

Beware of Cries for Social Justice

Honorable ladies and gentlemen, thank you for this opportunity to talk to you about the book “In the Shadow of Tyranny: Between Hitler & Stalin,” written originally by former Slovak Army General Peter Emilius Vlčko but later rewritten and edited by me, the fourth and youngest child of Peter and Georgina Vlčko. I am formally educated as a medical scientist and physician, but also have education in history, law, political theory, philosophy, psychology, and theology. The subject of this speech is very personal to me. During the Second World War, my mother’s family suffered tremendously under the Slovak fascists when thirteen members were sent to concentration camps, of which only four survived. If it were not for the heroic actions of my father, many more family members and Slovak citizens would have died. Shortly after surviving the horrors of the Holocaust, my Slovak family faced another totalitarian tyranny—communism. Communism forced a division in my family not unlike the tragic division experienced among many families during the American Revolutionary and Civil Wars. To this day, our family still suffers from this painful division—and you may agree with me that this is a sad reflection of the current state of Slovak society. The recent tragic events against the life of Prime Minister Robert Fico in Handlová confirm this polarized state of affairs in Slovakia. In this speech, I want to talk to you about the life and legacy of General Peter Vlčko, his understanding of humanity and society, and how they have over history interacted in self-destructive ways such as Nazism and communism.

Why should any of this be interesting and important to university students, educators, soldiers, and historians of the twenty-first century? The Second World War was a long time ago and communist totalitarianism has been exiled from your country. To answer this question, we first must ask ourselves, why are we students, educators, soldiers, and historians; what is the real purpose of education, public service, and a knowledge of the past? Is the sole objective of education merely economic security and materialism and is soldiering merely an adventure and means to an economic living? Many political and social philosophers, as well as theologians over the course of history have denounced the blind pursuit of materialism as egotistic, simple-minded, and ultimately self-defeating for individuals and society.

Knowledge of history provides an insight not only into past events but also into how people responded to those events over time. History informs us about how we reached our current condition. This knowledge offers a window into the human psyche; how we think and operate, our strengths and weaknesses as judged by time. This knowledge is an essential component to self-awareness. All scholarship, whether it is philosophy, political theory, economics, psychology, polemology, or science, is based on our understanding of history. Without a clear understanding of history, we are doomed to repeat past failures and tragedies and only by serendipity do we repeat past successes.

What differentiates enduring great nations and people from the ephemeral insignificant ones is their system of values or ethics—particularly, how they view themselves as individuals and their national heroes who defend those values. Without the right kind of ethics based on natural law there can be no true patriots and without patriots there can be no heroes. Such societies lack genuine purpose and are destined to ephemerality and insignificance. When the right kind of ethics are espoused and genuine purpose that reflects those ethics exists among a people, individuals are willing to dedicate and even sacrifice themselves for such a society in order to strengthen and preserve it. However, most important is a conviction that the values and ethics espoused by a society truly represent what each individual deeply believes in and longs for. This is where education and history play their role in creating and preserving great human societies. To be a great human society and people, a culture of the proper ethics based on natural law must be cultivated from generation to generation.

From ancient times to present, pursuit of knowledge to achieve self-awareness has been the penultimate objective of education. And although long forgotten, the ultimate objective of gaining knowledge has always been, and remains, discovering our origins, purpose, and destiny. Who we are in this universe, and what is our purpose and destiny? Are we just meaningless dust or is there a purpose in our existence? This has always pressed upon the conscience of humanity and has always been the undercurrent of scholarship and public service.

Why are self-awareness and origins, purpose, and destiny so important to humanity? The answer to that question should be self-evident; however, very few institutions of higher learning still ask

and provide guidance in seeking an answer to that question. Without self-awareness and understanding of origins, purpose, and destiny there can be no great and enduring human society. An examination of the life and legacy of General Peter Vlčko is emblematic of these inquiries.

I have many generations of family members and friends who live in Slovakia, and I have over the decades visited Slovakia many times. My wife and daughter-in-law are immigrants from Slovakia. In addition to being raised by Slovak parents, my personal communications with Slovaks have been well established for decades. So, please understand that I have not come here as an arrogant, self-righteous, uninformed American to preach to or offend any of you or your worldviews. I have merely come to challenge you to honestly re-examine core values that we may have believed were certain and immutable. If my invitation to join me on this potentially painful journey of self-examination is offensive, then please accept my heartfelt apology. For this most certainly is not my intention. However, let me acknowledge that the road to the truth is often inconvenient, painful, and at times offensive. Some of you may have already taken this journey and consequently have become more self-aware. For you, I am hoping this speech will be a reaffirmation of your enlightenment.

Before I dive into the meat of this speech, I must give fair warning. For most listeners, this speech is very philosophical and difficult to understand. The topics discussed are at times provocative and intentionally so. The philosophy is political and theological. This aspect alone makes this speech hard to follow. In this speech, I am going to systematically disassemble the conventional wisdom of the Enlightenment and all its perturbations. This speech goes right to the heart of why General Peter Vlčko acted as he did during the decade of 1938–1948. This seems to be a topic of growing interest among your generation—the first generation since breaking the bonds of totalitarianism. I welcome this interest because setting the record straight by revisiting history and the questions that continue to vex us is often enlightening as society and culture evolve but fundamental questions remain the same. So, please prepare yourselves for a true mental challenge and hopefully I will not lose any of you along the way.

I want to start by challenging your understanding and definition of certain terms. Many modern cultural conflicts are rooted in the misuse of key terms. Europeans differ significantly from

Americans in their understanding of terms such as liberalism, conservatism, nationalism, humanism, and patriotism. Likewise, great confusion persists over political and economic theories on socialism, communism, fascism, statism, democracy, capitalism, and progressivism. Unfortunately, great misunderstanding also exists on the fundamental differences in moral philosophy that form the basis to political and economic theory and jurisprudence. So, let us digress for a moment to clarify some important definitions that are used throughout this discussion.

Liberalism and conservatism are terms that have over centuries of Western history taken on many meanings and implications. Liberal theories form a broad continuum, from those that constitute full-blown philosophical systems, to those that rely on a full theory of value and the good, to those that rely on a theory of the right (but not the good), all the way to those that seek to be purely political doctrines. Nevertheless, it is important to appreciate that, though liberalism in the modern era has been primarily a political theory, it has been associated with broader theories of ethics, value, and society. Indeed, many believe that liberalism cannot rid itself of all controversial metaphysical (Hampton 1989, 791–814) or epistemological (Raz 1990, 3–46) commitments (Gaus, Courtland, and Schmidtz 2014). In our discussion here, the term liberalism, as opposed to conservatism, is used in three arenas: political; theological; and sociological.

The term “liberalism” is rooted in the Latin *liber* whose original meaning and intent was rebellion against traditional authority, truth, and culture. In pre-republican Rome, *liber* referred to a man who has “freed” or unbridled himself by rejecting and thwarting traditional authority. Such men were seen as rebellious and “free, unrestricted, unimpeded, unconstrained, unchecked, licentious.” Later, during republican Roman times, the term *liber* took on the meaning of a “noble born” or “free man.”

