**Malhotra, Rajiv, Being Different: An Indian Challenge to Western Universalism**

**Purva Paksha: Reversing the Gaze**

It is through Western categories, and hence the Western 'gaze', that the people who constitute the Judeo-Christian traditions see the world. This gives the Western perspective a de facto status as arbiter of what is considered universally true. When another civilization is the object of such a gaze, it becomes relative and no longer universal. Indeed, its depiction as the alien makes it interesting precisely because it is particular and not universal. Quite apart from the problems already discussed, the universalist pose (which I discuss at greater length in Chapter 6) and the failure to experience itself through different eyes leave westerners themselves blind to their own limitations, failures, idiosyncrasies, peculiarities and exotica. As long as one remains in the privileged position of subject, looking at others and not being gazed at oneself, one can assume that one's positions and assumptions represent the universal norm. The corrective to this problem in my view is the ancient and powerful Indian practice of 'purva paksha'. This is the traditional dharmic approach to rival schools. It is a dialectical approach, taking a thesis by an opponent ('purva pakshin') and then providing its rebuttal ('khandana') so as to establish the protagonist's views ('siddhanta'). The purva paksha tradition required any debater first to argue from the perspective of his opponent in order to test the validity of his understanding of the opposing position, and from there to realize his own shortcomings. Only after perfecting his understanding of opposing views would he be qualified to refute them. Such debates encourage individuals to maintain flexibility of perspective and honesty rather than seek victory egotistically. In this way, the dialectical process ensures a genuine and far-reaching shift in the individual. This requires direct but respectful confrontation with one's opponent in debate. In purva paksha one does not look away, so to speak, from real differences but attempts to clarify them, without anxiety but also without the pretence of sameness. There is more to this practice than meets the eye. It involves not only a firm intent but considerable self-mastery (i.e., a movement beyond ego) combined with an understanding of the magnitude of the issues at stake. Reversing the gaze in purva paksha is not painless, and resistance is to be expected. This method was extensively applied among various schools of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism lineages. There are hundreds of volumes of transcripts of these intense debates, and they comprise an important part of the heritage of the dharmic traditions. Advanced training in various schools of Indian philosophy includes a close study of these debates because it was through the purva paksha of the past that each school sharpened itself and evolved over time. Unfortunately, this tradition was not operative when Islam, Christianity and the European Enlightenment entered India. Rather than engaging in purva paksha with Islam and Christianity, or more recently with Marxism and secularism, the dharmic philosophers tended simply to ignore these foreign entries or else defer to them by adopting the attitude that 'all is one'. This stance, a misreading of the dharmic teachings, became an excuse for abandoning purva paksha, for if there are no differences, there is nothing important at which to gaze. The purva paksha method of engagement can engender sympathy as well as distance, understanding as well as critique. It must, however, retain several qualities not often found today: direct confrontation, clarification of difference, and an assumption of equality. Purva paksha should take place with transparency in as open a forum as possible and in such a way as to benefit each party. Acceptance of the need and potential for change should be a baseline from which to work. Reversing the gaze in this way should not be confused as 'tit for tat' or 'turning the tables'. Nor is it to be confused with the internal critiques of the West – there are a plethora of those but they are performed from within the West's own closed categories and vested interests. The issue here is not the merits and demerits of the West but the kind of gaze being applied to it. The shift in world power – both financial and political, caused by the rise of China, India and pan-Islam – is already threatening the West's supremacy and self-confidence. This trend, which is likely to continue, underscores the need for the kinds of gaze-reversal and widening of perspectives I am proposing. Each side has strengths as well as limitations, and these cannot be addressed without each side subjecting itself to the gaze of the other. The more level, clear and direct the gaze is, the better. Once these differences are understood and refined, we can embark on much more honest, fruitful and productive forms of cultural interaction. Any such programme must, in my view, include:

* a recognition and reduction of difference anxiety on both sides;
* a willingness to articulate and understand major differences both in terms of philosophical/theological debates and actions;
* some negotiation of the thorny issues of history-centrism, exclusivism and aggressive conversion in the West;
* a less passive attitude towards real world issues and religious differences on the part of dharmic practitioners, and a greater direct engagement in discussing the profound differences; and
* an understanding of the need to reform and correct the self-aggrandizing and self-referential institutional networks that produce cultural analysis, including academic institutions, foundations, the media, and publishers.

