

Bruce A. Ackerman

The Future of Liberal Revolution*

From Warsaw to Moscow, Johannesburg to Beijing, a specter haunts the world, as if risen from the grave — the return of revolutionary, democratic liberalism. This revolutionary reappearance on the world stage has, however, taken liberal thought by surprise. Contemporary liberal theory has taken an anti-revolutionary turn and is quite unprepared to assimilate the meaning of the present historical moment. One of Marxism's most consequential acts of appropriation in 1917, if not earlier, was its seizure of the idea of revolution. Of course, there were lots more non-Marxist revolutions than Marxist ones even at the height of Leninism's ascendancy. But the Marxists were remarkably successful in getting nearly everyone to believe that their kind of revolution was the genuine article, and that others were sham or worse. Only Hannah Arendt raised a powerful protest against this usurpation⁵; and I will be following her in suggesting that we must rethink the very idea of revolution before we can define liberalism's relationship to it.

But there is a second stumbling block as well, which Arendt and many others have had little interest in removing. Twentieth-century liberal thought has been so traumatized by the struggle with Marxism and Nazism that it has taken a markedly anti-revolutionary turn. To reassert the centrality of revolution, I must confront the anti-revolutionary character of this conventional wisdom: Should "mature" Westerners reserve the idea of liberal revolution to lesser breeds just emerging from tyranny? Are the Marxists right in this at least: that the age of liberal revolution has passed in the capitalist West? Or has it just begun?

I am not using the idea of revolution in a metaphorical sense. That would merely confirm the Marxist claim that their revolution is the only real kind. I am proposing instead a four-fold exercise in critical reassessment. The first (section I) is conceptual: how to define revolution? The sec-

* I have decided to reprint unchanged the Lecture I presented to the Wissenschaftskolleg in October 1991. Thanks to the many supportive, but critical, discussions I had with Fellows over the year, the Lecture finally grew into a book-length essay, published in English by Yale University Press (1992) and in German by Siedler Verlag (1993). A comparison of this version with the final book is enough, I think, to suggest the size of my debt to the Wissenschaftskolleg. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (1963).

and (sections II and III) is normative: why should modern liberal thought reappraise its prevailing hostility to revolutionary aspirations? The third (section IV) is historical: the case for revolutionary liberalism cannot be made in the abstract, but must take into account the very different historical experiences different political cultures have had with revolutionary practice. The fourth (section V) engages political science: what are the conditions for successful liberal revolutions — either in the rich countries of Europe and America, or in poorer parts of the world?

I. Definitions: Revolution Reconsidered

A. New Beginnings

Begin with an abstract definition of revolution that can encompass Marxist revolutions in Russia, religious revolutions in Iran, nationalist revolutions in lots of places — as well as liberal revolutions. Only then can we ask what, if anything, is distinctive about the last variety. We might also look for a concept rich and capacious enough to cover a broader family of phenomena, such as scientific revolutions. Where, then to begin?

By remarking upon the distinctive revolutionary orientation to time. First and foremost, a revolutionary proposes to cut time in (at least) two parts: a Before and a Now. Before, there was something deeply wrong with the way people thought and acted. Now, we have a chance to make a "new beginning" by freeing ourselves from these blinders.

How does this "new beginning" occur? Through a collective act by mobilized and self-conscious participants. These men and women recognize the validity of new truths and practice — paradigms, if you'll excuse the expression² — and proceed to reorganize their collective life by giving new weight to their importance. To put the definition in a single line: A revolution is a successful effort to transform the fundamental principles and practices of a nation's political life through an act of collective and self-conscious mobilization of the general population.

Abstract this surely is, but abstraction has two virtues. First, it allows us to recognize an obvious point: not all big changes come through revolutions. Many, perhaps most, come through evolution. Slowly, without anybody thinking much about the ramifications, a lot of little changes add up. Accepting the reality of evolutionary change, however, in no way con-

² The reference is, of course, to Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (2. ed. 1970)

tradicts or diminishes the profound impact of revolutionary mobilizations upon modern life. Second, our definition encourages us to ask how liberal revolutions differ from other kinds?

B. Three Types of Revolution

We have been learning to live with revolution for a very long time. As early as the Council of Nicea, there were people who set themselves, and their own era, apart from all that preceded it because of their self-conscious recognition of Christ's coming. A similarly revolutionary religious consciousness is at work in Iran — and to a lesser extent, Israel — today.