Irish philosopher and political theorist Philip Pettit described it this way:

The contrary of the *liber*, or free, person in Roman, republican usage was the *servus*, or slave, and up to at least the beginning of the . . . [nineteenth] century, the dominant connotation of freedom, emphasized in the long republican tradition, was

not having to live in servitude to another: not being subject to the arbitrary power of another (Pettit 1996, 576–604).

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, “liberal” was used as a pejorative term of reproach with the meaning “free from restraint in speech or action.” Soon, the Enlightenment—the “long” 18th century—completely inverted the orthodox understanding of the term liberal and adopted some of the neo-Roman republican characteristics of *liber* men revolting against injustice and oppression and redefined “liberal” in a positive sense as “free from prejudice, tolerant, not bigoted or narrow,” whose use emerged in 1776–1788. In the nineteenth century, “liberal” was more often used in the theological rather than political sense as meaning “opposed to orthodoxy.”

“Liberal” in the modern political sense meaning “tending in favor of freedom and democracy,” dates only from *circa* 1801, from the French *libéral*. In English, the political label was at first applied by opponents (often in the French form and with pejorative suggestions of foreign lawlessness) to the party more favorable to individual political freedoms. But also (especially in U.S. politics) tending to mean “favorable to government action to effect social change,” which seems at times to draw more from liberal theological use of the term as meaning “free from prejudice of traditional opinions and established institutions” (and thus open to new ideas and plans of reform—“progressive”), which dates from 1823. You can see how the Enlightenment completely perverted the meaning of liberal. This has led to a great misunderstanding of political and moral philosophy that persists to date.

The Left-Right “wing” label that we often hear originates from the 1789 French Revolution when members of the National Assembly divided into supporters of the king seated to the Assembly president’s right and supporters of the revolution seated to his left. By 1914, the Left half of the legislature in France was composed of Unified Socialists, Republican Socialists, and Socialist Radicals, while the parties that were previously called “Left,” now sat on the right side. The post-Enlightenment use of the words Left and Right spread from France to other countries and were applied to many political parties worldwide.

However, the single-axis Left-Right political spectrum defining and categorizing various political theories that has become conventional wisdom in academia, journalism, literature, and all forms of common communication is a contrived system that is based on emotion rather than fact. The Frankfurt School comprised of members of the failed 1919 communist revolution in Germany arbitrarily devised the Left-Right system that created a false dichotomy of polar differences between communism and fascism. The communists chose for themselves the left because they saw a kinship with the revolutionaries of 1789 France. After being declared outlaws, the communists of the Frankfurt School escaped Nazi Germany in 1933 and found refuge at Columbia University in New York. From Columbia, the socialist ideology of the Frankfurt School spread throughout the American academy bringing us to where we are today. The single-axis Left-Right system of political labeling has completely misled generations to believe that vast and polar differences exist between various political ideologies, which in fact do not exist. This misinformation has resulted in vitriolic debate and even violence and death. Few theologians over history have managed to recognize the simple factor that differentiates all religions that have ever existed.¹ Likewise, and I do not think it is an oversimplification to say that few philosophers and political theorists have managed to recognize the single factor that differentiates all political theories that have existed throughout history.²

The earliest scholastic use of the term liberalism was in theology and specifically refers to any deviation from orthodox (meaning “original” or “established”) dogma and doctrine. This concept arose from the legal theories of statutory interpretation, which was the basis of magisterial code in Roman law and of English common law, which interpreted and established the intended meaning of statutory law. Historical jurisprudence has taught that no legislation perfectly, unambiguously, and specifically addresses all matters that may arise over time. In ancient monarchical systems, the lawmaker (king) was most often also the interpreter of the law. As societies grew in complexity

¹ *This single factor in comparative religion is purely dependent on one’s view of man’s will—whether it is free or bound—and what role the will of man plays in his blamelessness, innocence, or moral purity before God. Without this blamelessness, man cannot spend eternity with a perfectly just and holy God. All religions over the course of human history (Christian and non-Christian) can be categorized as either a religion commanding man to do something to achieve temporal or eternal righteousness (blamelessness) to earn God’s mercy or a religion that teaches that man can do nothing to be perfectly righteous and that God alone in His mercy must do it for him.*

² *This single factor in political theory is purely dependent on one’s view on the nature of man—whether it is fundamentally good and pliable, or fundamentally corrupt and immutable.*

and size, the sheer volume of legal challenges made it impossible for the monarch alone to judge all cases. Therefore, societies established hierarchical systems of magistrates or judges charged with interpreting and applying legislation to specific challenges leaving the final word on appeal to the supreme authority (the monarch). Universal to the various systematic theories of statutory interpretation that developed over time was the concept of “narrow” (conservative) versus “broad” (liberal) interpretation of the intended meaning of specific words in the statute. Words are imperfect symbols to communicate intent. They are at times ambiguous and change in meaning over time; hence, their “broad” and “narrow” interpretation. Unforeseen situations are inevitable, and new technologies and cultures may change the meaning of words and/or change the basis, on which the legislation was originally written—*e.g.*, what was once thought to be scientifically or causally true may one day be proven to be false, yet the intent of the legislation remains apropos. One of the most fundamental factors that differentiates political, theological, and sociological ideologies is the meaning of key terms. Hence, the meaning of liberalism remains controversial. To mitigate this controversy in our discussion here, let us stipulate that the meaning of liberalism in the three arenas that we use the term is as follows:

- **POLITICAL LIBERALISM** can be divided into three categories: classical liberalism; neoclassical liberalism or libertarianism; and progressive liberalism. Classical liberalism, which is a misnomer because it is rooted in a traditionally conservative view of the nature of man and natural law, is founded on ideas of liberty and equality and, above all else, values the freedom of individuals and property rights, including the freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly, and markets, as well as limited government. These are not liberal concepts. In matters of moral and political philosophy, classical liberalism places the wisdom of the ancestors and traditional conservative values over modernity and science. Progressivism is antithetical to classical liberalism. Neoclassical liberalism or libertarianism is classical liberalism with the added extreme *laissez-faire* political philosophy advocating only minimal state intervention in the lives and wider property rights of citizens. Classical and neoclassical liberalism view government as a counter-productive force to liberty. Progressive liberalism defines liberty as social justice; social justice is the ultimate objective. Here, the chief task of government is to promote social justice. Greater value is placed on collective social justice than individual liberty; the

government's *modus operandi* is to promote a legalistic milieu of oppressive policies, rules, regulations, and laws that allegedly "engineer" a more perfect and just society, even if they impinge on individual freedoms. When balancing the tradeoffs between the greater good of collective social justice and individual liberty, collective social justice always supersedes in value. Outcome is valued over method as ethics are relative to outcome. Under progressive liberalism, moral philosophy is subservient to science and traditional dogma is condemned. Since progressive liberals do not view ethics as immutable and absolute, ethics to progressive liberals are simply cultural mores or norms that evolve from epoch to epoch. Progressive liberalism primarily looks to science to achieve the ultimate objective of enlightenment through the process of liberation from traditional dogma, illumination through scientific inquiry, and apotheosis. This process is the foundation of humanism.

