

исследователей неотъемлемым является «объективное» познание мира как такого, непрерывное осмысление жизни. Социальная ответственность людей за революционное развитие духовности, культуры в обществе и в социальном управлении, может стать интегрирующей силой его развития, способной создать рациональную систему жизни, дать человеку основные ценностно-мировоззренческие ориентации в сложном нынешнем мире.

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О вызове либерализма и его теоретических основаниях

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Данная работа пытается проследить связь между основаниями либеральной политической теории, заложенными, в первую очередь, Т. Гоббсом, Дж. Локком и Б. Спинозой, и ее развитыми или современными практиками. Последние демонстрируются в отношении фундаментальных концептов, которые до успеха либеральной теории были встроены в обобщенное представление о хорошей человеческой жизни, такое как вера, семья, любовь, мужество, и проч.

В работе формулируются некоторые ключевые понятия либерализма, такие как прогресс, потребление, толерантность, которые позволяют объяснить причины его успеха, возможности оценки этого успеха как неудовлетворительного, а также сложности, вызванные продолжением разворачивания либеральной логики, для таких встроенных в либеральную теорию понятий как свобода слова, меритократия, всеобщий мир.

Проведенный анализ, доказывающий прямую связь между теоретическими основаниями либеральной теории и успехом либеральных практик, показывает невозможность трансформации последних вне переосмысления первой. Тем самым постулируется неадекватность политического противостояния либерализму без предварительного теоретического решения поставленных либеральной теорией фундаментальных вопросов.

Ключевые слова: либерализм, человек, политическое, государство, хорошая жизнь, легкая жизнь.

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On the Challenge of Liberalism and Its Theoretical Foundations

This work seeks to trace a possible connection between the foundational principles of liberal political theory, established primarily by T. Hobbes, J. Locke, and B. Spinoza, and its developed or contemporary practices. These practices are examined in relation to fundamental concepts that were previously understood as integral to the generalized notion of the good human life, such as faith, family, love, manliness, etc., and that, as a result of its influence, underwent significant – sometimes radical – changes in the outline of the liberal logic.

The piece formulates key liberal concepts like progress, consumption, and tolerance to elucidate the reasons for liberalism's success, the potential negative implications of this success, and the challenges stemming from the continued unfolding of the liberal logic for concepts like freedom of speech, meritocracy, universal peace, etc. embedded in liberal theory.

The analysis, establishing a direct connection between the theoretical foundations of liberal theory and the success of its practices, highlights the impossibility of transforming the latter without reassessing the former. It posits the inadequacy of political opposition to liberalism without a preliminary theoretical resolution of the fundamental issues that liberal theory poses.

Keywords: *liberalism, man, the political, state, good life, easy life.*

The success of liberalism poses a challenge. Today, there is no doubt that liberal political theory is the dominant force shaping many modern practices and “-isms” (from capitalism and consumerism to institutionalism and progressivism). There is also no doubt that liberalism has brought about revolutionary changes in the understanding of the human and the political and of their relations. Despite some serious contradictions inherent in modern liberal practices¹, liberal theory, until recently, has been extremely successful in its practical implementation. However, in the 20th and 21st centuries, dissatisfaction with the achievements or outcomes of liberalism is increasingly evident². This dissatisfaction emerged “due to genetic defects in liberalism itself, not to a failure to realize liberal ideals in practice” [Holmes, 2022: 4; Cf. Holmes, 1996: xv–xvi] and, historically, was accompanied by armed conflicts and political upheavals³. Yet these reactions were, and still are, unsuccessful. Their failure, it seems, does not arise from a lack of comprehensiveness but from a misunderstanding of the challenge posed by liberalism. The practical issues that prompted these reactions are rooted in theory; they are the result of the unfolding logic embedded within liberalism.

Liberalism, of course, is not monolithic. Neither liberal political theory nor liberal ideology is fixed. On the contrary, both are constantly evolving and branching out, creating a multitude of different liberalisms. Thus, any serious attempt to analyze or speak of liberalism as such – rather than focusing on particular branches, historical periods, or theoretical aspects – seems destined to construct a chimera of liberalism. Yet, despite the evolution and changes that liberalism has undergone over the years, the foundations of liberal political theory have remained fixed. Therefore, an attempt to demonstrate the connection between the foundational principles of the theory and its contemporary practices may be considered feasible. Especially since this demonstration is limited to outcomes that could be seen as undesirable or dissatisfactory and aims to present a preliminary exploration of the challenge posed by the connection.