But, of course, most modern revolutions are more secular. I will distinguish two types. The first is nationalistic. Here the new beginning is attempted through the participants' mobilized commitment to a common language, social practice, and other elements of national culture. The second kind is rationalistic. Here the new beginning is attempted by participants who commit themselves to critical philosophical and scientific principles they believe withstand rational scrutiny.

I am, of course, dealing with ideal types. It is possible to mix rationalistic, nationalistic, and religious themes into numberless combinations. I think it fair, nonetheless, to place different historical specimens in separate analytic boxes. If, for example, I wanted to defend the notion of nationalistic revolution, I would be drawing my cautionary tales from Nazi Germany; religious revolution, from Iran. Since I will be defending the continuing importance of rationalist revolutions of the liberal type, my cautionary tales should come from Marxism. For it is the extravagant oppressions of the Leninist Party that have given rationalist revolution a bad name.

So let me say what was wrong with Marxism in general, Leninism in particular. First, its science of revolution was normatively impoverished. Rather than organizing their thought and program around critical principles of justice, Leninists believed the whole question of justice unscientific, hence pointless. Second, they tried to displace critical reflection on norms with a science of history beyond human capacities. Third, and unsurprisingly given its grandiose pretensions, Marxist science turned out to be hideously wrong. Its predictions of post-revolutionary improvement were mocked by the realities. Fourth, Marxism remained unrepentant in its scientific pretensions, condemning all those with false consciousness to harsh death or unspeakable misery. Fifth, the Leninist Party was increasingly dominated by cynical opportunists, without any real commitment to the rationalistic project of social transformation that had earlier motivated the revolutionary enterprise.

The hollowness of this failure is now apparent to all. The only question is what lesson we should learn from it. Should we try to save the ideal of rationalist revolution from the historical debris or cheer its demise?

II. Normative Foundations: Liberal Revolution?

A. Two Kinds of Liberalism

Of course, the answer is easy for those who treat "liberalism" as if it were a synonym for single-minded embrace of laissez-faire capitalism. Certainly this interpretation of "liberalism" does have some support — both in historical practice and philosophical theory. Nineteenth century liberalism, especially in Europe, was often single-minded in its embrace of "free markets". Contemporary thinkers like Hayek and Nozick have been vigorous in urging a renaissance of this nineteenth century tradition.³ Thus, it would be silly to deny the existence of a laissez-faire strand in the modern liberal tradition.

Nonetheless, it is an even more serious error to give undue prominence to this nineteenth-century current. At least since J. S. Mill and T. H. Green, a principal preoccupation of modern liberalism has been to put the market in its place — as one, but only one, of a series of fundamental liberal commitments. This is hardly the place to detail this century-long history — moving from John Dewey through John Rawls to a new generation of liberal theorists who seek to continue this tradition of *activist liberalism*. Broadly speaking, activist liberals place (at least) four kinds of limitations upon the operation of "free markets". The first — expressed in a theory of "market failure" — emphasizes the extent to which real world markets fail to conform to ideal models of perfect competition. This point, when elaborated, justifies a broad range of on-going state interventions — ranging from environmental control through consumer protection through the subsidized provision of old-age and health insurance. The second — expressed in a theory of distributive justice — challenges the right of one generation of market-winners to pass their economic gains on to their children, without concern for the equal opportunity of poorer children. The third — expressed in a theory of the physical and cultural conditions for freedom — emphasizes the crucial importance of education (broadly conceived) in the preparation of each citizen for the exercise of meaningful

³ see Friedrich Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (vol. 1, 1973; vol. 2, 1976; vol. 3, 1979); Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1974).

choice as a free adult. The fourth — expressed in a theory of equal citizenship — emphasizes each citizen's right to participate in politics on relatively equal terms despite the fact that they may have very different resources when it comes to buying cars or vacations. It is only within this larger framework — call it a framework of *undominated equality* — that activist liberals affirm the enduring value of the "free market". Only within such a framework is the "free market" something more than an ideological smoke-screen for the rich and powerful. Only when the conditions of undominated equality are approximated in real life can "free markets" become in practice what they are in theory: crucial mechanisms through which men and women can realize their claims to equal freedom.

Large claims, and controversial ones — which I have tried to defend elsewhere.⁴ My aim here is to build a bridge between these activist ideals and the enduring significance of liberal revolution. To put the matter simply, laissez-faire liberals like Hayek can think of only one possible role for revolution — and that is to serve as a moment of mobilized transition from an autocratic regime to a laissez-faire government that contents itself with protecting private property and freedom of contract. While the activist liberal recognizes this "new beginning" as a great moral triumph over the false claims of autocracy, he does not suppose this achievement represents the "end of history". For a laissez-faire system is transparently compatible with vast concentrations of inherited wealth, on the one side, and an uneducated propertyless class, on the other. Characteristically, such a structure will make a mockery of the ideal of equal political participation; it may also be quite compatible with a broad range of market failures — from cartelization through environmental degradation to the massive exploitation of consumer ignorance. Within the demanding perspective of activist liberalism, the "end of history" is not in sight. Generations of mobilized effort — many more "new beginnings" — will be required before any Western society can even begin to approximate the ideal of undominated equality.