- **SOCIOLOGICAL LIBERALISM** is a philosophy that human nature is fundamentally good, and that mankind's latent "goodness" needs to be guided, nurtured ("educated"), and teased out by the policies of an elite ("wise") overseer through societal apparatus of government and academia. As the fundamental "goodness" of more and more individuals is manifested, society approaches true social justice. Whereas classical liberalism emphasizes the role of individual liberty and believes that any attempt to ensure that market transactions and property rights conform to any predefined level of wealth to create "equality," "egalitarianism," and "social justice" will involve constant interference with individual freedom, social liberalism stresses the importance of equality and social justice that challenges the intimate connection between personal liberty and a private-property-based free market order. At its very foundation, sociological liberalism is meliorism.
- Finally, **THEOLOGICAL LIBERALISM** is any deviation from orthodox (meaning "original") teachings. Theological liberalism is a form of religious thought that establishes religious inquiry based on a norm (usually science and the historical-critical method) other than the authority of Holy Scripture and tends to emphasize ethics over doctrine and human experience over God's revelation in Holy Scripture. This applies to all religious faiths. However, according to orthodox Christian doctrine, Holy Scripture is *norma normans* ("the rule that rules") while Christian Confessions, Creeds, and traditions are *norma normata* ("the rule that is ruled"). Above all, theological liberalism asserts the freedom of the will

of man in matters of salvation or righteousness (justification, innocence before God); this issue alone, which constitutes humanism, is what separates all religions.

Many wrongly believe it was the liberalism of the Enlightenment that has been responsible for so many improvements in the human condition—liberation of the human mind and reason, representative democracy, individual human rights, property rights, separation of powers producing checks and balances on government, market-based capitalism, etc. However, these principles are not the product of liberalism as defined in this speech. They are plagiarized ideologies of orthodox conservative thought on the nature of man and natural law, traditionally espoused by classical liberalism, that over time have been hijacked by progressive liberalism and mutated into the Social Justice Movement, which now finds itself increasingly at war with these principles. Contrary to what most academics teach, republican democracy is not at all a liberal philosophy. Although they were liberal in many other respects, America's founding fathers feared reckless and chaotic Athenian democracy and deliberately adopted historically conservative philosophy when designing a republican democracy. In a letter to the mayor of Alexandria, Virginia on March 11, 1790, Thomas Jefferson wrote: "The republican is the only form of government which is not eternally at open or secret war with the rights of mankind." The Declaration of Independence and Constitution of the United States are the product of conservative philosophy on the nature of man and natural law. Contrary to conventional wisdom, tyrants and dictators are not conservative in political philosophy. They are overtly liberal in their legalistic oppression of individual rights and natural law. Remember, the orthodox, original definition of liberalism does not include greater individual freedom and respect for natural law. I urge you to challenge your professors on this point. The Enlightenment's reconceived definition of liberal is erroneous and perverted. The paradox of the Enlightenment is that while many philosophers of the period exalted an adulterated meaning of liberal, they also waged war against the prevailing tyrannical, irreproachable liberal political practices such as aristocracy, autocracy, and absolute monarchism, and produced some of the most enduring conservative ideas on individual liberty and governance based on natural law and the nature of man. So, while the Enlightenment resurrected critical thinking on the nature of man and natural law, its legacy has been corrupted into a socialist ideology that ultimately returns the individual to a state of subjugation. Such ideologies share the same fate as the French revolutionary Maximilian Robespierre and his *Republic of Virtue*.

What is “natural law”? Natural law, as opposed to positive law, is a body of unchanging moral principles independent of human reasoning and regarded as a basis for all human rights and conduct. Positive law is man-made and socially constructed by human reasoning. Throughout history, individual liberty has been a concept alien to human reasoning that lacks an understanding of natural law. If left solely up to human reasoning that is devoid of natural law, individual servitude to an overlord (monarch, dictator, or elitist state) is the predominant modus of governance. Aristotle held that what was “just by nature” was not always the same as what was “just by law,” that there was a natural justice valid everywhere with the same force and “not existing by people’s thinking this or that,” and that appeal could be made to it from positive law. The Jewish prophet Jeremiah quoted God: “I will put my law in their minds, and I will write it on their hearts” (Jeremiah 31:33). Apostle Paul also described God’s law written in the hearts of mankind (Romans 2:14–15; Hebrews 8:10). He was referring to natural law. In the year 1215, English noblemen used natural law to impose limits on an absolute monarch. By declaring the sovereign to be subject to the rule of law and documenting the liberties held by “free men,” the *Magna Carta* provided the foundation for individual rights in Anglo-American jurisprudence. Over 300 years later in 1550, at the height of the counter-Reformation and the hostile Council of Trent, German Lutherans who resisted Roman Catholic diktat and took up refuge in Magdeburg, the last city refusing to submit to Rome and Emperor Charles V, drafted the Magdeburg Confession—later known as the Doctrine of the Lesser Magistrates. The Magdeburg Confession was an impressive intellectual achievement, for it skillfully distilled and extended the most advanced theological and juridical (legal) theories of resistance to political tyranny that had to that date ever been formally drafted. Natural law was, in part, a basis for their argument. Just over a century later, English political philosopher John Locke wrote in his second treatise on government: “*The natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on earth, and not to be under the will or legislative authority of man, but to have only the law of nature for his rule*” (Locke 1689).³ And only a century after Locke, Thomas Jefferson and the authors of the Declaration of Independence referred to “the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God” when describing man’s right

³ Although John Locke (1632–1704) has been erroneously lauded as the “Father of liberalism,” based on the Enlightenment definition of the term, careful analysis of his philosophy, both political and moral, reveals a definitive conservative view of the nature of man and natural law. His view of the individual relative to the state is traditional conservative philosophy.

to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. However, few people realize that it was the Scottish-born American Founding Father, legal scholar, jurist, and statesman James Wilson whose arguments in a September 1774 pamphlet titled *Considerations on the Nature and the Extent of the Legislative Authority of the British Parliament*, were wholeheartedly adopted by Thomas Jefferson when he drafted the Preamble to the Declaration of Independence in 1776. In his 1774 pamphlet, Wilson promulgated the radical notion: “All men are by nature equal and free: No one has a right to any authority over another without his consent,” and then Wilson proceeded to lay out the philosophical basis to this argument and mounted a legal assault on the British conception of the constitutional structure of the British Empire (Barnett 2019, 11–14). It was an idea that Jefferson later included in his epochal draft of the Declaration of Independence. This history and the application of these anti-liberal natural law concepts are explored more deeply in the second edition of *In the Shadow of Tyranny*.

Traditionally, the conservative approach to the nature of man has been limited to *proscriptive* remedies to fringe behaviors counterproductive to the wellbeing of individuals and the community without violating the principles that prioritize individual rights over the collective. Liberalism took these traditional conservative principles and transformed and codified them into *prescriptive* legalistic, moralistic social justice legislation and jurisprudence—a form of social engineering to create an enlightened Utopian society—that prioritizes the collective over the individual, the consequence of which has been redistribution and concentration of power from the body politic to the elite few resulting in totalitarian governance and eventually tragedy. In the polemical portions of the book *In the Shadow of Tyranny: Between Hitler & Stalin*, liberalism is systematically argued to be the most important historical factor in the etiology of man-made tragedies (Dawson 1942 & 1954).

