

New Intolerance: Dialectic of Freedom

Brij Mohan¹

¹Dean Emeritus, School of Social Work, Louisiana State University, USA

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*Corresponding Author

Brij Mohan

E-mail: SWMoha@lsu.edu

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“Spirit is to be observed in the theater of world history where it has its most concrete reality.”

G.W. F. Hegel (1988: 19)

ABSTRACT

Introduction: The current era is marked by significant transformations that could redefine human history and civilization. Drawing on Hegel’s dialectical theory, this study explores the inherent conflicts and contradictions in the quest for freedom and prosperity. The primary focus is on understanding the interplay of educational praxis (EP), sociopolitical ideologies (SPI), and historico-economic struggle (HES) in shaping contemporary societal tensions and the emergence of New Intolerance. **Methods:** This study employs a comprehensive theoretical analysis, supported by qualitative data from historical and contemporary sources. The investigation delves into the dialectical processes within EP, SPI, and HES, identifying counterforces such as ignorance, acquisitive dominance, and ideological control. The study also examines contemporary examples of exclusionary authoritarianism and campus unrest to illustrate the practical implications of these theoretical constructs. **Results:** The analysis reveals that each sphere—EP, SPI, and HES—is subject to significant counterforces that exacerbate societal malaise and conflict. The rise of exclusionary authoritarianism, epitomized by Trumpism, and campus unrest are highlighted as manifestations of these underlying tensions. The study finds that current educational and political practices often fail to address the root causes of these conflicts, leading to increased polarization and instability. **Discussion:** The findings suggest that the current societal framework is ill-equipped to handle the complexities of modern challenges. The failure to integrate critical thinking and adaptive strategies in educational practices, along with the persistence of rigid sociopolitical ideologies, contributes to the perpetuation of conflict and intolerance. The study underscores the need for a fundamental rethinking of progress and development in the digital age, emphasizing the role of educational praxis in fostering a more equitable and just society. **Conclusion:** The study concludes that the dialectical forces at play within EP, SPI, and

²The author is Dean Emeritus, School of Social Work, Louisiana State University, USA (SWMoha@lsu.edu). He is author of twenty-five books and over four hundred papers and articles. *Return of the Leviathan* critiques counter-developmental forces that incubate institutional narcissism in a broken society. Its focus rivets civilizational malaise manifested by the social meltdown and political nihilism. To mitigate the perils of dysfunctional advancements--Brij Mohan proclaims--a post-Enlightenment view of human ingenuity and calls for a new Social Contract to achieve a civil society that ensures universal humanism. AmazonBookExpert.com released the book on July 1, 2024. (ISBN: 979-8-89406-116-0 (Paperback); 979-8-89406-118-4 (Hardback).

HES are critical to understanding the emergence of New Intolerance in contemporary society. Addressing these issues requires a holistic approach that integrates critical thinking, adaptive educational practices, and a redefinition of progress. The findings call for a renewed focus on social hope and the potential for human and societal development beyond the current limitations of triumphalism and authoritarianism.

Keywords: Dialectic of Despair; Ordeal of Democracy; Morality of Protest; and Educational Praxis.

1. INTRODUCTION

We live on the cusp of change that might turn a new page in human history and civilizational epoch. Dialectical change, Hegel theorized, “was immanent in human affairs”: “Every idea, every force, irrepressibly bred its opposite, and the two merged into a ‘unity’ that in turn produced its contradiction” (Heilbroner, 1999: 142).

We strive to be free from subjugation, aggression, exploitation, and poverty. We must however fight and wage wars to retain freedom and prosperity. Each society provides for its people means and resources that are crucial to survival as well as development. This urge ‘to be free’ is fraught with conflict and contradiction. Freedom for what? At what cost? Forces of ‘unfreedom’ are embedded in ‘concrete reality.’ The main premise of this article is to define and delineate the flux of forces that dialectically unveil the inter-and-intra-national tensions and fissures that present New Intolerance in the age of anxiety, extremes, resentment, and Artificial Intelligence (AI). The complexity of foci involves the following units:

- Educational Praxis (EP)
- Sociopolitical Ideologies (SPI)
- Historico-Economic Struggle (HES)

Each of the above spheres is confounded by a counterforce in a dialectical process: EP (ignorance); HES (acquisitive dominance); and SPI (Ideological control). The net outcome is banality of malaise and mayhem in the civilized world.

