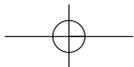
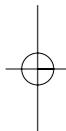
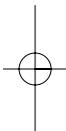


The Ideology of Tyranny



The Ideology of Tyranny
The Use of Neo-Gnostic Myth
in American Politics

Guido Giacomo Preparata

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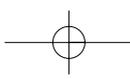
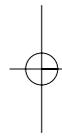
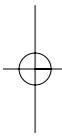
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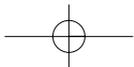
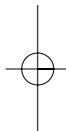
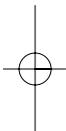
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Printed in the United States of America.



To my father, Giuliano (1942–2000).





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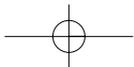
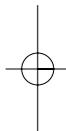
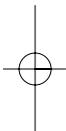
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Like all propagandists, the apostles of tolerance, truth to tell, are very often the most intolerant of men. This is in fact what happened, and it is strangely ironical: those who wished to overthrow all dogma have created for their own use, we will not say a new dogma, but a caricature of a dogma, which they have succeeded in imposing [on the western world in general]; in this way there have been established, under the pretext of “freedom of thought”, the most chimerical beliefs that have ever been seen at any time, under the form of [. . .] different idols.

René Guénon, *East & West*.¹

¹René Guénon, *East & West* (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001 [1924]), p. 28.

Preface

The world may wonder what possesses the collective spirit of America these days. The voice of the press claims it is a blind fury for conquest, mindless greed, or some such low drive that is responsible for the pervasive malaise of our time. The apologists demur and counter that what is observed is but the fierce and often confused reaction to external violence, a response to unfathomable threats. And the public intellectuals drop in the final word, intimating to us all that such an incontrollable distress is the incontrollable outcome of our world's fragmentation—we live, they admonish, in an environment that reacts to Western business's global reach by exploding a desire to manifest a congeries of different, diverse "faces": the world, they say, is finally unraveling in a tangle of ethnicities, lingoes, attitudes, and moods reducible to no common denominator. The era of rationality, progress, right and wrong, the era of *modernity*, the learned clamor, is finished. In its stead we are left to grapple with the uncertainty of the *postmodern* epoch. Our epoch. According to this new way of interpreting social events, we live in a world where power is "decentered," where old antagonisms have melted in a myriad of "particularisms," where "*universals*" matter no more. And, hence to wage battles in the name of these universals is perceived by the new "postmodern" apostles to be but a waste of time, a misplaced endeavor.

The desire that has led me to write this piece was to account in some fashion for the utter disarray that has been plaguing the movement of political dissent in America and the West. And it is my belief that one of the chief causes of this state of paralysis is indeed the establishment's endorsement of this "creed of divisiveness": the so-called *postmodern* politics of diversity.

It has been now over a decade that the catchy buzzword of "postmodernism" has made a wide warm nest for itself in the English language and in American public discourse. So much so that it hardly attracts attention anymore, and the fuss that led to its introduction in the United States a generation ago is now appropriately considered the concern of only a few academic antiquarians. And yet, as it usually happens, the story of this peculiar cultural import is revelatory—revelatory in that the mindset of the American intellectual elite appears to be under the influence of beliefs that are somewhat *alien* to those prevailing in Europe and elsewhere in the world. As this study will show, this

relatively recent creed—which is indeed but a modern re-elaboration of ancient, chaotic forms of dissidence—has driven its supporters to borrow wholesale the constructs of the late antihumanist French school with a view to giving formal, dignified expression to the late political and religious posture of the American Left. A Left that by the end of the seventies had come out thoroughly defeated by the system it had so confusedly antagonized for a decade and a half. In other words, this book tells the story of how the American intelligentsia ended up importing from France a peculiar jargon and imagery with which to articulate the new politics of diversity. This queer American adaptation of French speculative reverie has yielded a hybrid, which seems to have so far incapacitated the critical and analytical faculties of students and scholars under its sway.

Repeatedly have we heard the dissenting opinion blaming America for her barbarous fascination with “empire” and domination, which are said to be presently living a second youth with the superstitious nationalism of *Neoconservatism* and the neoLiberal enthusiasm for “outsourcing” and “globalization.” More interestingly, beyond the American conservative, bellicose animus, there is another form of devoutness, which at first glance seems to be at cross-purposes with the civic idolatry of White Protestantism, but which ultimately works to feed the late patriotic shiver and the anxiety-driven truculence of the average American. This other form of fanaticism speaks through, makes use of, and reshapes constantly the teachings of the French postmodern school. Such a singular catechism has lately assumed a sudden preeminence in the varied phraseology of public opinion, and as proof of its extraordinary powers of suggestion stands the fact that its rhetoric does frame not only the analyses of the contemporary Left but the visions of the Neoconservative hawks as well.