Liberal theory is based on the concept of a universal animal-man – an equal to himself, faceless, selfish, lonely consumer of natural resources. (T. Hobbes, the founder of liberal theory, emphasizes the low status of man in the world, saying that men “emerged from the earth like mushrooms” [Hobbes, 1998: VIII, 1].) This concept

¹ Primary among them is the contradiction between liberalism and democracy [Graham, 1992; Zakaria, 1997].

² Communitarianism today seems to be the main approach to criticism directed against liberalism – both from the right and from the left: “Hostility to liberal individualism and the apotheosis of a presumably redemptive community, taken together, constitute the enduring core of the antiliberal mindset” [Holmes, 2022: 4, cf. 14].

³ The most notable of which could be said to be the rise of the Third Reich and the subsequent outbreak of the Second World War [Strauss, 1999].

– when compared with the previous (Ancient and Christian) views on man – reveals several radical, if not revolutionary, positions.

There is no explanation for human existence. Nothing is outstanding about man; nothing elevates him above the world around him. He is not created by God or gods; he is not endowed by Nature with a particular goal inherent only to him; he does not have anything immortal in him. Therefore, he is not at all interested in the immortal or in an eternity of any kind. His interests always relate only to himself, and therefore they – like himself – are of momentary nature. Everything he desires, he desires only for himself, and because all humans are equal to themselves, i.e., they are the same, they all want the same thing: the satisfaction of their basic needs (the central one of which is the continuation of their lives). In obtaining all kinds of quick and easy pleasures, all men turn out to be enemies of each other. This is because not only do they enter into deadly conflicts with each other to extract the same things from the surrounding world (that is, what seems to them to be the means of achieving their desires), but also because they are prone to choosing the shortest visible way to achieve their goals; there is no point in trying to get the desired thing from nature if the neighbor already has it. This is how humans turn their lives into eternal war. (Summarizing this conclusion, T. Hobbes says that the life of men in this war is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” [Hobbes, 1996: I, 13].)

Men are almost completely incapable of forming long-term collectives because they think exclusively in terms of the length of their lives and, even more often, their desires. No one sees the point in doing something that will bear fruit after his death, as these fruits cannot be reaped. It is almost impossible to explain why one must do something that poses a serious risk of not yielding any fruits and that, at the same time, requires years of work when it would be much easier and more profitable to direct this work to the satisfaction of easily achievable desires. Therefore, men are completely deprived of any features that could separate them from one another: They have no culture, no art or creation, no memory or history, no morality. Even when they form collectives, the latter appear only on an artificial-contractual basis. In other words, men get together only if they intend to get something from others. The contract is terminated (becomes invalid) not only when it is fulfilled but also at the exact moment when it ceases to be perceived as profitable – that is, it ceases to provide the promised supposed good [Spinoza, 2007: XVI, 6-7].

Man’s life is his greatest possession, since it is the basis for the satisfaction of all his egoistic desires. Therefore, the concept of selflessness and, ultimately, self-sacrifice becomes questionable. Moreover, it is precisely to protect their lives – that is, to maintain the opportunity to receive pleasure – that men create, through a contract, a tool to help them achieve peace: the state. This is a structure that will force them to keep the peace by the threat of imminent death at its hands to any who try to violate it. Only the fear of violent death, or, to put it in somewhat more familiar terms, the idea of the “infinite value of human life” as such, could persuade men to live in peace. Thus, for the first time in the history of political theory, the goal of the state, the goal of the political union of men, turns out to be something so low, so basic, and therefore so easily achievable as the preservation of the lives of the members of the state. From now

on, the political has nothing to do with the achievement of the good life – good from both the natural and moral points of view. The genuine human good and the apparent good that each individual pursues due to the accidental circumstances of his existence clearly differ from each other, and any attempt to find the genuine good will be a *de facto* attempt to deny men the obtainment of the apparent good – will be an act of war. This would render impossible the achievement of the state's purpose. Therefore, the state is obliged to leave the question of the good half-open, and men should obtain the opportunity to satisfy their desires peacefully. All genuine and apparent goods, therefore, as long as they do not lead to a violation of peace, should receive the same status: Their pursuit (“the pursuit of happiness”) should be equally recognized by everyone as something good [Hobbes, 1998: XIII, 4].