Michael Sandel, DEWEY'S LIBERALISM AND OURS

…Dewey's lack of presence as a writer, speaker, or personality makes his popular appeal something of a mystery…  What was it then, that won Dewey so broad an audience for half a century?

The answer, Ryan persuasively suggests, is that Dewey's philosophy helped Americans make their peace with the modern world. It did so by easing the seemingly stark alternatives that confronted Americans in the early twentieth century-between science and faith, individualism and community, democracy and expertise. Dewey's philosophy blurred these familiar distinctions. Science, he wrote, was not necessarily opposed to faith, but another way of mak- ing sense of the world as we experience it. Individualism, properly understood, was not the rampant pursuit of self-interest but the unfolding of a person's distinctive capacities in a "common life" that calls them forth. Democracy was not simply a matter of counting up people's preferences, however irrational, but a way of life that educates citizens to be capable of "intelligent action."

Dewey argued, in short, that Americans could embrace the modern world without forsaking some of their most cherished allegiances. Raised in Vermont as a Congregationalist, a member of the first generation of university teachers of philosophy who were not clergymen, Dewey was not aggressively secular. He retained the vocabulary of faith, of moral and religious uplift, and applied it to democracy and education. This position, as Ryan argues, appealed to people who were seeking moral and religious ideals and ways to express them that were compatible with the assumptions of secular society. During a century of wars, vast social and economic changes, and widespread anxiety about them, Dewey offered a reassuring message, even a consoling one.

Dewey's tendency to blur distinctions, the subject of much annoyance among his critics, did not spring simply from a desire to soothe the anxieties of his readers. It reflected the two central tenets of his philosophy; pragmatism and liberalism. Recent debates about Dewey's work have concentrated on these two doctrines and on the relation between them. Since pragmatism and liberalism are often used in ways at odds with Dewey's meaning, it is important to see how he understood them.

In common usage, pragmatism describes a merely expedient approach to things, ungoverned by moral principle. But this is not what Dewey meant by it. For him, pragmatism described a challenge to the way philosophers understood the search for truth. Since the time of the Greeks, philosophers had assumed that the quest for truth was a quest for knowledge of an ultimate reality, or metaphysical order, independent of our perceptions and beliefs. Philosophers disagreed among themselves about whether the meaning of this ultimate reality was something we supply or something we discover; they disagreed as well about the nature of relations between mind and body, subject and object, and between the ideal and the real. But they shared the assumption that the test of truth is the correspondence between our thoughts about the world and the world as it really is. Dewey rejected this assumption. At the heart of his pragmatism was the notion that the truth of a statement or belief depends on its usefulness in making sense of experience and guiding action, not on its correspondence to an ultimate reality that exists outside or beyond our experience. According to Dewey, philosophy should "surrender all pretension to be peculiarly concerned with ultimate reality” and accept the pragmatic notion that "no theory of Reality in general, Uberhaupt, is possible or needed."

If Dewey is right, important consequences follow for philosophers. If philosophy lacks a distinctive subject matter, if the validity of a belief can only be determined by testing it in experience, then conventional distinctions between thought and action, knowing and doing, must be reconsidered. The process of knowing does not consist in grasping something accurately from the outside; it involves taking part in events in a purposive, intelligent way. Philosophers should give up their search for conditions of knowledge in general and attend to the particular problems for thought and action that arise in everyday life. "Philosophy," Dewey writes, "recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men."