For instance, a curious “meeting of the postmodern minds,” so to speak, occurred in the aftermath of 9/11, when a cultural critic belonging to the erstwhile anarchistic wing of the American Left joined hands figuratively with the propagandistic effort of the First Lady by celebrating the blast in Afghanistan of October 2001 as “the first feminist war in all history.”¹ It so seemed that America’s retaliatory “War on Terror” and Bush II’s overarching “compassionate conservatism” were by insensible degrees attempting to absorb in its stream the bulging movement advocating diversity (feminism being one offshoot of the Left’s new mania for singularities and a never-ending realm of *difference*).

This was postmodern political correctness working cheek by jowl with administrative authoritarianism: *this was something new*.

Manifestations of this kind lead to surmise that the United States is held hostage to the influence of two pernicious forces: a worship of violence embodied by the traditional Right, and a frantic materialism of the postmodern sort, which has impeached *active* dissent and opposition to the patent oligarchic deviancy of modern so-called Liberal democracies. Thereby, the postmodernism of the Left has corroborated the Right.

So far the debate on postmodernism has been the staple of highbrow conversations restricted to a clan of pundits who have been fighting one another with ever more intricate arguments and counterarguments drawn from the

philosophical tradition of the modern West. What have they all argued about? On one side, with a constant advertence to the holocausts of World War II, the French postmodern avatars and their American epigones have celebrated the end of reason, truth, and absolutist scientism, while their positivist opponents from both ends of the political spectrum have denied such claims. In the long run, however, the postmodernists have carried the day: school and university curricula in the United States have, for the most part, converted to the discourse of diversity, multiplicity, and unbridgeable “difference.” There were obvious political *motives* and gains for doing so, and one of the principal aims of this study is to fathom what these motives were.

In the postmodernist camp, by pushing to the extreme this aggressive invective against the dogmas of truth, beauty, and the divine, by celebrating the “diverse,” the postcolonial “Other,” the “black” versus the “white,” the female versus the male, and the homosexual versus the heterosexual, the learned class has driven itself into a corner and created a general state of apartheid, whereby groups, defined by gender, race, or creed come to assume radical positions and end up cutting off all communication between one another. This entrenchment, moreover, has played efficiently in the propaganda of the bureaucratic machine, which has managed to counterfeit its geopolitical imbroglios in the Near East and Central Asia as wars of liberation in the name of freedom and democracy (the “Liberal” ethos), as well as “diversity” (the postmodern pose).

The occult motivations and affinities that have brought the language of conquest to appropriate the new jargon of the counterculture may be uncovered by looking inside the works of the late French masters.

The guru whose work came to be imported and re-elaborated in the course of the seventies and eighties was Michel Foucault (1926–1984). Foucault’s Theory of Power has become the cornerstone of much public discourse in America—from academia to government by way of education curricula. Since its successful launch in the United States a quarter of a century ago, Foucault’s philosophy has gradually come to be adopted as the idiom of America’s intellectual Left. Enthusiastic hordes of academics, publicists, and educators have fished from the Foucauldian universe ideas, metaphors, neologisms, and similes that have enabled them to articulate to their hearts’ desire the inquietude of America’s social condition. Not only has postmodernism ever since become the State-sponsored factory of *political correctness* in America, but, paradoxically, it has also come to impose itself as the exclusive voice of reason and tolerance in higher learning. This is all the more astonishing as Foucault’s manifest worship of damnation, blood, and transgression, as shall be argued, is in fact the rational expression of a strange exhumation of ancient, antitraditional cosmogonies. A revival, which, for the most part, had indeed been brilliantly elaborated by the end of the thirties by the true master of Foucault and of all the new French *philosophes*: the accursed sociologist/pornographer Georges Bataille (1897–1962).

Bataille’s literary and philosophical “project” (*le projet*) was conceived to weaken the bonds of compassion that, in his view, *tenuously* held society together. His

sociology—a unique and genially disquieting collection of insights scarcely known to the English-speaking public—is possibly one of the central intellectual creations of the twentieth century in the realm of the social sciences. It is an enigmatic enterprise, blending lyricism, political economy, and a refashioning of religion, which is indirectly having (mostly through Foucault's elaboration) a lasting effect on the talk of America. And the vast majority of American postmodernists do not even seem aware of their being tributaries of such a strange project.