To put it more clearly, tolerance of the goals of men could be achieved only when no particular goal would demand a higher status than any other. This is not very difficult to acquire if one assumes that men who are initially in the state of sameness and equality essentially want its exact opposite: to be special and stand out from the rest. The existence of the state allows men to achieve differentiation by creating and sustaining conditions necessary for the formation of political and economic inequality [Hobbes, 1998: III, 13]. The former, however, is problematic. The pride that it generates inevitably leads to conflicts. This means that political inequality can become safe only if it loses its individualistic status: If a politician becomes a representative, servant, guarantor. Meanwhile, the latter seems less problematic. If all a man needs to be “happy” is to realize his desire for things by applying, to the surrounding world, the instrument of his first property, i.e., his body, the work of his body, then everyone can be “happy” – that is to say, only if the number of things extracted from the world can be infinite.

The unique stance of liberalism could be formulated through its main promise: To make possible a life devoid of serious threats and devoted to basic gains. With only a slight exaggeration, one would be able to say that the classics thought that the goal of man is to be good, as to be good is to be happy. The Christians believed that the goal of man is to reach Heaven; and one needs to be good to obtain eternal bliss. Finding both the afterlife and man's goodness dubious, the liberals pronounced pleasure as the goal of man's life, which does not define any specific means. Liberalism, therefore, could be quite accurately described as “political hedonism” [Strauss, 1965: 169, 188-189, 251].

The initial feature and main reason for liberalism's success was the fact that it did not appear in a vacuum. It appeared in the illiberal world. Liberalism, therefore, was initially built on illiberal grounds. However, it consistently erodes this foundation, pronouncing this process as progress. Here, progress can be defined as a consistent movement toward a perfectly free or liberal society. However, this concept itself presents a problem. Liberalism, precisely because of its progressivism, cannot replace the removed soil. The original definition of freedom given by liberal theory is the absence of boundaries (“Liberty (to define it) is simply the *absence of obstacles to motion*.” [Hobbes, 1998: IX, 9]). Therefore, even if new, more liberal practices and traditions take the place of old, illiberal ones, they immediately start to experience the

blows of progress. Any culture, or what could be loosely called seriousness in dealing with oneself and others is seen as obstacle constraining freedom – a set boundaries that separate the allowed from the forbidden.

What has already been said is enough to understand the results of the unfolding of the liberal logic – the causes and consequences of liberalism's success. However, it would be better to give a more detailed description of liberal theory's effects on the main aspects of human life.

There is a clear opposition between liberalism and faith. Not so much because of discrepancies between the religious worldview and the rational or scientific worldview. But rather because of polar understanding of problem of mortality. The believer is not preoccupied with the possibility of death. First, because he knows that there are things much more terrible than death. Second, because he is certain that corporeal existence is not comprehensive, that something much more important awaits him beyond death. Thus, the believer is not motivated by the promises (possession of things and pleasure from them) or threats (physical violence and, ultimately, violent death) imbedded into the logic of liberalism. In addition, the believer has a clear universal moral picture of the world. He is not just able to distinguish the bad men from the good, those who deserve punishment from those who deserve rewards, without any intermediaries. He is convinced that he, like the world around him, is not morally neutral.

This opposition, it seems, cannot be resolved, yet it cannot be continued. Thus, liberal theory proposes two main ways to discontinue it. One is the elevation of the state over the churches. (Although T. Hobbes and B. Spinoza [2007: XIX] explicitly advocate for this measure, the former formulates the problem much more clearly: "For if one sovereign commands [a man] to do something under penalty of natural death, and another forbids it under pain of eternal death, it follows... that the commonwealth is radically undermined. For no man can serve two masters." [Hobbes, 1998: VI, 11]) The other is the inculcation of tolerance. (Tolerance, originally, is the concept created to stop religious bloodshed [Forst, 2013].) The latter proved to be very successful in achieving the objectives of liberalism. That is why the concept of tolerance rapidly expands from religion to all spheres of social life. Tolerance, in fact, is the result of accepting the liberal notion of the impossibility of knowing the genuine human good. That is, the rejection of any way of overcoming the moral neutrality of the world that claims to be universal or objective. However, in a world where it is impossible to distinguish bad from good, neither one exists. Therefore, no one can declare himself neither righteous nor sinful; neither good nor bad; neither a true believer nor a false one. Religious tolerance turns out to be possible only at the expense of religiosity.