The idea of philosophy as unavoidably practical and experimental suggests that the philosopher must respond to the events of his or her time not only as a concerned citizen but also as a philosopher. It therefore suggests a closer connection between philosophy and democracy than most philosophers would accept. As Ryan observes, "Dewey came to think that every aspect of philosophy was an aspect of understanding a modern democratic society." So close a link between philosophy and democracy runs counter to the familiar contrast between philosophy, understood as the pursuit of truth, and democracy, understood as a way of representing opinions and interests. But Dewey viewed philosophy as less detached and democracy as more elevated than the familiar contrast assumes. **More than a system of majority rule, democracy was, for Dewey, a way of life that fosters communication and deliberation among citizens, deliberation that issues in intelligent collective action…**

Dewey's pragmatism gave his liberalism a distinctive, and in some ways unfamiliar, cast. Most versions of liberal political theory rest on moral and metaphysical assumptions at odds with Dewey's pragmatism. John Locke held that legitimate government is limited by natural, inalienable rights; Immanuel Kant argued that no policy, however popular or conducive to utility, may violate principles of justice and right that are not derived from experience but are prior to it; even John Stuart Mill, who based justice and rights on "utility," broadly conceived, relied on a strong distinction between public and private spheres of action.

Dewey rejected all of these versions of liberalism, for they rested on moral or metaphysical foundations that were held to be prior to politics and prior to experience. Unlike these classical liberals and many contemporary ones, Dewey did not base his political theory on the existence of fundamental rights or a social contract. Although he favored civil liberties, he was not primarily concerned with defining the rights that limit majority rule; nor did he try to derive principles of justice that would govern the basic structure of society, or to identify a realm of privacy free from government intrusion.

Central to Dewey's liberalism was the idea that freedom consists in participating in a common life that enables individuals to realize their distinctive capacities. The problem of freedom is not how to balance individual rights against the claims of community, but how, as he put it to establish "an entire social order, possessed of a spiritual authority that would nurture and direct the inner as well as the outer life of individuals." Civil liberties are vital for such a society, not because they enable individuals to pursue their own ends but because they make possible the social communication, the free inquiry and debate, that democratic life requires.

The overriding importance of democracy for Dewey is not that it provides a mechanism for weighing everyone's preferences equally, but that it provides a "form of social organization, extending to all the areas and ways of living," in which the full powers of individuals can be "fed, sustained and directed." For Dewey, the "first object of a renascent liberalism" was not justice or rights but education, the task of "producing the habits of mind and character, the intellectual and moral patterns," that suited citizens to the mutual responsibilities of a shared public life.' Democratic education of this kind, he stressed, was not only a matter of schooling but the essential task of liberal social and political institutions as well. Schools would be small communities that would prepare children to engage in a democratic public life, which would in turn educate citizens to advance the common good.

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Ryan's observation that Dewey's life and thought represent the "high tide of American liberalism" raises the question of Dewey's relevance today. Does the marked difference, in argument and emphasis, be- tween Dewey's liberalism and ours reflect the obsolescence of his lib- eralism or the inadequacy of our own? Ryan himself seems divided about this question. On the one hand, he is wary of Dewey's view that freedom is bound up with membership in a community, a view that reflects Dewey's debt to Hegel. Dewey's "urge to close the gap between what we desire for ourselves and what we want for other people," Ryan writes, "contains more wishful thinking than is de- cent in a philosophical theory.” On the other hand, Ryan describes Dewey's liberalism as a desirable corrective to the preoccupation with rights that characterizes much liberal political theory and prac- tice today. "Rights-obsessed liberalism is only one liberalism,” Ryan writes, "and not the most persuasive.” …

For Dewey, the primary problem with American democracy in his day was not an insufficient emphasis on justice and rights, but the impoverished character of public life. The source of this impoverishment was the discrepancy between the impersonal and organized character of modern economic life and the ways Americans conceived of themselves. Americans of the early twentieth century increasingly thought of themselves as freely choosing individuals, even as the huge scale of economic life dominated by large corporations undermined their capacity to direct their own lives. Paradoxically, Dewey observed, people clung to an individualistic philosophy "at just the time when the individual was counting for less in the direction of social affairs, at a time when mechanical forces and vast impersonal organizations were determining the frame of things."

