

Liberalism & Its Implications for the Middle East and North Africa*

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Summary

This paper sketches the origins and evolution of liberalism in the West, i.e. from its rise in Europe in the second millennium C.E. to its spread across the Atlantic Ocean to the North American continent in the 17th century, culminating in the establishment of the United States government in 1776. Both theoretical and social developments key to the evolution of liberalism as a movement are analyzed as well as the impact such determinations had on the success of this movement in the West. Just as adequate sun and water are necessary to the growth of plant life, so too are ancillary measures needed to determine whether liberalism can be successfully implanted in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region as well. The implications of the adoption of liberalism for Gulf, Arab, Middle Eastern and Northern African societies are then discussed within the context of the present transitional period.

Keywords: Liberalism, Capitalism

Centrifugal forces pulling away from and dissolving the unity of centralized religious and political authority, combined with a new focus and emphasis on the individual in comparison with the community, and buttressed by the sanctification of private property acting as the foundation of the new social and economic capitalistic mode of production,¹ accentuated by the increasing legitimation of usury or interest, underlay a social trend, which by the nineteenth century would galvanize into an intellectual movement called liberalism. Arising out of a European history long associated with mysticism, religious dogma, and tyrannical authority, the ideas that later would be associated with liberalism undergirded the seventeenth century European Age of Enlightenment which sought to replace reason for irrationalism, science for faith, and knowledge for superstition. In contrast to its so-called Dark Ages, Europe—society, politics, and ethics—was to be built anew upon the foundations of truth rooted in the verifiable observations of this world.

While many trace the origins of liberalism to the signing of the Magna Carta on June 15, 1215 at Runnymede in England between King John and his barons²—a written charter which spelled out the rights and liberties of the feudal nobility, emphasizing the independence of the Church of England, even though still subordinate to the Vatican at

¹ “By mode of production,” Marx, “did not refer merely to the state of technique—to what he termed the state of the productive forces—but to the way in which the means of production were owned and to the social relations between men which resulted from their connections with the process of production. Thus Capitalism was not simply a system of production for the market—a system of commodity-production as Marx termed it—but a system under which labour-power had ‘itself become a commodity’ and was bought and sold on the market like any other object of exchange. Its historical prerequisite was the concentration of ownership of the means of production in the hands of a class, consisting of only a minor section of society, and the consequential emergence of a propertyless class for whom the sale of their labour-power was their only source of livelihood. Productive activity was furnished, accordingly, by the latter, not by virtue of legal compulsion, but on the basis of a wage-contract” (Dobb, 1947, p. 7).

² See the 1215 Magna Carta translation at <<http://www.magnacartaplus.org/magnacarta/>>. The reigning pope at the time, Pope Innocent III (1198-1216), who considered England as his feudal fiefdom, even issued a papal bull—after King John I appealed to him for his help—declaring the Magna Carta to be null and void and threatened excommunication to anyone who adhered to it (cf. Collins, Ch. 6, 2003).

that time, while providing for the cessation of hostilities between the monarch and his subjects—it may also be suggested that the pivotal centrifugal idea of splitting apart from centralized authority was first put into motion by the great schism of 1054 C.E.³ when the Western (Roman) and Eastern (Orthodox) branches of the Catholic Church broke apart. Eastern Orthodoxy refused to accept the papal authority of the Roman bishop, instead preferring to retain the dispersed authority of their regional bishops, as well as the tradition of married priests. It was the papal bull⁴ of Pope Leo IX which excommunicated Patriarch Michael Cerularius of Constantinople, a leader of the Orthodox Church, an action which essentially “damned” all Orthodox adherents to hell,⁵ which initiated the split.

Two hundred years later at Runnymede in 1215, the idea of contestation of central authority had a legitimacy backed up by the Magna Carta’s emphasis on the independence of the English Church as well by the barons’ demands for political consultation. Indeed, this splintering of religious and political Christianity would accelerate with the initiation of the Protestant Reformation beginning in the fifteenth century and spurred on by the total separation of the Church of England from Roman Catholicism in 1534. Conflicts over religion spilled over into the political realm as well

³ C.E. stands for “Common Era,” though it should perhaps be read as “Common Error,” as it is the standard method for secularist dating in the West which maintains an adherence to the Gregorian calendar (established by Roman Catholic Pope Gregory XIII in 1582 in an effort to reform the Julian calendar established by Julius Ceasar in 45 B.C.E.) dating system oriented towards the Christian religion though without utilizing the religious abbreviation A.D. or *Anno Domini* which is Latin for “the year of the Lord.” The Gregorian calendar stipulates year 1 A.D. as the presumed year of the birth of Jesus Christ, though modern scholars now place the birth of Jesus (Yeshua of Nazareth) at year 4 B.C.E. (i.e. “Before the Common Era”), as that is the year in which the Jewish King Herod died (See *The Holy Bible*, Matthew, Chapter 2). For Muslims, the year 1054 corresponds with the Islamic year 445 A.H. (Hijri calendar).

⁴ A Papal Bull is a decree issued by the Pope, the leader of the Roman Catholic Church, and acts as an official policy statement by the Church. It is similar to an Islamic Fatwa, albeit, unlike in Islam, only the Pope can issue a Bull.