Nationalism is also a widely misunderstood term—particularly among Europeans. Although essentially present since the formation of the first societies in human history, European nationalism in its earliest form surfaced during the decline and fall of the Roman Empire in AD fifth century when tribal cultures previously under the imperial rule of Rome began ascribing themselves a unique national identity. Nationalism in meaning and practice has always been and continues to be the subject of fierce controversy. Like liberalism, nationalism is a term that has been associated

with various meanings, uses, and interpretations—either pejorative or approbatory. Since Lord Acton condemned it in 1862, and French historian and philosopher Joseph Ernest Renan broadly approved its more republican manifestations in 1882, observers and scholars have been divided, not only over its alleged beneficial or harmful effects, but as to the real meaning and nature of this elusive phenomenon. Nationalism's various meanings, uses, and interpretations generally fall into one of two categories—sectarian or patriotic nationalism. Sectarian nationalism is based on personal identity elitism or supremacy, which embraces militant xenophobia, racism, and ethnic, linguistic, and religious discrimination. Patriotic nationalism derives from collective allegiance to a nation or nationality and categorically rejects discrimination against its own members based on race, ethnicity, language, or religion.

Nationalism of the first definition has predominated human history and produced many of the worst man-made tragedies. Nationalism of the second definition when based in republican democratic governance (Aristotelian polity) has been integral to advancing dignity and ethics that have resulted in some of the most valued advances in the human condition.

Has patriotic nationalism at times also espoused sectarian nationalism? Certainly, in societies without a national constitution that enshrines individual human rights and universal suffrage for all its citizens, militant discrimination and sectarianism find fertile ground to flourish—such as colonialism, paternalism, national socialism, fascism, socialism, communism, autocracy, aristocracy, and military juntas, which have at one time or another ostracized, oppressed, or excluded a segment of their population. Immutable characteristics of human nature make it impossible to eradicate discrimination and xenophobia in all their forms. To believe otherwise would be naïve Utopianism and any legalistic effort to achieve such a sterile society would effectively result in totalitarianism. Yet, patriotic nationalism that respects its diverse constituency is an historic reality from ancient and Classical times in Western, Middle Eastern, and Eastern cultures that has positively contributed to humanity. A proper distinction between different forms of nationalism is essential to an intellectually honest appraisal of political history. Unfortunately, modern liberal Europeans view nationalism and patriotism only as sectarian and see no positive qualities in them.

Political philosopher and son of Russian and Polish refugees Stanley Isaac Benn identified at least five senses in the word *nationalism*: (1) a sentiment of loyalty to a nation (a form of patriotism); (2) a propensity, as applied to policies, to consider exclusively the interests of one's own nation, especially in cases where these compete with the interests of other nations; (3) an attitude that attaches high importance to and identification with the distinctive characteristics of a nation (race, ethnicity, language, heritage, religion) and, therefore, (4) a doctrine that maintains that national culture should be preserved; and (5) a political and an anthropological theory that asserts that humankind is naturally divided into nations, that there are determinate criteria for identifying a nation and for recognizing its members, that each nation is entitled to an independent government of its own, that states are legitimate only if constituted in accordance with this principle, and that the world would be rightly organized, politically speaking, only if every nation formed a single state and every state consisted exclusively of the whole of one nation (Benn 1967).

It should be evident that the first two senses mentioned here are related to patriotic nationalism while the latter three senses are related to sectarian nationalism.

Next to religion and liberalism, the consensus among historians, has been to regard nationalism as one of the most powerful and influential political, philosophical, social, and economic forces in the modern world (from medieval times to present) and to regard it as a necessary and fundamental element of modernity.

Finally, modern Europeans confuse humanism with humanitarianism. This has proven to be an unfortunate obstacle in my debates with Europeans on many different topics. Humanism by its most fundamental definition is an outlook or system of thought attaching prime importance to human rather than divine or supernatural matters. Humanism places natural man above the supernatural and some go so far as to reject the existence of and need for the supernatural. Although Francesco Petrarca is considered to be the "Father of Humanism," it was the German Idealist Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel who became humanism's greatest evangelist when he declared that man *is* God. Humanism views the supernatural as a product of primitive man and irrelevant to modern humanity enlightened by science and human reason. It is an antitheistic view centered on human agency, and a reliance on science and reason rather than revelation from a supernatural source to

understand reality and the world. Humanist beliefs stress the potential value and goodness of human beings, emphasize common human needs, and seek solely rationalistic ways of solving humanity's greatest challenges. Humanism is an approach to life based on reason that produces moral values solely founded on human nature and experience. Such moral values turn out to be the product of circular reasoning. For humanists, moral philosophy and ethics are continuously evolving as humanity approaches apotheosis of knowledge and enlightenment. Humanism sees humanity as the pinnacle of all existence with unlimited capabilities to find solutions to even the greatest of temporal challenges. Humanism has become a reactionary scientific counter-religion to traditional religion. Humanism is not humanitarianism.

Having stipulated the aforementioned definitions, let us turn this discussion to the life and legacy of General Peter Vlčko. Definitions of additional terms will become evident throughout this discussion.

Born in 1912 in the mountainous Slovak village of Brehý, once part of Austro-Hungary, Peter Emílius Vlčko was a lieutenant colonel in the Czechoslovak Army serving in the Military Office of the President under Edvard Beneš after the war. Peter Vlčko was the son of Czechoslovak Legionnaire who fought for democracy in Russia during the civil war. After graduation from *gymnázium* in 1931, he attended military academy in Hranice, Czechoslovakia, where he was commissioned as first lieutenant of the cavalry in 1934. Higher equestrian school in Pardubice followed by War College in Bratislava after the outbreak of war concluded his formal military education.

After Slovakia's declaration of independence and establishment of a fascist government aligned with Nazi Germany in 1939, Peter Vlčko risked and devoted his life to opposing Nazi tyranny. Forced to serve on the bloody Russian Front in Operation Barbarossa, he was wounded in combat. Despite his wounds, he managed to save two severely wounded Russian soldiers by timely delivering them to medical care. After returning from the Eastern Front, he was assigned to the war matériel department and during the height of Jewish deportations from Slovakia and at great risk to his own life, he used his position in the Ministry of National Defense to help save dozens of Jews destined for deportation and certain death in Nazi extermination camps in Poland. Falling

in love with a young Jewish woman, he secretly married her against his oath and the prevailing racist laws forbidding such relationships. Also, while serving in the Ministry of National Defense, Vlčko passed on classified information about deployments of Axis troops and armaments to a spy network connected with the Allied powers. In preparation for the Slovak National Uprising in August 1944, Vlčko served with the two largest army divisions in northeast Slovakia with secret plans to open the Dukla Pass for the Soviet Red Army. He was captured and interned by Nazi SS Panzer divisions of Army Group Heinrici in Prešov. He managed to escape and save his *aide-de-camp* from a train about to depart for Germany carrying thousands of captured Slovak soldiers. Together, with great skill they made their way south through dangerous territory to the headquarters of the revolutionary Slovak Army in Banská Bystrica where General Ján Golian, Commander-in-Chief of Czechoslovak Insurrectional Army, gave Vlčko a commission as Chief of Staff to Colonel Ján Malár of the Fourth Tactical Group Muráň defending Nitra Valley and cities of Prievidza, Handlova, Kremnica, and Banská Bystrica. Between September 1944 and April 1945, he was captured three times—twice by the Nazis and once by the Soviets—under the suspicion he was an enemy combatant or spy. Each time, Vlčko managed to either escape or persuade his captors of his innocence.

