms in the process. Loewenstein, K. (1937). Militant democracy and fundamental rights, I. *American political science review*, 31(3), 417-432. Loewenstein, K. (1937). Militant democracy and fundamental rights, II. *American Political Science Review*, 31(4), 638-658. Müller, J. W. (2016). Protecting popular self-government from the people? New normative perspectives on militant democracy. *Annual review of political science*, 19(1), 249-265. Capoccia, G. (2013). Militant democracy: The institutional bases of democratic self-preservation. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, 9(1), 207-226.

§2.2.3 Popper's Paradoxes and Liberal Solutions to Democratic Problems

Karl Popper himself has, in this regard, famously highlighted the “Paradox of Freedom,” the “Paradox of Tolerance,” and the “Paradox of Democracy,” all tied to one another and encapsulating the notion that, taken to their extremes, freedom, tolerance and democracy carry their own negation within them.

The paradox of freedom – according to which absolute freedom can lead to oppression of the many and strong on the lone and weak – is the most easily resolved one through the aforementioned idea that one's freedom can only extend as far as it does not infringe upon another's.

The paradoxes of tolerance and democracy are deeply intertwined between themselves.

The paradox of tolerance puts forth that unlimited tolerance – tolerance of the intolerant – enables the intolerant to flourish and ultimately erode the tolerant itself. If tolerant societies fail to defend themselves against openly intolerant actors, the latter can exploit those freedoms to stifle or eliminate competing viewpoints.

Now, when the intolerant manages to sway or convince the electorate, arises the paradox of democracy. Popper contends that a majority, exercising its right to choose, can effectively decide to empower the intolerant – the illiberal, the tyrant – itself, thus abolishing liberal democracy by democratic vote.

The natural conclusion by Popper is that there cannot be democracy for the anti-democratic just as well as there can be no tolerance for the intolerant. Popper's solution to these paradoxes may appear “unsatisfactory” or “undemocratic” in itself to some, as it stands in contrast with the Kelsenian idea that *“a democracy that tries to assert itself against the will of the majority, even with force, has ceased to be a democracy.”*¹³⁴

This latter proposition may perchance ring true if stated under the assumption of “democracy as majority-rule.” This definition is though – especially in light of all that has been stated up until now – a quite easily challengeable one.

Dutch constitutional scholar George van der Berg – during an impassioned lecture¹³⁵ in defence of democracy back in 1936, when democracy's future was as uncertain as humanly fathomable – had already concerned himself with this theoretical issue. He solves said issue by noting how democracy is not defined by the mere notion of “majority-rule,” but foremost by that of being a system of “*self-correction*.” He states that characteristic of democracy is that it is always able to revoke its own decisions (through its

¹³⁴ Kelsen, H. ‘Verteidigung der Demokratie’, in: *Verteidigung der Demokratie: Abhandlungen zur Demokratietheorie* (MohrSiebeck, 2006), 237.

¹³⁵ The lecture was for the most part an analysis of a rather outdated Dutch law on the basis of which it would be possible to ban anti-democratic parties.

procedures).¹³⁶ This leads Van den Bergh to conclude that “*all-but-one-decision for democracy has to be treated equally*,” *id est*, the decision to abolish democracy itself. For when a democracy decides to abolish itself – which makes the decision irrevocable by the same democratic procedures through which it was made – it actively betrays its nature. It is democracy deciding not to decide anymore, which – such decision being irrevocable – means the whole framework is lost.

Similar reflections render some measures in defence of democracy – such as the practice of banning anti-democratic parties following Popper’s rationale on tolerance¹³⁷ – not just pragmatically useful, but also theoretically justifiable.¹³⁸

If challenging the Kelsenian premise of “democracy as government by majority-rule” and changing it to “democracy as government by self-correction” allows the possibility to develop a coherent theory of democracy in which anti-democratic parties can be excluded from the democratic arena, **then, adding** to such new premise the ulterior and fundamental nuance of “democracy as liberal democracy” – in that **democracy cannot but be liberal**,¹³⁹ claim that this entire work has hitherto been building towards¹⁴⁰ –

¹³⁶ A great test of the strength of U.S. democracy will be whether or not it will be able to self-correct, which means, of course, whether the Republican party will manage to reverse its transformation into the MAGA (Make America Great Again) cult that it has become, whether or not Trump’s second term will be his last (highly troubling rumours are hovering in MAGA circles about the possibility of a third Trump term), whether or not there will be a peaceful transfer of power should the next elections’ result be in favour of a Democratic or non-MAGA Republican candidate, and, most importantly, whether or not, at that point – or, as should be expected in light of recent events, long before – the rest of the American people, both simple citizens and politicians or officials, shall prove a worthy defender of its freedom. This seems to be happening already, with approval rates which are plummeting, some Republican voters and party members finally coming to their senses, and strong backlash from crowds and even conservative media. It is a somewhat reassuring signal of hope, yet, a still pragmatically feeble one, in light of the MAGA control of the executive, Congress and Supreme Court.

¹³⁷ “*Unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance. If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them. In this formulation, I do not imply, for instance, that we should always suppress the utterance of intolerant philosophies; as long as we can counter them by rational argument and keep them in check by public opinion, suppression would certainly be most unwise. But we should claim the right to suppress them if necessary even by force; for it may easily turn out that they are not prepared to meet us on the level of rational argument, but begin by denouncing all argument; they may forbid their followers to listen to rational argument, because it is deceptive, and teach them to answer arguments by the use of their fists or pistols. We should therefore claim, in the name of tolerance, the right not to tolerate the intolerant. We should claim that any movement preaching intolerance places itself outside the law and we should consider incitement to intolerance and persecution as criminal, in the same way as we should consider incitement to murder, or to kidnapping, or to the revival of the slave trade, as criminal.*” Popper, Karl (1945). “Chapter 7, The Principle of Leadership”. *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Volume 1). Routledge. pp. 265–266.

¹³⁸ Rijpkema, B. (2012). Popper’s paradox of democracy. *Think*, 11(32), 93–96.

¹³⁹ If democracy is understood to include meaningful civil, individual and economic liberties, then undermining those rights is effectively anti-democratic; “illiberal democracy” is, at its core, an effort to gut the substance of democracy while leaving the formal shell in place. Kauth, J. T., & King, D. (2020). Illiberalism. *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, 61(3), 369–370.

¹⁴⁰ Political scientist Fareed Zakaria interpreted the liberal and “democratic” (a better term to indicate what Zakaria is describing here as “democratic” would be “majoritarian”) understandings of governmental power as being in fundamental conflict. He argued that while classical liberalism seeks to limit the reach of government power into the individual’s (therefore, the minority’s) private sphere through the separation of powers and legal guarantees of basic rights, “democracy” (like before, more appropriate would be the use of “majoritarian rule”) emphasises instead the sovereignty of the people and thus the concentration and maximisation of power in the hands of the majority. Zakaria thus posited that liberal democracy might just be one out of the several possible varieties of democracy, thus popularising the concept of “*illiberal democracy*.” **The claims of this work do not go against Zakaria’s observations; rather, they aim to reinterpret or slightly tweak**

together with the Schumpeterian “flavour” of competency requirements set on the passive electorate¹⁴¹ (advancing the observation of usually strong correlation between incompetence, populism and illiberalism; see §1.2.3 and §1.3.3, amongst other evidence throughout §1 and real world evidence, such as Venezuela's economic collapse under Nicolás Maduro), can allow one to conceive of a new coherent theory of democracy, in which illiberal or populist (or both) parties or movements – led by illiberal or incompetent (or both) agents – are labelled as *unreasonable*, outside the Rawlsian consensus on constitutional rules, anti-democratic, and, therefore, to be barred from the realm of political competition, office or representation.¹⁴²

Before building further upon this last claim, it is pivotal to dedicate a space to discuss such illiberal ideals, *id est*, how they came into being, spread through the various populations (even those of liberal democratic countries), how they evolved, and how they present themselves as what shall be baptised as “anti-Western sentiments.”

his conclusions. Democracy cannot exist *meaningfully* without liberalism. By adopting the oxymoronic albeit practically useful term that is “illiberal democracy,” Zakaria acknowledged that regimes can hold elections while disregarding constitutionalism, civil liberties, and institutional constraints. To accept “illiberal democracies” as still democracies risks though to misrepresent the essence of democracy itself. Elections alone do not make a democracy, for without liberal principles, majoritarian rule becomes electoral authoritarianism, not a democratic system. True democracy is not merely procedural but a framework that balances popular sovereignty with the protection of individual freedoms. A system that erodes those freedoms ceases to be democratic in any meaningful sense. Thus, “illiberal democracy” is a contradiction: without liberalism, democracy does not exist – only its façade. From here on, whenever the term “illiberal democracy” should be used, the reader should regard it as a practical shorthand, knowing of the merely practical nature that it carries, and, therefore, of the merely practical use that is made of it to shortly encapsulate its oxymoronic meaning. On the same wavelength, any future use of the word “democracy” that is not preceded by the word “liberal” is to be interpreted as presupposing it and merely having omitted it for brevity or stylistic choice. Zakaria, F. (1997). The rise of illiberal democracy. *Foreign Aff.*, 76, 22.

¹⁴¹ Be it absolutely clear, “competency requirements set on the passive electorate” means that such competency criteria are to be demanded **not** from electors (which comport tensions with the principle of liberal equality), but from electoral candidates, that is, representatives – so as to avoid unpleasant cases of “kakistocracy,” already all-too-common in current times. Just as company CEOs need a certain degree of competence to be entrusted with the administration of assets, personnel, and more, political representatives and officials must similarly be subject to parallel expectations in order to effectively administer a country.

¹⁴² Be it noted that this implies that these parties or movements lose any valid claim to seats, offices, or formal roles within democratic institutions, not necessarily losing their freedoms of speech and conscience, in the limits defined.

§2.3 The Rise of Anti-Western Sentiments

Should the main thesis here not be abundantly clear, yet another restatement is in order and hereby follows.

That which endangers liberalism, endangers democracy.¹⁴³ That which endangers democracy, endangers the pillars on which stand democratic peace and liberal interventionism.¹⁴⁴ That which endangers interventionism vis-à-vis threats, wherever they should come, endangers the free world.¹⁴⁵ That which endangers the free world, endangers its inhabitants and their freedoms.¹⁴⁶

If that which endangers liberalism, thus, transitively, the free world, are not merely external enemies, but its inhabitants themselves, plagued by anti-western sentiments, then perhaps the poison has reached too far into the organism for it to heal on its own.

Yet, “*success is but the ability to go from failure to failure without losing one’s enthusiasm*,”¹⁴⁷ thus, in hopes of aiding to the convalescence of liberalism – moved by the words of one who did in his time contribute to the rescue of the free world from the talons of illiberalism in its most extreme form¹⁴⁸ – this section shall be

¹⁴³ As has been defined throughout this work. Liberalism is the foundation of democracy, not merely an adjunct to it. As in §2.1 and §2.2, democracy is not merely “rule by majority” but a structured system grounded in constitutional checks, individual rights, and freedoms of thought, speech, and property. The historical precedents of Italy (1922), Germany (1933), and Putin’s Russia show that once liberal protections erode – if they ever existed and whether by government decree or populist drift – democracy ceases to function in a meaningful way, succumbing either to authoritarianism or to majoritarian tyranny. Liberalism is the only viable architecture for a self-correcting democracy; undermine it, and democracy loses its nature and worth.

¹⁴⁴ The *Foedus Pacificum* – the liberal “zone of peace” – relies on democracy’s persistence across international actors. As in §1.3.2, democratic states share internal norms of peaceful arbitration, legal consistency, and economic interdependence, making war between them exceedingly rare. Likewise, §1.3.3 underscores that democratic foreign policy is the mirror of domestic dynamics, interests and values: democratic states act according to those preferences. If such preferences shift to illiberalism, foreign policy will as well. When this happens, regional and international alignment are disrupted (see Hungary and its positions on the Russia-Ukraine War).

¹⁴⁵ Liberal interventionism is the defensive shield of the free world. Democracy cannot afford to be passive in the face of existential threats – whether from external threats (Putin’s Russia, China, Iran and Jihadist groups...) or internal subversives (illiberal movements exploiting democratic mechanisms, fuelled anti-Western sentiments, which shall be the object of analysis of this section). The whole of §1 illustrates the stakes: where interventionism is hesitant or absent, aggressors push their advantage, and democratic states suffer territorial and political setbacks. The same principle was at work in 1938 Munich, when the failure to act decisively against Hitler emboldened further expansion. If interventionism crumbles – whether due to internal political weakness, isolationist rhetoric or meddling by illiberal actors – those very illiberal actors will fill the vacuum.

¹⁴⁶ The “Free World” is not merely a geographic or economic bloc but an existential space in which civil liberties, political rights, and economic freedoms exist in relative safety. The loss of this world order means the loss of its security guarantees, exposing both states and individuals to coercion, repression, and aggression. When democracy fails to defend itself, its citizens are not merely inconvenienced—they are actively imperilled.

¹⁴⁷ Adapted from the words attributed to Sir Winston Churchill, “*Success is the ability to go from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm*.”

¹⁴⁸ “*If you will not fight for right when you can easily win without bloodshed; if you will not fight when your victory is sure and not too costly; you may come to the moment when you will have to fight with all the odds against you and only a precarious chance of survival.*” Sir Winston Churchill.

dedicated to an overarching analysis of how anti-Western sentiments, by definition illiberal, have risen to constitute a serious threat to all that is worth protecting in this world.

§2.3.1 Anti-Western Narratives and Shifts

In light of the centrality of Russia throughout this work, it is only fair to, once more, start from there to look at anti-Western sentiments when they come from outside. In 2019, Vladimir Putin himself proclaimed that “*the liberal ideal is obsolete*.”¹⁴⁹ Such assertions echo broader trends of democratic decline in recent years.

If Russia’s tirades against “the West” are – among other reasons, such as accuses of moral decay – ideologically fuelled by post-Cold War sentiments due to alleged “humiliation” and historical revisionism, the so-called “Global South” comes forth in turn with compatibly anti-Western, anti-capitalist, post-colonial claims. If China’s stance is sensibly more pragmatic – while still promoting narratives of Western hypocrisy and colonialism – Iran’s sentiment is instead deeply ideological, especially vis-à-vis Western foreign policy, secularism and civil liberties, as it is the case for other Jihadist non-state actors.

Francis Fukuyama identified the financial crisis of 2007-2008 and the euro crisis of 2009 as “*the final blows*”¹⁵⁰ that – united with the above historically revisionist, anti-capitalist, Third-Worldist and post-colonial accusations – by striking the then “*leading exemplars of liberal democracy*” (the United States and the European Union), further damaged the reputation of the system and contributed to the above-mentioned decline. In light of such context, those very authoritarian and rival countries, led by China and Russia, have become much more assertive¹⁵¹ and, *exempli gratia*, in the case of Russia and Iran (through its proxies), explicitly and militarily aggressive, respectively, towards freedom-yearning, *quasi*-democratic Ukraine (and, by extension, towards liberal democratic Europe), and, if flawed, still democratic Israel.

But the attacks to the liberal democratic way of life are, as anticipated, not limited to external aggression and assertiveness from illiberal enemies. On the contrary, when similar or compatible narratives to those listed above take hold in Western countries, whether they come from the right or left wing of the political spectrum, liberal democracies must struggle with anti-Western sentiments coming from the inside.

Some countries that had seemed to be successful liberal democracies during the 1990s – including Hungary (though shimmers of hope can be glimpsed, with the emergence of Péter Magyar and his Tisza Party, currently the biggest challenge to Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz) and Turkey (once commendably Kemalist, suffering at present under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s heel and his re-Islamisation of the public

¹⁴⁹ If obsolete and weak, how can it, as asserted by Putin, be of any threat to Russia? Just a provocative question. Kauth, J. T., & King, D. (2020). Illiberalism. *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, 61(3), 365-405.

¹⁵⁰ Fukuyama, F. (2018). Against identity politics: The new tribalism and the crisis of democracy. *Foreign Aff.*, 97, 90-114.

¹⁵¹ Not to mention the rising influence they are gaining by replacing that of the French and the U.S. in Africa, with Russia’s Wagner Group particularly involved.

sphere, also chargeable with geo-strategic opportunism,¹⁵² now asserting its key military importance to “the West” in what regards the War in Ukraine) among others – have, in fact, slid backward toward authoritarianism, notes Fukuyama. More surprising, more troubling and undoubtedly even more significant was the success of populist nationalism in elections held in 2016 by two of the world's most durable liberal democracies, that is, the United Kingdom, where voters chose to leave the European Union, and the United States, where Donald Trump scored an unexpected electoral upset in the race for president.¹⁵³

Albeit the United Kingdom’s political landscape has evolved to bring the country, once more, closer to the European Union (especially in what concerns international relations), the United States’ political environment and status has further deteriorated. After four years of dignified albeit imperfect Democratic presidency, under a Joe Biden of Wilsonian mould, marked by aid and support to Ukraine in its fight against the Russian invader, Donald Trump – a “new” Donald Trump of unprecedented and overtly un-American¹⁵⁴ positions, exuding a “rather nauseating stench of appeasement”¹⁵⁵ toward Russia so strong that it conjures an eerie *déjà vu* in reminiscing that of Munich 1938 toward Germany (only, as opposed to Chamberlain’s, this instance seems to may have been born out of something else than fear of war or naivety) – has been re-enthroned by the majority of the American electorate, comporting a startlingly and outrageously treacherous U-turn in U.S. foreign policy, moving the once beacon of freedom close toward the Kremlin and away from its democratic allies – yet another symptom that the poison of illiberalism has indeed penetrated to never-before-so-dangerous depths.

The same stench of appeasement is, if possible, equally and worryingly strong in the above-mentioned Hungary, with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán proudly defining it an “*illiberal democracy*,”¹⁵⁶ winking at Mr. Putin while undermining a cohesive and unified EU response to his aggression to Ukraine. Similarly, such stench is regrettably emanated by Slovakia’s socialist Robert Fico – with his blend of social populism, nationalism, anti-liberalism and de facto pro-Russian positions (such as his promise to end military aid for Ukraine)¹⁵⁷ – and more – encouragingly not (yet?) in positions of power as influential as the ones of

¹⁵² It is a NATO member, yet it has played both sides in buying Russian weapons (S-400), has supported Islamist movements (e.g., Muslim Brotherhood) that oppose Western interests, is not new to using refugee flows as a geopolitical weapon against Europe nor to accusing Europe of Islamophobia and neo-colonialism.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ “un-American” as in that such positions and values are in such contrast with those that have characterised the United States’ past that they would have the Wilsons, Roosevelts and Reagans of the past turning in their graves.