⁵ Four days later, Byzantine Patriarch Cerularius retaliated by excommunicating Pope Leo IX, and thus all adherents to Roman Catholicism. It was not until 1965 that both Roman and Orthodox Churches lifted their joint excommunications.

in the English Civil War of 1642-1649 with further attacks on monarchical rule culminating in the regicide of Charles I in 1649 at the behest of an independent-minded parliament which led to England's one-time republic being led by Oliver Cromwell until the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. And though the restored monarch Charles II and his brother who succeeded him, James II, attempted to revitalize the concept of "the divine right of kings," the latter was forced to abdicate in what would become known as the Glorious Revolution of 1688, thus culminating the centuries long fight between royalists and parliamentarians, replacing ever since absolutist with constitutional⁶ monarchy in England. Moreover, the Toleration Act of 1689 provided freedom of worship to all dissenting Protestants from the Church of England, laying out the basis for what would later become the principle of the separation of church and state in the United States.

The establishment of the institution of parliament is a consequence of one of these centrifugal tendencies, and its genesis can be found in a provision of the Magna Carta which required that the King may not levy or collect taxes (save for feudal taxes) without the consent of the council of barons. By the second half of the thirteenth century, after two civil wars between barons and the monarch for political power, parliament was firmly rooted by 1295. Initially comprised of representatives of the first and second estates⁷ who debated independently, by the middle of the fourteenth century, parliament was now divided into two houses, an upper house comprised of nobility and clergy, and a lower house consisting of knights and burgesses.

⁶ The British constitution is a compilation of many diverse documents, with no single written document embodying a fundamental constitutional statement as in the United States.

⁷ The French Estates system had been adopted by England at the time, which recognized the First Estate—the clergy, and the Second Estate—the nobility, while only rhetorically recognizing the commoners as comprising a Third Estate, which in time would be dominated by the growing power of the bourgeoisie.

A number of civil wars maintained the authority of Parliament until the fifteenth century War of the Roses (1455-1485) which restored royal supremacy. Royal authority was to grow to its height under the reign of Henry VIII (1491-1547), during which time Henry also severed England from the Church of Rome and established the independence of the Church of England, while uniting England and Wales. In addition, Henry VIII dissolved the Catholic monasteries thus depriving the abbots and priors (the so-called Lords Spiritual) their seats in the Upper House of Parliament, now dominated by the Lords Temporal, i.e. the nobility. Parliament was thus now constituted on a more firmly secular basis.

However, the great conflicts of the seventeenth century culminating in the English Civil War (1642-1649) would finally establish the supremacy of parliament over the power of the monarch. When Charles I attempted to thwart the will of Parliament, its members rose up, supported the insurrection of Cromwell, eventually killed the king, and established a republic, the Commonwealth of England, over which Cromwell and his army of Roundheads ruled for the next ten years until his death in 1658, before the restoration of the monarchy two years later. The era of absolutist monarchical rule was now over, albeit a temporary restoration of royal authority attempted to prolong its role in British history until parliament again rose up in 1688 and finally put Britain on a constitutional monarchical basis. From then on, sovereignty would arise upwards from the people and their parliamentary representatives, while the dispensation of authority from above would become an anachronism to adherents of the modern world. Still, republican governments firmly rooted in democratically elected representation, without a monarchical titular head, would have to await first the American revolution of 1776 and

the French Revolution of 1789, before gradually becoming the norm amongst governments of the modern world.

While the unity of Christendom broke down most dramatically in England, others elsewhere in Europe attempting to free themselves from the fetters of feudal social organization (which included the divine right of kings, the manorial or seigneurial system of production based upon obligatory labor of the peasant which was called the *corvée* in France, the idea of one's "natural superiors," the elevation of the clergy, etc.) were likewise engaged in religious, economic, and political conflicts with one or another element of the feudal social structure, which narrowed the scope of one's economic activities, one's belief structures, one's social activity—in short, one's individualism.

These centrifugal forces tearing at the authority of centralized rule could not have occurred without their antecedents in the questioning of the centrality of the Roman Catholic Church, most noticeably in the Protestant Reformation spurred on by the actions of Martin Luther (1483-1546), a fifteenth century German monk who denounced the Catholic Church's authority over the salvation of souls, instead arguing for a personalized inward faith or grace directly conferred by God on his elect. Openly attacking the sale of indulgences by which the faithful would pay money to the Church in order to ensure forgiveness of sins and a secure place in the afterworld, Luther went on to castigate the clergy for its temporality and fixation with luxury, improper sexual relations, and tyranny over the laity, instead advocating a priesthood of all believers, thus placing religious salvation in the hands of individuals and away from the organized Church.

Following Luther were the teachings of the sixteenth century French theologian John Calvin (1509-1564), particularly his belief in predestination, largely responsible for

the Protestant work ethic, whereby one's economic success was seen as indicating one's belonging to the predetermined elect and, hence, destined for heaven. Indeed, in combination with the idea of one's material success as an indicator of one's election, it was Calvin's legitimation of the practice of usury, or the charging of interest on the usage of one's money, as opposed to the medieval condemnation of usury, which prompted twentieth century sociologist Max Weber to credit Calvinism in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-5) as being one of the strongest forces "to have promoted the development of the spirit of capitalism" (Weber, 1904-5/1958, p. 44). Commenting favorably on Weber's analyses, the celebrated economic historian R.H. Tawney, noting that this new conception of religion which sanctified the pursuit of wealth, not merely as an advantage but rather as a duty, and which emboldened the then feeble bourgeois class and "welded [it] into a disciplined force," argued that:

It is the change of moral standards which converted a natural frailty into an ornament of the spirit, and canonized as the economic virtues habits which in earlier ages had been denounced as vices. The force which produced it was the creed associated with the name of Calvin. Capitalism was the social counterpart of Calvinist theology (Tawney, quoted in Weber, 1904-5/1958, p. 2).