B. Rethinking the Anti-revolutionary Argument

So far I have only cleared a conceptual space for the enduring significance of revolution in the activist tradition of modern liberalism. Much more work — of many different sorts — will be required before liberal revolution

⁴ I make this effort in *Social Justice in the Liberal State* (Yale University Press: 1980) and *Reconstructing American Law* (Harvard University Press: 1984).

might seem a plausible program in one or another concrete society. I begin by confronting the most sweeping objections to my proposal — objections that have achieved wide currency thanks to the embattled position of liberalism throughout much of the twentieth century. Since so much modern thought has been shaped by combat with Nazism and Communism, it is replete with arguments that seem to condemn all revolutions, whatever their inspiration. If, then, I hope to defend the idea of liberal revolution, I must explain why arguments good against twentieth century pathologies become overextended when taken to anti-revolutionary extremes.

1. Brave New World?

Begin, then, by noticing how the fundamental aim of liberal revolution differs from its many competitors. These characteristically seek nothing less than the transformation of human nature: through a mobilized act of collective self-consciousness, the revolutionaries will create a New Soviet Man or some other awful equivalent.

Revolutionary liberals, in contrast, struggle to protect every citizen's right to go to Hell in his own way. They do not yearn for a deep transformation in human nature. Taking people as they are, they work instead for social justice in the distribution of opportunities for individual growth and development. They emphasize the injustice of the existing distribution of resources: The fact that the millionaire's child starts out in life with so much more opportunity than the ghetto kid. They are alive to the way in which unregulated markets generate large-scale environmental disasters which the inhabitants would sacrifice much of their happiness to avoid. If a liberal citizenry is serious about righting such structural imbalances, it has a chance to succeed only if it is willing to undertake a generation-long effort at political mobilization aiming for a "new beginning". A major move toward liberal equality would indeed require fundamental changes in Western society as we know it. But it would abhor all efforts to use state power to coerce human beings into some narrow political mold. Whatever the failings of liberal revolutionaries, they cannot be accused of sharing the totalitarian ambition which has cursed twentieth century efforts.

2. The Resort to Revolutionary Violence

But we have only begun to define the future of liberal revolution. Most obviously, the rich and powerful will not mildly hand over the unfair advantages they propose to pass on to their children. Isn't it more likely that they will fight on behalf of the status quo? Won't the ensuing blood bath lead to a mockery of the modern liberal's utopian effort to reconcile

liberty and equality? Therein lies the problem of violence, a second fundamental source of liberal difficulty with the revolutionary enterprise.

My response is to reject the Leninist equation of revolution with violence. The pathology of violence unquestionably arises from the dynamics of the revolutionary enterprise itself. But once we understand its causes, they need not overwhelm us.

The turn to violence arises because all revolutions begin with a relatively small number of true believers who inevitably encounter resistance as they spread the word to others. This larger audience may be unpersuaded of the need for a new beginning. Rather than accepting the activist liberal's program for more equality, the sceptics look upon it as a cover for less noble motives.

At this point, revolutionary arrogance becomes tempting. So far as the revolutionary vanguard is concerned, the resisters are victims of false consciousness. If the recalcitrant only exercised their critical intelligence in the right way, they would soon find themselves convinced of the need for a new beginning. Only sloth or greed or worse is keeping them back. So why not force them to be free, and later on they'll thank the vanguard for the therapy!

The liberal revolutionary must learn to beware this gambit; violence is hardly a necessary condition for the mobilization of critical self-consciousness. The vanguard itself, after all, achieved this condition not through force of weapons, but through force of argument. Why give up hope that years of committed political activity will fail to lead others — many others — to respond to persuasion?

Violence is simply a shortcut, and one that should be cut short in the name of liberal values themselves. Men and women have the right to be wrong, even when it comes to fundamental questions of social justice. They have a right to demand that we take their objections seriously and that we try to convince them by virtue of the better argument.