Central among the mechanical forces were steam, electricity, and railroads. Their effect was to dissolve the local forms of community that had prevailed in American life through much of the nineteenth century without substituting a new form of political community. As Dewey wrote, "The machine age in developing the Great Society has invaded and partially disintegrated the small communities of former times without generating a Great Community."" The erosion of traditional forms of community and authority at the hands of commerce and industry seemed at first a source of individual liberation. But Americans soon discovered that the loss of community had very different effects. Although the new forms of communication and technology brought a new, more extensive interdependence, they did not bring a sense of engagement in common purposes and pursuits. "Vast currents are running which bring men together," Dewey wrote, but these currents did nothing to build a new kind of political community. As Dewey stressed, "No amount of aggregated collective action of itself constitutes a community." In spite of the increasing use of railroads, telegraph wires, and the increasingly complex division of labor, or perhaps because of them, "the Public seems to be lost."  The new national economy had "no political agencies worthy of it," leaving the democratic public atomized, inchoate, and unorganized." According to Dewey, the revival of democracy awaited the recovery of a shared public life, which depended in turn on creating new communitarian institutions, especially schools, that could equip citizens to act effectively within the modern economy. "Till the Great Society is converted into a Great Community, the Public will remain in eclipse."

Like many liberals of his day and since, Dewey assumed that the Great Community would take the form of a national community; American democracy would flourish insofar as it managed to inspire a sense of mutual responsibility and allegiance to the nation as a whole. Since the economy was now national in scale, political institutions had to become national as well, if only to keep up. National markets called forth big government, which required in turn a strong sense of national community to sustain it.

From the Progressive era to the New Deal to the Great Society, American liberalism sought to cultivate a deeper sense of national community and civic engagement, but with only mixed success. Except in extraordinary moments, such as war, the nation proved too vast for anything resembling a Great Community to be formed, too disparate to serve as a forum for the public deliberation Dewey rightly prized. Partly as a result, American liberals in the postwar years gradually turned their attention from the character of public life to the expansion of both rights against the government and entitlements backed by the government. By the 1980s and 1990s, however, the liberalism of rights and entitlements was in retreat, having lost much of its moral energy and political appeal.

As in Dewey's day, there is today a widespread fear that citizens are losing control of the forces that govern their lives, that people are turning away from public responsibilities, and that the politicians and parties lack the moral or civic imagination to respond. Once again there is reason to worry that the "Public," as Dewey conceived it, is in eclipse, while the play of powerful interests and the din of strident voices leave little room for reasoned public discourse. Now as then it could be said, with Dewey, that "the political elements in the constitution of the human being, those having to do with citizenship, are crowded to one side."  Now, however, it is conservatives, rather than liberals, who speak most explicitly of citizenship, community, and the moral prerequisites of a shared public life. Although the conservatives' conception of community is often narrow and ungenerous, liberals often lack the moral resources to mount a convincing reply. What Ryan calls the "rights-obsessed liberalism" familiar in our time insists that government must be neutral on questions of the good life, that it must avoid taking sides on moral and religious controversies. The great service of Ryan's book is to remind us that liberalism was not always reluctant to speak the language of morality, community, and religion.

"Deweyan liberalism," he writes, is different. It is a genuine liberalism, unequivocally committed to progress and the expansion of human tastes, needs, and interests... Nonetheless, it comes complete with a contentious world view and a contentious view of what constitutes a good life; it takes sides on questions of religion, and it is not obsessed with the defense of rights... The individual it celebrates is someone who is thoroughly engaged with his or her work, family, local community and its politics, who has not been coerced, bullied, or dragged into these interests but sees them as fields for a self-expression quite consistent with losing himself or herself in the task at hand.

At a time when the liberalism of rights and entitlements finds itself at low ebb, we might do well to recall the more robust civic liberalism for which Dewey spoke.

**Yascha Mounk Interviews Shadi Hamid on The Tensions Between Liberalism and Democracy**

Mounk: We agree on something important, which is that the core of our political system, liberal democracy, really consists in two elements that don't always go together; that there is a democratic element of collective self-determination and a liberal element of individual rights and freedoms, and those two things can come apart. That, I think, is a premise that we agree on.

You give a clear priority to one of those values. You think that in circumstances where we can’t have both, we should go with democracy over liberalism.

Hamid: When the two are in tension, as they increasingly are, you have to decide what you're going to prioritize…. So, we have to make some kind of decision: either we prioritize “small-l liberalism” over “small-d democracy,” or we do the reverse.