While providing a one-sided idealistic interpretation of the rise of capitalism, Weber, writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, was not unaware of the transformation which had taken place in capitalists' motivations, from the Christian asceticism of the sixteenth century which linked money-making and piety with the virtues of "diligence, thrift, sobriety, and prudence," to the twentieth century worldly desire for plunder and profits reaching what Tawney describes as "an orgy of materialism" (Tawney, quoted in Weber, 1904-5/1958, p. 3). "Victorious capitalism," wrote Weber, resting on "mechanical foundations," no longer needs the support of religious asceticism. The

Enlightenment, as well, he argued at the time of his writing was “fading,” leaving “the idea of duty in one’s calling prowl[ing] about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs.” Moreover, he concluded:

In the field of its [i.e. capitalism’s] highest development, in the United States, the pursuit of wealth, stripped of its religious and ethical meaning, tends to become associated with purely mundane passions, which often actually gives it the character of sport (Weber, 1904-5/1958, pp. 181-2).

Such lamentations on the demise of a social ethic mirror those heaped on capitalism’s predecessor social formation, feudalism,⁸ but what is key here is to sketch out significant driving forces which produced the modern world and liberated it from its feudal chains. In this regard, ideas needed to be connected to the movement of the masses. And both of the above intellectual giants—Luther and Calvin—and their successor reformers in the Protestant Reformation, were aided in this task by the invention in the West of the printing press⁹ or moveable type in the 1450s by the German Johannes Gutenberg. With this invention, the widespread dissemination of ideas would break the royal and clerical monopoly on knowledge, bringing the masses—albeit, still those who were literate—into discussions on religion, politics, and society. An early effort in this regard was Luther’s translation of the Bible into the German language. The hunger for knowledge was fed by an increasing production and distribution of pamphlets—mostly religious initially but followed quickly by politically-oriented

⁸ Feudalism was based upon a series of relationships between free vassals and their overlords and “were based on the tenure of landed holdings (fiefs or in Latin *feoda*). Fiefs were held by vassals in return for military service in the lord’s host; attendance at the lord’s court of jurisdiction; aid and counsel to the lord” (Hilton, in Sweezy, et al., 1976/1980, p. 30). The relations of production in feudal society were “predominantly the relations between ‘servile’ peasants and ruling landowners” (Hilton, in Sweezy, et al., 1976/1980, p. 20). The form of labor in the feudal mode of production is referred to as serfdom, and its essence “was the transference to the use of the lord of the labour of the peasant family which was surplus to that needed for the family’s subsistence and economic reproduction. The surplus labour could be used directly on the lord’s demesne (home farm of the manor), or its product could be transferred in the form of a rent in kind or in money, from the family holding” (Hilton, in Sweezy, et al., 1976/1980, p. 14).

⁹ The printing press was originally invented in China in 1041.

pamphlets—eventually developing into the rise of the novel by the seventeenth century. As well, newsletters arose in the seventeenth century, which eventually evolved into the first French newspaper in 1631, the first Swedish newspaper in 1645, as well as the first English daily newspaper in Britain in the early eighteenth century, the *Daily Courant* (1702). In the British colonies of North America by 1763, there were 23 papers in circulation. Indeed, the famous case of John Peter Zenger in the British colonies of North America who was acquitted by a jury of his peers for seditious libel in New York in 1735 for his attacks on the royal governor reinforced the public's growing watchdog role, via the press, and in defense of individual rights, over those with political authority.

Not only did the broad dissemination of knowledge to the masses help usher in the modern world, but as well the content of knowledge would be profoundly altered by the induction method of inquiry introduced by the English philosopher Francis Bacon (1561-1626). The elements involved in what we today term the scientific method—formulating hypotheses, experimentation, the drawing of conclusions based upon empirical and verifiable results—were first coherently postulated by Bacon. The gradual acceptance of the scientific method as the accepted form of inquiry served to discredit claims of divine knowledge and authority, as adherents of modernity opted instead for the empirical observations of this world by trained practitioners.

Providing the material foundation for this new focus on the individual was the expanding capitalist mode of production which occurred once merchants began to use money to make more money, not only through usury, but primarily by investing money to produce commodities for their exchange value on the open market. Unlike the barter economy which predated it, where one commodity was exchanged for another (c-c), or

the transitional merchant economy where money (in truth, a third commodity) was the medium which made one commodity commensurable with another (c-m-c), with merchants buying cheaply and selling dearly, the new capitalist method of production started with money to produce a commodity in order to obtain money with an increment, or more money, i.e. a profit (m-c-m'). Able to produce more commodities in less time, while utilizing a division of "free" labor to become a more efficient form of production, relative to its predecessors, this new capitalist mode of production quickly outpaced the feudal manorial and guild systems of production and continued to expand. The private initiative in search of profit is the mainspring of this system of production and is key to its expansion. In fact, private initiative in search of profit is largely responsible for the success of the English colonies in the New World, which first ousted their Protestant capitalist Dutch rivals from North America by 1675, then proceeded to dislodge the French from their colonies in North America after the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), undergirded the movement towards American independence, particularly as regards the negative affect of British taxes on commercial activity in the colonies, and eventually forced the relinquishment of all Spanish possessions in North America by 1821.