After the war, Vlčko was assigned to the military office of the president of the newly restored Czechoslovak Republic in Prague. In preparation for the post of military attaché to Washington, D.C., he was assigned as Chief of the American Section of Military Intelligence. Near this time, Soviet influence in Czechoslovakia resulted in the February 1948 *coup d'état*. Facing relentless pressure to swear loyalty to the Communist Party and Moscow, Vlčko saw no alternative other than to escape to the West. While awaiting a visa to the U.S. in a displaced persons camp in Ludwigsburg, West Germany and with great difficulty, he managed to extract his wife and two young sons out of communist Czechoslovakia in 1949.

The Vlčkos finally arrived in New York Harbor in November 1949 and began to build a life in the new, free world of their dreams. They settled in Michigan, where Peter became a testing design engineer for Ford Motor Company. Together with his wife Georgina, they raised four children. After the 1968 Prague Spring, Peter dedicated his life to writing his memoirs and fighting the tyrannies of communism and anti-Semitism. After five years of drafting his manuscript in his

native Slovak tongue and then translating it into English, he published his war memoir *In the Shadow of Tyranny* in 1973. In 1979, he retired from Ford Motor Company after more than thirty years of service. In 1981, he was honored with the title of “Righteous Among the Nations” by the Israeli Knesset and Yad Vashem: Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem, Israel. After peaceful division of Czechoslovakia in 1991, he was promoted to major general, in retirement, of the Slovak Army by Slovakia’s first Democratic president Michal Kováč in 1994. In 1998, he and his wife Georgina were granted Slovak citizenship. He peacefully died in Michigan in his wife’s arms in January 2004 at the age of 91-years. On 9 September 2004, the Slovak government facilitated a state funeral for General Vlčko with full military honors in his birth village Brehy. Present at the funeral were political and military dignitaries from the United States and Europe. Peter Vlčko’s legacy lives on *in memoriam* in national and Holocaust memorial museums throughout the world.

The title of my speech is: “Beware of Cries for Social Justice.” What actually is social justice, and can it ever be achieved by a society? We will explore these questions along with the reality of history and human nature. However, in all honesty, I must warn you that this speech is merely a crumb of all there is to say on human nature and the human condition. Much more can be discovered in the book *In the Shadow of Tyranny: Between Hitler & Stalin*.

Although this book is about General Peter Vlčko and Czechoslovakia during the Second World War, this work explores much more than war. It asks and answers the question why such tragedies happen at all and how they will continue to happen as history is permitted to repeat over and over again. This is the main theme of this speech. For General Vlčko, this was the main motivation to write his war memoir.

In restoring my father’s original intentions for writing his book, my primary objective with the second edition was to present the philosophical and psychological context for two of the greatest tragedies of the twentieth century—Nazism and communism. To accomplish this, I added “Part One – The Origins of the Nazi Movement” to the 1973 edition. In Part One, I carefully and systematically laid out an argument from history, philosophy, theology, political theory, psychology, and the arts, proving how the gradual and steady devolution in Europe’s value system

over the course of 500 years ultimately led to these two great tragedies. Then, after taking the reader through the intriguing and captivating story of Peter Vlčko and Georgina Reichsfeld, I closed the book with an epitome, which digests the main message of the book and the lessons to be learned, thereof—hence, the title of the closing chapter is *Epimythium* (or “moral of the story”) taken from the Greek Titan god Epimetheus, who as Greek mythology holds, possessed the gift of afterthought, or reconsideration. *Epimythium* provocatively explores some of the core lessons intended by this edited work. It is my sincere hope this new and expanded edition will help future generations move beyond the mere study of historical facts and to become metahistorians with a deeper understanding of history, the world, and human nature when developing their *Weltanschauung*.

This epic and harrowing historical Holocaust thriller has all the elements of a timeless story: intrigue; espionage; war; racism; genocide; political tyranny; forbidden romance; imprisonment; daring escapes; and freedom. In addition to the events in Czechoslovakia during the turbulent decade of 1938–1948, the second edition includes a novel examination of the origins of the Nazi and communist movements, the history and etiology of modern anti-Semitism, the Russian Revolution and civil war, the “Jewish Question” in Slovakia, the Soviet Union’s role in the Slovak National Uprising, the 1948 communist putsch in Czechoslovakia, and war crimes trials and amnesty. In addressing these issues, the second edition explores the inextricable nexus between theology, philosophy, political theory, psychology, art, historiography, and culture, how these disciplines have been hijacked by rationalistic humanistic forces, and how they have misled humanity over centuries leading it on an endless pursuit of self-righteousness and moral superiority. Closing out this sweeping, landmark *magnum opus*, the reader is left with a provocative examination of how humanity in all its progressive modernity could have produced such enormous tragedies as Nazism and communism, the timeless lessons, thereof, and a challenge to all citizens to explore under what ethical circumstances they may and should revolt against a tyrannical government. I believe that adding this closing provocative debate encourages the reader to examine his own beliefs on the subject and how inadequate and fettered their understanding may be.

For decades after his escape from communist Czechoslovakia, Peter Vlčko faced condemnation for his alleged treason by colleagues who remained in Czechoslovakia. Some among them merely regretted their failure to act as Peter Vlčko did. It was their misunderstanding of their ethical rights and duty to their government and motherland that led them to submit to a tyrannical government.

For Peter Vlčko, the decision to escape to the West in 1948 was a terrifically difficult one for several reasons. First, his wife was pregnant with their third child and his two toddler sons were barely out of diapers. Peter knew there was no way they could accompany him on such a dangerous venture. Second, Peter Vlčko was on a fast track to leadership positions in the Ministry of National Defense. Several of his immediate superiors who swore loyalty to the Communist Party eventually either became president of Czechoslovakia or held top leadership positions in the military. Had Peter Vlčko remained in Czechoslovakia and capitulated to the communists, his future at that time appeared to be very promising as a member of the elite ruling class. Above all, Peter Vlčko was a lionhearted patriot of Czechoslovakia and, like his father who was a Czechoslovak Legionnaire fighting for democracy in Russia, Peter loved his motherland. To leave his motherland forever was a tragic dilemma that he agonized over. An entire chapter in the book, titled “The Greatest Dilemma,” is dedicated to this agony. Yet, Peter Vlčko’s unwavering conscience would never permit him to compromise his values and beliefs. In his mind, he had only one choice. Although he had many contacts in the military intelligence services, when he escaped to the American Occupation Zone in West Germany, he had no idea if he would ever see his motherland or his wife and children ever again. This exemplifies how strongly he held to his ethical beliefs and core values.

How does the story of General Peter Vlčko and Czechoslovakia apply to us in these modern times? What can we learn from this history? Simply put, there are some things that never change over history, and one of them is human nature. I am not a subjectivist, nor do I subscribe to the concept of meliorism. Neither did General Vlčko. Meliorism is the belief that human nature, and thereby the world, can be changed for the better solely by human effort. History teaches us otherwise.