2. FACETS OF NEW INTOLERANCE

The rise of exclusionary authoritarianism is best exemplified by the hideous specter of Trumpian specter that looms large on the future of democratic freedom. Campus unrest—protests, violence, and suspension of normal educational functions—is the anti-thesis of what temples of learning must be serving in quest of knowledge and truth. The outcome is manufacture of lies and myths, falsification of facts, and perversion of civility in the name of freedom of speech. The exhibit above is dialectic framework that unravels New

Dialectic of the Quest for Freedom: *Ordeal of Knowledge, Democracy, and Justice*



Intolerance as a social phenomenon. Demise of dissent is the casualty.

“The most important thing I teach my students,” Robert Reich writes, “is to seek out people who disagree with you” (2024). I concur². Campus unrest against Israel’s genocidal war in Gaza is reminiscent of the violent Sixties³. Senator Bernie Sanders minces no words: “It [Sic] could become Biden’s Vietnam.”⁴

We are going through very troubled times. The human propensity to forget history is a curse that makes us relive the inglorious past. The failure of imagination—and lack courage—during seismic changes can be apocalyptic.

Fareed Zakaria brings out his *Age of Revolutions* that shaped the modern world from the seventeenth century to the present. The innovations that the Netherlands invented, the French Revolution that ended feudalism and monarchy, and the Industrial Revolution that replaced human hands by steam engines, and electronic machines that created assembly lines, mass production

²I posted an essay ‘Analects of Higher Education’ a few years ago on *Researchgate.net* and *Education.edu*. Robert Reich and I are on the same page. The ‘superstructure’ of Ivory Tower is tumbling down.

³I wholeheartedly support Israel’s right to defend itself against existential threats. I don’t believe criticizing Israel is anti-semitic. Christian Zionists have weaponized ‘antisemitism’ to annihilate Palestinians as a people.

⁴<https://www.kiro7.com/news/politics/bernie-sanders-says/UUCE5GE BCCYIR2DKJT2X2FVHOE/> (May 7, 2024).

and capitalism transformed the old world that had long wallowed in primitive and feudal exploitation. Zakaria contends that Globalization, Technology, Identity, and Geopolitics are four main outcomes for the radicalization of the world we live in today (Zakaria, 2024).

It's worth noting that the "golden age of colonialism" also invented slavery, feuds, and dogmas that brought fraught states and pernicious ideologies that ravaged humankind. The evolution of reason and science did not resolve worldly tensions. The two World Wars redrew the maps and contours of the nation-states that constitute the present 'new world order.'

I see a tsunami of counterrevolutions all over the world. Scourges of reactionary forces have exploded myths of triumphalism at the expense of fledgling democracies and voices of reason. The demise of egalitarian flowers of revolutions could not bloom.

There are at least four major hotspots of violence that can trigger a new world war in which no one wins. A conflict without a winner is a precursor of an inevitable war. From LoC in the divided India to the perpetual savagery between Palestine and Israel and the specter of unwinnable apocalypse around Ukraine and Taiwan are harbingers of a dreaded future. Before AI engulfs humankind, homoseresines might kills themselves. This is not a futuristic Sify scenario, it's a conjectural fact-based reflection.

We are "headed into the Abyss." Brian T. Watson who recounts "the story of our time, and the future we'll live," contends: "The current states of just ten forces--capitalism, technology, the internet, politics, media, education, human nature, the environment, population, and transportation--are driving society in predominantly negative ways" (Watson, 2019).

The darkness of abyss and instability of a polarized world call for a deeper, introspective analysis than Watson and Zakaria have accounted for.

In *Rediscovery of Society and Return of the Leviathan* (2022; 2024), I have made a modest attempt to unveil the paradox of human-social development in a triumphalist-dysfunctional civilization. Amid institutional meltdown and broken social contract, our contemporary culture--and nation states--confront each other with primordial rage, resentment, and anxiety. This proclivity is confounded by the continued curse of pugnacious territoriality. A nihilist-narcissism is embedded in collective Death Wish. Sigmund Freud held civilization "largely responsible for our misery" (1962: 33). The monumental failure of this civilization impedes the faint possibility of *Übermensch* rising.

Übermensch is evolutionary utopia—a higher level of human performance-- free from nihilism and resentment. George Bernard Shaw's comic play *Man and Superman* made it popular. We "should look at Nietzsche's

and *Zarathustra's* promise of the *Übermensch* as a mere possibility—something to aspire for; something to dream about" (Soloman, 2000: 11).