The examples of Gandhi and King establish that such a generation-long struggle can yield results that are more profound and sustaining than the quick kills of a Lenin or a Hitler. Perhaps violence may be justified as a last resort, if the power-élite responds to liberal demands for social justice by brutally suppressing the revolutionary movement. But it is far, far better if we respond to revolutionary vanguardism — the arrogance of the counter-élite — by designing a constitutional system that subjects would-be revolutionaries to a series of fair democratic tests.

3. Constitutionalizing Revolution

I've called such a constitution "dualistic", because it involves the establishment of a two-track lawmaking system. The lower lawmaking track is intended to register the successful conclusions of pluralist democratic politics — the mix of interest group pressure, regular electioneering, and practical statesmanship that characterizes the democratic polity most of the time.

The higher lawmaking track, in contrast, is designed for would-be revolutionaries. It employs special procedures for determining whether a mobilized majority of the citizenry give their considered support to the principles that one or another revolutionary movement would pronounce in the people's name. Dualists emphasize that while many small movements feel themselves called to the task of revolutionary renewal, few are chosen by a mobilized majority of a nation's citizens.

As a consequence, the higher lawmaking system imposes a formidable set of rigorous institutional tests before allowing a revolutionary movement to transform fundamental political principles in the people's name. Once the revolutionaries satisfy these rigorous tests, however, the dualist constitution gives their movement's call for a new beginning special status in the legal system. At least until the next successful revolution, the new principles will serve as higher law and trump the outcomes of normal politics.

All this may seem abstract. But I have argued elsewhere that the constitutional structure of the United States is best understood along dualist lines.⁵ In this view, the role of the Supreme Court (and other institutions) is to check the political outcomes of normal democratic politics against the conclusions reached by the People after a successful exercise in higher lawmaking. If the normal outcomes are inconsistent with these earlier achievements, it is the job of the Court to invalidate them — forcing the normal political élites to engage in the demanding exercise of popular mobilization required before an old constitutional principle can be repealed or a new one can be enacted.

My aim here, however, is not to describe the institutional mechanisms of dualist democracy. It is to suggest that, by institutionalizing a special system of higher lawmaking, the liberal revolutionary can provide a systematic alternative to the resort to violence that has marked some (but not all) revolutions of the past.

⁵ See *We the People: Foundations* (Harvard University Press: 1991).

III. Revolution and the Limits of Reason

Our inquiry has begun with two moral questions: Does the revolutionary effort at political transformation require the celebration of violence or the brutal transformation of human nature? If so, then liberals are well rid of their nineteenth century revolutionary pretension. If not, we can proceed one more step down the path of exploration.

A. The Limits of Instrumental Rationality

Suppose, for a moment, that a majority of a liberal citizenry did indeed mobilize themselves to support a "new beginning", in which their country committed itself to the serious pursuit of *genuine* equality of opportunity or *systematic* environmental protection or ... If this commitment were made, do liberal revolutionaries really know enough to devise a set of state interventions that will do more good than harm? Won't the best laid plans be swamped by second-order effects that mock the demands for social justice or environmental integrity that motivate the revolutionary enterprise? Isn't the world much too complex for our puny efforts at social engineering? Shouldn't we recognize the revolutionary demand for social justice as the delusion that Hayek says it is: a phantasm that will only serve to authorize technocrats to impose a rigid tyranny upon the rest of us?⁶

While laissez-faire ideologists may treat this question as rhetorical, the student of revolution should take it seriously in concrete case studies. The results, I suggest, do not support the fashionable neo-conservative scepticism that condemns all efforts at self-conscious political change as futile at best, counterproductive at worst.⁷ For all the ironies of history, revolutionaries have, over the past two centuries, often succeeded in achieving some of their central aims.

Of course, sometimes these revolutionary "successes" in instrumental rationality have yielded great evils, not great goods. Many of the successful revolutions of the twentieth century have been anti-liberal ones. But this is a very different point from the one we are now addressing. While we may despair at the instrumental success of anti-liberal revolutions, it is not because the revolutionaries failed to achieve their goals. To the

⁶ Friedrich Hayek, *supra*, n. 3.

⁷ See Albert O. Hirschman's recent critique, *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy* (1991)

contrary: Revolutions can be powerful instruments for achieving political ends. Why should liberals surrender this implement to their opponents?

B. Liberalism and the Limits of Community

While conservatives have long doubted the liberals' capacity to master the arts of social engineering, a new kind of doubt has gained prominence over the last decade. This too scrutinizes the theory of knowledge underlying liberalism. But it does not focus on the daunting empirical inquiries liberals confront in designing programs that will reliably work in the real world. Instead, this new doubt goes deeper — to the liberal's theory of moral knowledge.