So much has been written over the years, particularly in the twentieth century, on the various causes of war over the long course of human history, but the conclusions have predictably varied

depending on the narrowly focused disciplines of the scholar who is reviewing history. Very little holistic scholarly work has been published that transcends the interests of specialized academic disciplines and digs deeper than the superficial, academic observations of historians whose conclusions inherently lack a metaphysical understanding of human nature and its role in humanity's self-destructive behaviors. This matter of the nature of man is often overlooked among scholars debating how best to facilitate emerging democracies that are transitioning from totalitarian governance.

Mahatma Gandhi often said: "Those who believe that religion and politics are not connected do not understand either."

Among primitive peoples, the ideas that later came to be designated as political are inextricably blended with conceptions known to us as legal, ethical, theological, ecclesiastical, and even mathematical. The disentanglement of this confused mass and the isolation and definition of what is purely political is practically never fully accomplished. From the fact that political philosophy in all ages has stood in such intimate relationship with other philosophy, it is inevitable that a historical treatment of the special should involve a good deal of attention to the general field. Particularly obstinate is the entanglement of politics with ethics and jurisprudence. A by no means insignificant proportion of the thought of political philosophers has been devoted to defining the interrelationship of the three, or to demonstrating that no distinction can be drawn between them. Ethical and juristic concepts, therefore, must figure largely in a history of political concepts (Dunning 1919, xix–xxi).

In polemology (the study of war), when one surveys the history of international war, the majority of conflicts fall into either one or a combination of the following four categories: first, ideological – meaning theopolitical; second, economic – meaning either survival or hegemony; third, anticolonial – meaning the desire for self-rule; and fourth, diversionary – intended to mask underlying domestic weaknesses – the classic ruse. Any of these causes of war can be considered just or unjust. When unjust, these four primary causes of war can be simply combined under either belief in moral superiority or lust for power, and from a psychological viewpoint, these two narrower categories can be seen as one—the lust for domination and power over others (known

from patristic medieval times as *libido dominandi*). St. Augustine of Hippo had much to say about *libido dominandi* (Augustine, preface). In the closing chapter of *In the Shadow of Tyranny*, I explore the theological and psychological root causes of *libido dominandi*, its essence in human nature, and systematically integrate it into the cyclical tragedies of human history.

In his *opus magnum The City of God*, Saint Augustine of Hippo elucidated his understanding of what constitutes a “just war” (Augustine). With some minor additions, Augustine’s definition has remained the standard in Western philosophy. Augustine never countenanced a strict separation of the political from the theological because in his understanding of history and human nature, the two are inextricable and mutually symbiotic. Moving forward to modern times, two of the twentieth century’s greatest historians and political and cultural philosophers, Englishman Christopher Dawson and German Erich Vögelin, also viewed politics and religion as inseparable and as the very reflection of a society’s cultural values. Both men, who lived during tumultuous years from the opening of the twentieth century to the Vietnam War era, had much to say on war, political movements, and their intimate relationship with religion and culture. From these philosophers and metahistorians, we can conclude that all wars and political movements have an essential element of religion or moral sense. This moral sense can be traditional or nontraditional, conscious or subconscious. The very concept of justice is inherently rooted in some kind of moral sense. History has shown how mankind has often manipulated this moral sense for selfish motives.

Let us now examine the role of social justice in history. The concept of social justice can be traced as far back in time as the origins of humanity when it faced the reality of the limitations placed on it by the Creator.

Let us pause here and digress for a moment. Yes, I said “Creator” because while it is impossible to persuade an intransigent unbeliever, the fact is that only an illogical person would believe that the universe of matter and the complex laws of physics that govern it created themselves from nothing or that they simply always existed in one form or another. According to a 2012 study conducted by the Pew Research Center that surveyed people in more than 230 countries, it is estimated that over 90 percent of the world’s population believes in a supernatural creator.

Furthermore, a 2017 Worldwide Independent Network Gallup International study revealed that only nine percent of the world's population identifies as atheist.

No antitheistic or antisupernatural evolutionary theory has ever been able to explain the origin of matter, the incredibly complex laws of physics that govern it, and how matter attained consciousness and self-awareness. The laws of mathematics, probability, and physics overrule any amount of time provided. To the intellectually honest and uncorrupt mind, proof of the existence of a higher power than nature is overwhelmingly evident in the physical and metaphysical realms. Without a supernatural power outside of nature and the hope of life beyond the grave, every philosophical question from love to justice becomes a mockery of the mind. When one denies the possibility of life beyond the grave—when one tries to live without God—the greatest philosophical problem for the skeptic remains, the problem of life's suffering—the existence of evil and the finality of death. Without God, origins, purpose, and destiny are pointless inquiries and justice has no referential basis. As a trained and published scientist, I briefly debate these undeniable facts in the closing chapter of the book.

Once again, the concept of social justice can be traced as far back in time as the origins of humanity when it faced the reality of the limitations placed on it by the Creator. Soon humanity began to think in terms of how to rectify his limited condition and achieve the same heights of knowledge and glory as the Creator. Humanity did not think these thoughts out of a latent evil residing deep within it. No, as a matter of fact, before disobeying the Creator, humanity was pure and content in its condition. However, when thoughts of doubt in what the Creator had told humanity about its limitations were rhetorically introduced together with the melioristic enticement that it is possible for humanity to improve its state to be like the Creator, humanity yielded to the false argument, and the seeds of doubt infected humanity. This doubt led to betrayal of the Creator that resulted in humanity being cut off from the Creator. Disharmony with our Creator naturally led to disharmony with our fellow man, with nature, and ultimately disharmony with truth. Mankind could no longer distinguish truth from lie. By mankind's rejection of the Creator's promise and veracity (effectively, unbelief), a bondage to depravity and death were for the first time incorporated into humanity's state of being and destiny. Moreover, to its original sole emotion of happiness, three

pathological emotions borne of guilt and shame have been added to humanity's permanent temporal state—fear, anger, and sadness.

Humanity lost understanding of its true origins, purpose, and destiny, the understanding of which emanated from and reinforced the harmony that humanity enjoyed with its fellow creation and the Creator. From here on out, humanity's method of thinking and operating became purely anthropomorphic, humanistic, eudemonistic, hedonistic, self-serving, utilitarian, egoistic, and consequently, ultimately self-defeating. From this point forward, all of humanity's endeavors are unwittingly focused on its attempt by its own powers to reverse its depraved state, redeem itself, and restore the perfection, innocence, and harmony that it once possessed with its fellow creation and the Creator. Essentially, in its hubris humanity by itself strives to erase what happened and, in this struggle, it engages in war with God and with itself that will only confirm its ultimate destiny of damnation and self-destruction.

St. Augustine's anthropology of the Fall of Man hinges on the lust for domination (*libido dominandi*) that became humanity's core motivation (Augustine, preface). Having been stripped of a relationship with God, humanity fell into a deprivation of self, having been stripped of relational harmony with others, humanity fell into a deprivation of relationships that was based on trust and love, and having fallen into a life dominated by falsity caused by living by one's own standards, humanity fell into a deprivation of truth. Consequently, man was totally given over to this internal lust for domination—a domination not solely rooted in contempt or anger but rooted also in fear and a deep lust for justice (erasing our guilt). Humanity became dominated by lust itself. Unable to recognize that his problem rests with his alienation from the Creator, others, and the world, man turns his alienation against everything in the world. In short, man seeks to find his refuge by possessing and dominating everything possible. Only in this possession can man find his contentment—or so he thinks.

