

Franco La Cecla  
A Eulogy of the West



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*The old culture managed to live through many a fierce storm and tempest, but, though it kept its outer form, it lost its real content. Today it is fighting silently and desperately against a new and all-powerful opponent the bania civilization of the capitalist West. It will succumb to this newcomer, for the West brings science, and science brings food for the hungry millions. But the West also brings an antidote to the evils of this cut-throat civilization the principles of socialism, of cooperation, and service to the community for the common good. This is not so unlike the old Brahman ideal of service, but it means the brahmanization (not in the religious sense, of course) of all classes and groups and the abolition of class distinctions.*

Toward Freedom: The Autobiography of Jawaharla Nehru. 1941.  
[p 274-275]

## Despite everything

Don't get me wrong, Europe, the West, is also the cause of a majority of the bad in the world. It has a history of abusing its power, of oppression, slavery, and destruction of other cultures and economies. If you read the history of the West, there is no massacre, environmental disaster and present human error that have not already been anticipated in Western politics, ideology, and arrogance. From this point of view, the conspiracy theorists have it easy. All that is currently rotten in this world is in some way or another connected to the West. So, if you just align yourself with the other side, you are on the side of reason, on the side of the "noble saviors", on the side of the good guys against the everlasting bad guys – America and Europe - who are joined through the creation of the chaos that is the world today. They are the ones who have destroyed countries who had their sense of equilibrium like Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, to name the most well-known; they are the champions of the destruction of a great part of Africa, Asia, and Latin-Ame-

rica. Even more, the main culprits behind the ecological crisis that the planet is facing today, horrendous consumers of unrenowable resources, unpunished polluters, exporters of plagues and toxic waste, advocates of the mad rush of capitalism against the wall of the future. Is there a guiltier part of the world than the West? In the face of Western wrongdoing, terrorism, the massacres by armed fanatics and the devastating fury of angry mobs can be considered justifiable actions. What can one expect from the rest of the world when the West has created the underlying horror of a large part of present-day suffering?

Yet, within the same West, there is a history and geography that speaks of something else. There is the history of the opposition against this folly, the geography of individuals and movements that have fought for centuries against the arrogance of the powerful, against capitalist and economic devastation. There is a history of thoughts and actions that counterposed the murderous insanity of the West with human dignity, the idea of the indispensable depth of being in this world, and the defense of the spiritual principle that along with the material principle moves humanity. Those who don't see that the West is the evil, and at the same time its constant opposition, believe to be innocent just because they can point out the bad, but then they are incapable of sustaining the momentum of struggle, solidarity, compassion, and awareness and the construction of a common good. This form of myopia is perhaps a greater evil than the evil enemy. It feeds the nihilism, sadism, and masochism, in which we live, it is the murder of those who, nevertheless, hope and live to instill hope. Pessimism and the relentless analysis of the "shit" that we're in, are, along with the victim mentality, the greatest victory of the ruthlessness of capital.

Today the victim complex often seems to be the right to embody minorities, ethnic groups, oppressed languages,



affinities, genders and sexes of various types that would be marginalized but who just need to exercise the same victim mentality. It has become such a widespread practice that anyone can transform their own identity into an “oppressed community”. The West, Europe, Capitalism, and Globalisation, allows anyone to be a victim. At the expense of detailed investigations, the condemnation of real culprits and admitting complicity. It is incredible to reread Ivan Illich today, to realize how trenchant his analysis of the debilitating professions and crippling institutions, and the services and grants that would create dependency is. It is exactly because his analysis was not “in general” but detailed, that we can find our complicity in the concrete and in the dependencies that we choose every day. To feel like a victim instead requires staying in “generalizations”, adopting slogans and posters as flags.

The words of Étienne de la Boétie in *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* are more relevant than ever:

He who thus domineers over you has only two eyes, only two hands, only one body, no more than is possessed by the least man among the infinite numbers dwelling in your cities; he has indeed nothing more than the power that you confer upon him to destroy you. Where has he acquired enough eyes to spy upon you, if you do not provide them yourselves? How can he have so many arms to beat you with, if he does not borrow them from you? The feet that trample down your cities, where does he get them if they are not your own? How does he have any power over you except through you? How would he dare assail you if he had no cooperation from you? What could he do to you if you yourselves did not connive with the thief who plunders you, if you were not accomplices of the murderer who kills you, if you were not traitors to yourselves? You sow your crops in order that he may ravage them, you install and furnish your homes to give him goods to pillage; you rear your daughters that he may gratify his lust; you bring up your