¹⁵⁵ “*I seem to smell the stench of appeasement in the air—the rather nauseating stench of appeasement.*” Margaret Thatcher to the House of Commons, October 30th, 1990 on the situation in Iraq. <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/108234>;

¹⁵⁶ The following description underlines the oxymoronic nature of illiberal democracy: “*Distinct from full authoritarian regimes, illiberal democracies still hold elections and do not subject their citizens to direct violent oppression; yet options for voicing discontent are already limited, in the political process is made increasingly difficult, and the rule of law is frequently undermined to serve the government’s objectives.*” Kauth, J. T., & King, D. (2020). Illiberalism. *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, 61(3), 370.

¹⁵⁷ <https://www.epc.eu/en/publications/What-can-we-expect-from-Ficos-government-in-the-EUanother-Orban~546384>

those just mentioned – political figures and movements throughout Europe such as Italy’s populist, pacifists-by-proxy¹⁵⁸ “Lega” and “Movimento 5 Stelle,” France’s ambiguous “Rassemblement National” and crypto-isolationist, neo-Third-Worldist “La France Insoumise,”¹⁵⁹ Germany’s red-brown convergence between “Alternative für Deutschland” and “Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht,” along with more and more “useful idealists” spreading through the populations of liberal democratic countries.

The mechanisms through which such illness has metastasised within western societies shall now be considered, with the formerly mentioned illiberal, anti-Western, Third-Worldist and fervently post-colonial thought finding fertile ground in multicultural liberal societies and especially among post-modern, relativist, radical, anti-capitalist (and at the very extremes Marxist-Leninist), left-wing, intersectional identity politics, whose greatest fault was, according to Fukuyama, to have in turn “*stimulated the rise of right-wing identity politics*,”¹⁶⁰ creating, this way, new, fertile ground for Eurosceptic, anti-“Western establishment,” sovereigntist, ethno-nationalist, anti-globalist, traditionalist, anti-“moral decay,” equally illiberal sentiments, all in a climate of **instrumentalised disinformation**¹⁶¹ from both extremes, which only plays in favour of all actors that would gladly see “the West” tumbling on itself.

¹⁵⁸ Appeasers and mostly pro-Putin Euro/NATO sceptics, forgetful of its delineation in the 1941 Atlantic Charter by Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Sir Winston Churchill: “*a peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries, and which will afford assurance that all men in all lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want.*” Roosevelt, F. D., & Churchill, W. S. (1941, August 14). *The Atlantic Charter*. The Avalon Project, Yale Law School. <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/atlantic.asp>

¹⁵⁹ With especially strong anti-American positions.

¹⁶⁰ Not to say that extreme right-wing positions did not exist before, they just were not as popular, therefore, not as relevant. Fukuyama, F. (2018). Against identity politics: The new tribalism and the crisis of democracy. *Foreign Aff.*, 97, 90-114. p. 101.

¹⁶¹ See, for instance, recent controversies due to Donald Trump’s untruthful declarations on the Russia-Ukraine War, along with similar senselessness spouted by actors such as the above listed ones, and those described in the following pages. See, for instance, recent controversies due to Donald Trump’s untruthful declarations on the Russia-Ukraine War, along with similar senselessness spouted by actors such as the above listed ones, and those to be described in the following pages. **A most illuminating example of this strategic falsification is offered by an official publication dated 16 April 2025, issued by the Press Bureau of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) (*Evrofashizm, kak i 80 let nazad — obshchiy vrag Moskvy i Vashingtona*, 2025).** The document contends that a supposed resurgence of “Eurofascism” unites Moscow and Washington in common cause against Europe, weaving together half-truths, historical cherry-picking, and blatant inversions of moral responsibility. Such grotesque contortions bear the telltale marks of what may be termed strategic historical perjury – a calculated weaponisation of history, purposed not towards the pursuit of truth, but towards the reconstitution of grievance as virtue, and of imperial nostalgia as righteousness. The rhetorical sleight of hand whereby fascism is projected upon the liberal democracies themselves – while the Russian Federation, the world's contemporary champion of personalist autocracy and revisionist aggression, is miraculously exonerated – stands as a masterpiece of Orwellian inversion. Such “analyses” ought not to be dignified with serious historical rebuttal. They deserve, rather, to be exposed as acts of political necromancy, calling forth the spirits of discredited ideologies to serve present ambitions. Indeed, the irony could scarcely be more caustic. That the heirs of the Great Terror and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact dare now to cloak themselves in the martyrdom of the very Europe whose liberties they helped once to annihilate. If a single image could encapsulate the intellectual degradation of the neo-Eurasianist project, it would be this. Such is the abyss to which unchecked propaganda (*criminally spread by some within the Free World*) descends. Sluzhba vneshney razvedki Rossiyskoy Federatsii. (2025, April 16). *Еврофашизм, как и 80 лет назад — общий враг Москвы и Вашингтона* [Eurofascism, as 80 years ago, a common enemy of Moscow and Washington]. SVR Russia. <http://www.svr.gov.ru/smi/2025/04/evrofashizm-kak-i-80-let-nazad-obshchiy-vrag-moskvyy-i-vashington2.htm>;

§2.3.2 On the Left: Zealots and Ideologues Who Would Undo Their Past

It goes without saying, the topics this sub-section covers are engaged with in a way that is limited to the extent that these intellectual currents contribute to the growth of anti-Western attitudes, that is to say, when their – at times inevitably – radical iterations take hold in liberal democratic societies and morph from tools of critique into mechanisms of de-legitimisation of liberal thought, values and metaphysics. This way, Western self-flagellation turns into a perilous condition to be in, due the reluctance it causes of certain political factions to take firm, should-be-unquestionable, self-evident stances in key matters, say, against autocratic aggression. On a more polemic note, if one were to momentarily abandon the perhaps naive assumption of *bona fides* in the intellectuals and movements behind the advancement of such ideologies, it may well be pointed out how the above condition of self-flagellation, for the repercussions it has, does play into the hands of potentially ill-intentioned actors towards “the West.” Of course, to deem ill of others may perchance offend virtue, yet, all too often, experience would seem to vindicate the doubt. To assert that this signifies that all those backing such ideologies are vowed (rather than merely contributing) to the harm of the Free World, therefore to be regarded as the “snakes in the bosom” of liberal democracies, is too strong of an accusation to be made lightly, yet, that of at least some amongst its perpetrators and followers being animated by anti-Western or illiberal hate is a too plausible one to be lightly dismissed. These political repercussions and last observation (which similarly applies to the right-wing counterpart of this ideologies) will have become clearer by the end of the sub-section (and in the next), where they shall be taken up again.

A good starting point to unravel the functioning of such dynamics would be discussing intersectional identity politics.

According to the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, identity politics is “*a wide range of political activity and theorizing founded in the shared experiences of injustice of members of certain social groups*”¹⁶² within which people identify based on gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or other markers of social identity. Since its rise in the 1960s and 1970s, the movement has had the scope of underscoring and drawing attention to social, political and economic inequalities experienced by members of minority groups and demanding changes to address such systemic inequalities.

However noble the aims and purposes for which identity politics may have emerged, one must not fail to recognize and consider the possible dangers to society’s cohesion and well-functioning that such movement poses, evaluating the perils and disadvantages of – rather than putting emphasis on a value-

¹⁶² <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-politics/>

based, liberal democratic identity, based the defence of the rights and liberties of the only one minority all living people are part of, that is, the individual¹⁶³ – adopting a radical worldview that frames all questions under the form of a victim-victimiser conflict between groups, today seemingly bent – in order to “undo” marginalisation – on subverting the very structure of Western societies due to its inevitable association with other thought currents.

One of the most problematic features of identity politics is that its “*meta-theoretical apparatus*”¹⁶⁴ consists in post-modernism, one crucial point in has in common with post-colonialism. It is, in fact, the post-modern framework of thought – characterised by its critique of the autonomous self and of all kinds of normativity, its rejection of western modern philosophy¹⁶⁵ and of the enlightenment ideals of reason and progress, its scepticism toward modern epistemology, its counter-historical tendencies, and its condemnation of grand and meta-narratives¹⁶⁶ – that has led to new emphasis on absolute specificity,¹⁶⁷ on hyper-relativism, the social character of the individual, difference, identity and authenticity, therefore prompting an extremely fragmented and non-cohesive attitude, the result of which is well represented by, for instance, the shift from Martin Luther King, Jr.’s enlightened, universalist emphasis to the nowadays more separatist or proud-distinctiveness claims¹⁶⁸. This way, marginalised groups increasingly started to demand not only that laws and institutions treat them as equal, but also that the broader society recognise and even celebrate the intrinsic differences that set them apart.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶³ Concept that seems to reflect that of *reasonableness* is that of creedal national identity: “*Governments and civil society groups must focus on integrating smaller groups into larger wholes. Democracies need to promote what political scientists call ‘creedal national identities,’ which are built not around shared personal characteristics, lived experiences, historical ties, or religious convictions but rather around core values and beliefs. The idea is to encourage citizens to identify with their countries’ foundational ideals and use public policies to deliberately assimilate newcomers*” Fukuyama, F. (2018). Against identity politics: The new tribalism and the crisis of democracy. *Foreign Aff.*, 97, 90-114. p. 106.

¹⁶⁴ Maffettone, S. (2011). How to avoid the liaison dangereuse between post-colonialism and post-modernism. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 37(4), 493-504. p. 498.

¹⁶⁵ “...from Descartes to Kant.” Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Naturally, this presentation of post-modernism is a very thin and essential one, one that though wants to suggest that the practical consequences of a lack of universalism and normativity are damagingly perilous, and that such lacks make even the right claims impossible to be appropriately formulated or tackled.

¹⁶⁷ ...as opposed to universalism...

¹⁶⁸ See the Black Lives Matter movement.

¹⁶⁹ A deeper understanding of this demand for recognition – now often reframed in separatist, antagonistic, or oppositional terms – can be found in Francis Fukuyama’s reworking of *thymos*, a concept inherited from Platonic philosophy. Unlike material interest (*epithymia*) or rational calculation (*logistikon*), *thymos* refers to the human need for dignity and recognition. Fukuyama distinguishes between *megalothymia*, the desire to be seen as superior to others, and *isothymia*, the demand to be regarded as equal in worth. The triumph of liberal democracy, in this view, was a historical institutionalisation of *isothymia*, making dignity recognition-based and universal in scope. However, when that recognition is perceived as withheld or insufficient, *isothymia* degenerates into resentment, the moral and emotional state in which individuals or groups construct their identity in opposition to a perceived oppressor, and seek not inclusion but symbolic revenge. Identity, under these conditions, hardens around grievance, and dignity becomes zero-sum. Thus, recognition is no longer pursued in terms of liberal universality but rather as a correction to historical injury – injury inflicted by an Other that is often identified in none other than, as the next pages will follow to argue, “the West” itself, and/or the Enlightenment ideals (universal reason, individuality, secularism, normativity) it represents. In this context, demands for group-based recognition risk devolving into inverted hierarchies, wherein the very liberal-democratic ethos that made such recognition possible

To carry things forward, before looking further into the political repercussions of this last observation, another concept strictly tied to identity politics must in turn be taken into consideration.

Intersectionality has, in fact, provided a methodology for understanding how various forms of social stratification – such as race, gender, sexuality, ability, and other axes of identity – do not exist independently of each other, but rather interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels, allegedly contributing to systematic social inequality. This approach challenges the notion that different identity-based issues or “oppressions” can be understood or addressed in isolation from one another. Intersectionality has thus become vital to identity politics in underscoring the complex ways in which different aspects of identity intersect to shape individual experiences of alleged privilege or oppression. It argues that traditional identity politics, which might focus on a single axis of identity (such as race alone, or gender alone), might – not considering the ever more popular intersectional claim that each person has more than one “group identity” – inadvertently overlook or marginalize individuals who face discrimination on multiple fronts.¹⁷⁰

Instead, various forms of social oppression – the claim here is that Western society is patriarchal, white-supremacist, cis-heteronormative, and so forth, with more and more strata of oppression and identity as one approaches left-wing radicalism – are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. According to such perspective, addressing or dismantling the oppression experienced by one marginalized group inherently involves confronting and having to unravel the entire interlinked structure of alleged systemic inequalities. Thus, progress made for one group cannot be isolated, as these interlocked forms of discrimination depend upon and sustain each other within the broader societal framework.

At the heart of the matter is, though, that this latter proposition is demonstrably flawed.

It encounters, for instance, significant challenges when examining the interplay between transgender identities and feminist perspectives, suggesting a paradox within the intersectional framework.¹⁷¹

is now reinterpreted as the structural enabler of oppression. *Thymos* thus becomes weaponised – no longer a force driving integration into a shared civic project, but one fuelling tribalism, victimhood essentialism, and ultimately, anti-liberal normativity. Fukuyama, F. (2018). Against identity politics: The new tribalism and the crisis of democracy. Foreign Aff., 97, 90-114.

¹⁷⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/intersectionality>; <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-politics/>

¹⁷¹ Among multiple incompatibilities between the two groups, particularly thought-provoking is the one in reference to Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity, in which she argues that gender is not an innate, fixed attribute, but rather something that is performed based on societal norms and expectations. In this view, gender identity is seen as fluid and socially constructed, rather than strictly biologically determined. The argument posits a perceived contradiction with transgender identities, suggesting that if being a woman (or any gender) is a performative act, then the deeply held sense of gender identity expressed by many transgender people – who often experience their gender as a core, unchangeable part of their being, not merely a performance – presents a conflict. This perspective argues that one cannot simultaneously hold the view that gender is entirely performative and fluid for everyone, and also acknowledge that, for some individuals, gender identity is a profound, intrinsic aspect of themselves over which they have no control.

Moreover, the relationship between transgender identities and the aims of the gay and lesbian liberation movements further illustrates similar contradictions. The premise of transgender identity appears to challenge the foundational assertions of these movements, which have been predicated on the stability of sexual and gender identities over the past half-century. Such juxtapositions, merely the feeblest and of least interest amongst the innumerable, infinite others – such as the infamously recent oxymoronic conundrum of queer groups supporting Iran’s proxy terrorist organisation, Hamas, vis-à-vis the only state in the Middle-East that would see their rights (including the most basic one – the right to life) protected¹⁷² – suffice to raise critical questions about the coexistence of these frameworks within intersectional theory.

Now, it is commonly posited by rational thinkers, outside the post-modern framework of thought, that, when two opposing concepts try to move forward at the same time, one of them must, ultimately, yield, as the contradiction between the two must signify that one of them is, at least partially, flawed or inferior.

Intersectionalists, though, in perfect post-modern fashion, do not seem to find this to be a problem. Some may counter that contradictions within intersectionality merely reflect the complexity of lived experiences rather than undermining the framework itself. Yet the problem is, one could submit, that a worldview that simultaneously holds mutually exclusive positions fails not merely because it is complex, but because it lacks the fundamental requirement of internal consistency, which is only given by a stable, normative, foundation. The problem is, finally, that if such contradictions are allowed, then the whole system does suffer in its credibility, and it furthermore renders any kind of comparative assessment or judgement quite difficult.

Lastly, adding to the crucial issues of intersectionality and identity politics is, besides the contradictions, the very way such approach pits groups one against the other and how it renders any kind of dialogue or discussion *quasi*-pointless, counterproductive, or downright impossible. The criticality comes whenever it happens that an individual is placed in more than one group, which is – if one considers the intersectional claim as valid – always, by definition. In such cases, one or more of such groups will be regarded at the same time as both ‘victim’ of some groups and ‘victimizer’ of some other ones, and so on and on *ad infinitum*. Now, if one is seen as a victimizer by another individual on the basis of one (or more) of the groups in which he is placed, then – even if only by natural, instinctual defence mechanism – any kind of dialogue becomes impossible, as the individual will feel attacked by the supposed ‘victimizer’.

¹⁷² This contradiction arises from intersectionality’s tendency to harmonise the perceived oppression of certain groups with others, even when those groups’ ideological or political commitments are fundamentally incompatible. The support for Islamist movements by some progressive activists, despite their severe repression of LGBTQ+ and feminist causes, raises questions to whether intersectionality really functions as a hierarchy of grievances rather than a coherent ethical framework, as, in this case, it seemingly prioritises the ‘oppressed’ based on historical narratives rather than present realities. In doing so, intersectionality not only fosters internal incoherence but also legitimizes alliances that actively undermine liberal democratic principles.

This way, his political views will have become his very person and identity, and should anyone try to attack those views, he will feel attacked himself.

In exploring the theoretical framework on which identity politics stands, it will surely have become evident, as anticipated, how natural an environment it is for the contemporary political left, and how fertile a ground it has thus become for certain positions and ideologies to prosper.

Mentions have been made of marginalised groups having started to seemingly favour seeing their differences highlighted and stressed as distinguishing features, as opposed to the arguably wiser yet apparently discarded purpose of being instead recognised as equals. What could seem to be an oxymoron – between such groups claiming to be “normal” and simultaneously exalting that which sets them apart – appears to have been resolved by reinterpreting the notion of multiculturalism. The term – originally referring to a positive quality of diverse societies, especially when implemented within an assimilationist framework of integration within the liberal state – has become a label for a political program that values each separate culture and each particular lived experience equally, one which easily devolves into grievance-based identity segmentation.¹⁷³

This political program – though still having to endure some tension between the “old”¹⁷⁴ working class (as a comparatively privileged stratum, indifferent to racial and immigrant and other grievances, therefore deprioritizing purely class-based concerns), and the new, infinite, allegedly interlocked¹⁷⁵ axes of oppression – managed not only to eventually weave a “new” class struggle into intersectional narratives.

¹⁷³ “The left began to embrace multiculturalism just as it was becoming harder to craft policies that would bring about large-scale socio-economic change. By the 1980s, progressive groups throughout the developed world were facing an existential crisis. [...] Both Marxists and social democrats hoped to increase socioeconomic equality through the use of state power, by expanding access to social services to all citizens and by redistributing wealth. As the twentieth century drew to a close, the limits of this strategy became clear. Marxists had to confront the fact that communist societies in China and the Soviet Union had turned into grotesque and oppressive dictatorships. At the same time, the working class in most industrialized democracies had grown richer and had begun to merge with the middle class. Communist revolution and the abolition of private property fell off the agenda. The social democratic left also reached a dead end when its goal of an ever-expanding welfare state bumped into the reality of fiscal constraints during the turbulent 1970s. Governments responded by printing money, leading to inflation and financial crises. Redistributive programs were creating perverse incentives that discouraged work, savings, and entrepreneurship, which in turn shrank the overall economic pie. [...] With China's shift toward a market economy after 1978 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Marxist left largely fell apart, and the social democrats were left to make their peace with capitalism. The left's diminished ambitions for large-scale socioeconomic reform converged with its embrace of identity politics and multiculturalism in the final decades of the twentieth century. The left continued to be defined by its passion for equality, [...] but its agenda shifted from the earlier emphasis on [solely] the working class to the demands of an ever-widening circle of marginalized minorities.” Fukuyama, F. (2018). Against identity politics: The new tribalism and the crisis of democracy. *Foreign Aff.*, 97, 90-114. p. 97-99.

