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Editor's Introduction

Free Society or Fear Society?

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Israeli politician and human rights activist Natan Sharansky, who spent nine years in Soviet prisons as a political dissident and "refusenik" (a person refused the right to emigrate), posed a startling question in a recent book: "Can you express your individual views loudly, in public, without fear of being punished legally, formally, in any way? If yes, you live in a free society; if not, you're in a fear society."

Each of us must answer that question and confront that stark choice for himself, but things do not look good for the freedom half of the equation.

For one thing, we are facing a renewed fear of crime, physical violence, and even personal assault that has resulted from such efforts as "defund-the-police" and no-cash bail, as well as the installment of district attorneys who have upended normal juridical procedure by taking the side of the perpetrators instead of the people. The dreadful handling of the Covid 19 pandemic with its unprecedented lockdown mandates is another factor generating fear. Now the constant menace of invisible covid variants is being waved over us, and we feel the continuing pressure toward masks and compulsory vaccines and boosters, even though their specific effectiveness is far from clear. Most ominous is the curtailment of freedom of speech and thought, both internally and externally imposed, because that is what underlies the prohibition of honest debate about these other developments, a prohibition backed by the well-grounded fear of persecution for holding "dissident" views, those that go against the official narrative.

Sharansky's 2004 book, *The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror*, earned the praise of President

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George W. Bush, who saw it as offering "a glimpse of how I think about foreign policy." Bush awarded him the Medal of Freedom in 2006.

Some years later the fearless Sharansky had seen the mistakes in that policy. In *Defending Identity: Its Indispensable Role in Protecting Democracy* (2008), the book in which he posed the above either/or question, he went from a neoconservative to a national conservative even before that latter epithet had earned its current significance. He argued that without a strong national identity a democracy cannot defend its values. He also saw religion as a fortification against servile obedience to the state.

In his own context, Sharansky could see that peace between Israel and the Palestinians would not be attained without "the building of real democratic institutions in the fledgling Palestinian society, no matter how tempting a 'solution' without them may be."

Sharansky is one of the few who understood and even fewer who could admit what went wrong with the democracy project of the Bush administration. Democracy, or representative self-government, requires a preexisting cultural infrastructure to sustain it. It can't be achieved through military overthrow of a dictator followed by elections and the proclamation of universal ideals accessible to all humanity coupled with condemnation as bigots those who demur. It has to be built on the character of a people who are capable of sustaining it.

In fact, Sharansky's insight tells us something of what has gone wrong in our own culture, that is, the hoary belief that we have none, that our substance lies only in our ideals of freedom and equality. This is an especially dangerous reliance since even highly educated people often show that they have no idea what those ideals consist of in actuality and have in fact turned them into their opposites. In order to further equality, for example, they have redefined it as "equity" (which they've also redefined)—turning individual rights into group rights and squelching our freedoms in order to further this deception.

Watching the chilling 2006 documentary *The Rape of Europa*, I was stunned to see how much emphasis the Nazis placed on culture as a means through which to conquer. Pillaging a country's

museums, defacing monuments, destroying valued buildings, were a way of crushing a nation's spirit as much as Hitler's lightning war. Recognizing what was happening, officials in many European countries endeavored to protect their treasures, and took elaborate, painstaking, and often risky measures to hide what they could. In our case, it is as Lincoln said, no foreign army will drink from the Ohio or walk on the Blue Ridge, but our destruction will come from within, as is now happening.

Another dissident from communism in another country, Vaclav Havel, broadens the picture of the fight we are in. Back in the 1980s he maintained that if "we take a second look at the two basic political alternatives between which Western intellectuals oscillate today," that is, the West vs. the Eastern Bloc, "it becomes apparent that they are no more than two different ways of playing the same game, proffered by the anonymity of power—and as such, no more than two diverse ways of moving toward the same global totalitarianism."

Even back then, Havel could already perceive what we now call the deep state, huge anonymous Kafkaesque bureaucracies wielding power in obscure ways and undermining individual moral responsibility which, for him, is the basis of "anti-political politics," the politics of "practical morality" and "service to the truth." And, we might add, the basis for a self-governing country.

And yet Havel did not fall prey to false moral equivalence. He was "cast into deep gloom" when "a French leftist student told me with a sincere glow in his eyes that the Gulag was a tax paid for the ideals of socialism and that Solzhenitsyn is just a personally embittered man." Havel understood that the West was the better alternative at the time, but he presciently saw "that western culture is threatened far more by itself than by SS-50 rockets," because "many people in the West still understand little of what is actually at stake in our time." We should pay heed because the 2022 midterm elections revealed that our young people are willing to sacrifice freedom and even their own self-interest for the achievement of a socialism that they scarcely understand.

Why am I quoting so many people? Because we have so much history to draw from. Are we going to act as if we were born yesterday,

that we have nothing to learn from the titanic struggles against totalitarianism in the last century? Here's a salient experience from the so-called free world, which happened in this century.