This critique, now often described as "communitarian", challenges the liberal idea of personhood. The liberal's demand for social justice makes no sense, it is said, without positing the existence of abstract and isolated Egos who are scarecrows of the real-world folk we know and love so well. While a few philosophers may be convinced by abstruse Kantian texts to accept these alienated Egos as the key to personal identity, communitarians are confident that most people will be repelled by such a forbiddingly antiseptic construction. Whatever neo-Kantians may say, most people simply do not think of themselves as Abstract Choosers whose dignity consists in the possession of Equal Rights. Instead, ordinary humans gain their identity by sharing in their concrete community's pre-existing commitments and traditions. Given this fact, why should normal people sacrifice themselves when the liberal revolutionary calls upon them to join together to guarantee equal rights to all?

I leave this question to my formidable allies who do indeed see in Kant's philosophy the deepest expression of political liberalism. I can only speak for myself, and I am not now, nor ever have been, a member of the Kantian Party. In this, I am not alone. Most of the liberal voices of the past take pains to reject the Kantian image of an abstract and isolated Ego. They have emphasized instead the profound ways in which human identity is bound up with the body, the senses, and the experience of society. However different Locke, Hume, Mill, and Dewey are from one another, they are alike in their rejection of the Kantian theory of the self. It is a shallow critique that awards Kant an intellectual monopoly that he has never possessed in modern liberal thought.

If pressed for a counter formulation, I would say that the creature haunting modern liberal thought is not the deracinated self, but the flesh-and-blood people we think of as Strangers. These Strangers may literally

live next door, but they are not at all like us. They are doing odd things at odd times, for reasons that deeply disturb us.

How to respond? By loving the strangers as we do ourselves? Only a god could do this: There are too many strangers with too many strangenesses. By persuading these strangers to change their actions and beliefs so that they agree with mine? Of course, I should never give up on this project if this is what my convictions demand. But persuasion and reflection take time: I must listen to the Strangers' arguments if I hope that they will listen to mine. In the meantime, an abyss remains between us, and we may well die before one of us comes to see the other's truth for what it is.

How, then, are we to conduct our ongoing public life? Are we forever fated to repeat the mistake of the Ancient Greeks who, finding that others spoke a different language, despised them as barbarians merely because their talk sounded like bar, bar, bar to Greek ears? Must we endlessly destroy what we cannot understand?

No, there is an alternative: we must try to become politically self-conscious about the very problem posed by our continuing Strangeness. By focusing on it, we may find a political solution. You and I may remain strangers, it is true, but we may find common ground in a politics that protects our equal right to cultivate our distinctive characters without any one Stranger calling the shots.

By working with one another to build a liberal state dedicated to our equal right to be different, we may become something more than strangers, if less than friends. We may become liberal citizens, speaking to one another in a distinctive voice. We will have to understand at least this: that you and I, struggling alike for our own purposes and meanings, have no choice but to use this deep communality — our common struggle for individual meaning — to build a civilized political life together.

C. Self-Restraint

This is the promise of liberal revolution. I do not encounter you in some mythic state of nature, but in the here and now. I call upon you to mobilize your political energies to work with me to shape a world that gives equal respect to our right to be different. By working out a public understanding of the practical implications of this idea, we may inaugurate a "new beginning" in our relations with one another. We may succeed so well that our children, looking back, will say of us: Thanks to them, we have come to give new significance to the proud boast that all men are created equal.

Or we may fail. It is hard work, liberal revolution. Harder, I think, than the revolutionary exercises proposed by religious and nationalistic rivals,

who can offer a deep spiritual satisfaction that the liberal denies herself. These rivals allow their devotees to proclaim, in a variety of accents: We are the Chosen Ones, let the rest of humanity go to Hell.

Liberal revolutionaries, in contrast, cultivate a principled split between their public and private personae. Publicly, they call out to their fellows: Despite our deep and abiding disagreements, may we not all join together to build a political life of mutual respect and civility — by recognizing each citizen's equal right to be different? Privately, however, they may find that their public encounters only confirm their doubts about the morality of the strangers they recognize as fellow-citizens. The tension between private convictions and public tolerance will be difficult to bear. It is so much easier to use state power to suppress difference than to support or endure it.

But managing this spiritual tension is only part of the problem. The practical challenges of liberal statecraft raise special difficulties as well. Other revolutionaries may flirt with totalizing conceptions of the state, using central power to project their religious or national Idea into the furthest recesses of social life. The liberal's relationship to the state is more complex. On the one hand, we must use centralized power creatively to guarantee each of us a fair share of basic resources — health, wealth, education — as each sets out in her own quest for meaning. On the other hand, we embrace the principle of limited government. It is not the job of the state to answer the fundamental questions of life, but to provide equal resources to all citizens and then to facilitate their efforts to find meaningful collaborations.