¹⁷⁴ As in “white,” for example. The problem remains the same, i.e., that, for instance, a white, heterosexual, working-class man will be seen by intersectionalists as “less oppressed” than a white, homosexual, working-class man. Assessing the “degree of oppression” becomes though much more difficult if the comparison is made, say, between a white, heterosexual, working-class man and a black, transsexual, high-income woman. Is the latter more oppressed than the white, heterosexual man – in an allegedly white-supremacist, cis-hetero-normative, capitalist society – or is he, *en tant que* working-class vis-à-vis her high-income status, the “real” or greater victim? This “race to victimhood” between ever-proliferating (therefore infinite) identity groups renders any attempt at judicious comparisons near impossible. But, again, not a problem from a post-modern point of view.

¹⁷⁵ The scepticism from the author is here due to the previously explored, evident contradictions.

thereby broadening even more the scope of identity politics, but also – just as Aristotle and Aquinas found that a chain of causes cannot regress infinitely, for everything in motion must have a prime mover – effectively did so in identifying the “Causa Prima” of all the evils and oppressions hitherto considered (and all those existing all over all parts of the planet ever reached by liberal democracies) in the colonial past of the Free World's Western society and its capitalist history,¹⁷⁶ de facto incorporating post-colonial and Marxist thought in its already wide (perhaps, as already foreshadowed, too-problematically-wide) range.

The issue here is that if post-colonial narratives have a potential to reach sound conclusions through reasonable nuance and reliance over a normative liberal philosophical argumentative structure, by being incorporated into the wide scope of intersectional identity politics (as has been illustrated immediately above), therefore embracing instead the “liaison dangereuse”¹⁷⁷ with post-modernism, they risk falling prey to Foucauldian- or Derridean-inspired anti-foundationalism¹⁷⁸ (e.g., a “lack of objectivism,” “anti-scientism,” and “anti-modernism”), and incur into the now familiar nihilist and perverse consequences of such current, which render the construction impossible of a sensible discourse on the matter at hand, predisposing instead to political fragmentation and an aggravated climate of resentment toward “the West”, much like all former instances that have been considered until now, resenting (as they do) from the *contradictio in adjecto*¹⁷⁹ that Sebastiano Maffettone calls “*post-modern radical normativity.*”

¹⁷⁶ In line with Marxist and Neo-Marxist IR theories such as “Teoria de la Dependencia” and Wallerstein’s “World-Systems Theory,” dividing the world between “Core” and “Periphery” (and, later, “Semi-periphery”) countries, with political terms such as “Global South” that, employed by experts with a sympathy to Third-World causes, should express or represent some kind of post-colonial “solidarity” (probably partly inspired by the opportunistic Leninist proclamation of “Oriental”/Islamic countries as natural allies of proletarians) between “exploited” or marginalised non-Western countries in relations of dependency to the capitalist core, overlooking, though, the fact that such solidarity has never really existed (e.g., continual struggles between African countries, decades after de-colonisation, or the nowadays’ Chinese-Indian rivalry, the same that had already opposed Nehru to Mao/Zhou Enlai at Bandung in the 1950s), which should provide sufficient reason, among others, not to rehabilitate such theories.

¹⁷⁷ Maffettone, S. (2011). How to avoid the liaison dangereuse between post-colonialism and post-modernism. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 37(4), 493-504. p. 498.

¹⁷⁸ The rejection of any ultimate or universal basis for knowledge and morality. From a Foucauldian perspective, truth is tied to power; from a Derridean one, meaning is never fixed and always “deferred.” Such stances can erode shared standards of truth or justice necessary for a coherent political critique.

¹⁷⁹ “Post-modernism strongly relies on a sort of normative criticism of normativity. Major institutions, starting with capitalism and state, are considered able to impose their own patterns through a series of practices in a falsely neutralized way. [...] In some way, the post-modern radical normativity represents a *contradictio in adjecto*. To be clear: it seems that the Archimedean perspective that such a radical criticism of objectivity (the post-modern one) presupposes needs a privileged point of view. In other words, it needs more and not less objectivity. Which by definition is impossible within the postmodernist framework.” On one hand, post-modernism rejects the idea of any absolute, objective standpoint (because it sees all knowledge as socially constructed or bound by power). Yet on the other, it makes strong moral or political judgments, *exempli gratia*, accusing capitalism or the state of imposing norms under the guise of neutrality. If one wants to accuse something of being oppressive in a universal sense, at least some claim to an objective standard (an “Archimedean perspective”) is needed. Still, post-modernism says no such objective vantage point exists, hence the contradiction. How can one know something to be wrong or oppressive if it simultaneously holds that there is no universal or objective truth from which to assert that? The “*contradictio in adjecto*” is essentially a contradiction in terms: post-modernists want to condemn institutions but also deny the kind of solid moral foundation that makes condemnation meaningful. In other words, the more radical the critique of objectivity becomes, the more it undercuts any coherent basis for issuing that critique. *Ibid.* p. 502.

Six fundamental tenets¹⁸⁰ can be identified in post-colonial thought, though mostly problematic, therefore relevant to the argument on the rise of anti-Western sentiments, are its strong anti-Eurocentrism, its emphasis on localism, and its counter-historicism, along with the overall vicinity of the whole current to Neo-Marxist claims (see, for instance, footnote 176) that saw Western imperialism as the natural, final stage of capitalism.¹⁸¹

Regarding post-colonial anti-Eurocentrism, it becomes problematic in that – in strikingly intersectional fashion – it implies with it the rejection of modernity and (therefore) universalism at the same time. If condemning colonialism is easy from the perspective of universal justice,¹⁸² doing so would imply relying on the same modern European intellectual tradition that post-colonialists see as having justified colonial expansion on the basis of a view of non-Western societies as “behind” on the path of history and in need European intervention to “progress.”¹⁸³ The question is further complicated by the fact that capitalism was the structural enabler of said modernity, in addition to being identified by post-colonial thinkers as the economic driver of colonial exploitation. This way, capitalism, modernity and universalism are all conveniently tied together with imperialism and colonial rule, therefore viewed suspiciously in favour of a more localist vantage of Gramscian flavour, denouncing them as instruments for the establishment of Western cultural hegemony via the disguising of Western moral values as global ethics.¹⁸⁴

The peril is here evident of conflating all forms of knowledge with colonial oppression due to anti-scientific or anti-rational positions. In Foucauldian terms, this suspicion of “truth-claims” and “power”

¹⁸⁰ First, it condemns Western colonialism as an unjust and exploitative system whose cultural dominance has inflicted enduring harm on colonized peoples. Second, it espouses a strong anti-Eurocentrism, viewing universalism as a disguised extension of Eurocentric modernity. Third, it foregrounds localism, whose core “*consists in denouncing the cultural hegemony of the West (Gramsci), proposing on the other hand the richer cultural background of some local cultures (Gandhi)*”. Fourth, it prioritizes marginal groups over both Western culture and local elites, thereby recasting political agency in favour of subaltern populations, once more approaching traditional Marxist positions. Fifth, it reclaims religion as a spiritual counterbalance to the rationalist bias of liberalism, ranging from the most spiritual and apolitical to the more politicized (often in the Islamic world) purposes. Lastly, it promotes counter-history, resisting historicist accounts that depict non-Western societies as “not yet” modern and instead asserting a subaltern “now” that contests Eurocentric timelines. Ibid. p. 495-498.

¹⁸¹ The Marxist-Leninist claim that imperialism is the inevitable final stage of capitalism (Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism, 1917) can be challenged. Joseph Schumpeter (1919) argued that imperialism is not a capitalist necessity but a pre-capitalist atavism, as evidenced by non-imperialist capitalist states (e.g., Switzerland). Modern economic globalisation further undermines Lenin’s thesis, as trade interdependence has largely replaced colonial conquest as the dominant mode of expansion. Politically, as argued in §1.3.2, Liberal Democratic Peace Theory suggests that democratic capitalism discourages imperialist wars, while the decline of formal empires after 1945 reflects institutional shifts (e.g., the UN, WTO) favouring economic cooperation over direct control. Historically, imperialism predates capitalism (e.g., Roman, Mongol, and Ottoman Empires), which challenges the notion that it is exclusive to capitalist economies. Postwar decolonization was largely driven by capitalist states, further contradicting the idea of perpetual imperial expansion. While capitalism has coexisted with imperialism, it is neither its necessary outcome nor its final stage, as globalised markets and institutional frameworks have proven more sustainable than territorial conquest.

¹⁸² In that it applies moral principles equally to all societies...

¹⁸³ Hegel argued that history follows a rational progression, where civilizations move toward greater enlightenment and freedom. This is the concept of *Weltgeschichte* (“World History”), of which post-colonialists are highly critical, arguing, in the face of similar views, that colonized peoples were not passive “students” of history but had their own agency, historical narratives, and resistance movements, not having to “catch-up” to Western societies. Ibid. p. 496.

¹⁸⁴ These post-colonial perspectives are, of course, challengeable.

often takes shape as a critique of the West's "biopolitical" control, while in Derridean deconstructionist terms, it centres on resisting the "ontological violence" of Western metaphysics (Western definitions of reality, of "how things are," allegedly violent in erasing or distorting non-Western perspectives) by focusing on the "margins" and "otherness."¹⁸⁵ The historical aspect of Western cultural hegemony, argue post-colonialists, can be reversed by questioning the very structures of historical knowledge, thus, through a rewriting of history from the perspective of marginalised groups as opposed to the one of the Western bourgeoisie and colonial elite, in an attempt to make such new subaltern point of view itself hegemonic. Cognitive failure is though inevitably encountered when the counter-historical interpretation is confronted with traditional historiography, result of which is deeper frustration with "the West."

In short, through all the tackled dynamics, radical, post-modern, post-colonial left-wing identitarian movements have expanded their critique of power structures beyond national contexts, adopting a deeply illiberal, globalised view of oppression that conflates all Western, liberal institutions, values, knowledge systems, and historical developments with a hegemonic project of domination.

Such attitude has rendered vane any attempt at finding solutions to form broader, more integrative groups based on values and beliefs, rather than small, self-regarding ones. A good example of this is the proposal by Bassam Tibi, German academic of Syrian origin, of making "*Leitkultur*" (leading culture) the basis for a new German national identity. He defined *Leitkultur* as a belief in equality and democratic values firmly grounded in the liberal ideals of the Enlightenment. Yet, leftist academics and politicians attacked his perfectly rational and wise proposal by accusing it of implying that such values were superior to other cultural values; in doing so, the German left gave unwitting comfort not only to Islamists, but also far-right nationalists, who have famously little use for Enlightenment ideals. The fact is, though, that Germany and other major European countries desperately need something resembling Tibi's *Leitkultur*, that is, a normative change that would permit Germans of Turkish heritage to speak of themselves as German, Swedes of African heritage to speak of themselves as Swedish, and so on based, for instance, on "*a workable creedal national identity [that] has to offer substantive ideas, such as constitutionalism, the rule of law, and human equality.*"¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Foucauldian "biopolitics" highlights how power operates through institutions and norms to manage populations; instead of simply punishing or coercing people through brute force (as in medieval times), "biopower" works through managing life itself. Modern governments control populations not only through laws and repression but also by regulating bodies, health, reproduction, education, and other aspects of life. Post-colonial writers see colonial powers as the extreme example of such control. Derridean "ontological violence" points instead to the ways in which Western knowledge, logic and language structure reality, potentially erasing or marginalizing other cultural expressions (the "margins"). Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Fukuyama, F. (2018). Against identity politics: The new tribalism and the crisis of democracy. *Foreign Aff.*, 97, 90-114. p. 108.

Instead of embracing solutions such as the above one, the same attitude has made it so that – returning with these examples to what was anticipated in the first paragraph of this subsection – some radical left-wing groups may hesitate to support Ukraine’s struggle against Russia due to post-colonial narratives that frame NATO as an imperialist force (with Russian imperialism being instead overshadowed by the “non-Western-ness” of its perpetrator). Similarly, these same radical groups often overlook non-Western atrocities, crimes and human rights violations when they come, say, from Islamic countries (e.g., the terrible condition of women in Iran and Arab states), condemnation, this, the lack of which is coherent with the post-colonial tenet of localism from the moral standpoint, for an open denunciation of such dynamics would instead mean to rely on the very Eurocentric perspective of universal justice that post-colonialists so sternly reject and to embrace their oh-so-detested view of non-Western societies as effectively “behind,” this time not merely on the path of history, but on that of civility.¹⁸⁷

One more thing that could be interpreted as particularly striking – and yet, considering of the spread of such ideologies, loses much of its peculiarity and inexplicability – about the divergence between the West and other civilizations lies in the rather unique manner in which the former approaches its own historical narrative. In Western educational institutions – particularly in schools and universities – a prevailing tendency to frame the history of the West in predominantly negative terms has emerged. This self-critical orientation has, over time, assumed the characteristics of a normative dogma, functioning less as a balanced historiographical approach and more as an ideological framework through which successive generations are systematically socialised. No other civilization, to the best of current comparative evidence, engages in a similarly self-denigrating historiography. A cursory examination of educational curricula and textbooks employed in non-Western countries such as China, Russia, Turkey, or across the Arab world reveals a markedly different approach – one oriented toward national affirmation rather than cultural or historical (both, really) repudiation. The widespread embrace of this self-critical paradigm in the West risks, in this context, exerting a furtherly deleterious effect on the civic and historical consciousness of an entire generation, undermining the capacity to cultivate a coherent and constructive civilizational identity, such as Tibi’s *Leitkultur*.

Furthermore, besides these troubling phenomena with repercussions at the international level (especially if one considers Moravcsik’s “transmission belt” for state preferences, with no “antibodies” in place to shield it from such sentiments), this expansion has not only alienated some “old” segments of Western working-class populations, whose struggles (or values) no longer seamlessly fit within the intersectional paradigm, but has also provoked a reactionary and polarising counterforce that mirrors its logic in reverse. New right-wing movements have emerged, embracing an equally identitarian rhetoric that, though

¹⁸⁷ “Civility” as in “respect of basic human rights and decency.”

presenting itself as opposite to the radical left, ultimately converges with it in eroding the very principles of liberal democracy, this time through a mixture of sovereigntist, ethno-nationalist, anti-globalist, traditionalist, anti- “moral decay,” and more positions.

§2.3.3 On the Right: Cowards and Collaborators Who Would Forfeit Their Future

The left's embrace of identity politics was understandable, and (much like post-colonialism) its moderate positions – when articulated sensibly, with nuance, and, most importantly, through a normative liberal framework – can indeed be sound, and have produced positive changes in society.

There is nothing “wrong” with identity as such (especially when its purpose is to unite rather than to divide, see the above consideration on creedal identities), rather, as should now be clear, it is the methodology and approaches behind it that are damaging. And it is this – the “grievance-mongering,” the “Cancel Culture”, the historical revisionism, and much more of the so-called “woke”¹⁸⁸ left – that – for reasons that will be explored – has been (and is still being) replicated on the fringes of the right, leading to a point where both extremes reach similar, if not identical, political stances (especially and worryingly on non-trivial matters), even if doing so for completely opposite purposes, and, therefore, starting from completely opposite premises.¹⁸⁹

One of the first reasons (for the emergence of this “new” right-wing) that may come to mind does so by echoing the previously mentioned tension that the intersectional left has had to endure vis-à-vis the “old” working class, by which – together with portions of the middle and even upper class – the accusation could be moved of concentrating too much energy on the “symbolic” politics of recognition and representation, rather than on solving actual economic preoccupations that shape the lives of most citizens, such as that of rising inflation rates.

Another reason of the right's response is identifiable in the left's embrace of political correctness,¹⁹⁰ a social norm that – with the constant discovery of new identities and new boundary lines being drawn, therefore, shifting the grounds for acceptable speech – prohibits people from publicly expressing their beliefs or opinions without fearing moral opprobrium. In reality, as Fukuyama points out, only (and fortunately) a relatively small number of writers, artists, students, and intellectuals on the left fully espoused the most extreme forms of political correctness, yet those instances were (and are still) picked up by the conservative media, in order to use them and tar the “woke” left as a whole. For instance, at a time when many Americans saw public speech as excessively policed, Donald Trump found support in

¹⁸⁸ “Wokeness” is best understood not in terms of policy positions, rather, by looking at the philosophy and methodology behind a movement.

¹⁸⁹ This reflection will be taken up by the end of the section.

¹⁹⁰ “*The left's identity politics poses a threat to free speech and to the kind of rational discourse needed to sustain a democracy. The preoccupation with identity has indeed clashed with the need for civic discourse. The focus on lived experience by identity groups prioritizes the emotional world of the inner self over the rational examination of issues in the outside world and privileges sincerely held opinions over a process of reasoned deliberation that may force one to abandon prior opinions. The fact that an assertion is offensive to someone's sense of self-worth is often seen as grounds for silencing or disparaging the individual who made it.*” Ibid. p. 101.

appearing as not intimidated by the pressure to avoid giving offense, somehow representing a kind of “authenticity” that many Americans could even admire, given the present context, despite the malicious, bigoted, wholly un-presidential and often normatively politically suicidal stunts through which he managed that.

Still, the rise of illiberal figures like Trump did not reflect a conservative rejection of identity politics, rather, it reflected the right's embrace of it.

People living in rural areas, once-(perhaps)-moderate conservatives (belonging to any social strata, frustrated by the recent, radically leftist pushes), and any white working-class supporters of this new “woke” right – the backbone of populist movements both in the United States and through Europe – often feel, in fact, that themselves and their values are being disregarded or even threatened by cosmopolitan, globalist, and urban elites, and as well by the contemporary Western liberal framework itself, as if it had “betrayed” its traditional system of beliefs for a new, “perverse,” one.