I focus on democratic dilemmas in the Middle East, which I think were quite stark, especially during the Arab Spring. That's where a lot of people got their first taste of the fact that liberalism and democracy don't go together, specifically because religiously-oriented parties, Islamist parties like the Muslim Brotherhood, came to power through free elections in Egypt. But that had been going on for a while in the Middle East—in the 1989 elections in Jordan, where the Muslim Brotherhood did extremely well; the 1991 elections in Algeria, where an Islamist party was on the verge of coming to power, but then the secular military launched a coup to prevent that; in 1995 in Turkey, where the Islamist party came to power (though there was a coup afterwards); in 2006, with Hamas coming to power through elections.

In some ways, the Middle East was at the vanguard of the divergence between liberalism and democracy. And now it's become a more universal phenomenon. We see it in recent elections—Italy, Sweden, Brazil, India, Israel. Citizens really do have to make a choice, because it probably will affect their own country, if it hasn't already.

Mounk: Part of the concern, especially in the Middle East, is that historically, the US government has chosen liberalism over democracy. They would choose these military regimes that have a kind of secular basis, or dictators that promised at least to uphold some form of religious pluralism or limit the power of Islamist movements and parties. They said, “These are going to be more reliable partners to us geopolitically, and so we’re actually quite skeptical of democratic movements.”

Hamid: As it happens, liberal elites in Egypt were vociferous supporters of the coup. And then there was also a massacre after the coup, a month later, in which a thousand Muslim Brotherhood supporters were killed over the course of the day.

Some of it is personal in a sense. I was born and raised in the US, but my parents immigrated from Egypt. My extended family is mostly still in Egypt, and most of them are what you would call Westernized, secular elites. And I saw how they supported the coup, and also the massacre, because they saw the rise of a religious party as a threat to their understanding of what Egypt was. They couldn't get past that existential tenor. They said, “Well, democracy is nice in theory. But if this is what it means, in practice”—i.e. if it means that there could be changes regarding gender, women's rights, minority rights—then they were very concerned. And so they made their choice.

Mounk: Why should we think that these deeply illiberal governments are going to continue to be democratic in a meaningful sense?

Hamid**:** I'm glad you raise that objection. It is one that I hear quite a bit. Liberalism and democracy diverge in certain ways, but they also still overlap in important ways. Part of what I propose is what I call “democratic minimalism.” I tried to lay out in detail what that actually means in practice and in theory. As you alluded to, you need some degree of political liberalism to have free and fair electoral competition. People need to be able to gather in public squares to hold rallies. They need to be able to communicate with voters. They need to be able to criticize the ruling party. They have to be able to found new political parties. Without those things, a democratic result will not, in fact, be representative of the electorate, because the electorate wouldn't have had a chance to express and entertain different options and ideas. So at a very basic level, even with my minimalist conception of democracy, you still need some political liberalism.

However, on cultural, religious, and social liberalism—that is where I think we have to give elected governments more permission to run.

It's ultimately up to the electorate, and if you really don't like a particular outcome, then you do have the option of fighting another day, four or five years later, at the ballot box. That actually encourages you to make your case to the voters. That's what democracy ultimately does: at the end of the day, if you don't like something, you have to persuade voters that you are the better alternative. And I know a lot of people don't like doing that, because it requires talking to deplorables and to the pious, unwashed masses. That's where I think that liberal parties—which are increasingly dominated by upper-class, professional, elite types, who are very well educated, sometimes too well educated—don't necessarily like talking to the masses and persuading them to join their side.

Here's an example of the distinction. If a government restricted protests of over a hundred people, that would be a violation of political liberalism, and it would affect the fairness of democratic competition. But if you think about an elected government that restricted the right to consume alcohol, that restricted abortions, that introduced laws on blasphemy as it relates to insulting prophets and divine texts, or an elected government that made it harder for women to initiate divorce proceedings—those might be objectionable and even morally abhorrent to us. But they don't violate a minimalist conception of democracy.

**Josiah Ober,** from **Demopolis: Democracy Before Liberalism in Theory and Practice**

Prologue:

This book asks what it would mean to be a citizen of Demopolis. What will be gained and what is lost when life in Demopolis is compared to life in a liberal democracy? I answer those questions, first, from the vantage point of a worried liberal, one who hopes to shore up the political foundations of liberal values… But I also try to answer questions about what life in Demopolis would entail from the very different perspective of a religious traditionalist residing in an autocratic state. The traditionalist I have in mind dreams of a life without autocrats but is not ready to embrace contemporary liberal values. Does a theory of democracy have anything to say to him or her?..