Unlike other monographs on Bataille, which depict him merely as a Nietzschean, this work places emphasis on his profound originality and describes how in fact his cherished “work of contamination and contagion,” as he put it, was a unique—mostly hypnotic and aesthetic—reenacting in a modern setting of ancient antimonotheistic worship: a revamped cult of Dionysus and of the White Goddess, and of its late philosophic expression into Gnosis. Foucault surreptitiously re-elaborated the Bataillean mythology and modified it also to fit the political needs of the American Left, which by the seventies had been redefined as a “multicultural” ministry of sorts. What is striking, and what this book's detailed study of Bataille's opus will reveal, is that the American Left has paradoxically embraced a creed that, rather than compassionate, is the precise opposite. So in closing the circle, we come to the conclusion that today in America the jargon and the myths upheld by the self-appointed party of emancipation were originally fashioned by France's most lucid advocate of religious violence and moral turpitude.

And what is more, the credence prevailing on the opposite bank of the Neoconservative Right is essentially the same as that underlying the arguments and metaphors of the postmodern Left. That is why we may speak of “postmodernism of the Right.” Each faction has recited the part ascribed to it by a consensus-building method, which relies on the chronic antagonism between the official Right and the official Left. As we shall have occasion to argue, the belief system of those conservative intellectuals who have hitherto been active in the administration of Bush II presents a deep affinity with the views of Bataille himself. All of which goes to show that this game of opposition between the Right and the Left-wing of postmodernism is ultimately a cooperation of sorts; it is an institutionalized enmity sustained on the one hand to keep up the figment of open and democratic debate, and, more importantly, to block any form of alternative dissent, on the other.

Because postmodernism is anticompassionate and strongly divisive, it is no accident—and this is the main thesis of *The Ideology of Tyranny*—that it has been adopted by the U.S. administration, an administration that has grown increasingly more effective and sophisticated in taming, neutralizing, deflecting, and suppressing any form of dissidence. What seems to have so far functioned satisfactorily for this bureaucracy, then, is the combination of standard intimidatory tactics (police bullying and administrative sanctions), with the ideological diffusion of a gospel of divisiveness across society (in the schools and the workplace). The state of paralysis induced by the fluid dissemination of such a gospel has been extraordinary, far more crippling, in fact, than the old contraposition

between Socialists and Liberals. And, as such, postmodernism has configured itself as the new, potent ideology of tyranny.

This study will begin with a cursory examination of the degenerate religious cults (chapter 2: the Great Goddess and Dionysus), whose tradition Bataille—through experience, sentiment, affinity, and research—sought to revive, aesthetically, in the twentieth century. A brief mention of gnosticism (chapter 3) and its parallels with postmodernism, followed by a note on the Marquis de Sade (chapter 4), precedes the central discussion of Bataille's production; Sade is a hero to Bataille, Foucault, and the postmodern following. Divided into five subsections (Mystique, the Monstrous Archons, Eroticism, Expenditure, and Power), the chapter devoted to Bataille (chapter 5) is succeeded by a biographical exploration of Foucault's vision and of his critical elaboration of the Bataillean project. Chapter 6 traces the ways in which Foucault crafted the theory of Power/Knowledge, and how and why it came to be imported and adapted by the American intelligentsia. Chapter 7 ("The Mocking Varlets of Postmodern Left") features a sample of postmodernist production. The latter comprises two sections. The first discusses the current U.S. approach to pedagogy as inspired by French postmodernist Jean-François Lyotard, the notion of freedom, and the absurdities to which political correctness may lead. There follows a critique of Hardt and Negri's poli-sci best seller *Empire*—an unavowed Bataillean fresco, which the official American press has endorsed enthusiastically.