Such sentiments have paved the way for the emergence of a right-wing identity politics that starts with those already existing moderate (on even stronger ones) conservative positions and takes them to often irrational, historically revisionist, anti-progressive, ultraconservative and *tout-court* illiberal extremes, such as (just one extreme example out of the many possible connotations of this “woke” right, including, for instance, religious fanaticism and its consequent backward political stances) explicitly racist white nationalism, which has moved from the fringes of political discourse to something resembling its mainstream, with its proponents greatly exaggerating the extent to which minority groups receive advantages, just as they exaggerate the extent to which political correctness muzzles free speech.

To better visualise such dynamics, one may imagine society as a pendulum – its weight never graciously suspended, no, but more or less gently oscillating, just as one healthy liberal democratic system may do, face to a messy reality pervaded by chaos, that is, nothing more than the natural consequence of the human condition of free will and agency. The pendulum thus oscillates between competing ideas, policies and interests, always slightly unsettled, facing the inevitable imperfections of such reality through democracy's self-correcting capacity. At times, some outside forces may disturb this motion of the pendulum, just as some may attempt to shatter that which freedom depends upon, and other forces will be required to correct its course and guide it back to its original, messy-yet-functional equilibrium – just as some have done in the past, rescuing democracy when in peril. Some inner forces may attempt to intervene as well, perhaps unsatisfied with such system, perchance demanding swifter (or revolutionary) solutions to those natural imperfections, perhaps even ill-intentioned. Herein lies the danger. Should such intervening forces – be it in order to destabilise the system or to try to correct it, be they motivated by

urgency, enmity, or ideological zeal – commit the judgemental error (or the crime) of forcefully pushing the pendulum's weight towards one extreme – envisioning overcompensation to one side as the solution to the imperfections of said system (or as the very shatter-point of its equilibrium) – then – just as no move goes without consequence and no force without resistance, for to every action corresponds an equal and opposite reaction – the natural rhythm shall be disrupted, and a reactionary force shall emerge, of nature ironically identical to the first. In the case of left-wing pushes – as seen in the previous subsection, having greatly gained in popularity and further radicalised their positions – it is their thrusts towards more and more maximalist positions that have triggered Newton's Third Law, engendering a similar surge in popularity and intransigence in the aforementioned reactionary right of similarly “woke” stamp. But just as Newton's laws do not fully govern the complexities of the open systems of the real world, so too does the pendulum of society fail to obey merely equal and opposite reactions in the nowadays ever more polarised environment, each force fuelling a stronger counterforce, extremism begetting extremism, bitterness inspiring bitterness, until, as the weight's oscillations escalate with every new swing, each one going further and higher than the one preceding it, a horseshoe shall be drawn by its trajectory, with political adversaries, supposedly polar opposites, finally mirroring each other's tendencies. The pendulum now swings dangerously high, reaching, from both sides, positions that defy reason, moderation, and liberal democratic principles altogether. Finally, the pendulum, propelled by the swings, rises to an apex. Society is inverted precariously above its pivot, extremes meet at last, and the once rival forces find themselves aligned in their antagonism to the one thing they are too blind to value and too eager to destroy – liberalism. (See Annex A: The Pendulum)

Since the entire “project” of the radical left has become, as demonstrated, that of undermining the belief of “the West” in itself – in the goodness of its model (despite its acknowledged imperfections), in the value of its history, in the significance achievements, and in the legitimacy of its values – they must, in order to do so, necessarily target all that may stand tall as a symbol of “pride” and celebration of said Western values, that is, liberal values themselves and, for instance, those who defended them. Whoever may people hold up in honour of their service to the liberal ideals must, therefore, be torn down.

One example of the “pendulum” in action is the recent tendencies of the new “woke” right to try to tarnish the same historical figures as the “woke” left. Such is the case of Sir Winston Churchill, for decades the subject of a skilfully orchestrated campaign of vilification, made of conspiratorial accusations and attacks, that would – in more enlightened times – have been unceremoniously dismissed as the ravings of far-left fantasists.¹⁹¹ Why, though, would some on the right – who were once supposed to be

¹⁹¹ Justifications for the author's scepticism towards similar accusations can be found in the following sources: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/winston--and-india-setting-record-straight-212881>; <https://openthemagazine.com/essay/churchill-a-war-criminal-get-your-history-right/>;

the patriotic and “pro-West” part of the political spectrum – increasingly attempt to denigrate his legacy, appears to be a troubling conundrum.

Churchill did save Western Civilisation. Not alone, *ça va sans dire*, but he did. He warned the Free World against appeasing Hitler, as well as he did later warn for an “Iron Curtain” face to the rise of the Soviet Union. When his time came to face the Führer, “*he mobilized the English language and sent it into battle*,” a spearhead of hope for Britain and the world.¹⁹² Still, dubiously authoritative figures on the “woke” right, the likes of pseudo-historian Darryl Cooper – introduced as the “*best and most honest popular historian in the United States*”¹⁹³ by ex-Fox-News-host-turned-illiberal-propagandist Tucker Carlson – continue peddling ahistorical conspiracies and factual disinformation on his person and deeds, by depicting him as the “arch-villain” of World War II (allegedly for “having caused it,” a most ungenerous interpretation of his decision not to kneel before Hitler like some today would do before Putin), along a more variegated-yet-equally-preposterous set of accusations.¹⁹⁴ This way, Sir Winston Churchill's legacy is once more under attack, this time by right-wing charlatans and obscurantist pseudo-intellectuals, rather than post-colonial radicals (or similar political creatures).

Now, as has been repeatedly alluded to, the existence of this “woke” right-wing would not – albeit being a sad phenomenon in and of itself – be a terribly worrisome or significant nuisance to liberal democratic systems and values, if not for the fact that half of the U.S. population has managed to elect the sordidly quintessential human personification of said ignominious right as their President, and the other quite disheartening fact that similar courses have been (or risk being) undertaken throughout the rest of the Free World.

Back, though, to the conundrum of why would the right wing indulge in such behaviours, it is central to understand that said behaviours are, in response to left-wing ones, they themselves the result of an ideological evolution. If the “woke” left “hates the West” for its ideals and past, the “woke” right similarly hates it for allegedly “failing to live up to them.” Just as has been said for the left, the motives behind such sentiments – when articulated *reasonably*, without indulging in relativist, revisionist, and illiberal instincts – can be sound. The frustration that some people feel about the decline of Western self-

¹⁹² <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/quotes/quotes-faq/>;

¹⁹³ The following link takes to the complete interview. Caution against the outrageous amount of disinformation there contained be advised to the reader, should he or she feel curious (as well as patient and courageous) enough to listen to it. <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=vOTgPEGYS2o&pp=ygUmZGFycnlsIGNvb3BldiBjaHVyY2hpbGwgdHVja2VlIGNhcmxzb24%3D>;

¹⁹⁴ <https://winstonchurchill.hillisdale.edu/cooper-koureas/>;

confidence and “moral decay” can be understandable,¹⁹⁵ yet – again, just like for the left – the approach and conclusions that are delved from it are as dangerous as they are flawed.

Churchill is targeted because “he did not bring victory,” or, rather, because he did not bring it in the form that some on the ultra-conservative spectrum would now see it. Which is exactly what some “woke,” ultracrepidarian right-wingers would – in a stunning example of the Dunning-Kruger effect¹⁹⁶ being put into practice – point out, before engaging in their best attempt at articulating something resembling a coherent sentence, by putting forward the daring claim that – in the contemporary Western world – “freedom” is no more, as, for instance, “the people” cannot “control who comes into their country” anymore, nor “criticise government policies lest getting arrested,” and so forth with more and more mainstream propaganda that, if rooted in those that are often real issues¹⁹⁷ – worthy and requiring of being dealt with in an enlightened manner – becomes instead the justification for them to indulge in their usual crude intellectual and moral posturing, reducing – much like the radical left does – political discourse to an exercise in reactionary victimhood and a mixture of either overly simplistic or incredibly contorted narratives, where the aforementioned need for enlightened and liberal approaches is sacrificed on the altar of populist and self-pitying rhetoric.

Obviously, the accuses laid on Churchill and their approach are patently absurd, and any intelligent or minimally sensible being might spot at least two logical errors. Firstly, the idea that a man who led Britain into World War II more than eight decades ago should be held in any way responsible for the state of “the West” today is insanity, and borderline seems to even blame him having opposed Hitler in the first place as a cause of that. Secondly, Churchill is (to be) celebrated because the alternative to World War II was Hitler’s domination of Europe. In failing to accept this, critics (the likes of Darryl Cooper himself) engage in exactly the same the “woke”-leftist practice of utopian, historical revisionism, *id est*, they imagine an infinite array of utopian different possibilities, to then condemn historical leaders for failing to achieve such idealized, unattainable outcomes.

The question is now whether much of those who support, share or argue for these or similar views are genuinely as unintelligent as would be necessary in order to (besides holding such positions in the first place) be unable to grasp such rather self-evident truths, or whether behind such daftness lay ulterior purposes. One thought-provoking observation that might be raised in such regard is that, generally in life, the hardest people to convince tend to be those who profit from misunderstanding. From this

¹⁹⁵ The former arguably more so than the latter.

¹⁹⁶ “A cognitive bias whereby people with limited knowledge or competence in a given intellectual or social domain greatly overestimate their own knowledge or competence in that domain relative to objective criteria or to the performance of their peers or of people in general.”
<https://www.britannica.com/science/Dunning-Kruger-effect>;

¹⁹⁷ Such as are the contemporary immigration crisis and integration issues, for instance.

observation follows that the real reason for which Sir Winston Churchill must be “torn off his pedestal” is that he serves as a singular antidote for one among the illnesses with which these pages have been concerned, one that, given the present circumstances, also happens to be the deadliest one, that is, the “anti-war,” “pacifist” stance in the face of Putin’s aggression that so many among Western society have embraced – the same that is espoused by the likes of Viktor Orbán, Robert Fico, exponents of the listed parties in §2.3.1,¹⁹⁸ and, last but not least, Donald Trump himself. Hence, for anyone today who should, for whatever reason, maintain similar “anti-war” stances, the main argumentative point must forcibly be that “war is always bad” – the obvious challenge to which is the fact that World War II, albeit a terrible and horrific tragedy, was equally just, righteous, and necessary (for now hopefully obvious reasons, including those above). This narrative about World War II is therefore going to have to be absolutely overturned, if one is going to advance an “anti-war” position, thus, figures the likes of Churchill – rather than being considered heroes of the Free World as history would righteously demand – must be vilified, *en tant que* obstacles to such cheap and malicious revisionism.

Now, as superfluous as it might be to point this out once more, this “pacifism” warrants being regarded, now as in the future, with at least the same level of contempt that Neville Chamberlain’s appeasement toward Nazi Germany has rightly earned itself under the rightly severe and unforgiving scrutiny of history. “At least,” for – while Chamberlain committed his mistake out of misplaced optimism and naive illusions that Hitler might be placated and, therefore, that a new global conflict could be averted – contemporary advocates of such “pacifism”¹⁹⁹ – all those who, “*between war and dishonour*,”²⁰⁰ are seemingly more comfortable with the second option, as well as similarly blind to the fact that any *reasonable* individual (and, by extension, any *reasonable* actor in both domestic and foreign affairs) should have a vested interest in the “rule of international law” continuing to exist (conceding that any such thing exists in the first place and exerts a mitigating effect on the anarchist tendencies of the international chessboard only within a *Foedus Pacificum* of “like-minded” states, or else if and only if it is backed by strong retaliation against those who violate it)²⁰¹ – keep their position despite the overwhelming weight of historical evidence demonstrating its folly, being fully aware of autocratic aggression, and often lionizing figures like Putin,²⁰²

¹⁹⁸ Among which the radical leftists of “La France Insoumise,” the populists “Movimento 5 Stelle” and “Lega,” and the infamously ultranationalist Alternative für Deutschland.

¹⁹⁹ Both voters and politicians from the populist, “woke” left and right both, some of which, tragically, in power.

²⁰⁰ “*We seem to be very near the bleak choice between War and Shame. My feeling is that we shall choose Shame, and then have War thrown in a little later on even more adverse terms than at present.*” Sir Winston Churchill to Lord Moyne, September 11th, 1938.

²⁰¹ Should the Free World falter in its support to Ukraine, the whole liberal international order – and with it the international rule of law by it established – shall lose all of their remaining authority and credibility, to be replaced by a new, more brutish international state of anarchy, where the only rule of law in force being that the strongest.

²⁰² While, as already covered, the radical left claims that NATO, the “capitalist war machine,” provoked Russia through expansionist policies and views Ukraine as a pawn of Western imperialism, the radical right portrays the Atlantic Alliance as a tool of globalist elites seeking to erode national sovereignty, and Putin as a defender of traditional Christian values against the so-called decadence of liberal democracy. Both sides consequently advocate for appeasement, spread pro-Kremlin narratives, and oppose military aid to Ukraine, illustrating a paradoxical unity in their rhetoric.

friendly to their ailing ideological worldview by standing in opposition to the “globalist, elitist, overly secular, progressive West” they see as so dangerous to the “traditional values” behind which they mask their true Eurosceptic, anti-establishment, sovereigntist, ethno-nationalist, anti-globalist, traditionalist, anti-“moral decay,” and quintessentially illiberal sentiments, whose roots can *perhaps* be traced in earlier nationalist and ultra-conservative movements that, at this point, regrettably seem to never have disappeared fully in post-war Europe.

Taking up one of the initial claims of this sub-section, this “pacifism” is – despite their arguably opposite purposes and, therefore, opposite starting premises – not the only stance these two *unreasonable* yet ever-more-popular (especially among the young population) sides of the political compass end up, rather unpleasantly, sharing.

One might ponder, for instance, the role of economic populism, with right-wing populists identifying globalism, interdependence, and free-market capitalism as “betrayals” of both “the people” (e.g., the various “*America First*” and “*Prima gli Italiani*” movements) and national identity (another narrative encouraging protectionist measures – such as Donald Trump’s rather messy and confusing tariff plans against important international partners, including the EU and Canada – actually trumping all reasonable, well-established, existing macroeconomic principles warning against such kinds of backward economic policies), and left-wing populists attacking instead neoliberalism and capitalism as inherently exploitative and Western-centric. Both denounce liberal policies and view global institutions like the World Trade Organisation and International Monetary Fund as mechanisms of elite control.

Their shared distrust of financial elites lives in symbiosis with their proneness to veer into anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. Leftists claim that Jewish financiers manipulate global economies for allegedly imperialist ends, which they identify, for instance, in Zionism and the existence of the state of Israel, depicted as a “colonial apartheid entity” to be dismantled, with some engaging in Holocaust banalisation²⁰³ by accusing Israel of exploiting it for political gain. Right wing extremists, on the other hand, recycle classic anti-Semitic tropes and display eerily familiar tendencies in framing Jews as architects of multiculturalism, immigration policies, and progressive movements designed to “dilute” national identity and weaken the distorted image of “the West” they see and argue of wanting to protect.²⁰⁴

Similar convergence of extremes appears in their attitude towards Islamist extremism. Activists of the “woke” left often justify groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, as well as state actors such as Iran, as

²⁰³ Something which happens as well on the right, with some outright denying or distorting Holocaust history by claiming it was exaggerated.

²⁰⁴ While being an extremist, Donald Trump’s support to Israel sets him apart, at least regarding this specific position, from other right-wing anti-Semitic factions.

resistance movements against Western colonialism and, in perfect coherence with their above anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist views, against the state of Israel. Liberal right-wing factions exist that, rather than because of racial prejudice, see Islamism as a danger to Western societies out of concerns based on the incompatibility between some of its uses and practices (see Sharia law) vis-à-vis liberal tenets and public reason. However, some anti-Semitic far-right factions see radical Islamists as allies in their shared opposition to secularism and liberal values they judge as perverse, unnatural, or “too progressive”, particularly LGBTQ+ rights and feminism, also finding Islamist opposition to Israel helpful to the struggle against “Jewish influence.” (See Annex B: A New Horseshoe?)

All the examples above had as their purpose to showcase, following the metaphor of the pendulum, how effectively both factions reach – from different premises and utilising opposite rhetoric – similar positions, to some extent both needing one another, each feeding the other on their shared rejection of the *alter* and their contempt for it, as if not realising that it is merely the equivalent of any man despising another, unbeknownst to him that he is his looking, through a mirror, at its very own reflection.

Behind this actual phenomenon lays though the reason – that has been the main claim of these last few pages – that, in order to “respond” to the “woke” left, the “woke” right has – rather than completely rejecting it in favour of liberal alternatives – embraced its post-modern counterpart’s relativist, revisionist, grievance- and identity-based theoretical and methodological approach.

To the intersectional left’s usage of victimhood narratives, the radical right has responded by mirroring it and applying it to white, Christian, traditional, and heterosexual male populations, depicting them as the “new victims of modernity.” To the “woke” leftist “Cancel Culture,” thought policing, public shaming, and boycotts, the “woke” right now responds by arguing for bans on LGBTQ+ education, feminist discourse, perspectives deemed “anti-nationalist,” and by targeting journalists, professors, and media figures seen as “globalist” or “degenerate,” mirroring leftist attempts to censor conservative viewpoints with their conservative twin vis-à-vis progressive ones. Face to the deconstructionist, leftist historical narratives focused on anti-colonialism and exposing oppression, the revisionist right-wing rewrites history in the opposite direction, suppressing all historical nuance to advance their own ideological goals, both advancing anti-liberal and anti-Western sentiments. To the Neo-Marxist and post-colonial views that see universities, media, and even science and medicine as complicit in upholding capitalist power structures and being instruments of colonialism and corporate control, the traditionalist and anti-establishment right-wing responds by matching it with its own rejection of mainstream narratives and expertise, seeing universities and media as controlled by globalists, leftists and progressive elites, while accusing science and medicine of being corrupted by political correctness.

Finally, by adopting the same methodology, one serving more to entrench division than to advance discourse, both these mirrored zealotries end up eroding and endangering the should-be-cherished liberal public sphere and values, making the Western world vulnerable to all those who – grinning from the outside at the spreading of such illness – scheme and attack it, dreaming of the day – *may it never come* – they shall hear the sound of shattered crystals, after having witnessed freedom’s fall.

The purpose of these pages, and of all of §2.3, was that of highlighting the nature of anti-Western sentiments – no less dangerous when they come from within than when they come from outside – and the threat that they can constitute. It must have now become evident that extreme movements – whether they come from the far-left or the far-right of the political spectrum – ultimately converge on a shared illiberalism that weakens confidence in liberal democratic values. Anti-capitalist and post-colonial frameworks, no less than ethno-nationalist and traditionalist narratives, all channel discontent into a deep hostility toward the very ideals for which “the West” has always been known as the cradle of civilisation. Figures such as Donald Trump or Viktor Orbán merely personify this broader malaise. They exploit the vulnerabilities of democratic procedures – naively ill-equipped with the necessary “antibodies” to counter such threats pre-emptively – and thus seize positions of power while championing anti-Western sentiments from within. Their rise testifies to how fragile democratic systems can become when unchecked by robust protections against those who would undermine the free, open society.