This double-edged commitment will generate a characteristic search to define a limited set of strategic state interventions in a focused effort to secure initial equality. Progressive taxation and compulsory primary education serve as classic examples. The challenge is to define new forms of intervention that will make genuine equality of opportunity a social reality. With fundamental entitlements secured, however, the liberal legal order seeks to provide citizens with a broad set of facilitative tools, such as freedom of contract and freedom of association, to trade and collaborate on their own terms within a just basic structure.

This two-sided program commits the liberal revolutionary to the rule of law. Citizens should not be obliged to bow before bureaucrats on bended knee. The law guarantees them fundamental rights to an equal starting point in life and a rich set of tools for meaningful collaboration. And it is the job of judges to interpret this law, not appeal to their private notions of moral perfection. Revolutionary justice, for the liberal, is provided by a rule of law that effectively guarantees all citizens their equal right to be different.

IV. From Ideal to History

So far, my effort to rehabilitate liberal revolution has suffered from excessive idealism (in a number of senses). I do not apologize for beginning in this conceptual and moralistic way. If the idea of liberal revolutions is, in principle, a bad one, we should stop at the threshold and not waste any more time on it. I hope I have said enough, though, to suggest that it is not foolish to take the possibility of liberal revolution seriously.

If this is so, our discussion should begin to take a more pragmatic and historical turn. Granted liberal revolution might be a good idea at some time and place, under what conditions should this idea be taken seriously? I begin by describing how the liberal's revolutionary practice differs from his nationalistic and religious rivals. My aim will be to explain why liberals reject the notion of "permanent revolution" and seek to impress a distinctively cyclical shape upon the process of revolutionary transformation. I shall then turn to the historical experience in the West. The revolutionary project has worked itself out in very different ways in different parts of the world — sometimes yielding substantial successes, sometimes tragic failures. These past experiences will profoundly shape the way in which different political cultures define the legitimacy of future revolutionary exercises. Some will greet them as familiar, and potentially legitimate, forms of popular expression, others will greet them with deep anxiety.

A. The Revolutionary Cycle

Before exploring the very different fates of the revolutionary enterprise throughout the world, begin by marking the distinctive way in which liberals expect their revolutions to differ from those attempted by more nationalistic and religious types. For these rivals, the revolutionary moment is a time when the masses are most alive to the national and religious ideals that make life worth living. It is only natural, then, that these revolutionaries want this moment to go on indefinitely. Thus their continuing fascination with notions of "permanent revolution".

For activist liberals, things stand differently. The revolutionary moment is indeed one when citizens are most alive to their problem in political construction: How, given their deep and fundamental differences, are they to elaborate principles of justice that will give all a fair and equal opportunity to pursue their different lives? These moments are precious in the life of the polity, for they allow its members to renew and rede-

fine a common political identity that may otherwise be drowned out in the cacophony of different voices.

But, however important this task may be, it should not displace the different one each of us faces in answering the simple question: What is the meaning of my life? While some liberal activists will find the answer in a life-long dedication to public service, they cannot be surprised when others turn away from politics for deeper satisfactions elsewhere.

At their best, then, liberal revolutions are passing events. During these periods of mass engagement, the citizenry place the problem of political reconstruction at the forefront of their consciousness. At these times, they seek to do justice to the problems thrown up by their historical situation. The challenge for statecraft is to use these precious moments to build new and deeper foundations for liberal politics — before the opportunity for self-conscious transformation is lost in the centrifugal whirl of liberal society.

In the best case, a liberal state will experience a distinctive cycle of revolutionary activity over the generations. At Time One, a mobilized citizenry will focus its attention upon the political problem posed by their deep differences and mobilize themselves for a self-conscious effort to regulate these differences by framing appropriate principles of constitutional justice. If they succeed, most citizens will respond by focusing most of their energies in other directions, leaving the adaptation and implementation of these principles to electorally responsible politicians and legalistically inclined judges.

As these periods of normal politics proceed, the proud constitutional principles of the previous revolutionary period suffer predictable ossification. New forms of difference become central in social life; new historical conditions throw the older revolutionary principles into doubt. Finally, a new generation senses a need to mobilize, to transform old vocabularies, confront new differences, and create a new liberal order that does justice to their self-conscious scrutiny. If this effort at revolutionary renewal succeeds, political mobilization will subside, as the collective revolutionary achievement empowers most people to explore their differences, rather than their commonalities.