Because of its new state of deprivation (or depravity), humanity embarked on an endless pursuit of rectifying its alleged inferior position for the sake of justice, a new perfection, and a greater virtue in hopes of pleasing the Creator and restoring the harmony that was lost. Being deceived, humanity naively believed it would please the Creator the more it became like the Creator.

However, these subconscious rebellious thoughts were originally rooted in the lack of a thankful heart brought on by doubt or disbelief in what the Creator had promised. Hence, the Social Justice Movement was born. In the book *In the Shadow of Tyranny*, this phenomenological history of the fundamental psychopathology of humanity and its role in the cyclical tragedies of history is systematically exposed. Without a clear understanding of this psychopathology, there can be no honest and accurate discussion of political and moral philosophy.

From ancient to medieval times, justice for the individual in society traditionally represented social justice; individual rights naturally reflected upon wider collective society. Over time, individual justice came to be defined by the concepts of ethical jurisprudence, equal protection under the law, due process in the courts, and more broadly the right to life and liberty. Many societies over that time held themselves as just; however, in retrospect and by the aforementioned definition, given the existence of slavery, serfdom, and reserved privilege for the landed aristocracy, they were unjust societies. Slowly, societies began to insist on a more just balance between an absolute ruler, the nobility class, and the rights of ordinary subjects. Over much time, this effort ultimately produced the Constitution of the United States in the year 1787. This was mankind's first successful legal codification of traditionally understood social justice that placed the individual at the top of the power pyramid with wide limits on the power of government. Furthermore, this document intentionally contained the seeds of slavery's ultimate destruction in America. Even though slavery in America continued until 1865 and universal suffrage was not achieved until 1920, the world was shocked, amazed, and envious that a people could successfully unshackle themselves from one of the most powerful tyrannical monarchies in the world and establish an independent, free, and self-chosen government under such a document. However, almost immediately after ratification of the American Constitution, the traditional understanding of social justice in the Western world turned on its head and morphed into a novel concept based on the distribution of wealth. Terrifying countercultural revolutions beginning in France ensued across the Western world and took this new concept to extreme heights.

By modern definitions, social justice is equated with the "fair and compassionate" distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society with the right of all human beings to benefit from a safe and pleasant environment. A clear, generally accepted definition of "fair," however,

remains elusive. The forced redistribution of wealth—a form of legislated morality—continues to be the pillar of “progressive” social justice. The United Nations’ 2006 document, titled *Social Justice in an Open World: The Role of the United Nations*, offers a concise history, as follows (United Nations 2006):

[T]he notion of social justice is relatively new. None of history’s great philosophers—not Plato or Aristotle, or Confucius or Averroes, or even Rousseau or Kant—saw the need to consider justice or the redress of injustices from a social perspective. The concept first surfaced in Western thought and political language in the wake of the industrial revolution and the parallel development of the socialist doctrine. It emerged as an expression of protest against what was perceived as the capitalist exploitation of labour and as a focal point for the development of measures to improve the human condition. It was born as a revolutionary slogan embodying the ideals of progress and fraternity. Following the revolutions that shook Europe in the mid-1800s, social justice became a rallying cry for progressive thinkers and political activists. . . . By the mid-twentieth century, the concept of social justice had become central to the ideologies and programmes of virtually all the leftist and centrist political parties around the world, and few dared to oppose it directly. Social justice represented the essence and the *raison d’être* [“ráyson daytra”; or justification of existence] of the social democrat doctrine and left its mark in the decades following the Second World War. Of particular importance in the present context is the link between the growing legitimization of the concept of social justice, on the one hand, and the emergence of the social sciences as distinct areas of activity and the creation of economics and sociology as disciplines separate from philosophy (notably moral philosophy), on the other hand. Social justice became more clearly defined when a distinction was drawn between the social sphere and the economic sphere, and grew into a mainstream preoccupation when a number of economists became convinced that it was their duty not only to describe phenomena but also to propose criteria for the distribution of the fruits of human activity.

Here ends the short history of social justice provided in the United Nations document. With a proper understanding of this short history, a person can see how easily the masses can be misled to believe they are on the side of moral righteousness when fighting for this new social justice. This was the ideological basis on which the early pioneers of socialism and communism placed their faith. However, we will now examine how pursuit of this new social justice has been hijacked by self-righteous, self-serving, power-hungry forces who took the movement to extremes and have only produced tyranny, but a much more subtle tyranny than the Republic of Robespierre.

I first visited Czechoslovakia in 1971 during the crackdown after the Prague Spring of 1968. I met many of my family members who survived the Second World War, some of whom also managed to survive Auschwitz. I remember to this day what struck me the most about these people. Without exception, each of them lived in a psychological prison of fear. This was not a fear based in posttraumatic stress disorder from the past war, but an ongoing fear of powerful government authorities and an intrusive police state. When asked ordinary questions about their lives and social contentment, they winced and exhibited fear to speak honestly and openly. Let us not forget, this was the generation that remembered what life was like in democratic Czechoslovakia between the two great wars.

I did not have the opportunity to return to Slovakia until nearly 30 years later in 2000, after the fall of communism and division of Czechoslovakia. Since 2000, I have returned several times and traveled all over Slovakia. In 2009, my son was wed to a beautiful young Slovak woman in Košice. They now live in Florida with their two children. Much has changed in Slovakia since 1971; however, one thing most certainly has not changed. Slovaks continue to exhibit a deeply rooted fear. This fear has evolved from the prior generation's fear; however, it is still based in the same fundamental psychopathology.

For more than 1,000 years, Slovaks have been the tragic victims of one overlord after another. And during those 1,000 years, not once did Slovaks rise and seriously fight for their liberty, human rights, and national identity. The only possible exceptions in Slovak history were the two uprisings in 1848 and 1944. But we know how those two moments in history played out and ended. There are very few moments in history when Slovaks were psychologically prepared to face a crossroads;

moments when existential dilemmas presented themselves to be resolved and Slovaks rose to the occasion. Unlike 1938–39, 1993 was a true fulfillment of Slovak longing that eluded a definitive solution for a millennium. Thirty years have passed since that long-overdue solution, and I wholeheartedly congratulate this first generation of truly free Slovaks who have suffered through this painful transition. We are now witnessing a setback in Slovakia, but if the next generation of Slovaks remains dedicated and faithful to this journey towards individual liberty, I am convinced that even greater hope and promise awaits them, and the psychological imprisonment will finally end.

One lasting consequence of the tragic history of the Slovak people is that a sense of abdication and submission has been deeply rooted into the general Slovak psyche. As the old saying goes: “There are no tears in Moscow,” so too do Slovaks rarely express deep regret and anger over their lack of control over their lives. They have an encoded psychological reflex to acquiesce and submit, regardless of the oppression that they live under—a sense of helplessness and hopelessness. We do not see this same general sense of psychological imprisonment among the Czechs, Poles, or Hungarians. Somehow Slovak spirit, national pride and identity, and patriotism have been extinguished by a millennium of tyranny and oppression. The concepts of individual liberty and natural law have not been deeply rooted values in the Slovak psyche. Few Slovaks are willing to risk their lives and die for these values. Interestingly, in May 2024, Ipsos, the world’s third largest market research agency, conducted a survey of Slovaks for the Central European Digital Media Observatory Hub (CEDMO)⁴ on the issue of whether Slovaks would be willing to take up arms and defend their homeland if any country attacked their country. The survey revealed that only 25 percent of Slovaks would be willing to do so.