The professed egoism of man puts into question the previously cherished concepts of love. Friendship, which the ancients revered as the highest of external goods [Aristotle, 2022: 1155a3-6], now could be based only on deriving pleasure from the satisfaction of vanity – the desire to stand out from others [Hobbes, 1998: I, 2]. As long as a man believes himself to be superior to others in any way, he continues to be in their company. That is, from the very beginning, the satisfaction of vanity makes indifferent both the quality of the company and the way of standing out in it. Naturally,

it is easier, i.e., more rational, to stand out by what is easier to obtain and over those who are easier to surpass. That is why “friendship” now does not help a man elevate himself or even become unique. It only creates said sensations. Of course, as in the case of other unnatural or contractual relationships, “friendship” ceases to exist as soon as it ceases to bring the seeming pleasure. This means all “friendly” ties are made superficial from the very beginning so as not to lead to displeasure upon their rupturing. The superficiality of these connections also makes it possible to increase the number of one’s “friends”. The more people included in the company, the easier it is to find those against whom one can stand out. At the same time, it is easier to cut ties with those against whom it is impossible to do so. Finally, the easiest way to stand out is through external features or things, for they do not require hard or time-consuming work. This, on the one hand, compels one to satisfy the desire for things; it pushes one toward consumption. On the other hand, it partly explains why consumption has nothing to do with the use of things (“what is consumed is precisely something other than the ‘useful’” [Baudrillard, 1998: 112]). Here, the purpose of acquiring things is the pleasure derived from possession, not from use. This, therefore, allows a special type of things to spread – things that are initially, by design, useless, i.e., that are created exclusively for consumption.

The concept of family finds a similar fate. As already mentioned, the horizon of hedonism is located exactly along the border of the individual’s life, so it makes no sense for him to participate in the creation of something that, by definition, goes beyond the boundaries of this horizon. Participation in such an enterprise is an act of self-sacrifice that is clearly impossible. And because family relations are also contractual, i.e., voluntary, no one will help elderly parents without expecting to inherit their property. However, what is even more important is that, in knowing that there is no guarantee of gratuitous help or gratuitous efforts from adult children, much sense in having children is lost. (T. Hobbes is forced to explain childbearing through vanity [Hobbes, 1998: IX, 8].)

Upbringing can no longer be the responsibility of the parents. Because the only natural power of man over man is oppression [Hobbes, 1998: VIII, 1], parental authority cannot be natural. Therefore, the relationship between parents and children should also be contractual. However, upbringing is clearly carried out without consent, and most often against the consent of the educated. Therefore, upbringing is not a chosen framework of behavior but, rather, a set of imposed boundaries to which liberalism is precisely in opposition. The fact that a child is an individual already means that it is free to choose the framework of its behavior independently. This, in turn, means that the parents should treat the child as an adult, i.e., enter into the already described pleasure-sharing relationship with it. This leads to general acceptance of a new attitude toward children as detrimental to a pleasurable life.

Romantic love, as something that requires putting the interests of the beloved above one’s own, also becomes problematic. Thus, turning into a contractual exchange of pleasures. Rational behavior here requires the same thing: minimizing costs while maximizing pleasure. So, the place of long-term attachments, burdened with additional obligations, begins to be occupied by short-term relationships without obligations. And

because the contract – temporary by definition – can cease to be executed by one of the parties as soon as this is considered good, everyone is always in search of a better contract. Relationships are broken as soon as they cease to be perceived as pleasurable. No one wants to suffer losses (trying to fix a shaken relationship) instead of reaping profits by signing a new contract as soon as possible.

Not only does the contractual interpretation of love call into question the concept of gender or age roles, but the very notion of gender turns out to be dubious. Men can be equal – in the fullest sense of the word – only if they are the same, that is, if all the essential differences between them are artificial, contractual. In addition to the obvious blurring of differences between adults and children (which allows men as men to enter into relationships of any character, including prohibited⁴), between the insane and the sane, between the crippled and the healthy, between deviant behavior and normal behavior (in this aspect of liberalism, B. Spinoza is the most consistent thinker⁵), this requirement leads to the erasure of differences between men and women. If the distinction between the sexes is artificial, it can be revised. Thus, the logic of liberalism includes “sexual liberation”. Going back a little, one could say that in the situation of sameness, everyone’s vain desire to stand out – to “be themselves”, i.e., to be different from others – is suppressed as the most dangerous (Hobbes says about vanity: “There is nothing more offensive than this, nothing that triggers a stronger impulse to hurt someone” [Hobbes, 1998: I, 5].) not by prohibitions but by the total permission (“Honour is nothing, if everybody has it” [Hobbes, 1998: I, 2]).