B. The Varieties of National Memory

But, to put it mildly, the liberal cannot count on the Invisible Hand to lead the revolutionary impulse down the historical path to the best case. During the past two centuries, the idea of revolution has swept the world, leaving diverse experiences in its wake, that have had a profound impact upon

political memory in different parts of the world. Some political cultures have come to look with fear and loathing upon the revolutionary aspect of their history; others, with hope.

A thoughtful assessment of liberal revolution cannot overlook the range of historical encounters with revolutionary transformation. In parts of the world, the experience of revolution has left behind a bitter residue of cultural suspicion. This was the fate of the first proto-modern historical experience: the English Revolution of the seventeenth century. After a generation of bloody conflict, English Revolutionaries saw their hopes for a new beginning destroyed by the Restoration of 1660. From that moment to the present, there has been a deep suspicion of the constructive possibilities of self-conscious political mobilization in English culture—an almost visceral belief that the noisy excitement of revolutionary politics leads to demagogic irrationality, not moral seriousness and rational engagement on fundamental matters of political principle.

This, too, has been the fate of revolution in Germany: one failure after another, capped by the nationalistic madness of Nazi Germany. After 1848 and 1933, there is little wonder that German liberals, and not only liberals, respond to tremors of mass mobilization with unconcealed anxiety. The very notion that it might lead to rational political reconstruction seems almost a utopian dream. From this perspective, the recent upheaval in East Germany is a matter of the greatest importance. Will it lead to a new confidence in the constructive possibilities of revolution, or deepened despair?

We shall see. My point here is cautionary. Since modern liberal thought is so indebted to England and Germany, it should not be surprising that so much of it deeply abhors revolution. The liberal scepticism of an Oakeshott or a Hayek expresses in part the failures of self-conscious mass mobilization in England and *Mitteleuropa*.

But there are places — many places—where the revolutionary exercises of the past played a more affirmative role in a political culture's self-definition. Begin with the case of "colonial revolutions". While many of these were not deeply rooted in a mobilized and self-conscious citizenry, some were sufficiently grounded in popular consciousness to serve as crucial elements in national political identity. However different India, Mexico, Israel maybe, they are the same in this: an affirmative valuation of a modern episode of revolutionary mobilization places a central, and affirmative, role in political self-definition. Of course, none of these cases fits neatly into the ideal type of "rationalistic liberal revolution" that I have been constructing. Nonetheless, liberal revolutionaries in these cultures (and there are many others) may well make imaginative use of indigenous precedents and symbols as they struggle to push history in the right direction.

A colonial revolution that comes closer to the ideal type is the modern world's first successful one: The one that took place in the English colonies of North America in the late eighteenth century. I have argued elsewhere that the American revolutionaries not only succeeded in their own terms — beating the British, establishing a Constitution, and then sustaining themselves in power for the remainder of their lives. The Founding Generation also established models of legitimate mobilizational/ revolutionary activity that shaped the theory and practice of subsequent generations — both for the good and for the bad. The national narrative dominant in America invariably emphasizes the positive contributions of revolutionary mobilization to national identity: it is Abraham Lincoln as the spokesman for the victorious Republicans of Reconstruction, Franklin Roosevelt for the New Deal Democrats, Martin Luther King for the Civil Rights Movement, who stand for the best in the ongoing revolutionary tradition of activist liberalism. An exploration of these (and other) case studies provides important insights into the promise and limitations of this form of liberal politics.

But it is not necessary to leave the continent of Europe to find relatively favorable self-evaluations of the revolutionary project in "new beginnings". The great case of France, after all, has positive as well as negative meanings — especially within France itself. True, in contrast to the American case, the original French revolutionaries did not succeed in stabilizing a regime proclaiming the success of their efforts at mobilized self-consciousness. Thus a member of the revolutionary generation of 1789, if he lived to a ripe age, would see Louis the XVIII and Talleyrand mock his profoundest hopes; in contrast to the Bourbon Restoration, Americans of 1816 were going to the polls to replace one revolutionary hero (Madison) with another (Monroe) in the Presidency. This difference in historical experience deeply colours the meaning of the French Revolution both in France and Europe more generally. Nonetheless, despite their historical failure to stabilize their regime, the French revolutionaries managed to create positive cultural symbols that still remain central to political identity both within and without the Francophone world — symbols that might be used to help legitimate further exercises in liberal revolution (as well as anti-liberal ones).