While the pursuit of profit, i.e. a rational calculation of an initial layout of capital set in motion in order to enhance that amount—a central element of capitalism—has existed in many social formations throughout history, what distinguishes the modern capitalist form of production from its predecessors is its basis in the concept of "free labor." Prior conditions of servitude—e.g. slave or serf labor—could not act as a basis for the production of commodities, that is, items of use-value manufactured by human labor which could be exchanged in the context of a market economy. In this regard,

capitalism is a product of the modern world, a wholly new mode of production, which had its initial beginnings in the Italian city-states of the fourteenth century, then Europe's main ports of trade with the East, and from there spread throughout Europe, meanwhile jumping the Atlantic to the New World with the establishment of the British colonies in the seventeenth century by private stock companies, unlike the state supported royal colonial adventures of Spain, Portugal, and France which predated the British presence in the Americas.

Bringing together laborers to produce items with an exchange value for sale on the market, capitalists make their profits not from buying low and selling high, but rather from the amount of labor extracted in the production process relative to their total outlay for each production cycle, for in a market economy where, *ceteris paribus*,¹⁰ each capitalist must pay the same price for all commodities utilized in the production of the same or similar commodities—and this includes the commodity of labor as well, the only source of profit, or what Marx termed “surplus value”,¹¹ that is the form of the surplus after wages, cost of materials, and depreciation on machinery have been extracted—profit must be extracted from paying the worker less in the form of a wage than what is garnered from the sale of the commodities the worker has produced in each production cycle.

The consequence of the utilization of “free labor” undermined the entire feudal social formation throughout Europe and laid the material basis for the modern liberal constitutional state. Marx had long ago recognized this relationship between the economy and the state when he noted that:

¹⁰ i.e. All things being equal.

¹¹ See Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Ch. 4, p. 251.

It is in each case the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the immediate producers—a relationship whose particular form naturally corresponds always to a certain level of development of the type and manner of labour, and hence to its social productive power—in which we find the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social edifice, and hence also the political form of the relationship of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the specific form of state in each case (Marx, 1894/1981, *Capital*, Vol. III, Ch. 47, p. 927).

As the noted political theorist C.B. MacPherson argued in his *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (1962/1988), the idea of free labor conceptualizes the individual “as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them.” Freedom, as “the” human essence is portrayed in a negative sense as “freedom from dependence on the will of others,” with freedom being a function of possession. From this origin, owing to the necessity of the capitalist mode of production, society begins to be seen as constituted on a contractual basis, consisting of relations of exchange between proprietors. Consequently, MacPherson concludes, political society “became a calculated device for the protection of this property and for the maintenance of an orderly relation of exchange” (MacPherson, 1962/1988, p. 3).

Comprehending these new relations of production, therefore, we can begin to understand their impact on the new theories of state formation rooted in the freedom of the individual. In this regard, beginning first with Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), we get the first of the social contract theorists, who argued that society is formed on a contractual basis, owing to the fact that in the state of nature, i.e. mankind in its original condition, before an agreement on a collective sovereign is attained, where all are “in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man against every man,” security is of paramount concern. In such a state, argues Hobbes, we are all in

“continually feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short” (Hobbes, 1651/1988, Ch. 13, pp. 185-6). In such a state, argued Hobbes, “every man has a Right to everything,” but because there is no security, as a general rule, we should all seek peace and, when others are willing, finally lay down this right to everything and transfer part of our natural liberty to a collective sovereign. This “mutually transferring of Right, is that which men call Contract” (Hobbes, 1651/1988, Ch. 14, pp. 190-92).

Hobbes was followed by John Locke (1632-1704), who in his *Second Treatise of Government* concludes that civil society is formed in order “to avoid, and remedy those inconveniences of the State of Nature.” People do so, he argues, by “setting up a known Authority, to which every one of that Society may Appeal upon any Injury received, or Controversie that may arise, and which every one of the Society ought to obey” (Locke, 1690/1965, Ch. VII, p. 369). Yet Locke goes further than Hobbes by insisting that once the community is made into one body, it should act with the power of one body. And so “it is necessary the Body should move that way whither the greater force carries it, which is the *consent of the majority*; or else it is impossible it should act or continue one Body, *one Community*, which the consent of every individual that united into it, agreed that it should; and so every one is bound by that consent to be concluded by the *majority*” (Locke, 1690/1965, Ch. VIII, pp. 375-6).

In addition, and reflective of the growing capitalist socioeconomic relations impacting upon Locke, he postulates a labor theory of property. Stating first that men have a property in their own person to which no one else has a right, Locke then proceeds to argue that: “The *Labour* of his Body, and the *Work* of his Hands, we may say, are

properly his.” As such, he continues: “Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his *Labour* with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *Property*.” Still, Locke quickly adds a qualification, which is often missed, which we see in the following passage: “For this *Labour* being the unquestionable Property of the Labourer, no Man but he can have a right to what that is once joyned to, *at least where there is enough, and as good left in common for others*” (emphasis mine) (Locke, 1690/1965, Ch. V, p. 329).

In *The Social Contract*, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) completes the social contract theories by stating that whosoever refuses to follow the general will of the social contract “shall be constrained to do so by the entire body politic, which is only another way of saying that his fellows shall force him to be free” (Rousseau, 1762/1954, Ch. VII, p. 25). By giving up his natural liberty, Rousseau argues, man “gains civil liberty along with ownership of all he possesses....Nor is that all: One might add to the gains from the civil state *that of moral freedom*, in the absence of which nothing can make man truly his own master. For just as motivation by sheer appetite is slavery, so obedience to self-imposed law is liberty” (Rousseau, 1762/1954, Ch. VIII, pp. 26-7).