It might seem, as some are claiming [Deneen, 2018], that liberal theory literally turns man into the image of the natural man that it has initially drawn. However, from the point of view of liberalism, the original man is naturally aggressive, and if he problematizes violence, he does so only when it is directed against him. Liberalism wants to domesticate this primordial “savagery” of man. Peace is the goal that liberalism prescribes to the state – it requires man to renounce the deliberate use of violence. It must be used only instinctively, as other animals do. However, to make man nonviolent means to deprive him of his original manliness.

The relationship between liberal theory and manliness is also quite complex. Not only because manliness appears to be something altruistic by default. For the manly, being able to overcome the fear of violent death and therefore face death of their own volition will never reap the fruits of their actions. Therefore, liberal theory cannot explain the manifestation of manliness as an act of self-sacrifice. (This problem is so great that T. Hobbes is ready to allow disobedience of the supreme authority if it orders one to commit suicide [Hobbes, 1998: VI, 13]. Meanwhile, J. Locke prohibits suicide altogether [Locke, 1988: IV, 23, XV, 172].) More because manliness renders the basic

⁴ To illustrate the peak of the modern development of liberal theory, it is enough to recall Butler [2004: 152-160], Rubin [2011: 109-136], and their arguments in favor of this kind of relationship between parents and children, adults and minors.

⁵ “Each individual thing has the sovereign right to do everything that it can do... Here we recognize no difference between human beings and other individual things of nature, nor between those human beings who are endowed with reason and others who do not know the true reason, nor between fools or lunatics and the sane. For whatever each thing does by the laws of its nature, that it does with sovereign right, since it is acting as it was determined to by nature and can not do otherwise.” [Spinoza, 2007: XVI].

propositions of liberalism dubious, for it proves that there are men who naturally (as opposed to the artificial, religious way of achieving the same ability) do not experience or consider the fear of violent death to be the ultimate fear. Therefore, they radically differ from the vast majority. In undermining the postulate of an equal attitude toward death, it also undermines the idea that the threat of the latter leads to the achievement of universal consent.

The existence of the manly, therefore, puts in grave danger the existence of the liberal state, for the manly alone are capable of taking its place. This is not only because the state is merely an artificially created individual that imitates manliness – that is, an individual capable of causing violence and unafraid of enduring it at the hands of the violated due to its sheer size [Hobbes, 1998: V, 3] – but also because the power of the state is artificial, while the power of the manly is natural. (As already mentioned, the natural domination of men over men is domination through force [Hobbes, 1998: V, 12; Locke, 1988: XV, 172; Spinoza, 2005: II, 4].) Being natural, it naturally denies the original equality of men.

Liberalism, therefore, seeks ways to neutralize manliness – to create “the gender-neutral society” [Mansfield, 2006, 1] Yet the achievement of this goal bears some intrinsic problems. First, men who are not ready to die for anything at all and are not ready to kill for anything except their own interests – their own survival – can neither be genuine adherents of any political position nor genuine patriots. Second, because, from the position of liberal theory, all states always exist in the state of nature [Hobbes, 1996: I, 13; 1998: X, 17, XIII, 7; Locke, 1988: II, 14; Spinoza, 2005: III, 13], the truly liberal states are unable to protect themselves. There are two ways out of this situation (without mentioning possible temporary solutions): to stop being liberal or to end the state of nature.

The logic of liberalism, which demands universal peace, implies that it can be achieved only through the creation of the universal state: “According to reason there can be no other way for [states] to emerge from the lawless condition, which contains only war, than for them to relinquish, just as do individual human beings, their wild (lawless) freedom, to accustom themselves to public binding laws, and to thereby form a state of peoples (*civitas gentium*), which, continually expanding, would ultimately comprise all of the peoples of the world” [Kant, 2006a: 81; Cf. Kant, 2006b: 63]. Meanwhile, the liberal states must somehow protect themselves, i.e., find men who are ready to, at least, imitate manliness. However, because the motivation to imitate it outside the above-mentioned traits might consist of only the desire for things, this leads to the creation of professional soldiers – soldiers who are ready to kill to obtain things but who are not ready to die precisely because the dead cannot enjoy things. The creation of modern professional armies, therefore, calls into question the readiness of the liberal states for serious warfare. Such armies can successfully fight only if they have overwhelming (if not total) superiority over the enemy. That is why any significant conflict requires anti-liberal measures from the liberal states, i.e., the transition to conscription or, it would be better to say, the citizen-soldier army. In this, too, liberalism is built on an illiberal foundation, and in this, too, it destroys this foundation because it is impossible to compose an army of citizen-soldiers without a