Indeed, “*danger gathers*”²⁰⁵ upon the path of the Free World. Not all hope is though lost, nor can some promising signals be ignored. In Rome, tens of thousands have recently participated in a poignant, pro-Europe rally, a comforting display of union despite ongoing debates on defence spending and the new “Rearm Europe” initiative. Initiative, this one, symptom of a long overdue awakening of the European Union, face to the realization – dawned upon it through Donald Trump’s election and subsequent, treacherous, pivot in U.S. foreign policy – that it can no longer afford to outsource its security to external powers. The void left behind by Winston Churchill had for decades remained unfilled, with no one able to fully honour his legacy. Yet now, throughout Europe, a response has begun to take shape versus appeasers and Kremlin sympathisers (both inside and out) threatening to repeat history’s gravest errors. Leaders such as French President Emmanuel Macron, to-be German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk seem to have stepped up for the challenge. There is a seed of courage, as well, hidden (often deeply, it is true) in the heart of those apparently lost. Spring may yet return to Budapest and put an end to Orbán’s winter, with enlightened thousands reversed into the streets and the liberal, centre-right opposition party gaining momentum, signal that the Hungarian people might soon undertake the road to convalescence from their illness. Heart-warming protests have erupted in Serbia

²⁰⁵ “*Danger gathers upon our path. We cannot afford – we have no right – to look back. We must look forward.*” Sir Winston Churchill, 10 December 1936

against authoritarian, pro-Russian President Aleksandar Vučić,²⁰⁶ and in Georgia, following the decision by the ruling party “Georgian Dream” – blameworthy, already, of having adopted policies reminiscent of Russian governance²⁰⁷ – to depart from Georgia's pro-European trajectory by suspending the country's European Union membership bid. Move, this, which rightly ignited public outrage and led to mass demonstrations across the nation, also and especially in light of accusations – moved by the pro-Western Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili herself – of fraud and Russian interference in the October 2024 parliamentary elections.²⁰⁸ In an exemplar display of how to deal with such kind of interferences and illiberal forces, Romania annulled its compromised presidential election,²⁰⁹ disqualified pro-Kremlin candidates linked to foreign meddling,²¹⁰ and took swift legal action against coup plotters,²¹¹ all the while reaffirming its belonging and commitment to the European Union and NATO alliance amid domestic unrest and rising far-right tensions.²¹² In Turkey, too, hope resists repression, with the contemptible arrest of Istanbul mayor and Kemalist opposition leader Ekrem İmamoğlu – Erdoğan’s most credible challenger – having sparked the largest pro-democracy protests in over a decade, as thousands and thousands defy bans and the brutality of repression to call for liberty, to defend the rule of law.²¹³ France

²⁰⁶ The massive protest in Belgrade on March 15, 2025, was primarily driven by domestic issues, notably widespread allegations of government corruption and negligence asking for transparency and accountability. Vučić has alleged, without providing concrete evidence, that Western intelligence agencies are influencing the unrest, referring to it as an “imported revolution” and as an attempt to destabilise Serbia. <https://www.theguardian.com/global/2025/mar/15/serbians-stage-huge-protest-in-belgrade-against-their-president>;

²⁰⁷ Notably, the controversial “foreign agent” law requires organizations receiving over 20% of their funding from abroad to register as “foreign agents,” drawing parallels to similar Russian legislation. The “Georgian Dream” party's policies have raised alarms about increasing Russian influence in Georgia. The party's alignment with Moscow's interests, including distancing Georgia from the EU and NATO, has been a focal point of the protests. <https://globalvoices.org/2025/03/12/georgia-marks-100-days-of-protests/>; <https://www.vox.com/world-politics/389362/georgia-protests-eu-georgian-dream-russia>;

²⁰⁸ The EU has expressed concern over Georgia's political developments. It has called for new elections under international supervision due to the aforementioned, Russian-fashioned, allegations of fraud. Furthermore, in response to the government's actions, the EU suspended visa-free travel for Georgian diplomats and government officials, condemning the violent crackdown on opposition protesters and urging the Georgian government to realign with democratic principles. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20241121IPR25549/parliament-calls-for-new-elections-in-georgia>; <https://apnews.com/article/eu-georgia-visas-sanctions-elections-membership-6af30eece5e41b46f0e8c2dd313be775>;

²⁰⁹ The Romanian Constitutional Court ruled to annul the December 2024 presidential election after evidence emerged of Russian interference favouring far-right candidate Călin Georgescu. The court cited significant irregularities, including foreign financial support and manipulated digital campaigning. <https://www.ft.com/content/c090764f-0d24-4586-8270-0fd6c7ad0dbd>;

²¹⁰ The Romanian Election Commission barred Călin Georgescu from participating in the rerun after uncovering links to Russian-backed organizations and campaign finance violations. Additionally, far-right candidate Diana Șoșoacă was disqualified for openly promoting an anti-EU and anti-NATO stance deemed incompatible with the presidency. <https://apnews.com/article/romania-presidency-candidates-simion-sosoaca-2a52240b31506ee3a4df29166eeb020c>;

²¹¹ Romanian authorities arrested six individuals allegedly plotting a coup with Russian backing. The group, suspected of attempting to incite nationwide unrest and destabilize the government, was charged under national security laws. <https://apnews.com/article/romania-russia-treason-coup-plot-detain-diicot-437213648450f20031f76b53266ce50c>;

²¹² Protests erupted across Romania following the election annulment, with far-right supporters of Călin Georgescu clashing with police. On the other hand, amid growing concerns over Russian influence, thousands of Romanians participated in pro-EU and pro-NATO demonstrations in Bucharest. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/romanians-rally-show-support-europe-amid-election-tensions-2025-03-15/>; <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/former-pm-ponta-joins-romania-presidential-race-after-georgescu-barred-2025-03-12/>;

²¹³ Ekrem İmamoğlu, Istanbul’s mayor and Erdoğan’s main rival, was formally arrested and charged with corruption days before his expected nomination as CHP’s 2028 presidential candidate. He called the charges “politically motivated” and

as well has commendably seized the first opportunity to rid itself of populist, illiberal Marine Le Pen, her forecast victory at the 2027 presidential election “guillotined” by the five-year ineligibility sentencing passed – having found her guilty of embezzlement of public E.U. funds – by the “Tribunal correctionnel de Paris.” Finally, whether the mounting backlash against Donald Trump – manifesting in mass protests, legal challenges, and growing bipartisan defiance – shall prove to be a mere tremor or the prelude to a true reckoning remains to be seen. Yet, if history teaches anything, it is that long standing democracies, though battered, are not so easily broken. The resilience of the American people, now put to the test, may yet remind the world that the nation which once stood as the arsenal of democracy and beacon of liberty has not indeed forgotten how to fight for its soul.

vowed “*I will never bow.*” His detention sparked some of the largest protests in more than a decade, with demonstrators chanting “rights, law, justice” despite bans and violent crackdowns. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5yren8mxp8o>; <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4g0ylrmy1yo>; <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0egivj8vdro>;

§2.4 In Defence of Democracy

§2.4.1 Karl Loewenstein and the Indomitable Will to Survive

A strong voice in defence of democracy is the timeless one of an exiled Karl Loewenstein from Nazi Germany, amid the wreckage of interwar Europe. With his influential 1937 twin articles introducing the concept of “*wehrhafte Demokratie*” (militant democracy), he forcefully warned against democracies’ too strict adherence to procedural neutrality in the face of existential threats.

Loewenstein’s approach at the time was as dramatic and straightforward as it is controversial today:

*“Furthermore, **democracy should be on its guard against too much optimism. To over-estimate the ultimate efficiency of legislative provisions against fascist emotional technique would be a dangerous self-deception.** The statute-book is only a subsidiary expedient of the militant will for self-preservation. **The most perfectly drafted and devised statutes are not worth the paper on which they are written unless supported by indomitable will to survive.** Whether successful defence is ultimately possible depends on too many factors to be discussed here. National traditions, economic considerations, the social stratification, the sociological pattern, and the specific juridical technique of each individual country, as well as the trend of world politics, come into play. **In order definitely to overcome the danger of Europe’s going wholly fascist, it would be necessary to remove the causes, that is, to change the mental structure of this age of the masses and of rationalized emotion.** No human effort can force such a course upon history. Emotional government in one form or another must have its way until mastered by new psycho-technical methods which regularize the fluctuations between rationalism and mysticism. **Perhaps the time has come when it is no longer wise to close one’s eyes to the fact that liberal democracy, suitable, in the last analysis, only for the political aristocrats among the nations, is beginning to lose the day to the awakened masses. Salvation of the absolute values of democracy is not to be expected from abdication in favour of emotionalism, utilized for wanton or selfish purposes by self-appointed leaders, but by deliberate transformation of obsolete forms and rigid concepts into the new instrumentalities of ‘disciplined,’ or even – let us not shy from the word – ‘authoritarian,’ democracy.**”²¹⁴*

Ça va sans dire, Loewenstein’s words – especially his provocative use of the term “authoritarian” next to “democracy” – and pessimism need to be read and carefully interpreted by taking into account the gravely worrying context in which they were written, lest they – and rightfully so – might scare some of his most prudent readers. Still, beyond their rhetorical force, they convey a prescient and staggeringly topical warning about the menaces to and fragilities of liberal democracies the present work has been so concerned with thus far.

It is precisely in this spirit – moved by the same core purpose and determination of Loewenstein’s doctrine – that the final, crucial, object of it shall therefore be to identify a path – that is normatively coherent and adjourned to present day political and theoretical standards, thereby rejecting any attribution of the “authoritarian” adjective – by which to ensure that democracy does not fall victim to the very forces that seek its undoing tackled through §2.3, reinforcing the principle that the existing glimmers of hope and their “indomitable will to survive” must be harnessed, while illiberal and anti-Western voices are to be ignored – not forcefully silenced nor deprived of any of the individual rights and liberties any innocent citizen may have a rightful claim to – but (delighted and rejoiced by the magisterial example of

²¹⁴ Loewenstein, K. (1937). Militant democracy and fundamental rights, II. *American Political Science Review*, 31(4), 638-658.

Romania, in their recent treatment of Călin Georgescu) rightly excluded from positions of (or proximity to) power that would let them undermine the liberal values that, in the first place, make democracies worthy of their name. The solution to Popper's paradoxes described in §2.2.3 remains the necessary guiding principle: no tolerance for the intolerant, no democracy for the anti-democratic, and, therefore, neither for the illiberal.

The claim – which concluded §2.2.3 before delving into anti-Western sentiments – that it is possible to conceive a coherent and justifiable theory of democracy in which illiberal, populist and incompetent actors are labelled as unreasonable and therefore barred from the realm of political competition, office, or representation²¹⁵ – controversial as it may sound – necessitates further discussion, in hopes of – if unable to cure the disease, therefore to eliminate illiberalism altogether (also according to Loewenstein²¹⁶ too much of a would-be-utopian goal) – at least being able to identify a “treatment” to alleviate its symptoms and allow the *vulnus* mentioned in the introduction²¹⁷ to cicatrise, that is, to make it so that indeed democracy’s shatter-point – perfectly encapsulated by Popper’s paradoxes – shall be secured and neutralised.

For this purpose, some reflections (including some *verbatim* restatements, hopefully clearer, now, in light of the established backdrop of past sections) anticipated in the introduction to this work shall follow, contextualised or expanded upon, and, due to their utility to the argument, function as its starting point.

²¹⁵ Here it follows in its entirety, for courtesy and efficiency. “If challenging the Kelsenian premise of “democracy as government by majority-rule” and changing it to “democracy as government by self-correction” allows the possibility to develop a coherent theory of democracy in which anti-democratic parties can be excluded from the democratic arena, then, adding to such new premise the ulterior and fundamental nuance of “democracy as liberal democracy” – in that democracy cannot but be liberal, claim that this entire work has hitherto been building towards – together with the Schumpeterian “flavour” of competency requirements set on the passive electorate (advancing the observation of usually strong correlation between incompetence, populism and illiberalism; see §1.2.3 and §1.3.3, amongst other evidence throughout §1 and real world evidence, such as Venezuela's economic collapse under Nicolás Maduro), can allow one to conceive of a new coherent theory of democracy, in which illiberal or populist (or both) parties or movements – led by illiberal or incompetent (or both) agents – are labelled as unreasonable, outside the Rawlsian consensus on constitutional rules, anti-democratic, and, therefore, to be barred from the realm of political competition, office or representation.” §2.2.3, p. 51-52.

²¹⁶ “...it would be necessary to remove the causes, that is, to change the mental structure of this age of the masses and of rationalized emotion. No human effort can force such a course upon history. Emotional government in one form or another must have its way until mastered by new psycho-technical methods which regularize the fluctuations between rationalism and mysticism.” Loewenstein, K. (1937). Militant democracy and fundamental rights, II. *American Political Science Review*, 31(4), 638-658.

²¹⁷ Follows the direct quote from the introduction. “History has heretofore proven – infamously in 1922 and 1933, respectively in Italy and Germany, among other more recent instances of regression to illiberalism – that even democracies collapse when they allow illiberal elements and actors to erode their principles from within. This fragility has been too big a vulnerability, a shatter-point, and for far too long a time. The error has been to have allowed illiberal forces to find this vulnus, to have allowed them to exploit it over and over again, to justify their propaganda under the guise of “free speech” and the very liberty they endanger, and to reach such proximity to power (even in the once-champion of liberalism, the United States, now back at the mercy of Donald Trump’s whims) that liberal values – and with them their security mechanisms crucial to the defence of the “Free World” – in democratic countries seem to be more at stake now than they have been in a thankfully long time. But such error will not become a mistake until the refusal to correct it.” Introduction, p. 10-11

§2.4.2 Of Voters and Virtues: The Domain of Reasonableness

The main, pragmatic conclusion that can be derived by considering both the definition that has been articulated up to this point of democracy as liberal democracy, and the innumerable challenges – profusely covered between the case study (§1) and the previous section – it has to face from inside and out, is that the right to vote cannot include the right to abolish the system that guarantees it, nor the values that ushered it.²¹⁸

It follows that, if a system in which the dogmatic respect of majoritarian “democratic” processes allows illiberal groups to exploit such processes, reach power (or even proximity to it), and, therefore, at best, endanger, or, at worst, even destroy democracy itself, then such system is neither a functional one nor a truly democratic one, but a fetish, and empty idol, an obsession, and a sick one at that.

Liberal values gave democracy life, they permitted it **and** they, even now, **allow it to protect itself**, all through the mechanisms and principles explored throughout these pages and specifically in §1.3 and §2.1. **They should in turn be protected by it**, that is, by institutions and practices put in place to safeguard the liberal soul of democracy – its very *conditio sine qua non*. **Should this not be the case, then liberal values must rise to protect themselves from it.**

Leaning on the observation by Fareed Zakaria (see footnote 140) of the majoritarian and liberal understandings of governmental power as in fundamental contrast to each other,²¹⁹ the approach to finding a solution vowed to the preservation of liberal democracy comes as it follows. Should “democracy” – in its majoritarian component – be swayed to betray its principles, to betray liberty, to strangle its parent, then – by its own principles, that is, its liberal component – it must be disciplined. If such “democracy” should wield the sword – or be it a sickle – against its *true* self, liberty must therefore be swift in staying its hand – or severing it. Strip any democracy of its liberalism, and all that made it worth defending will have been lost to a soulless, derelict majoritarian rule, prone to decay into electoral authoritarianism. Just as no man can ever hope to survive a terrible illness without tasting the bitterness of medicine, so democracy cannot hope to survive its own malaise, without suffering the wound necessary to free itself from it. **It shall therefore be preferable to have a wounded democracy, in its majoritarian component, than a dead liberty. For such wound shall, by cutting off the malignant tumour of illiberalism, finally deliver it from the evil threat to its survival. For democracy can either be liberal, or be it cannot.**

²¹⁸ The solution proposed here shall avoid limiting the right to vote in an *active* way on pre-emptive grounds (though there are arguments for that being discussed in the academic community). Rather, it circumscribes the *passive* electorate to *reasonable* candidates.

²¹⁹ Zakaria, F. (1997). The rise of illiberal democracy. *Foreign Aff.*, 76, 22.

If the purpose of liberal democracy is to make *legitimate* political decisions, some criteria of legitimacy²²⁰ must be established. If the purpose is, though, to make *right* political decisions, then some criteria of justification are needed as well.²²¹ Indeed, the majoritarian component of democracy provides a first criterion of legitimacy through the periodic consultation of “citizens-voters”²²² on political matters, that is, elections. To be sure, it is of importance and value for democratic institutions to take “the will of the people” into consideration, and to act as transmission belt²²³ of citizens’ preferences to the international scene as well. Yet, whether such value is of *positive* (therefore whether it also constitutes justification, rather than mere, “empty” legitimation) or *negative* connotation is to be determined by a second criterion – one that, in light of all points made up to this moment, is going to be defended as of primary (and therefore justificatory) consequence – that is, the **qualitative** aspect of those preferences (and discourses) upon which, through such mechanism, both domestic policies and foreign affairs decisions shall be based.

If “the will of the people” is debated between two or more figures, parties, or coalitions that, despite their policy disagreements, argue for different yet still *reasonable* positions – *id est*, positions that fit inside the Rawlsian consensus on constitutional rules, articulate themselves within the boundaries of a normative, liberal framework of values, and, by virtue of that, do not constitute a security threat²²⁴ to liberal democracies from either within or without, nor do they endanger the Free World’s mechanisms of self-defence and preservation²²⁵ – then the value is *positive*, with the assumption of political-moral equality of citizens (on which is based, for instance, that of argumentative symmetry between speakers dear to Habermas)²²⁶ practically holding true and resulting non-problematic.

²²⁰ Sartori, G. (2016). The theory of democracy revisited. In *Democracy: A Reader* (pp. 192-196). Columbia University Press.

²²¹ Legitimation indicates that a political decision or institution enjoys acceptance (e.g., through majority support), while justification concerns whether that decision or institution is normatively right or morally defensible. Majoritarian or deliberative models often conflate the two by assuming that broad-based acceptance through suffrage or discursive process should automatically confer moral correctness. However, genuine justification does require substantive liberal principles – for instance, a commitment to individual rights or the exclusion of illiberal actors – beyond – and at times opposed to – what sheer majority agreement can supply. Maffettone, S. (2000). Liberalism and its critique: Is the therapy worse than the disease? *Philosophy & social criticism*, 26(3), 1-37.