The intellectual currents associated with the European Enlightenment—freedom of conscience, focus on individual rights, an economic system rooted in the rights of private property, commodity production, free labor, legitimation of the charging of interest, the contractual basis of society, wide dissemination of information, and the scientific method—spread across the Atlantic to the so-called New World (i.e. “new”

from the European perspective¹²) in the seventeenth century. Free from the fetters of established tradition and settled populations and cultures (save for the Native Americans, whom the European settlers perceived as savages and not worthy of the designation of civilized and, hence, less than human), these ideas took root and flourished, eventually leading to the independence of the United States in the eighteenth century and congealed in its founding documents, the Declaration of Independence, the first document proclaiming to the world the Lockean idea that governments are instituted to secure the rights of life, liberty, and happiness “deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,” and the US Constitution, which incorporates the ideas of the French theorist Montesquieu regarding the separation of powers between legislative, executive, and judicial authority in the government, as well as the ideas of federalism, checks and balances, and regular fixed elections based upon majority rule, albeit with protection of minority rights. Also, by the eighteenth century, European thinkers associated with the Age of Reason had by then

rejected the pessimistic Calvinist concept of innate human depravity, replacing it with the optimistic notion that a benevolent God had blessed humankind with the supreme gift of reason. Thinkers like John Locke, in his influential *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), argued that God had not predetermined the content of the human mind but had instead given it the capacity to acquire knowledge. All Enlightenment thinkers prized this acquisition of knowledge, for it allowed humankind to improve its condition (Nash, et al., 2006, pp. 140).

Indeed, perhaps the most significant development in the history of liberalism is the concept of the separation of church and state, a concept which is still not accepted by all societies in the world today, and, arguably, not fully in the US as well. The passage in

¹² Archaeologists today place the arrival of the first humans in the Americas, having crossed from Asia over the Bering Strait between present-day Russia and Alaska, at about 35,000 B.C.E. (Nash, et al., 2006, p. 4).

1787 of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, drafted by Thomas Jefferson and pushed through the Virginia Legislature by James Madison, both of whom would later serve as Presidents of the United States, was deemed by Jefferson as one of his greatest achievements. The principle of separation of church and state, a principle which aims at a strictly secular government, was incorporated into the second United States Constitution, as Amendment I (of the first ten amendments to the US Constitution), ratified on December 15, 1791. In what is now referred to as the Establishment Clause, the First Amendment reads: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion,” which is immediately followed by what is now referred to as the Free Exercise Clause which reads: “or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” While the acceptance and application of these principles has been uneven throughout the country’s history, they have prohibited the establishment of any national church or established faith and allowed freedom of conscience for believers of all faiths, as well as for those of none.

In essence, the affect of the liberal movement on modern thinking is profound, redirecting human thinking more towards events in this world and away from a supernatural worldview and its concomitants. Indeed, a cursory examination of some of the major philosophical and religious debates in the world today are demarcated by this pre-modern versus modern worldview. [See chart below.]

Pre-Modern Versus Modern Worldview

	Pre-Modern World View	Modern World View
Condition of Human Life	Belief in fate directed by supernatural and omnipotent being(s), i.e. God(s)	Belief in individual choice, albeit affected by social circumstance and chance
Condition of Life on Earth	Belief that the present form and condition of humanity and all of nature to have existed as is since the creation of the Earth by	Belief in evolution of simple to complex creatures based upon natural selection involving many millions of years, with the

	God(s) several thousand years ago ¹³	understanding of the age of the Earth to be at least four billion years old ¹⁴
Knowledge	Revealed by God(s)	Must be verified by science
Afterlife	Belief in an afterlife; immortal Soul goes to either Heaven or Hell	Individual dies with the body; all humans are mortal
History	Human history is progressing to the final showdown between good and evil, a parousia, followed by the intervention of a deity and final judgment	Belief in historical progress and the ability of humanity to learn from their mistakes and create a better world, though cognizant of the consequences of ignorance and neglect
Human Ethnicity, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Language & Culture	Belief in the superiority of one's race, gender, sexual orientation, language, and culture	Recognition that human distinctions, including those based upon race, gender, sexual orientation, language & culture are social constructions based upon convention

This revolution in thinking which popularized the possibility of human perfection and, hence, the notion of progress, many argue, not only opened up the scientific revolution in America leading it to become a great industrial power, but as well generated movements for the further democratization of the United States, including the abolition of slavery, the enfranchisement of landless whites, blacks, women, and Native Americans—all struggles for equality which are still ongoing.

The history of liberalism in the United States, however, is not without its contradictions and setbacks, e.g. the genocide of Native Americans and usurpation of their lands, the enslavement of Africans into chattel property, the exploitation of indentured servants, and the initial exclusion of poor landless whites, women, blacks, and Native Americans from the franchise and politics. And, as liberalism was to mature in

¹³ Irish-born Anglican bishop James Ussher (1581-1656), perhaps the most famous, though not the only, exponent of an Earth of only a few thousand years of age, asserted, in his *Annals of the Old Testament, deduced from the first origins of the world*, Volumes I (1650) & II (1654), that the Earth was created on the 23rd of October, 4004 BCE.