civic culture. However, liberalism does not accept the latter for the already indicated reasons. It denies men the formation of political connections, replacing them with economic ones.

It is often said [McCloskey, 2023] that liberalism's main achievement consists of the increase in the economic prosperity of liberal countries. The promise of liberalism regarding the pleasure of having things runs into two basic problems stemming from the original definition of property. Property is the result of the labor of the body [Locke, 1988: V, 27]. Therefore, there is a direct connection between labor and wealth [Locke, 1988: V, 40, 48]. The labor of the body is the labor of external things – natural resources, which are transformed into things through it. However, this means the satisfaction of the desire to have things directly depends on the amount of natural resources available for the labor. Initially, liberalism is extremely optimistic; it does not assume that natural resources can be exhausted [Locke, 1988: V, 32-33, 36]. However, this optimism is unfounded. In the situation of limited resources, the endless accumulation of things becomes impossible and the promise of universal economic prosperity – of universal “happiness” – becomes unattainable. The second problem is connected with this conclusion. As soon as the limited character of natural resources is taken into account, the link between wealth and labor disappears, and, given the fact that initially labor is perceived as a necessity, i.e., as unfreedom, the liberal promise of liberation turns out to be the promise of liberation from labor accompanied by the increase in wealth. This, on the one hand, dissolves such a feature of liberalism as meritocracy⁶. On the other hand, this necessarily divides the globe into two parts: the illiberal world of labor and the liberal world of consumption.

In this sense, once again, the liberal world is based on the illiberal one – that is, the former exists only because of the existence of the latter. Such a collaboration, as is well-known to history, while remaining vertical, could have existed for millennia. However, in the case of liberalism, this is hardly possible due to the concept of progress.

Consumption is not a new phenomenon. If consumption is understood as the practice of obtaining things that are seen either as useless by design or as useful but not used for their intended purpose, or even harmful, then consumption can be seen as having originated a very long time ago. However, before the era of liberalism, this liberal practice was vertical, as it belonged (like the liberal mindset, in general) [Rosenblatt, 2018; 2022] to a more or less limited group of people: the aristocrats [Stearns, 2006]. Consumption has existed for so long without being a major threat precisely because the aristocrats were not progressivists. They did not want to turn everyone into themselves. On the contrary, they were ready to deal with uprisings, revolutions, and wars to prevent those who did not belong to them from gaining rights, i.e., privileges. However, the progressivism inherent to liberalism demanded that aristocratic abundance be extended to everyone – it demanded that the vertical practice of consumption be made horizontal.

⁶ Strictly speaking, meritocracy does not belong to liberalism; it is an ancient concept [Wooldridge, 2021]. Moreover, meritocracy that belongs to the illiberal world is attacked in the process of the unfolding of the liberal logic. Today, the very possibility of meritocracy in the liberal countries is put into question [Markovits, 2019; Sandel 2020].

In other words, progress requires different diverse parts of the world to converge into one point – to become identical, identically liberal, thereby losing their differences and peculiarities. Everyone must achieve an abundance of things. However, the gap between consumption and labor combined with the limitation of resources means that, on the one hand, for one part of the world, the abundance of things has been achieved without labor and that, on the other hand, for the other part of the world, despite labor, it will never be achieved. The moment the world of production turns into the world of consumption, the world of consumption will cease to exist. Therefore, the dream of achieving the abundance of things is dead for both worlds: for the liberal world, because it has been fulfilled, and for the illiberal world, because it could never be fulfilled.