This is a book about what collective self-government costs and what it can provide to people willing to pay those costs: a recognizable and potentially attainable sort of human flourishing – the chance to live as an active participant in a reasonably secure and prosperous society in which citizens govern themselves and pursue other projects of value to themselves. I suggest that the easiest way to think about the costs and benefits of democracy without liberalism is to describe a democracy that did or might pertain in a community before liberal value commitments have been added to the constitutional order [the Greek demos]. …

So I hope to offer a degree of reassurance to liberal democrats by showing that some of what they value is delivered by democracy in itself and that nightmarishly illiberal consequences need not necessarily follow upon a crisis of liberalism in a democratic state. But I also hope to have something to say to traditionalists who are tired of being ruled by tyrants but who reject certain tenets of contemporary liberalism – notably, state-level neutrality in respect to religion. As matters now stand, such people may doubt that democracy of any kind is really an option for them. Their doubts are well grounded only if democracy is available uniquely as a package deal of which liberalism is an integral part….

**Epilogue**

My fear is that contemporary liberalism lacks the resources necessary to take on the most pressing political, economic, and environmental problems of our times. If the institutions of liberalism prove unequal to the challenges posed by those and other highly salient issues, then, in a readily imaginable scenario, citizens of developed countries may choose (with whatever level of regret) to jettison relevant features of contemporary liberalism. What happens then?

If liberalism and self-government are so entangled that they must stand or fall together, what happens is that democracy will collapse. The new regime will be some form of autocracy. If, however, the argument offered in the previous chapters goes through, then a basic democratic framework could remain intact after certain features of contemporary liberalism have been lost. If the basic democratic frame stands, and if I am right about the conditions that are required to sustain it, then there is a decent (if hardly ideal) nonliberal alternative to insecurity, immiseration, and tyranny. If, as I have claimed, basic democracy is *not* majoritarian tyranny, and therefore is not a political option available to illiberal populists, then democrats have a ready response when, in a postliberal world, opportunists seek to appropriate the term “democracy” for autocratic purposes. Meanwhile, liberal democrats may have an alternative to counsels of unmitigated despair, a despair that might otherwise seem to be as justified as it is deep.

Sean Illing

There’s a good deal of confusion about the terms “democracy” and “liberalism.” What, in your view, is the difference, and why is it so easy for democracy to flourish alongside illiberalism?

Fareed Zakaria

Perhaps the best way to think about is to look at our founding. The Founding Fathers were very distrustful of democracy. They never called America a democracy; they called it a republic. And in many senses, the Constitution was designed as a check against the dangers of democracy turning illiberal.

The Bill of Rights, after all, is a list of things the government cannot do, regardless of what the majority wants. It is a check on democratic majoritarianism; it is saying that no matter what the majority may think, you cannot abridge the freedom of speech, you cannot abridge the freedom of religion, you cannot abridge the freedom of association. And so the Bill of Rights is a perfect example of the kind of liberal constitutional check that was placed on democracy, and that's always been the way in which liberal democracy has distinguished itself.

In Europe, you had illiberal democracies in the late 19th century in places Austria and, more recently, in places like Germany in the 1930s. It's really only in the post–World War II era that these two traditions have merged completely and mutually support one another.

When you look around the world at various emergent democracies, what you see is that these two strands haven't quite banded together. On the contrary, they're often splitting apart, and in some cases — most notably in Russia under Putin — populist dictators are working cleverly to accelerate this process.

Sean Illing

When we’re talking about liberal democracy, then, we’re really talking about culture, about a constellation of norms and practices, not merely a procedure for choosing leaders. Why are these cultural antecedents so essential to supporting liberal democracy?

Fareed Zakaria

It's something I've realized as I watch these developing countries move toward democracies: They tend to spiral downwards into various sorts of illiberalism. The question is why does this happen? And why does it happen in some states and not others? Some of it's institutional. If you're a deeply divided or sectarian society, there's more danger of spiraling downward.