¹⁴ Based upon radiometric dating of the oldest known minerals, meteorite fragments, and lunar samples, geologists and astronomers' have placed the age of the Earth to be approximately four and a half billion years old, while the age of the universe is postulated to be some 13.7 billion years old.

the Western world with capitalist social relations becoming dominant in Europe and the United States by the late nineteenth century, it would often behave with decidedly illiberal actions, albeit others attribute imperialism, war, genocide, sexism, racism, classism, and homophobia to either temporary anomalies which were corrected or are in the process of being addressed, or rather owe their etiology to other, decidedly nonliberal, causes.

In its genesis, the ideas which galvanized liberalism into a movement of thought and action represented a bold change for human populations, rewriting the nature of human relationships and restructuring the institutions of religion, government, economics, and society. A revolution in production interacted with a revolution in thought with each feeding off of their separate developments to upend the previously existing feudal society and all the determinants upon which that society rested. Were the intellectual leaders of this movement correct in their appraisal of the human condition? Was the prioritizing of scientific reason over religious faith advantageous to humanity? Is the belief in human progress justified; that is, can the human condition be improved through education and critical thinking? Should freedom of conscience take priority over doctrinal unity? Can church and state be separated and, if so, to what extent? These and related questions were answered affirmatively by Western leaders in the eighteenth century, and the acceptance of such principles by larger majorities has expanded in the twentieth-first century. The adoption of liberal ideas and practices by others in the world would later be enhanced and or hindered by differing conditions, histories, and cultures, as well by their interactions with the extant liberal societies in the West.

Implications of the Adoption of Liberalism in the Middle East and North Africa

Understanding the workings of capitalism is difficult enough; yet understanding the philosophy of liberalism and its historical development requires abstraction in thought beyond the limits of most people, especially people unfamiliar with Western culture. The kind reader who has thus labored to this point will necessarily be inquiring as to the relevance of this history of liberalism for the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region and to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states in particular? What can be learned from the European/US experience with liberalism? What are the implications for policy in the region?

Before a discussion of these issues are undertaken, the reader must first understand that, unlike the development of liberalism in the West, a process evolving over 1000 years, the adoption and spread of liberalism in the MENA region is, arguably, only slightly more than two generations old, if we take World Wars I & II and the discovery of oil in the region as our points of departure, that is, when western corporations vied for the first contracts to extract the region's crude oil assets and, in the process, shifted men and material, along with their families, cultures, and alien ways of behavior to the area. Coming into contact with a largely bedouin culture rooted in tribal affiliations, these western oil men and their surrogates had a very different perspective on life than their gracious hosts. Replicating institutions, practices, and business relations necessary for the successful extraction of oil, these agents from the West, most of them unknowingly and unwittingly, advanced the implementation and spread of liberalism in a rapacious manner, perhaps unequaled in the historical annals of the world. Their successors, foreign-owned corporations, foreign direct investors, and now, their domestic

counterparts, who have digested liberalism and are actively part of the regions' business owners and leaders, are fully engaged in the stabilization of liberalizing forces in the region and as well invested in its advancement in adjacent or peripheral countries. Unlike the centuries-long series of intellectual debates and concomitant political and religious conflicts characteristic of its rise in the West, liberalism here in the MENA region is being implemented with an iron hammer, rapidly and unrelentingly, through the unforgiving workings of the market, through the programmatic work of institutions of civil society, through the dominance of the modern media in all of its forms of communication and reinforcement of values and attitudes necessary for liberalism to exist and thrive, and, finally of course, when all else fails, through military force.

For the last one hundred years or more, liberal ideas have crept into the Middle East and North Africa, captured the minds of Turkish, Arabic, Persian, Jewish, Islamic, Christian, and other regional thinkers, been debated, critiqued, implemented, improvised, discarded, treated with respect and contempt, and yet continue to permeate into every Middle Eastern and North African country today. However, the Middle East and North Africa is at a crossroads currently with wars in Palestine and Iraq and tensions between the US and Iran, and with continuing conflict in the Sudan. Adjoining conflicts in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia add to this tension, challenging traditional leaderships, leading to destabilization, and fostering a state of general cognitive dissonance over questions regarding the basic social compact. Whether to expunge Western influence and embrace traditional Islamic modes of society (a combination of political and religious Islam) or adopt liberal forms of governance (primarily a separation of state and mosque or state and religion) is the primary question being debated and

fought over.¹⁵ Alternative models of socioeconomic formation are entirely absent from the debate.

Building on its earlier entrance into the region just prior to WWII,¹⁶ the United States is capitalizing on the absence of its Cold War foe, the Soviet Union, from the area since 1991, and is attempting to implement liberal regimes throughout the Middle East and North Africa, primarily to ensure continued access to the region's oil reserves on favorable terms, although it likewise claims to be fighting terrorism, seeking to eliminate so-called Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), supporting its major ally in the region, Israel, as well as promoting freedom and democracy. What is certain is that capitalistic socioeconomic relations favorable to the US are being embedded in each of the Middle Eastern and North African countries. Normalization of such relations and relationships in the region is the goal sought for by the US. This became particularly true following the election of George W. Bush to the US presidency in the year 2000. Faced with the prospect of entering the period of "peak oil,"¹⁷ and prompted by analyses encouraging

¹⁵ In his letter to President George W. Bush on May 9, 2006, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad rhetorically questions whether one can be a follower of Jesus Christ and yet present liberalism as a civilization model. He then concludes that: "Liberalism and Western style democracy have not been able to help realize the ideals of humanity. Today these two concepts have failed. Those with insight can already hear the sounds of the shattering and fall of the ideology and thoughts of the liberal democratic systems" (Ahmadinejad, May 9, 2006).