In 2011 John F. Burns returned to England after forty years as a foreign correspondent for various publications, including the *New York Times*, for which he had covered the Iraq War of 2003. Still carrying "the gilded memories" of his youth, Burns was dismayed at the changes he saw in his native land. Sounding like the proverbial voice of an earlier age, he lamented that "the land of Henry V at Agincourt and Nelson at Trafalgar, of Churchill and the Battle of Britain, of Shakespeare and Locke and Orwell—of all that England and its monarchs, statesmen, philosophers, writers, inventors and explorers had given the world" —had become "Rude Brittania"—marked by "eroded sensibilities and courtesies," "coarsening of life in the public sphere," "rough-tongued disdain" in everything from the streets to the newspapers to the broadcast media, and "abandonment of standards that touched even great national institutions like the BBC, Parliament and Scotland Yard."

Naturally, as always happens when someone takes a critical look at our times, Burns's own family members are on hand to remind him that the England of his great-grandfather, that of Charles Dickens, was a much rougher and poorer place, while the England of today has attained affluence and equality unimaginable in the past. But Burns sticks to his point because, like many of us, he suspects that this is a red herring. The choice is not between a cruel past and a debased present. The fact that a culture tolerated some social ills in the past, or knew not how to remedy them, does not mean that there was no good in it. And the fact that some previous social ills have been eradicated does not excuse a society from addressing its present deterioration. The very idea that a modern-day Brit would write in this almost Kiplingesque vein, in the *New York Times*, no less, seemed like a signal that the spirit of the past was awakening from slumber.

So Burns continues undeterred with his appalling chronicle—the feral youths, the beer culture, the bullying, the thuggishness, the simple incivility—far too much to allow complacency about the superiority of the present. In fact, as he notes, some of the present decline

has been caused by the very developments that present day Britons regard with satisfaction. Generous social entitlements producing chronic unemployment and welfare dependency. Erosion of the class system arguably destroying all standards of discrimination whatsoever. By recalling the culture of his youth, he could see how far England had fallen.

And Burns turned out to be something of a prophet, because within a few weeks of his writing "Rude Brittania," his reports on the London riots of 2011 became continuing front-page news in the *New York Times*. In August of 2011, a policeman shot a man dead in north London; this sparked arson, looting, destruction of homes, businesses, and police vehicles in other parts of the capital and eventually in other cities. It was an uncanny foreshadowing of our own 2020 season of mayhem, and it is remarkable that Burns in a sense anticipated it by comparing what he saw in the present to what he remembered of the culture in which he had matured.

So must we do, keep track of where we are and what is happening, in detail, and fearlessly answer efforts to destroy our freedoms and blacken our history, as Nathan Cofnas, George R. LaNoue, J. Scott Turner, and John Staddon illustrate in their articles for this issue.

—In "Four Reasons Why Heterodox Academy Failed," Nathan Cofnas shows how Jonathan Haidt's worthy effort to challenge rigid academic social justice orthodoxy has come full circle to replicating it. Seven years after its founding, writes Cofnas, "you can count HxA's accomplishments in promoting heterodoxy on the fingers of zero hands. It has focused mainly on aggrandizing celebrity academics who hold conventional leftist views and giving a platform to liberals to engage in empty virtue signaling about their alleged commitment to free inquiry."

—In "Courts versus Campuses: The Struggle to Protect Free Speech," George R. La Noue surveys the historic efforts that secured academic freedom and freedom of speech in the university against external threats, but must note that now the threats are internal, as "academic professional associations, university administrators, faculty senates, and student groups commonly demand commitments

to various political causes which leave those who dissent in perilous positions."

—J. Scott Turner in "Decolonizing Science" interrupts the routine postcolonial narrative of Africa to exclaim, "If only it were that simple! There is, in fact, a colonialist story to tell about science, natural resources, and the developing world, just not the story being promulgated by the rhetoric of the decolonize science narrative." Read on to learn of the fascinating example that Turner presents, involving a special succulent plant and the tribal folklore of southern Africa.

—In "Stratification Economics: How Social Science Fails," John Staddon discusses the attempt to establish a new sub-field in economics, "Stratification Economics," which seeks to explain wealth and income disparities among groups, especially those defined by race and gender. Staddon finds that SE departs from "normal scientific practice," since it "explicitly excludes from its analysis of group disparities anything to do with the interests and abilities of the individuals involved—which would only be legitimate if those factors have been proven to be irrelevant to socioeconomic variables."

—In a review essay, "Colonialism: Taking the Good with the Bad," P. Eric Louw evaluates two books on colonial Africa and finds that one engages in scholarship while the other wallows in ideology.

Articles more directly about culture include "From Dante to Dostoevsky: The Golden Age of Christian Art (1321-1821)," in which Duke Pesta explains how these authors conveyed and embodied Christian virtue in their work. In two Short Takes, Daniel Asia, "Culture and Cultural Appropriation," sees the latter as "not of theft, but of admiration and respect," and Noël Valis considers the ongoing significance of William Buckley's seminal book in "On Buckley's *God and Man at Yale* at 70."