children in order that he may confer upon them the greatest privilege he knows---to be led into his battles, to be delivered to butchery, to be made the servants of his greed and the instruments of his vengeance; you yield your bodies unto hard labor in order that he may indulge in his delights and wallow in his filthy pleasures; you weaken yourselves in order to make him the stronger and the mightier to hold you in check. From all these indignities, such as the very beasts of the field would not endure, you can deliver yourselves if you try, not by taking action, but merely by willing to be free. Resolve to serve no more, and you are at once freed. I do not ask that you place hands upon the tyrant to topple him over, but simply that you support him no longer; then you will behold him, like a great Colossus whose pedestal has been pulled away, fall of his own weight and break into pieces? [Étienne de la Boétie, *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* (1571), The Mises Institute, Auburn, Alabama, 1975 p.48-49 translated by Harry Kurz].

These are words of apparent ingenuity, of that second naïveté that Paul Ricoeur believed is necessary to recreate a philosophy for the present. Never before did it seem so topical, for those who see in the West a pretext to give up their freedom.

Those who don't gather from both the history and present of the West the resistance against the bad, reproduces the alibi of those who became voluntary servants, of those who think that there is nothing to do, who with their victim complex pull out of history and geography and plan not to "get involved at all". The anti-West today, for the most part, is this kind of victim complex, a convenient depression that leads to a cynical contemplation of the disastrous world. Today the principle of hope is sneered at by those who think they are the most realistic of the planet. The great tragedy of the world in which the West participates is to act for the most part influenced by this same attitude. The ruling classes, but also terrorists from other worlds, learn the principle of 'so much the worse' from the lips of those in the West who hope for the universal regeneration of Armageddon, and who

think that only through the ultimate and total destruction, and in the shedding of others' blood and their own, will there be the moral outcome that our history deserves. The victim complex of the rest of the world resembles those from the West who stands by idly to read the news and say that by now there is nothing left to do. And they withdraw quietly into safe places and their magnificent private life.

In other continents, in other countries, there is the additional excuse of being right. The West is decadent, it's at its end, let's give it the coup de grâce. As if elsewhere than in the West there were not the same roots of evil, no cruelty to other human beings, there was no suppression of voice of women and those that are different, no exploitation of entire small population groups into castes or ethnic groups and opposing tribes. The return to the sacred values of the community to which the non-Western world would be the guarantor is an idiotic pantomime created by the West. The idea that elsewhere people are less guilty for what they do is an insult to human dignity. For how many years still, do we have to listen to the same old story that September 11 was a creation of the secret service because the Arab world would be unable to plan and carry out something like that? As if complicity and duplicity could not also be the heritage of the Arab world. All of this is part of the idea of Western superiority also in doing bad, it's the monopoly, if not real then ideological, of vileness. It is time to stop with this idiocy that dominates the planet, this globalization of a stupidity that is guilty and short-sighted at the same time.

A great part of those who wish bad things for the West is a result of thinking that human beings are incapable of free gestures, be it magnificent or bad. On the one side, there are the bad guys who are able to plot against everyone, on the other side the good, victims of everything (and in the middle of the Atlantic, the Strait of Gibraltar and the Sicilian Channel).

The deformation of a certain dialectical materialism and the

misreading of the importance of the economy within history have created a mechanistic and reductionist reading of human events. It has produced a distorted idea of humanity. No one is guilty there are only circumstances. If no one is responsible, neither is the West, one might say, and then stand still to watch the “pachinko pinball” of the world shoot towards the explosion. Today we would need a philosophical debate and thought that recovers all theses on free will and on the possibility that even the last slave has the principle of freedom inside of him.

So it is no coincidence that I resolved to write this pamphlet for my libertarian friends because no one knows as well as they do that on the crest of the present, it is only the conviction of human beings’ deep sense of freedom that makes the difference. The freedom to do good or evil, not the overtly political rhetoric of freedom, but the daily practice of it, in routines and in meetings, in cohabitation and in the vicinity. It is the abundant history of informed anarchism, the one that believes in the glue that holds society together, not just in the individual as a monad. It is the history - to a large extent Western but exported to the rest of the world - of the principles of will and hope, that from Carlo Cafiero in Italy to Pëtr Kropotkin in Russia and Europe, to Multatuli in Indonesia, to B.R. Ambedkar in India, to Jose Rizal in the Philippines. It has been the engine of endless transformations and creativity by those who know that evil is within us but tamable - because it’s human - and can be turned into good. We must defend this history and this geography that is anthropologically very Western, along with the heritage of resistance in life and the future that the West represents. Without the West, the very idea of freedom would be much more dubious and uncertain, as contemporary history shows us.