²²² Maffettone, S. Democracy: Nature, crisis and new opportunities. p. 7.

²²³ See Andrew Moravcsik's New Liberalism and his system of state preferences derivation, §1.3.3

²²⁴ In coherence with Arnold Wolfers' definition of security, for convenience restated here once more. “*Security, in an objective sense, measures the absence of threats to acquired values, in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked.*” Wolfers, Arnold. *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962.

²²⁵ That is, liberal interventionism, for instance.

²²⁶ Argumentative symmetry in Habermas's discourse ethics refers to the ideal condition in which all participants engage in dialogue as equals, free from coercion, misinformation, or structural power imbalances, allowing the “better argument” to prevail, with legitimation deriving from deliberation in such scenario. This presupposes rational discourse, sincerity, mutual respect, and an absence of *systematically distorted communication* (while reality presents all sorts of strong obstacles to communication, some of nature ideological, manipulative, others due to disinformation, repression, ignorance, irrationality...) <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/habermas/>; Habermas, J. (1970). On systematically distorted communication. *Inquiry*, 13(1-4), 205-218.

On the obverse of the coin, whichever reader has made it this far – as well as any non-excessively-naïve observer of the present state of the world – cannot escape the rather unhappy conclusion that reality falls spectacularly short of these ideal expectations. In fact, in most present-day Western political systems, not only are *unreasonable*²²⁷ actors present, but they also count themselves in significant (which means worrying) numbers as parties, among parties, and as popular movements and influential figures (including politicians, intellectuals, ideologues, youth groups, revolutionary movements, and so on and so forth...), all provided that they be not already in or in proximity to power (see §2.3.1 and §2.3 as a whole). Therefore, given the contemporary set of circumstances, the value that the majoritarian component of democracy may acquire in “legitimising” certain political decisions may turn out to be a dangerously *negative* one, which, in turn, implies that maintaining the above assumption (of political-moral equality) as invariably and unconditionally granted becomes a highly problematic posture indeed.²²⁸

This last claim requires further clarification. To provide that, it might be of use to consider the example of how, in the present-day state of political affairs, even the arguably provocative assertion that “*the opinion of ten thousand men is of no value, if none of them know aught of the matter*”²²⁹ appears strongly optimistic.

First, to merely dismiss ignorance as rendering one’s opinion as of “*no value*” – rather than to recognise and issue a firm condemnation of the harmfulness of uninformed opinion to any political discourse and environment – severely underestimates its gravity, particularly due to the precarious position the Free World finds itself in.

Second, the assertion’s very formulation is *per se* overly optimistic. It assumes ignorance, when the problem is often disinformation or blatant, undisguised *mala fides*. Nowadays, ignorance in itself is not, in fact, a passive void, but an actively cultivated and weaponised force, exploited to erode liberal democratic institutions from within (see footnote 161).

Third, it is no matter of a mere ten thousand men (see half of the United States’ population electing Donald Trump, along with the popularity of many of the parties cited in §2.3.1). The phenomenon is not confined to the fringes anymore; it has infected mainstream political arenas, with populist and illiberal actors leveraging misinformation,²³⁰ manufactured outrage, and identity-based divisions to gain power.

²²⁷ In Rawlsian terms and as defined in §2.2.3, in opposition, of course, to the *reasonable* ones described above.

²²⁸ Problematic, as in, enhancing the risk of illiberal regression in democracies.

²²⁹ Commonly attributed to Roman Emperor and Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius, yet, no verifiable source seems to corroborate it, nor does it appear in any of his known works, such as *Meditations*. Still, the quote serves its purpose.

²³⁰ For instance, recent declarations by Donald Trump and J.D. Vance (and other populist leaders throughout Europe) on the effect of tariffs, *etcetera*...

In this sense, it must be clear that, to argue that it becomes problematic to uphold political-moral equivalence of citizens, means but to criticise – *a posteriori*, due to the loss of political-ideological innocence by segments of the citizenry – the universal applicability of it. It means to acknowledge that, as demonstrated, such assumption cannot obtain in a reality where also exist the *unreasonable* actors encountered thus far, unless some “*domain of definition*”²³¹ be established, for, outside of it, not solely are encountered the damaging consequences of the fact that the ignorant, ill-intentioned, and misinformed may speak (as much as it may be tempting to argue for that in this particular instance, no one can nor should ever deprive anyone else, not even such stunning exemplars, of their right to free speech), but as well the infinitely more tragic ones of the fact that they have been (and continue to be) elevated to political forces and legitimised by sheer numbers through the majoritarian component of democracy.

The determination of a “*domain*,” in mathematical terms, can translate in philosophical ones (more useful to this study) into the delineation of some boundary conditions within which the concept of political-moral equivalence between citizens can be fully applied without involving “non-permissible operations,” which translates to “undermining the stability and security of liberal values in democracies.”

In order to do so, it is necessary to explicitly introduce the idea that has stood behind all the claims that have been made throughout this work, and to which has been strongly foreshadowed up to this point, *id est*, that of **political-moral asymmetry**. To put it shortly, there is no political-moral equivalence between *reasonable* and *unreasonable* ideologies, stances, political actors, movements, and – since political systems are “legitimised” through the majoritarian component of democracy – citizens-voters in the political sphere. This is **not** in any way to be conflated with an *a priori* negation of the principle of equal moral worth of innocent persons. The liberal idea of equality, as described by John Locke (see §2.1.1), holds, in fact, that men – since the ontological worth of individuals is, by nature, equal in all who are innocent – should act according to the golden rule in the ethics of reciprocity. It assumes equality among persons, but not an equivalence among their intentions, particularly should the latter fall “*not under the ties of the common law of reason*.”²³² Liberal equality is therefore not to be understood as an indiscriminate, procedural egalitarianism between all views – *that would amount to relativism* – but as a commitment of reciprocal respect among those *reasonable* ones who are willing to abide by terms of mutual recognition of rights and liberties. The **political-moral asymmetry** formed between liberal and illiberal entities **is therefore based on behavioural and intentional criteria** (and, by extension, ideological ones, in those cases where behaviour or intention be derived by ideology). Such asymmetry becomes a principled necessity **derived**

²³¹ That is, in mathematical terms, the conditions of existence of an expression, function, or equation refer to the set of all values of the variable(s) for which the expression is well-defined, that is, for which it does not involve any undefined or non-permissible operations. The set of input values for which the mathematical object (e.g., a function) is valid and can be correctly evaluated.

²³² Locke, J. Two Treatises of Government. Book II. Chapters II, III. 1689.

from the rejection, by parts of the electorate, of the foundational values and commitments of liberal democracy – a rejection **which**, in political terms, **marks a loss of innocence akin to that of a murderer at the moment**, immediately before the act, **when he forms the intention to kill**. Consequently, just as natural liberty does not encompass the license to inflict harm upon others, yet, in such cases where self-preservation be at peril, any man victim of aggression “*may destroy a man who makes war upon him*,”²³³ then, should any *unreasonable* actor embrace ideals opposite to the liberal ones²³⁴ – or form an intention to destroy them – those who have a duty²³⁵ and an interest to uphold liberal values may then exclude such actors from the realm of political representation as means of inhibiting them from enacting their illiberal purposes, for “*when all cannot be preserved, the safety of the innocent is to be preferred*.”²³⁶ Just as no moral equivalence can ever exist between aggressors and defenders, neither can any political-moral symmetry ever exist between any liberal defending, for instance, “*the rights and liberties of small nations*,”²³⁷ or, again, the right to dissent, and any illiberal who would respectively imperil and abolish them once in power. The former acts within a self-limiting, normative framework; the latter, within a self-serving, destructive one.

In more pragmatic terms, the asymmetry persists between democratic and authoritarian states. With this “*Domain of Reasonableness*” – that is, it must now be clear, a **normative hierarchy wherein liberal values must take precedence over mere procedural majoritarianism, in order to grant justification to the mere legitimation from the latter derived** – once established and enforced within democracies, to be ignored – that is, to no longer find representation in the political sphere – would be *unreasonable* individuals, crude Kremlin apologists, Islamist extremism supporters, anti-Western agents and other ill-intentioned or naively sentimental actors near those similarly *unreasonable* factions described in §2.3 (protesting against the same liberal values by virtue of which they enjoy the privilege of being allowed to complain in the first place). *Par contre*, in truly illiberal, authoritarian regimes, those already – systematically – ignored (if not eliminated²³⁸ outright) are the very *reasonable* indeed opposers of such regimes, protesting in the name of the very democracy and liberal values that their Western counterparts – who all-too-easily and criminally take for granted (and at times attack) the liberties others die to obtain – are often too lazy, ignorant or foolish to stand up to defend.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Therefore, to build a parallel with Lockean terms, non-innocent ones.

²³⁵ That is, liberal democratic institutions, leaders, officials, and, more broadly, any good, *reasonable* citizen.

²³⁶ In this case, that of the innocent, liberal ideal. Ibid.

²³⁷ W. Wilson, *Address to Joint Session of Congress*, April 2, 1917; See §1.3.1

²³⁸ Aleksey Naval'nyj among them, or “simply” poor women and girls murdered in Iran over backwards dogmatism of religious fundamentalism.

It is one thing for a liberal democratic state to ensure that *unreasonable* actors, while retaining their free expression rights intact,²³⁹ are, for the principled reasons above, **excluded from the competition for political representation and decision-making roles**.²⁴⁰ Another completely different thing (speaking in political-moral terms) is – this time for oppressive reasons – for an authoritarian regime to instead eliminate and silence any liberal opposition whatsoever.

This principle may be elevated to a maxim by arguing for a rejection of absolute consequentialism in favour of the idea that, in the established hierarchy of values, **whatever endeavour or action undertaken by any actor, be its intention aligned with liberal deontology or purposed to the advancement or preservation of liberal values, should have, *ipso facto*, higher political-moral standing than any other action** (be it even of the same kind) **by any other actor of purpose illiberal or vowed, instead, to the advantage or gain of authoritarian regimes**.

Such *domain of reasonableness* having been established, a “*modulus*”²⁴¹ is effectively imposed on the majoritarian expression of “the will of the people,” preventing it from acquiring *negative* value.²⁴² **Within such domain, the assumption of political-moral equality among citizens regains its solidity and its standing**, since – though inevitable that some shall remain *unreasonable* in their private convictions – such voters may now find political expression solely in the choice of representatives from a passive electorate composed of exclusively *reasonable* and competent²⁴³ candidates, therefore

²³⁹ Freedom of speech is to be held in the highest regard of importance, yet such freedom of speech does not amount to freedom from the consequence of whatever speech was uttered. All individuals should be free to voice their political views, however normatively problematic they might be, yet, just as any man would reasonably be prone to forge closer bonds with any other, after having heard him utter reasonable words, and, even more reasonably, want to distance himself or even cut ties with anyone else he should hear having uttered instead preposterously aggressive words towards him or his loved ones, **so should any healthy** (that means **liberal**) **political system, face to agents or ideologies forcefully manifesting their will to tear it down, do well to believe their words, and react accordingly**.

²⁴⁰ “**It is one thing to advocate antidemocratic ideas; it is another to organize actively and gather political strength. [...] in the informal public sphere extremist speech should generally be tolerated. If nothing else, listening to such speech, especially by the state, helps track the concerns of citizens; silencing people would mean that genuine social and political problems go undetected. Parties might pick up and normatively filter such concerns, that is, translate them into policies that do not fail to treat citizens as free and equal, even if the speech that initially expressed the concerns might have been far from reasonable in a Rawlsian sense. However, as unreasonable citizens organize, gather political support, win votes, and move closer to the centre of actual decision-making power, tolerance should decrease – and, in the end, a party with an antidemocratic agenda might have to be banned altogether.**” Müller, J. W. (2016). Protecting popular self-government from the people? New normative perspectives on militant democracy. *Annual review of political science*, 19(1), 249-265.

²⁴¹ In mathematics, the absolute value (or modulus) $|x|$ of a real number x is the non-negative value of x without regard to its sign.

²⁴² See pages 82; [To be sure, it is of importance and value for democratic institutions to take “the will of the people” into consideration, and to act as transmission belt²⁴² of citizens’ preferences to the international scene. Yet, whether such value is of positive (therefore whether it also constitutes justification, rather than mere, “empty” legitimization) or negative connotation is to be determined by a second criterion – one that, in light of all points made up to this moment, is going to be defended as of primary (and therefore justificatory) consequence – that is, the **qualitative** aspect of those preferences...] and 83 [Therefore, given the contemporary set of circumstances, the value that the majoritarian component of democracy in “legitimising” political decisions acquires is a strongly negative one, which in turn implies that maintaining the above assumption (of political-moral equality) as invariably and unconditionally granted becomes a highly problematic posture indeed.]

²⁴³ Recalling the end of §2.2.3, including the “*Schumpeterian ‘flavour’ of competency requirements set on the passive electorate*” within the boundaries of the *domain*, it shall be ensured that incompetent populists and demagogues, able to sway the public to elect them to positions of power, may **not** reap the profit stemming from their carefully cultivated crop of harmful, misinformed

allowing democracy, now endowed of the necessary antibodies, to finally begin its healing process from the illiberal disease.

rhetoric. On the same wavelength of the reasoning already articulated in footnote 141, if, to be considered a *reasonable* candidate to administer some branch of some even small private company, one is demanded to possess demonstrable skilfulness, expertise, and a rich curriculum, then, by elementary common sense, any *reasonable* candidate for any political or public administrative office – therefore, to (directly or indirectly) play a role in the direction of what could be argued to correspond to the biggest, most prominent and important kind of “company” (besides it being the only one to have legitimate claim – monopoly – on the use of violence) – must as well present a high and demonstrable level of expertise, skilfulness, trustworthiness, and a decent political-philosophical level of knowledge.

§2.4.3 Eternal Vigilance: The Price of Liberty

Acknowledging, of course, the fact that most of the above statements may appear, to some, as either particularly daring or somewhat controversial, two potential, interconnected concerns shall now be addressed, and a third, that shall tie in to slightly more pragmatic directives for a sensible enforcement of the *domain*. Before that, one clarification. This opera neither seeks nor claims the status of a work of jurisprudence, nor does it presume to arrogate such a classification to itself. Its aim is not to codify law, but to provoke – very often in outspoken, blunt, even sonorously brusque terms – a reaction. To contribute, perhaps, in times so uncertain and so dark, to the emergence of a renewed, sensible “political culture.” Perhaps even to something more. It is in such spirit that all words written in preceding pages – and those in the ones that shall follow – are to be read, interpreted, and, it is hoped, understood.

The first preoccupation that may arise is, in fact, identified by political scientist and philosopher Jan-Werner Müller (anticipated in footnote 133).²⁴⁴ Such worry, translated to the jargon utilised in these pages, may be framed as follows. A system operating under the proposed *modulus* may become prone to degenerating into a corrupt one, in which an elite of self-proclaimed *reasonable* individuals may arbitrarily exclude others from political participation. In fewer words, a sort of dictatorship. Should one ponder, though, such preoccupation for longer than a moment – while keeping into careful consideration the philosophical and theoretical foundation (introduced and recalled to throughout §2) on which the proposed approach rests – it shall soon become apparent how such concern can be easily dismissed for, among other reasons, being much too close to a “slippery slope” fallacy. To explicitly address it – and to therefore outline some more pragmatic, core, criteria for identifying *unreasonableness* – the reader shall be so kind as to forgive the author of some repetitiveness in the lines that follow.

The definition of *reasonableness* has, indeed, been thoroughly articulated (see above, as well as §2.2.2 and §2.2.3) as normative, rather than arbitrary. The *modulus* is grounded on publicly defensible, liberal criteria – not on subjective preference. It is therefore not a *carte blanche* for political exclusion, rather, it is a guardrail to prevent anti-liberal forces from weaponising democracy’s majoritarian procedures against itself. As already stated, the exclusion of *unreasonable* actors does not eliminate freedom of expression, nor it does eliminate the right to dissent or political pluralism (see footnotes 239-240). Having established the philosophical boundary between the *reasonable* and the *unreasonable*, some “red lines” – functioning as more pragmatically useful diagnostic tools – may tentatively be traced by looking, in political actors, for anti-constitutional intents (explicit calls to abolish, suspend, or undermine constitutional checks, the separation of powers, basic freedoms and liberal individual rights...), incitement to violence or unjustified

²⁴⁴ Müller, J. W. (2016). Protecting popular self-government from the people? New normative perspectives on militant democracy. *Annual review of political science*, 19(1), 249-265.

discrimination (persistent endorsement or use of violence, targeted threats against innocent groups...),²⁴⁵ and, most gravely, collusion or even non-voluntarily-direct complicity with foreign agents hostile to the Free World to the detriment of the liberal establishment (spread of misinformation, funnelling of clandestine funds, receipt of foreign funding, propaganda coordination...).

It is, hence, no matter of delegitimising actors arguing for lower tax-rates or, vice-versa, a stronger welfare system, for, albeit different, those are legitimate political positions, so long as they are put forth in respect of fundamental liberal principles (e.g., property rights, equality of innocent citizens before the law...).²⁴⁶ On the other hand, any other actor that should, say, vocally or materially support or favour autocratic regimes (e.g., Russian propagandists or “useful idiots”),²⁴⁷ defend radical Islamism (e.g., application of Sharia law), defy constitutional limits, spread misinformation (especially if tied to, say, pivotal geopolitical events)²⁴⁸ or, in any other way, contribute to the weakening of the liberal component of democracy, is to be considered dangerous and, therefore, impeached. In other words, **critique and debate are welcome, subversion is not**. Loewenstein saw similarly subversive movements the likes of fascism as not mere ideology, but as *“sophisticated techniques for the attainment of power”* within contemporary democracies, founded on an appeal to the psychology of the masses. The success of fascism was, in other words, based on its “perfect adjustment to democracy.”²⁴⁹ In this perspective, it is finally evident how not only is the risk posed by inaction in front of threats farsooth greater than that comported by action, but also and above all that failure to enact countermeasures against illiberal actors²⁵⁰ is to be considered tantamount to the sin of complicity, a silent assent to tyranny under the guise of forbearance.

Complementary to Werner’s preoccupation is the second one out of the three, namely that “if a people should elect an *unreasonable* leader, then perhaps such people is no longer worth of being ‘forced’

²⁴⁵ Discrimination can only ever be objectionable to the extent that the suspicion whence it springs is irrational, grounded in prejudice, and unjustified. It is otherwise to be called common sense.