VI. The Future of Liberal Revolution?

All this is very superficial, but I will count it a success if it encourages you to reflect upon the complex set of symbolic resonances that the prospect of liberal revolution will generate in one or another part of the world. This

sets the stage for an inquiry even more speculative: the future. Let me make it clear at once that I am not a determinist. Though we are shaped by many social, economic, and biological forces, there is an important sense in which the future depends on us. All that political "science" can do is point to possibilities.

So let me turn, in conclusion, to a brief discussion of the situation that prompted this essay: Europe after the collapse of communism. Obviously, the liberation of Eastern Europe has itself placed the question of liberal revolution back onto the serious political agenda. Not that I mean to minimize the anti-liberal strains evident in a variety of East European nationalisms that have also accompanied the recent revolutionary activity. Indeed, it is this very ambiguity that I mean to emphasize: will the main lines of political evolution move in the direction of a renascent liberalism or a resurgent nationalism?

We can ask the same question about Western Europe, presently in an unrevolutionary phase of its cyclical history. Here the tension between nationalism and liberalism not only expresses itself on the stage of domestic politics, but also in the relationship between each individual country and the "European" institutions — the Economic Community, a variety of transnational courts, and so forth. Speaking broadly, it is at this supernational level that liberal forces have had a comparative advantage. This is no accident: there is something about federalist and quasi-federalist institutions that loves liberalism. The reason for this mutual compatibility between liberalism and federalism is not hard to grasp. If, as I have suggested, a core liberal insight is the need to deal with strangers with mutual respect, this need is never so exigent as in an evolving (con)federation. Each of the "national" units must, if the experiment is to survive (and prosper), somehow participate in the articulation of a political vocabulary that recognizes (and celebrates) the others' right to be different, and yet affirms the need for mutual cooperation in the pursuit of common interest and the protection of fundamental rights.

Not, mind you, that this modern European project in confederation has been principally motivated by a pure desire for respectful communication. The EEC began as part of the struggle against Communism; it has been largely sustained by the promise (and reality) of vast economies of scale upon the successful creation of a European-wide market. Thus far at least, the pressure toward European institutions has not been the product of a mobilized mass movement attempting the self-conscious creation of a "new beginning" in political life on this Continent. It has been the work (largely) of political and economic élites.

Which leads me to my main point: the next liberal revolution on the continent should involve the mobilization of a broad and deep popular move

ment in support of a stronger European Federation. Such a proposal, I am well aware, seems hopelessly visionary right now. But consider:

1. Europe can no longer rely upon the Americans and the Russians to preserve the peace. It will have to do it (largely) on its own. The case of Yugoslavia is only the first that will reveal the painful need for more decisive peacemaking actions on the European level. Surely the memories of the disastrous consequences of nationalism in the twentieth century are fresh enough to motivate a great deal of effort to assure against the repetition of the mistakes of the inter-War period?
2. The emerging environmental crisis cannot be solved within the boundaries of individual European states. Negotiated solutions between "sovereigns" gives a veto to the country with the least developed environmental consciousness and/or the costliest clean-up problems. Surely this will become increasingly unacceptable to many, many people?
3. The EEC's success in opening up national markets will place increasing pressures on each nation's existing welfare state. Welfare states which impose heavier regulatory and fiscal burdens will find themselves at an increasing competitive disadvantage in the economic struggle. The only solution — short of destroying the common market and returning to high tariff walls — will be to grant powers to the Community to establish a "European" welfare state that will prevent this pernicious tendency to undermine existing guarantees. This will require, of course, a radical reorientation of the position of many Socialist parties — which have thus far looked upon the Community with great scepticism. As they begin to appreciate the extent to which community-wide competition endangers national welfare guarantees, will they be wise enough to see that their traditional concerns require them to change their existing policies — and support the creation of a stronger political identity on the transnational level?
4. Without strong federal institutions, individuals continue to risk the sacrifice of their fundamental human rights if their national politics run in authoritarian directions. An increase in federal power on other fronts makes it far more likely that the mandates of the appropriate transnational courts of human rights will serve as effective constraints on the evolution of politics on the national level.

If people reflect on the future, then, there are a number of different, but important, reasons for concern with the status quo: The prospects of war, environmental degradation, disintegration of the national welfare state, the emergence of national tyrannies. Will these rational anxieties be

enough to mobilize deep popular support for a "new beginning" in European political identity? If so, will it embrace a variety of activist liberalism?

I do not know. Stranger things have happened. History is full of surprises. Perhaps we have actually learned something from the horrors of the twentieth century? Perhaps there is such a thing as progress?