¹⁶ Though Gulf Oil was the first American company to gain an oil concession in the Middle East, their concession lapsed in 1928 before they could act on it. Their concession was taken over by the Standard Oil Company of California (SOCAL) in 1931, and, fortuitously, their subsidiary, the Bahrain Oil Company, successfully struck oil in Bahrain on May 31, 1932. British oil firms, Burmah Oil and Anglo-Persian Oil, were the first oil companies in the Middle East following the discovery of oil in western Persia in 1908.

¹⁷ As geologist and first president of the Association for the Study of Peak Oil & Gas (ASPO), Dr. Colin J. Campbell, states: "The term Peak Oil refers the maximum rate of the production of oil in any area under consideration, recognising that it is a finite natural resource, subject to depletion" (Association for the Study of Peak Oil & Gas, website). Dr. Campbell has predicted that world oil production will peak in the year 2007. Given that demand will then outpace production, not only will the depletion of world oil reserves drive prices upwards but, as well, the foreseeable end of the oil age is likely to have grave consequences for humanity. (cf. Campbell, 1998, *The Coming Oil Crisis*).

further US intervention into the oil-rich Middle East,¹⁸ and claiming his actions were justified by the war on terror following the attacks on the US mainland on September 11, 2001, Bush pushed an agenda intent on liberalization in the region under the guise of promoting freedom and democracy. In his November 6, 2003 speech before the National Endowment for Democracy (NED)¹⁹ in Washington, DC, President George W. Bush asserted that America's commitment to democracy in the Middle East "must be a focus of American policy for decades to come." "It should be clear to all that Islam—the faith of one-fifth of humanity—is," asserted President Bush, "consistent with democratic rule." Noting that half of the world's Muslims currently live under democratically constituted governments, Bush went on to assert: "A religion that demands individual moral accountability, and encourages the encounter of the individual with God, is fully compatible with the rights and responsibilities of self-government" (Bush, November 6, 2003). Furthermore, Bush noted:

Yet there's a great challenge today in the Middle East. In the words of a recent report by Arab scholars, the global wave of democracy has—and I quote—"barely reached the Arab states." They continue: "This freedom deficit undermines human development and is one of the most painful manifestations of lagging political development." The freedom deficit they describe has terrible consequences, of [to] the people of the Middle East and for the world. In many Middle Eastern countries, poverty is deep and it is spreading, women lack rights and are denied schooling. Whole societies remain stagnant while the world moves ahead. These are not the failures of a culture or a religion. These are the failures of political and economic doctrines (Bush, November 6, 2003).

¹⁸ These analyses include Zbigniew Brzezinski's *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (1997), The Project for the New American Century's (PNAC): *Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategies, Forces, And Resources For A New Century* (September 2000), and The Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies': *A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm* (June 1996).

¹⁹ For information on the history, background, and practices of the NED, see *Exporting 'Made-in-America' Democracy: The National Endowment for Democracy & U.S. Foreign Policy* (Cavell, 2002).

Building on this policy commitment to the region, the US has already established Free Trade Agreements with Israel, Jordan, and Morocco, with a fourth FTA recently implemented with Bahrain. As well, both Iraq and Libya have been removed from the US list of designated states that sponsor terrorism, with full diplomatic relations established with both countries by the US. In addition, a host of other programs have been implemented by the State Department to foster these US policy goals, including the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), which to date has spent over 300 million US dollars supporting over 350 program efforts by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), businesses and universities to foster education, free-market economics, women's empowerment, and democratic development.

While many of the US policy goals for the region have some popular appeal, e.g. education of and inclusion of women in the political process, free trade agreements, transparency of laws, legal protection of foreign direct investment and copyrights, election of national representatives through competitive, open, and fixed periodical elections, establishment of laws protecting women's and children's rights within the family, etc., at the same time, many of the existing governments and populations are resisting these goals, either claiming they are foreign exports, contrary to established religious doctrine, or because they are seen as undermining the established political regimes in the region, most of which are autocrat and/or undemocratic regimes.

Indeed, critics of US policy often point to this very contradiction of the existence of autocratic regimes in the Middle East and North Africa, propped up over the second half of the twentieth century by the US during the Cold War, which are now being chastised by the Bush Administration for their failure to implement democratic reforms.

The regional governments, themselves, at first reluctant to embrace Bush's reform message have now, however, come to understand that rhetoric is often more important than actual implementation. The runner-up in Egypt's 2005 presidential elections, Ayman Nour, has since paid the price by being sentenced to jail for challenging Hosni Mubarak for that country's leadership, while Mubarak realized that he would suffer only a mild rebuke from the White House press secretary. Meanwhile, Israel's government acts with regular impunity, and either open or tacit US support and/or acquiescence, with regards to the Palestinians, and to its neighbors, as indicated most recently in Lebanon, no matter how undemocratic and excessive its actions appear to the outside world. And though Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar have each granted women the right to vote in recent years, only in Qatar has one woman representative been elected to its Central Municipal Council. Thus, US calls for reform are seen as formalities to be selectively implemented and not meant to challenge the existing autocratic governments, but rather merely to gradually restructure their societies to conform to the realities of modern capitalistic production practices and the expectations of their populations so as to prevent the development of homegrown terrorists, the proliferation of religious fundamentalists, and, of course, to avoid domestic revolutions. Having learned the lessons from Gorbachev's 1987 economic reforms in the Soviet Union, known as *perestroika*, which was a forced restructuring from above, the US is careful not to force liberalizing policies in the region in a doctrinaire, inflexible, or rigid manner—all which can lead to destabilization from below.