The key promise of liberalism is to exchange the possibility of the good life for the realization of the easy life. Liberalism, from its very beginning, seems to be something humanistic, explicitly raising the banner of protection of basic human needs. However, the implementation of such protection was possible only to the detriment, only against something higher. The security and freedom that liberalism promises, it would seem, should have allowed everyone to engage in “the pursuit of happiness” – one’s own happiness. However, anyone who found (or thought they had found) what could be grandiloquently called the meaning of life immediately becomes a danger for this way of life. The meaning of life is something more than life itself – something more than the “comfortable self-preservation” [Strauss, 1952: 490; Cf. Locke, 1988: VIII, 95] and he who has found it can neither fear death nor be tolerant. Whoever discovered the good life made life serious once again – re-established the boundaries beyond which life loses its meaning and turns into non-life. Those who have chosen hedonism cannot value something outside life, for life is the basis for all and any pleasure. Therefore, they seek to destroy every and all boundaries, except those that protect their life and its basic needs. The life devoid of boundaries, the life devoid of seriousness, therefore, turns out to be the easy life – some kind of entertainment or a fun pastime. This conclusion, coupled with progressivism, requires declaring everything that claims to be serious as dangerous.

One would think that the acceptance of tolerance would lead to apathy and nihilism, to the complete permission of any and all positions. However, this is not the case. In practice, as is clear in the example of religion, tolerance requires rejecting the intolerant. This is true first because of fear, i.e., out of the feeling that those who refuse to accept tolerance, not by word but by deed, deny the liberal way of life and, thus, threaten its existence, and second because liberalism deprives men of self-contempt, as it requires them to not demand anything from themselves. The doctrine of universal equality asserts that the biological relationship to the genus *homo* is enough to be a full-fledged human being. Therefore, all men are already “good”. By the fact of birth, all already have positive rights and legitimate claims. The pretention that the liberals have discovered the only true way of life should therefore elevate them above their opponents, should guarantee their superiority and, therefore, victory. As a result, one observes the phenomenon of moralizing immoralism that the more fiercely tries to occupy a moral high ground, the more immoral it becomes. It is joined by the desire to

be special (more special than others) and more “good” – and, therefore, more progressive, more actively dismantling the existing boundaries. Thus, the promise of liberation from restrictions that oppress human dignity becomes the promise of liberation from suffering in general. (Liberalism also stands here on the basis that its predecessor provided.) This, among other things, requires an ever-expanding interpretation of violence. Everything illiberal must be stopped precisely because, by the very fact of its existence, it causes pain. Therefore, it is a manifestation of unfreedom – another instance of oppression, destined to fall. It is not necessary to explain that one of the first things that this logic dooms is the universal right to freedom of speech – one of the main initial achievements of liberalism [McGowan 2019]⁷.

The described relationship between the foundations of liberal theory and contemporary liberal practices, on the one hand, and the preceding concepts, on the other, explains not only the reaction to the unfolding of the liberal logic but also the practical-political character of this reaction. However, the demonstrated connection between liberal theory and liberal practices, at the same time, indicates the impossibility of overcoming the consequences of the latter without overcoming the former. It also implies that successful opposition to liberalism from the standpoint of the already-defeated-by-it positions is impossible. The radical transformations of human life carried out by liberalism, by themselves, demonstrate the potential of political theory, including the ability to resolve practical problems.

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⁷ Not the universal right or, rather, a privilege to speak freely, is also quite ancient and has no direct connection to liberalism [Carter, 2004].

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Интернет-мемы о будущем: пролегомены к методологии исследования

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В статье разрабатываются приемы и методы анализа интернет-мемов как источников для изучения образов будущего современной культуры. Стратегия интерпретации мемов базируется на существующих подходах изучения визуальной метафоры и креолизованного текста и включает в себя перенос информации из области-источника на область-цель с установлением отношений фрейма и топоса интернет-мема. С помощью схем автор демонстрирует подходы прочтения визуальной метафоры, креолизованного текста и различных типов интернет-мемов. В заключительной части статьи проводится анализ мемов о будущем России.

Ключевые слова: *образ будущего, социальные ожидания, интернет-мем, креолизованный текст, когнитивная метафора, визуальная метафора, методы исследования визуальных источников, образ будущего России.*

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Internet Memes About the Future: Prolegomena to Research Methodology

The article develops techniques and methods for analyzing Internet memes as sources for studying images of the future of modern culture. The strategy for interpreting memes is based on existing approaches to studying visual metaphor and creolized text and includes the transfer of information from the source area to the target area with the establishment of relations between the frame and topos of the Internet meme. Using diagrams, the author demonstrates approaches to reading visual