Chapter 8 is devoted to the "postmodernism of the Right": it opens with an exploration of Ernst Jünger, one of the most talented and controversial writers of the twentieth century. Jünger is here introduced as conservatism's counterimage of Bataille. The deep likeness between the two, especially Jünger's forerunning analysis of "disciplinarian power," is evidence of this fascinating communion between Left and Right, a communion sealed by the shared belief that sacrifice, war, and violence (i.e., the necessity of the holocaust) are the ways of nature and, therefore, of man. Though poorly known to the American public, Jünger is a conspicuous figure that has exercised a strong influence upon Martin Heidegger. Heidegger's mythology of the *Dasein* (the being-there) is but the German, parallel formulation of Bataille's "core" (*le noyau*). This philosopher, who, like Jünger, had been associated with Nazism, is, in fact, a guiding light of postmodernism. He is revered on the Left, by Foucault and the French antihumanists, as well as on the Right. Among the conservative admirers of Heidegger, we find Alexandre Kojève, who taught Bataille, and whose "End of History" is a tenet of Right- and Left-wing postmodernism, and Leo Strauss, a late icon of Neoconservatism. Following a discussion of Jünger, Heidegger, and Kojève, this chapter goes to appraise in succession the writings of Strauss and his followers (in particular, Allan Bloom, Irving Kristol, and Francis Fukuyama), who have come to embody the rhetorical panoply of so-called Neoconservatism. This portion of the study aims to conjoin the two sides of this alarming ideology; we reiterate in this case the known thesis whereby this verbal confrontation opposing these Siamese halves of postmodernism is but a pretense—a pretense revealing the utter powerlessness and subservience of the Left, which, in fact, testifies by its stances

and by preventing alliances across divides that it has taken a back seat in the great vehicle of power, driven by the Right.

This conclusion is borne out by the analysis conducted in the final chapter (chapter 9), which scrutinizes the unmitigated failure of the so-called Left to fulfill its dissenting role in our times. This motley choir speaking in the name of “dissent” has indeed proved incapable of providing a truthful interpretation of international events, and thereby of articulating an incisive critique of the overwhelming injustices lately inflicted by the Western powers (and above all, the United States) on the civilian populations of the Near East, to take a poignant and most recent experience. It is my belief that the origins of the failure of the American Left are to be traced in the last true season of revolt, which the United States experienced after World War I when the regime crushed the Socialist movement. The firebrand who epitomized that season of dashed hopes was Thorstein Veblen, one of the West’s greatest thinkers. Veblen’s farewell analyses of the ills of contemporary business enterprise, and the remedies suggested to correct them, are here repropounded, in the hope that they might form a programmatic beginning for a renewed, rejuvenated movement of compassionate dissidence. Veblen’s testament is followed by a brief excursion into America’s and the West’s recent record of ideological dueling, from the shadowboxing of the Cold War to the antiwar agitation and the dissolution of the latter into the multicultural, State-assisted, bailout.

Even on the rubric of the West’s tormented relation with the Near East, Foucault paved the way for the Left’s drift toward critical inanity. In a series of articles he penned in 1979 for an Italian daily on the occasion of Khomeini’s “revolution,” Foucault interpreted the sudden and sonorous “Islamic” counter-attack as a pure instance of power resisting at the margins in open defiance to the disciplinarian defiance of the shah. He sided with the mullahs in the name of blood reprisal. Foucault’s imitator, Jean Baudrillard, did likewise in 1991, when he provocatively wrote in a set of widely distributed pieces that the Gulf War was the theatrical rendering of a collective subconscious process. This was a process by which our Western embarrassment, for having prodded Saddam into war in 1980 against the purity of Islam embodied by Khomeini’s Iran, demanded that we destroyed the proofs, and therefore that we liquidated Iraq’s little tyrant—something which could be effected only by means of a mock war. Baudrillard would hazard a similar metaphorical reading of 9/11, construing the latter as our secret, self-intoxicating desire to strike at our own Western hegemony by way of terrorism’s “viral” power. But, the establishment has clearly favored more conventional Foucauldian analyses, such as that of Hardt and Negri, that inscribe terrorism among the negative, rebellious repercussions of a general process of globalization, whose direction appears beyond the powers of any single authority—official or otherwise. This is the type of sophistic speculation that is presently circulated in academia and that the media have alternatively promoted to digest all geopolitical consummations since 9/11. Not even the theorists of the old Left—the late survivors of the antiwar marches of the sixties—have been capable of offering interpretations of recent events that differ significantly from

the Foucauldian model. And, in the final analysis, it is readily seen that all such kindred explications from the realm of “dissent” are indeed analogous to the government’s official account, as stated in the *9-11 Report*. It thus appears that postmodernism and segments of the old Left have managed to reach an intellectual compromise with the hawks of the U.S. administration over the War on Terror by acknowledging the inevitability of globalization and the Foucauldian fictions of Al-Qaeda’s “loose networks of decentered power” and Bin Laden’s “symbolic resistance.”