Each of the states of the Middle East and North Africa region are, with minor exceptions in degree, capitalistic²⁰ states, ruled over by elites who vary their allegiances between the ruling autocrat and the necessities of their business interests, balancing what would be beneficial to their interests as a class of strong and determined capitalists with fealty demands to the existing regime. The major elements in play in each regime are the dynastic clan, a class of capitalists, a rising middle class, a domestic working class, and, in most of the Gulf states in particular, a large immigrant labor class, comprised largely of Pakistanis, Indians, Philipinos, and others. Enacting democratic reforms will exacerbate tensions between domestic capitalists and domestic autocratic ruling clans, as each vies for power, with the capitalists appealing to the interests of the rising middle classes, while the autocratic clan leaders attempt to assuage the capitalist class while keeping them in check with concessions to the domestic working classes and their religious guides. Support by the US for inexperienced and uncertain liberal leaders as alternatives to the existing autocratic leaders will likely fail, as domestic working class leaders, many currently from fundamentalist religious backgrounds, will be able to utilize autocratic clan and capitalist class rivalries to their advantage, delegitimizing existing regimes in the process, as witnessed by the dramatic Hamas victory in Palestinian parliamentary elections in January 2006.

²⁰ As Bettelheim noted: “In brief, if the state apparatus which owns the means of production (as a result of state control) exists *apart* from the masses, and if, moreover, *this apparatus is not subject to control by a party which is linked to the masses, and which helps the masses to struggle to gain control over the use made of the means of production*, we are then faced with relations constituting a structure which reproduces *the separation of the direct producers from their means of production*. If under these conditions the relationship between labor power and means of production is expressed through a *wage relationship*, this means that the relations of production are *capitalist relations*, and that those who occupy leading posts in the central state apparatus and associated apparatuses are, *collectively, a capitalist—a state—bourgeoisie*” (Bettelheim, in Sweezy & Bettelheim, 1971, p. 59).

An active voice in the political process would be largely welcomed by a majority of the working masses in the region, but full implementation of democracy would likely lead to the ouster of traditional US allies and the expulsion of the US from the region. Hence, gradual implementation of liberal reforms will be assisted by measured educational and cultural programs designed to alleviate the most undemocratic aspects of the existing regimes. Negotiating the implementation of liberal reforms—necessary to conform Middle Eastern and Northern African societies to modern capitalistic practices—will continue to be confronted by fundamentalist challenges. Understanding and balancing the existing elements at work are essential to successfully navigating through this period of transition. Persistent US pressure for gradual liberal reform can be expected to continue for some time to come. The eradication of fundamentalist challenges in the region will depend upon the successful implementation of liberal reforms in each country. Whether material support can satisfy rising societal expectations associated with such reforms will be the key to how peaceful these transitions will occur.

While Iran currently is opting for an alternative path to development, those states embracing liberalism, either earnestly or out of necessity, can learn from Western experience, first and foremost, that development is in their own hands, albeit influenced strongly by external factors, like foreign investment, non-governmental organizations, and governmental organizations, primarily the US government. Moreover, recognition of the value of their own resources and strategic location and the fact that the US and Western countries will pay dearly for access will aid regional leaders in the presentation of and negotiations over their comparative advantages. As well, acquisition of

technology and staying abreast of technological development, in all of its forms, will allow MENA states to modernize while demonstrating a progressive character to their regimes. Mention must be made here that modernization does not necessarily equate with westernization, a point continuously emphasized by President Ahmadinejad in his country's pursuit of nuclear technology. In conjunction with this, one of the key lessons from the Western experience with liberalism has been the gradual opening to the common citizenry of ideas and information, necessary to understanding and functioning in a complex society. This entails firm commitments to education, dissemination of information, freedom of communication, association, deliberation, and political participation. It requires transparency in organization, ability to criticize, and the rule of law. To the extent existing regimes are seen as serving the interests of their populations, stability and legitimacy will be achieved. To the extent existing regimes attend to the material interests of their populations, that is, beyond the basics of water, food, and shelter, to the provision of education, jobs, health care, and social security, stability and legitimacy will be achieved. To the extent existing regimes help disquiet populations by assisting in their understanding of the complexity and necessity of the changes impacting their lives, stability and legitimacy will be achieved.

While liberal reforms are at a nascent stage of development in many of the MENA countries, it is the GCC countries, with their higher stage of economic development along with higher levels of foreign direct investment as well as direct US government interests, which likely take the lead in the expansion of liberal values, attitudes, and practices. Liberal institutions, practices, values, and attitudes are arguably much further along in these countries than in the wider MENA region. If the European

and US experience has demonstrated anything specific, it is that there can be no such thing as “a little” democracy or only partial liberalization. Once the state has made a commitment to a democratic path or to liberal reforms, its inhabitants will continue to struggle to make good on the state’s promises, principles, and values. This can be true not only for the leaders of the state but as well for its citizens, as the state will sometimes find it necessary to assist in the advancement of certain sectors of society. For the immediate continuity of existing regimes, there can be no going back once the citizenry is empowered towards self-improvement and the values of self-government. Reforms may be temporarily stalled; however, they cannot be indefinitely put off. How the existing regimes and populations in the GCC countries fare in the liberalization of their societies will be instructive to their liberal oriented, albeit less-developed, MENA neighbors as well as to those advocating alternative paths towards development.

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