²⁴⁶ See the healthy dynamic in Germany between the SPD and CDU parties, respectively centre-left and centre-right policy-wise, yet both aligned on the defence of the Free World and baseline liberal principles. Long accustomed to a tradition of compromise and coalition-building – the **Große Koalition** (“Grand Coalition”) – such bipartisan ethos has proven useful to marginalise political extremes (e.g., what is happening at present-day time *vis-à-vis* the alt-right AfD scoring above 20% in the last federal election) and maintain a stable distance between illiberal actors and actual power.

²⁴⁷ Here, the expression “useful idiots” is employed in its historically and polemically rooted sense, emerging in post-WWII political discourse to describe figures – often intellectuals or politicians – who, knowingly or not, further the agenda of a political force they do not formally belong to; in this case, those in the West who, through naivety or ideological alignment, have served Russian strategic narratives, sometimes against their own political interests; <https://accademiadellacrusca.it/it/consulenza/utile-idiota/30495>

²⁴⁸ Again, see Donald Trump’s administration – among numerous others of Putin’s “useful idiots” or propagandists in Europe as well – and its blatant lies on the start of the Russia-Ukraine War, for instance.

²⁴⁹ “*By exploiting the freedoms guaranteed by democratic regimes, fascists were able to render democratic procedures unworkable and systematically discredit those regimes. At the same time, they mobilized in semi-military corps that served to impress and intimidate the masses. With this strategy, fascist movements sought to acquire power ‘on the basis of studious legality.’*” Capoccia, G. (2013). Militant democracy: The institutional bases of democratic self-preservation. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, 9(1), 207-226.

²⁵⁰ See the Italian system’s failure to declare the so called “Stato d’assedio” (literally “state of siege,” under Article 48 of the then Italian constitutional charter, the “Statuto Albertino” – a legal mechanism that would have allowed the liberal government to easily disperse the modest numbers of the fascist squads) against Mussolini’s “March on Rome” in October 1922.

to remain free.” Similarly to it, such notion must as well be carefully qualified, and the same tolerance towards some repetition may be required of the kind reader of these pages. Though the above point may tempt one’s realism, it just cannot be accepted without serious caveats.

Firstly, it ignores the extensively argued idea that the liberal core of democracy is here deemed to be always worth preserving against the moments of irrational, *unreasonable*, majoritarian drift that would endanger it. **By what right, one might wonder, should fifty-one trump forty-nine, if the former sides with demagogues and illiberal agents, while the latter stands for reason, liberty, and constitutional order?** Only in a system where both alternatives are reasonable – say, between a Mitt Romney and a Barack Obama – does such majoritarian right remain normatively tenable.

Secondly, even were one to close an eye to this asymmetry, to “let them lie in the bed they have made,” as it were, might be permissible if the consequences of their electoral folly were purely domestic. But they are not. In an age of global interdependence and normative entanglement, the posture of any great or small liberal democracy affects the cohesion and operational capacity of the Free World as a whole (see the case of the European Union and the challenges in dealing with Russian-sympathising Hungary, also due to certain problematic requirements of unanimity in decision making). A people’s democratic regression thus becomes not only their problem but a burden upon others. It ties the hands of multilateralism, weakens unified responses to crises such as the war in Ukraine, and emboldens the very enemies that seek to undo the liberal international order.

The third preoccupation to be tackled is the one concerning the practical applicability of such system, from which others similar to the above ones (themselves included) may lay their foundations, and which, as anticipated above, will bring to a much-needed discussion over general directives regarding the implementation of the *modulus*, and thereby the enforcement of the proposed *domain*, that is, as should now be clear, a sort of new, necessary “*conventio and excludendum*.” It is, in fact, more than fair to inquire as to whom such duty ought to be entrusted.

In a utopian world – or, one might rather say, in any ideal *Foedus Pacificum* of liberal democratic states – an independent commission of liberal intellectuals, philosophers, competent experts, technocrats, and jurists²⁵¹ should be established at the supranational level (for instance, within the European Union) and made responsible for a function – parallel to that of judicial review of legislation (already a vital counter-majoritarian fail-safe *vis-à-vis* abuses by the majoritarian component of democracy) carried out by courts – of “normative review of *reasonableness*,” specifically dedicated to the determination of *unreasonableness* of political actors, among some other secondary functions. Just as any constitutional court should ground

²⁵¹ All selected, nodding to the Schumpeterian argument for the necessity of competency, on the bases of outstanding merit and contribution to the preservation and strengthening of liberal values in democracies and throughout the world.

its deliberations on the constitutional rules of the polity to which it belongs, such “*Commission of the Reasonable*”²⁵² should base its own on a “*Normative Corpus of Liberalism*” – a body of philosophical, theoretical, and juridical-political texts which would perform a normative function akin to that of a “philosophical constitution.” This *Corpus* would comprise the works – the actual works, codified, as they were written, in a law-like form – of those thinkers whose ideas have historically shaped – and (should) continue to underpin – the values, moral and institutional architecture, and political ontology of liberal democracy – from John Locke to Montesquieu, from Kant and Mill to Tocqueville, Habermas, Rawls and all others whose contributions have defined the liberal tradition’s commitments to individual liberty, rule of law, limited government, constitutionalism, pluralism, and the dignity of persons.

The function of such *Corpus* would not be that of providing inflexible, doctrinal orthodoxy, but that of serving as a normative touchstone – a lodestar – a conceptual foundation capable of illuminating the boundary between that which is *reasonable* and that which is not. In consulting the *Corpus* – just as any jurist, through the discipline of comparative law, may examine the divergent approaches of various legal systems and thereby reach more educated conclusions – the *Commission* may – by engaging with the plurality of perspectives offered by these kindred yet distinct liberal thinkers – draw enlightened principles that are inspired and informed by the dialectical richness of a shared tradition, in order to carry out its purpose and evaluate whether any given actor, party or movement abides by – or existentially threatens – the liberal democratic order. Should the latter be the case, the binding deliberation of *unreasonableness* shall, following the articulated reasoning in §2.4.2, escort any such actor outside the realm of political competition. In order to do so, the *Commission of the Reasonable* should have executive power to enforce its decisions. Its rulings would thus possess direct operational authority.

In all of the above, it is essential to reiterate that the *Commission* may exercise its functions in both abstract and concrete ways, in the legal sense of these terms – *id est*, applying both the continental-European

²⁵² The proposition of such *Commission of the Reasonable*, especially considered its outlined composition, may raise some concerns about elitism or technocratic excesses. To address them, some principles reflecting that of “checks and balances” might be followed in its institutional design. Some features that a hypothetical structure may include shall follow. Foremost, multi-nationalism and multi-disciplinarity, with commissioners of diverse origins from inside the *Foedus*, belonging to diverse fields of expertise (international relations, economics, *etcetera*), jurisprudential traditions, and equally diverse liberal schools of thought). Rotational terms of 5-years should be opted for in order to prevent entrenchment (renewable, non-consecutively for non-democratically appointed commissioners). Appointment processes should be transparent, with a two thirds qualified majority in each participating parliament (or, similarly, a two thirds qualified majority in a supranational legislature) appointing – in order to ensure a layer of democratic input – half the commissioners on renewable term, remembering the vital requirement of high competency levels to have been irrefutably demonstrated both under strict audition by the respective appointing body, and by either earned titles or career achievements; each candidate of the other half shall be personally designated – on grounds of recognised merit and contribution to the academic, intellectual and/or material prosperity of the Free World – by the respective outgoing commissioner they shall replace, to then be appointed on renewable, non-consecutive term through qualified majority approval by two thirds of the outgoing commission (again, after having undergone strict auditioning). All Commission reasonings and opinions should be published, with all decisions mandatorily including written opinions, studiously citing relevant text from the *Corpus*. Regular reporting should be annually in order in the form of public hearings. The *Commission* may only be dissolved by a three fourths qualified majority of Member States’ parliaments.

tradition of review (in its case, non “judicial” but a normative one of political actors and groups) *in abstracto* (detached from specific cases, focused on general compatibility with the liberal-democratic order) and the Anglo-American tradition of concrete, case-bound adjudication (arising from live controversies or acts).

Beyond its primary mandate, the *Commission* would also have important advisory roles. When member-state constitutional or supreme courts should undertake *ex ante* (*a priori*) judicial review of legislation, the *Commission* must issue an official opinion that the courts are obliged to take under serious consideration, though not necessarily bound to follow. Analogously, parliaments and executives should solicit the *Commission*’s opinions on new laws or policy decisions. Again, these opinions should remain formally non-binding but carry an obligation for rigorous consideration by the relevant legislative or executive authority. In any ongoing legal proceeding, any party (including the judge or litigants) may also request the *Commission*’s opinion, which must be factored into deliberations.

Finally, the *Commission*’s binding determinations – particularly those declaring *unreasonableness* – would establish a precedent with *erga omnes* effects, shaping future adjudications across the entire *Foedus pacificum*. This body of precedent would help further embed liberal democratic principles into the legal and political spheres of all participating states.

Back, however, to the imperfect truth of the real world, constrained by its legal and political shackles, will now follow some considerations over which of the already existing institutional bodies are best equipped for carrying out the task described above. Jan-Werner Müller astutely observes that “*there is widespread agreement that, if militant democracy is legitimate at all, it ought to be applied by impartial institutions, primarily courts,*”²⁵³ which can be regarded as a sensible enough position to be accepted. It might, in fact, very well be pointed out how leaving such task exclusively to executives or parliaments may, on the wake of the above concern, easily empower them to conveniently outlaw competitors or obtain easy consensus against unpopular minorities. The main actors to entrust with the duty to safeguard liberal democracy should therefore be identified in courts. Whether they should be the only actors endowed with such responsibility, or whether executives and parliaments should play any role in the determination of *unreasonableness* is indeed an item worthy of discussion, but that lies not within the already capacious scope of this work. It might nevertheless be noted how sensibly prudent would it be that independent courts should – whatever resolution should be reached with regard to the above dilemma, and in lack of the utopian *Commission of the Reasonable* to discharge such task – retain a right to have the final say on the matter of exclusion.

²⁵³ Müller, J. W. (2016). Protecting popular self-government from the people? New normative perspectives on militant democracy. *Annual review of political science*, 19(1), 249-265.

One specific occurrence that would significantly facilitate, for instance, European courts to perform such duty would be an upgrade – improbable as much as would be useful and desirable – of the European Union’s “constitutional” architecture to explicitly entrench the liberal-democratic values mentioned in Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU)²⁵⁴ through the adoption an **eternity clause**, vowed to rendering them unamendable, non-derogable, and enforceable against both Member States and EU institutions alike. Such a reform would endow European courts with the normative and legal bases required to operate as genuine guardians of a supranational liberal order. Of course, as anticipated, the possibilities of a similar development actually materialising are – due to a number of reasons, an exhaustive and satisfactory explanation of which lies, once again, beyond the scope of this work²⁵⁵ – quite dishearteningly remote,²⁵⁶ unless some radical shift (the likes of those the world is presently experiencing) should somehow cause a shockwave so strong as to create sufficient incentives – or rather, instil sufficient fear – capable of pushing the Member States of the European Union to finally rush toward the long-overdue goal full political integration into an actual supranational entity. Only under such exceptional circumstances might it become conceivable to respectively establish some institution or enshrine – during the drafting of a proper European constitution – some charter in purpose (and possibly in nature) analogous to the *Commission of the Reasonable* or the *Normative Corpus of Liberalism* outlined above.

Lacking such would-be-welcome developments and outside the framework of the European Union (or that, in a hypothetical future, of the United States of Europe), the duty to enforce the *dominion of reasonableness* shall befall onto individual states rightly concerned with the preservation of their statuses of liberal democracies. The adoption of stringent eternity clauses (more so than the ones already existing, say, in Germany)²⁵⁷ – codifying in national constitutions some tool, parallel to the proposed *modulus*, of

²⁵⁴ “The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.” https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC_1&format=PDF;

²⁵⁵ Nevertheless, here follows a synthetic attempt at it. A similar reform would require a formal amendment of the Treaties under Article 48 TEU, which governs the revision of the “constitutional framework” (*id est*, the Treaties) of the European Union. To introduce an eternity clause the likes of that proposed above, Member States would need to unanimously adopt such revision, either via the ordinary revision procedure – involving a Convention (“composed of representatives of the national Parliaments, of the Heads of State or Government of the Member States, of the European Parliament and of the Commission.” Ibid.) and Intergovernmental Conference (“convened by the President of the Council for the purpose of determining by common accord the amendments to be made to the Treaties.” Ibid.) – or through a simplified procedure if applicable to institutional changes.

²⁵⁶ Also considering that, for such a clause to be meaningful, it would need to be accompanied by an expanded interpretative mandate for the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU).

²⁵⁷ Germany’s “Grundgesetz” (“Basic Law”), contains Article 79.3, which states that “Amendments to this Basic Law affecting the division of the Federation into Länder, the participation of the Länder in legislation, or the principles laid down in Articles 1 and 20 shall be inadmissible,” where Articles 1 and 20 respectively guarantee human dignity and fundamental rights, and establish democracy, the rule of law, federalism, and the social state. These principles are indeed declared unalterable, even by constitutional amendment, yet, illiberal parties explicitly vowed to do so, such as the extreme left-wing populist “Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht” and *pseudo*-nostalgic, alt-right, ultranationalist “Alternative für Deutschland” are not only permitted to exist, they are allowed to participate to elections, be “legitimised” (keeping in mind the negative value that assumes in such circumstances) by (in the case of AfD) strong electoral turnout in their favour, and to therefore set foot into parliament, gain momentum, spread their poison and weaken the Free World from within – proof, this, that the safeguards in place are not nearly strict as they should be. <https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/gg/BJNR000010949.html>;

discrimination between reasonable and unreasonable political entities, with consequent exclusion of the latter from active political competition – should remain an absolutely valid course of action (a more feasible one as well, at the national level), effectively allowing courts to perform their duty of judicial review basing their deliberations on now crystallised principles of liberal democratic self-preservation. This solution, while of nonetheless difficult implementation, should render decisions such as that taken by the Romanian Constitutional Court *vis-à-vis* Russian-backed Georgescu – already in and of itself constituting a graciously precious precedent – more frequent and common, as well as hopefully more commonsensical and less controversial.

Among other numerous practicalities – an in-depth discussion of which falls, yet again, outside the scope of this work – are the ideas that some proportionality ought to guide the “application of the *modulus*” – distinguishing, for instance, between “soft” and “hard” containment measures for those deemed *unreasonable* “to differing degrees”²⁵⁸ – and that obligations of absolute transparency and responsibility for all involved actors – both parties (whose sources of funding and donations should be absolutely verifiable and of public domain) and deliberative bodies (whose proceedings need also be as transparent as feasible and admissible, only subject to exceptions tied to security concerns) – should be strictly upheld.²⁵⁹

Lastly, and to tie back to the case study that opened this work, while all proposals and reflections articulated thus far have been conceived and intended to apply to everyday, “normal-time” democratic life and governance, it may have not escaped notice how profoundly the contemporary state of the international relations – *id est*, a state of crisis of international law and vulnerability of the Free World without precedent since 1938 – has influenced and substantiated the tenor of the pages written so far, and of the few that remain.

The clarion call for “peace through strength,” so often and so rightly invoked with regard to foreign adversaries, emerges just as powerfully in the imperative to repel subversive actors from within. Indeed, neither Ukraine’s resilient stand against invasion nor the Free World’s concerted response – now more than ever hindered by certain, familiar, illiberal voices – would have been possible without a robust liberal-

²⁵⁸ “***As unreasonable citizens organize, gather political support, win votes, and move closer to the centre of actual decision-making power, tolerance should decrease – and, in the end, a party with an antidemocratic agenda might have to be banned altogether. [...] An alternative to banning –but one that preserves some of the valuable intuitions of the con-centric model of democracy protection – is the deployment of what I call soft militant democracy. To be sure, it can only be called soft in contrast with the ultimate hard measure of banning a party or restricting rights [...] Soft measures would leave a party in existence but officially limit its possibilities for political participation, or de facto make its life difficult [...] Parties might also be allowed to compete in elections but be denied party financing or specific means of campaigning, such as access to broadcasting...***” Müller, J. W. (2016). Protecting popular self-government from the people? New normative perspectives on militant democracy. *Annual review of political science*, 19(1), 249-265.

²⁵⁹ To minimize arbitrariness, any such body tasked with the duty should commit to some procedural standards, such as evidence-based hearings (with documented proof of anti-constitutional or violent rhetoric functioning as justification for exclusion, rather than suspicion or rumour), proportionality tests (differentiating between one-off, extreme statements and systematic, sustained attacks on the liberal order), and, to be restated once more, the above transparency requirements (clear publication of findings, reasoning, and opportunities for the accused actors to respond).

democratic resolve. So too must that same resolve be shown in confronting those very home-grown, anti-Western factions whose endeavours – directly or through stealth, wilfully or out of naivety – weaken or threaten to dismantle the liberal order from the inside. In times of crisis especially, it is hence mandatory for the execution of measures vowed to the enforcement of the *domain of reasonableness* to be immediate and ever more robust. If, even in “normal” times,²⁶⁰ courts or commissions should thoroughly and periodically conduct strict – albeit gradual – oversights, then, democracies may find *reasonable* and legitimate cause in times of true emergency to invoke for a heightened activation of complementary, accelerated processes²⁶¹ – for instance, an *interim* suspension of an illiberal group’s legal standing before it shall be able to exploit the crisis.²⁶² In similar contexts and for similar reasons, liberal democratic regimes and – out of common civic sense and moral-political duty – all *reasonable* sections of their civil societies may, respectively, issue and heed recommendations to withhold any kind of media amplification and public or private platform from illiberal propagandists, spreaders of mis- or disinformation, along with any other malicious figures interested to leverage the criticality of times to gain their own infamous “fifteen minutes of fame,” – save where accompanied by rigorous adversarial and enlightened counterpoint, scrutiny and diligent fact-checking, as would be requisite to expose such charlatany for what it is.

None of the above is to imply that implementing strong safeguards or fortifying democratic protections will be either easy or uncontroversial. After all – as Loewenstein put it – “*the most perfectly drafted and devised statutes are not worth the paper on which they are written unless supported by indomitable will to survive.*”²⁶³ Practicalities and political will shall therefore have to join forces as firmly as are perilous the dangers they seek to address, if they are to defeat them. The core realization thus stands. **If democracy is worth defending in the international arena, it is equally worth defending – and no less vigorously – within its own borders. By rigorously differentiating the *reasonable* from the *unreasonable* – forestalling the capture of institutions, and not committing the grievous error of giving ear to such sibilant, poisonous voices, nor that of relinquishing liberal principles at the altar of majoritarian whim – more shall be achieved than to have saved democracy from its illness, for shall therefore be fortified that indispensable promise of liberty which animates genuine self-rule, ensuring that even in most perilous times – indeed,**

²⁶⁰ As if there ever was a time when the ill-intentioned put a stop to their illiberal endeavours...