Hope is a logical impossibility in a nihilist and material culture. Richard Rorty's *Social Hope* (1999) is, however, marred by calcified structures of beliefs, duality of Western thought, Platonism and metaphysics. Rorty says:

"[V]ocabulary which centers around these thoughts which traditional distinctions has become an obstacle to our social hope.... Plato and Aristotle were wrong....I want to demote the quest of knowledge form the status of end-in-itself to that of one more means to towards greater human happiness" (1999: xiii).

Rorty's *Social Hope* is thwarted by the forces that encourage, even breed, authoritarianism, and anti-democratic chaos: Trumpian triumph in the United States, communism thriving on state capitalism in China, statism in Russia and cultish-counter-secularism in Modi's India. "The language of American politics increasingly resembles an Orwellian monologue," Christopher Lasch wrote fifty years ago (1969: 29).

The opening words in *The Manifesto* reverberate in contemporary states of extremes and contradictions that Marx and Engels had predicted: "The spectre is haunting in Europe—the Spectre of Communism. All the powers of old Europe have entered a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre: Pope and Tsar, Metternich and Guizot, French radicals, and German police spies."⁵

A counter-revolution is in the works. The superstructure that protected the Ivory Tower is in disarray. We don't ban guns; we are banning books. School shootings go unabated. Police brutalities are commonplace. New inequality is disturbing. Xenophobia, bigotry, and falsification of truth are new hallmarks of modernity's monstrous specters that haunt nation builders, pundits of politics, and presidents of fabled institutions.

We are on the cusp of a change fraught with uncertainty, insecurity, and violence. Today's commoditized education, unprincipled politics, and lack of an unclouded vision of any program of social reconstruction belies any hope for attaining a decent civil society. The loss of "social hope" is a veritable incubator of despair. Life does exist on "the other side of despair"⁶. Truth and subjectivity (Mohan, 2023a) are phenomenologically interactive. Objectivity, however,

⁵Quoted by Robert L. Heilbroner (1999: 136)

⁶Jean-Paul Sartre paraphrased.

becomes a victim of its own validity. A genocide in Gaza is a global tragedy but Biblical Zionists justify mayhem as their birthright. Voices of protest and outrage against this orthodoxy is a moral obligation in the wake of post-Enlightenment (Mohan, 2024).

Real freedom in a “mature civilization” calls for redefinition of progress (Marcuse, 1966). Herbert Marcuse raises a question: “The only pertinent question is whether a state of civilization can be reasonably envisaged in human needs are fulfilled in such a manner to such an extent that surplus-repression can be eliminated” (1966: 151). The construction of human, social, and organizational behavior in the digital age presents a paradox of development. Artificial Intelligence has replaced human ingenuity with dire consequences. It’s only through educational praxis that progress can replace pernicious triumphalism. Post-industrial society and liberal democracies are plagued by their own contradictions and conflicts. Cultural decadence is not confined to developing nations. Rise of global inequality, authoritarianism, violence, and terror mark the evil profligacy of the new bourgeois class (Mohan, 2023b).

Humankind has witnessed the rise and fall of twenty-seven civilizations. On August 12, 2022, at the amphitheater in Chautauqua, in upstate New York, a free-spirited writer was murderously assaulted by a fanatic. In those twenty-seven heinous seconds, an intolerant assassin’s *Knife* (Rushdie, 2024) changed the meaning of ‘freedom’. Nietzsche wrote in *Ecce Homo*⁷.

“The *lie* of the ideal has hitherto been the curse on reality, through which mankind itself has become mendacious and false down to its deepest instincts—to the point of worshiping the *opposite* values to those which alone could guarantee it prosperity, a future, the exalted *right* to the future.”

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⁷Quoted by Luc Ferry (2010: 146)

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Biographical Statement of Author

Brij Mohan, Dean Emeritus and Professor of Social Work, Louisiana State University, USA, is an internationally renowned Scholar with expertise in social philosophy, social welfare, public policy and international social development.



He is the author of 24 books and over 400 articles, papers, and reviews. His most recent books include: *Development, Poverty of Culture and Social Policy* (Palgrave, 2011), *Climate, Economy and Justice* (Palgrave, 2015), *The Future of Social Work* (Sage, 2018) and *Social*

Policy on the Cusp (Nova, 2020). Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith honored him with a Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*) and the National Association of Professional Social Workers in India awarded him the *Life-Time Achievement Award*.

Currently, he is working on two new books, including his memoirs.

Brij Mohan, Professor Emeritus

Dean Emeritus

Louisiana State University

LSU School of Social Work

Baton Rouge, LA 70808. USA

E-mail: brijmohan128@gmail.com

www.Brijmohan.org