²⁶¹ Complementary emergency methods and processes may include monitoring of legal-institutional changes (for instance, manipulations of electoral laws, judiciary appointments, or constitutional amendments that concentrate power), tracking and confronting subnational strongholds (some illiberal drifts begin in local or regional contexts where vigilance is weaker), and instituting political health assessments (civil-society organizations and free media should periodically publish “democratic barometers,” measuring the viability of checks and balances, much like macroeconomic indicators).

²⁶² Any such emergency measure would nonetheless require the establishment of “sunset clauses” (automatic expiry of exceptional restrictions after a set duration, unless formally renewed or confirmed in “normal” times), independent oversight (parallel judicial or parliamentary committees empowered to evaluate whether the emergency conditions still apply), and periodic review (a mandatory re-examination of all “crisis measures” at brief intervals – *exempli gratia*, every 3 or 6 months – preventing the indefinite extension of draconian controls).

²⁶³ Loewenstein, K. (1937). Militant democracy and fundamental rights, II. *American Political Science Review*, 31(4), 638-658.

especially in the darkest of hours – democracy shall never surrender its spirit in the face of those forces that, from within or without, would see it undone and cast it into fire.

Conclusion

The Russian invasion of Ukraine – especially in light of the varied, at times disheartening reactions it has prompted – has, in the starkest way possible, reminded the world that democracy’s survival cannot – indeed it must not – be taken for granted. This war is not merely over land or influence; rather, it replays history’s perennial clash between liberty and subjugation, right and wrong, and – without shying from the moral weight carried by these words – between good and evil. As sections above have shown, the war’s root causes lie to a great extent in opposing domestic regimes. On one side stands Ukraine, flawed and unfinished in its democratic aspirations, yet nonetheless striving for liberal values and broader European integration. On the other looms Russia, flattened into a personalist autocracy under Putin’s heel, unrestrained by neither meaningful checks nor accountability mechanisms, emboldened in a reckless imperial gambit. What might, at first regard, have appeared a localized tragedy has hence been revealed to be a global warning, reasserting the harsh truths that evil, unchallenged, will expand its reach; that tyranny, unchecked, will strike at the free; and that *“freedom is the sure possession of those alone who have the courage to defend it.”*²⁶⁴

Such lesson would be grim enough if threats came solely from beyond democracy’s gates. Yet, as this work has laboured to demonstrate, the far subtler and perhaps more perilous danger creeps from within. Modern liberal democracies, with their structured procedures for voting and speech, remain vulnerable to hijacking by zealous actors who prey on the letter of democratic rules and ravage its liberal spirit. Whether driven by radical-left identity politics that tears down Western values from a post-colonial vantage, or by a radical-right populism that mirrors its enemy’s methodology in reverse – through manufactured outrage, historical revisionism, and scapegoating – the threat is no less real. The disintegration of liberal democracy does not, in fact, always come at the hands of foreign conquerors. Time and again, it has yielded to internal subversion by opportunistic populists, corrupt demagogues, or “useful idiots” of dictators and autocratic powers, and it will continue to do so unless equipped with robust mechanisms of self-defence.

By applying the Liberal theories of International Relations (Interwar Idealism, Doyle’s Liberal Democratic Peace Theory, and Moravcsik’s New Liberalism), why illiberal regimes engage in conflict has been demonstrated, and why instead democracies, when true to themselves, remain – at least among themselves – at peace. **Yet, “true to themselves” is the essential qualification, for democracy holds meaning only when firmly tethered to liberal values** – individual liberty, property rights, separation of powers, genuine rule of law, and a resolute stance against all that would subjugate these core principles.

²⁶⁴ Paraphrased from Pericles (as reported by Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, 2.43)
<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/classics/research/thucydides/ttt/text/>;

Its shatter-point is revealed when it is allowed to devolve into mere majority rule, unanchored by the moral guardrails that, first, gave it life. It all converges on the same, single warning, *id est*, if democracy will not defend its own liberal heart, then it will have courted its own demise.

Because the stakes have been made so vivid in Ukraine, and because illiberalism has reawakened across the Western world, so the democratic age of moral neutrality has passed, and it ought never to have lasted this long.

*“Qui si convien lasciare ogni sospetto;
ogne viltà convien che qui sia morta.”*²⁶⁵

Neither cynicism nor complacency shall ever shield anyone from the shadowing storm of illiberalism. What will – these pages contend – lies in remembering that even in the darkest of times, hope can endure, if the “*indomitable will*”²⁶⁶ remains to kindle its flame. In this struggle, the delineation and enforcement of a “*Domain of Reasonableness*” by the nations of the Free World must become that light – a luminous boundary in defence of democracy. It must entail a readiness to discriminate between harmless dissent and malevolent subversion, allowing free expression yet denying *unreasonable* agents the institutional levers by which to dismantle what centuries of “*blood, toil, tears and sweat*”²⁶⁷ have arduously struggled to build. Liberal societies must remain open to debate and self-correction, yet a renewed affirmation of democracy’s right to self-preservation is in order. For, if the right to freedom of speech – rightly – forbids to silence *unreasonable* voices, in the same way it does not, and indeed it cannot, forbid the right of those *reasonable* others to expose them for what they truly are, nor can a misguided assumption of moral neutrality debar the sacrosanct democratic right to deal accordingly with the threats that they pose. For, should the voices vowed to degrade liberty, to stoke anti-Western resentment, or to bend the knee before autocrats be allowed to drive liberalism away from democracy, to push freedom to abandon its helm, then its now empty vessel shall – deprived of guiding reason and principle both – find itself helplessly adrift,

*“nave senza nocchiere in gran tempesta,
non donna di province, ma bordello.”*²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ “*All hesitation shall be left behind; all cowardice, here, must die.*” Dante Alighieri. (1321). *Divina Commedia: Inferno* (Canto III, vv. 14–15).

²⁶⁶ Loewenstein, K. (1937). Militant democracy and fundamental rights, II. *American Political Science Review*, 31(4), 638–658.

²⁶⁷ Winston Churchill to the Parliament of the United Kingdom, May 14th, 1940. <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/yourcountry/collections/churchillexhibition/churchill-the-orator/blood-toil-sweat-and-tears/>;

²⁶⁸ “*a bark without a helmsman, in wild tempest, no lady of the lands, but a house of ill-fame.*” Dante Alighieri. (1321). *Divina Commedia: Purgatorio* (Canto VI, vv. 77–78).

There is, in short, an imperative to reclaim the militant dimension of democracy. That means harnessing courts, legislatures, and supranational bodies in the service of preserving liberal democracy's core, even if it means to tie the hands of those bent on its destruction. It demands ceaseless vigilance, lest "*the malice of the wicked [be] reinforced by the weakness of the virtuous*,"²⁶⁹ for complacency is ever the ally of tyranny. Equally imperative is the duty to hold – firmly – the positive belief that citizens can yet rally around a creed of freedom worthy of their loyalty, from which the mission to protect and nurture such precious seeds of hope, so that, one day, they may flourish into a verdant forest. Should the Free World flag or fail in its mission, should fear of conflict triumph over right, should the will to appease eclipse the courage to resist, then, once again, all shall witness how easily democracies forfeit their future.

Yet hope remains. Ordinary Ukrainians, braving relentless bombing to defend their independence, remind the world that even the most defenceless of nations can be strong when armed with a principled belief in its freedoms. Protesters for true democracy in Hungary, Serbia, Georgia, Turkey and beyond are proving the same. The history of liberal democratic states uniting in solidarity, from Wilson's days to the current ones, shows that the moral fibre and willingness to protect a *Foedus Pacificum*²⁷⁰ among free peoples is indeed still there. No one, through wavering will or faltering vision, dare allow this solidarity to fade away. Every man who can pride himself as free shall hence bear his share of responsibility in defending not merely the soil of a country, but the very principle that, despite all of its flaws and all the challenges it faces, the "*worst form of government*" remains, so long as the spirit of reason dwells in the hearts of its people, indeed the best – the finest sentinel of freedom ever conceived by mankind.

May these pages therefore conclude with a plea and a hope. A plea to every free society to rediscover the courage, unity, and determination essential to the safeguard of its inheritance – against tyrants from abroad and saboteurs from within. A hope that democracy, if ever weakened, wounded, or diseased, may yet find renewal. Many today, for varied reasons, would meet the call to defend their

²⁶⁹ "It is my purpose, as one who lived and acted in these days, to show how easily the tragedy of the Second World War could have been prevented; how *the malice of the wicked was reinforced by the weakness of the virtuous*... *How the counsels of prudence and restraint may become the prime agents of mortal danger; how the middle course adopted from desires for safety and a quiet life may be found to lead direct to the bull's-eye of disaster*" Sir Winston Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, 6.

²⁷⁰ It bears reiterating that nowhere in this work is the *Foedus Pacificum* ever presumed to be "*pacificum*" in the sense of unconditional external pacifism. Like all political orders, the liberal democratic world has interests. When they are pursued (see Doyle's invocation of Machiavelli in §1.3.2) through "expansionist" or interventionist postures, in order to reinforce the material and strategic position of free societies – especially face to challenges and hostilities posed by autocratic, illiberal adversaries, and even more if at the expense of them – such pursuits do not represent a betrayal of liberal principles but rather their worldly assertion; not a departure from liberal commitments, but a pragmatic response to threats, channelling domestic energies outward in service of unity and security, and exercising liberal strength against those who dwell outside the "zone of liberal peace." The present work has framed this phenomenon as a variant of Liberal Imperialism – a notion that lends coherence to the doctrine of liberal interventionism and reconciles realpolitik with a deontological commitment to liberal values. In this light, the involvement of NATO and the European Union in Ukraine's defence finds normative grounding, while Russia's conduct is better explained by the unmoored, autocratic logic of a regime utterly detached from constitutional constraint. As argued in §2.4.2, this contrast legitimates a moral asymmetry: actions undertaken in defence of liberal democracy should, by virtue of their normative alignment, possess inherently superior political-moral standing than analogous actions in service of autocracy.

freedoms, naively yet naturally, with the wish that such necessity need not have risen in their time. So does the very one whose pen set down these words, and so did all who lived to see such times. But that was not – it is not – for them to decide. All there is to decide is what to do with the time that is given.

No illusions shall be harboured. Victory is never assured, and never shall the horizon be entirely clear of storms. Nevertheless, it is only through steadfast adherence to the fundamental tenets of liberalism – its unwavering respect for reason, the rule of law, and the intrinsic dignity of every individual – that democracy shall weather the tempest, repulse its foes, and safeguard its essential power of renewal, thus securing, across the trials of generations, that precious promise of liberty upon which all else rests. Then shall come the moment when, from the shadows of struggle, a chorus of liberated voices will rise triumphant, proclaiming at last, with joy and indeed with relief –

*“E quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle.”*²⁷¹

²⁷¹ “*And so we rose, once more able to set our gaze upon the stars.*” Dante Alighieri. (1321). *Divina Commedia: Inferno* (Canto XXXIV, v. 139).

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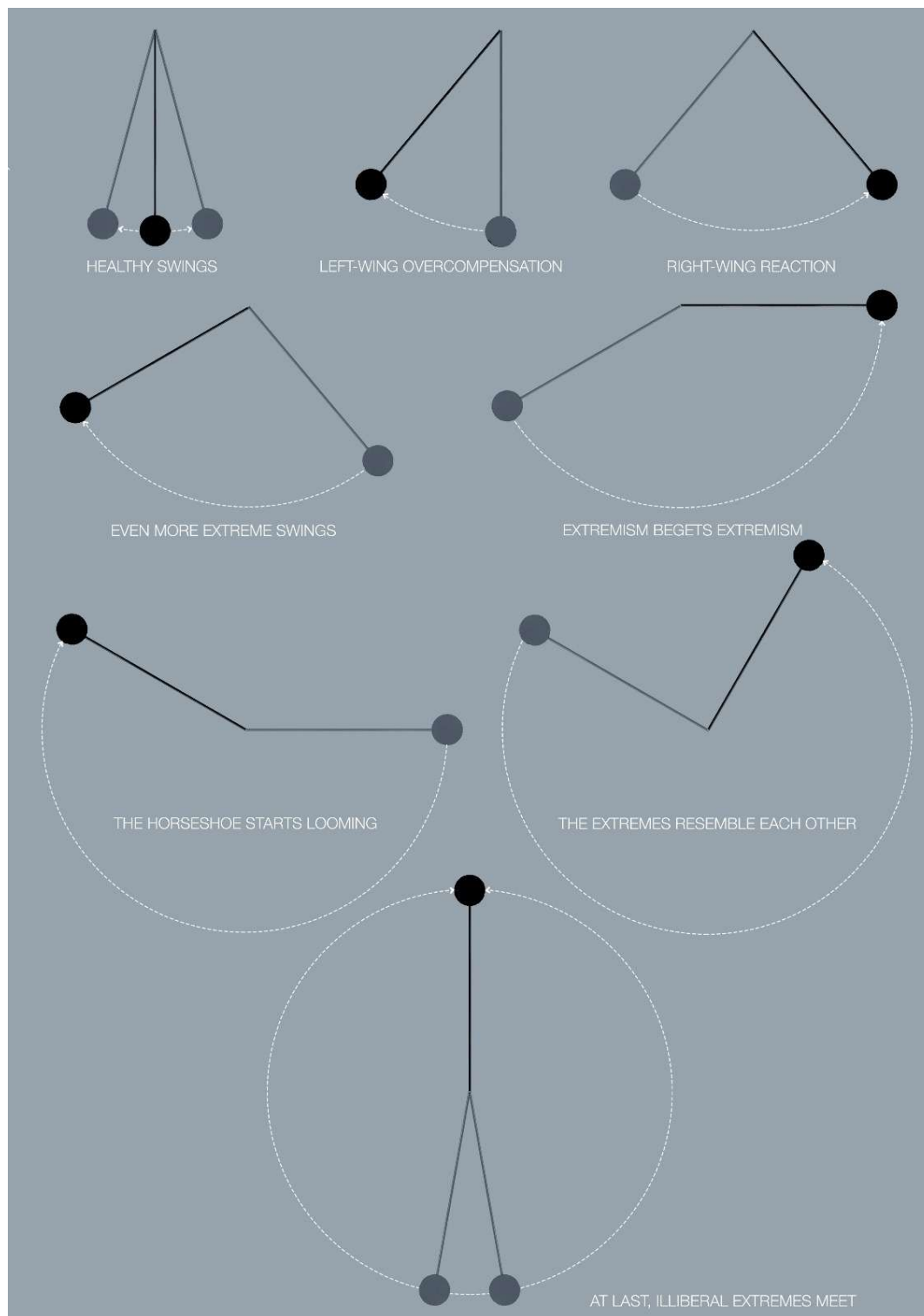
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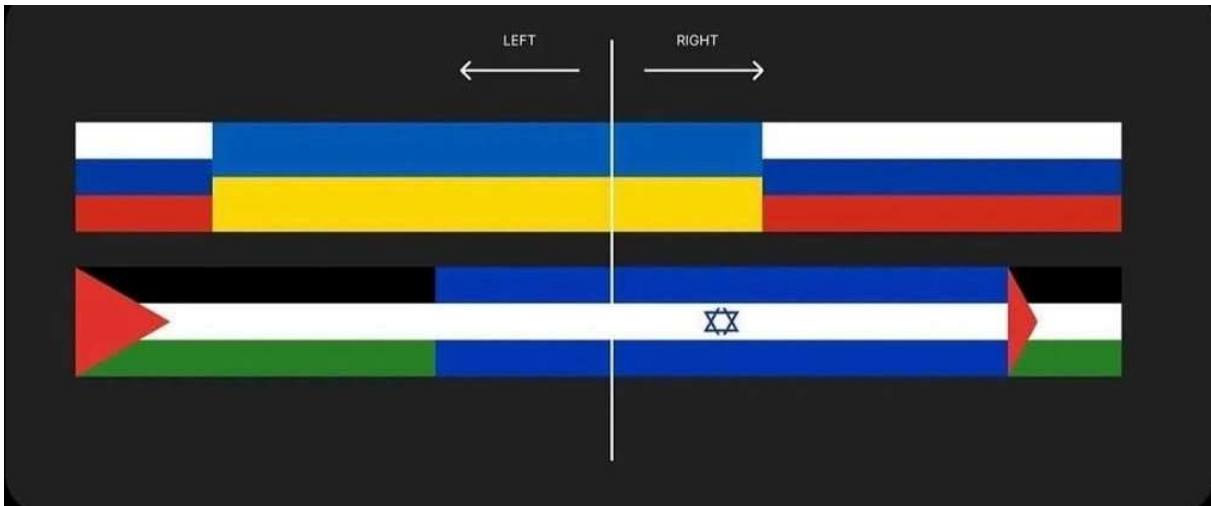
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Annexes



Annex A: The Pendulum

(rendering by Alessandro Sforza & Roberto Sforza Sr.)



Annex B: A New Horseshoe?

Annex C: Liberté

*Liberty, oh Liberty,
What have you done, Liberty,
For those who rose to stand and guard your name?
Behold your friends –
They were too small, too young –
And now the hangman comes to claim them.*

*They loved their children well,
They loved their fathers and mothers,
And not a little wine, and love, and song.
Yet something still was missing –
Something they could not name –
And it was you, fair Liberty of better days.*

*With a rose upon their hat,
Far lovelier than any flag,
One day they walked straight forward, unafraid.
But scarce had they stepped forth
When the sergeants blocked their path,
And seized them at the point of loaded guns.*

*Have you no face, oh Liberty –
Now joyful, now severe?*

*Liberty, Liberty,
What have you done, Liberty,
To those who trusted blindly in your word?*

*They never saw your face,
And now they never will –
Liberty, that famed dream of humankind.
They spoke of none but you,
They lived for none but you,
And it is you they'll pray to in the skies.*

*Their hearts are still the same,
They feel no cold, no fear –
You are, forever, oh Liberty, their sun.
And when they heard their sentence,
They bowed without a tear,
And kissed each other once before the end.*

*They cried, "Long live the king!
Long live the queen, and the law!"
But also "Long live – yes – long live Liberty!"*

— Charles Aznavour