For generations, Slovaks have been a nation of passive sheep who listen to the voice of their shepherd, whether he be a despot or merely a puppet of a foreign power. Slovaks continue to admire and yearn for an iron-fisted strongman to lead them to the promised land. But the only

⁴ CEDMO, as an independent non-partisan multidisciplinary hub, aims to identify, research and prioritize the most critical sources and causes of information disorders in Central Europe (mainly the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland). This international consortium was created to propose a set of short and longer-term actions, as well as recommendations to help civil society, public institutions and the private sector respond to the declining trust in key institutions and help society to resist the effect of increasing exposure to mis- and disinformation.

reward that they have received is one form of socialistic tyranny or another—either from the West or the East. Slovaks are particularly vulnerable to sectarian nationalism or conspiracy theories that capitalistic democracy is a menace and immoral. According to a regional opinion survey released in May 2024 by Globsec, a research group based in Bratislava, of all the countries in Central and Eastern Europe that shook off communist rule in 1989, Slovakia has the highest proportion of citizens who view capitalist democracy as a threat to their identity and values—43 percent compared with 15 percent in the Czech Republic.

The Ukraine crisis has precipitated and exposed how Slovak society is presently on edge and deeply divided. Slovaks have arrived at another historic crossroads; nearly equally divided between the old loyalty to your eastern “brothers” with their rationalistic humanistic system of mythical proletariat social justice—now known as the new elite oligarchic future—and the new awakening movement that seeks meaning and truth in individual freedom and representative democracy but rejects the old definitions and pejorative value judgments of bourgeois capitalism. Many Slovaks are still beholden to the belief that the Soviets were honorable liberators against fascism and exploitive capitalism. Such Slovaks deny the truth as it has become more and more evident over time that the Russians were no more interested in saving Slovaks from the tyranny of fascism and capitalism than they were interested in establishing social justice. By Stalin’s own admission, the objective of Soviet National Front strategy through the Comintern—or world communism via the Communist International—was more about geopolitical domination than social justice. Stalin emphatically explained to Yugoslav Communist Milovan Djilas in 1945: “whoever occupies a territory also imposes his own social system. . . . It cannot be otherwise” (Djilas 1962, 114). Historian and diplomat George Keenan once said that “[w]orld communism is like malignant parasite which feeds only on diseased tissue” (Karabell 2021, 347). The values of individualism and capitalist democracy are ideological obstacles to geopolitical domination by a collectivist state system that is diametrically opposed to individualism and its most enabling form of governance. If individualism is immoral and unjust, then the relative value of the individual is beneath that of the collective state and the state becomes the highest priority.

The false class struggle that the Germans Marx and Engels envisioned would bring society closer to social justice has only brought 170 years of oppression, stagnation, mediocrity, despondence,

and disillusionment. Admittedly, in the beginning, the class struggle liberated the working classes from exploitive aristocrats and barons. It put bread on everyone's table and literacy at everyone's fingertips. But it was not satisfied with its liberating achievements and raced deeper into chaos only to show its true ideology—power and control over the masses; a Robespierrean totalitarian diktat over all human endeavors and relations to serve the almighty state under the guise of moral superiority and social justice. After finally breaking the shackles of a tyrannical aristocracy, individuals once again were denied the right to weigh and decide for themselves what is morally right, just, and beneficial and then decide on their own under what kind of government they wish to live. Morality and social justice by government fiat was the new paradigm of justice.

But who was this government? Who dared to claim they knew better what was best for individuals and society? By whose definitions were such values determined to be superior and correct? Careful analysis of the class struggle movement exposes how one despotic overlord managed to replace another despotic overlord. This was all simply accomplished by convincing the masses of the moral and socially just superiority of the class struggle ideology. The class struggle was so successful because it exploited humanity's greatest weakness—humanity's incessant drive to be like God (in theological terms known in Latin as *sicut Deus*, in psychological and philosophical terms known in Latin as *homo incurvatus in se* – man curved in on himself). To achieve this high status, the class struggle movement first had to destroy all traditional beliefs in God and God's principles. At first, the movement attempted to be ecumenical by amalgamating traditional moral beliefs with modern rationalistic humanistic ideology. Very quickly, however, the movement discovered this was in direct conflict with Marxist dialectical materialism and unacceptably slow in bringing about social change. The class struggle movement then radically shifted to excise all traditional moral values and replace them, as well as the God who gave those values to humanity, with a new deity—the all-powerful state. And violent revolution became the central apparatus by which this social justice could be efficiently achieved. Every citizen-comrade would expend all their energies to serve and uplift the state. In the process, every citizen-comrade should reap the benefits of economic and social egalitarianism lifting all of society equally. Once this critical threshold was reached, the class struggle movement would theoretically cease to exist, and universal harmony would prevail.

Well, it took society a very long time to discover these romantic Utopian promises were a lie. Society finally began to realize it suffered from stagnation, mediocrity, despondency, and disillusionment. Individuals realized they were living a life without hope. The hope they found lacking was based in the concept that if one works harder and more diligently than his neighbor, he can rise above his peers and humble circumstances, and improve his and the life of his children. Moreover, industrious individuals naturally need to be able to rely on periodic fair compensation for the hard work and extra effort they expend above other people. And equally important to the individual is the natural desire to freely worship and serve his Creator according to his faith and value system—religious freedom is a freedom of the conscience while the opposite is enslavement. Coexistence of religious freedom and Marxian dialectical materialism is impossible. This is why Marx and Engels ultimately had to extirpate all traditional moral value systems that stood over the state. And this is why the Founding Fathers of America enshrined in the Constitution religious liberty as the very first right of a citizen.

In this material world, one of the most valuable rewards of honest labor is ownership of private property and the rights that are inherently attached to it. Historically, private property rights have long been linked with individual liberty and natural law. “Property must be secured,” John Adams succinctly observed in 1790, “or liberty cannot exist.” Noah Webster, an important influence on the founding fathers of America, expounded on John Locke’s principles of property rights and stated: “the power of the people has increased in an exact proportion to their acquisitions of property . . . *property* is the basis of *power* . . . the means of preserving our freedom. *A general and tolerably equal distribution of landed property is the whole basis of national freedom*” (Webster 1787). This principle was inferred throughout the U.S. Constitution.

An economic system grounded on respect for private property rights helps to ensure that the power differential between government and individuals remains in the individual’s favor. Property was therefore traditionally seen as a safeguard of liberty because it set limits on the reach of government. By helping to preserve the economic independence of individuals, secure private property encourages participation in the political process and willingness to challenge government overreach. Viewed in this light, the ownership of private property represents personal empowerment. These are the very natural longings that the class struggle movement condemned

as immoral and socially unjust—as “bourgeois.” Without these forms of compensation for an honest day’s hard work and the security that is created by individual property rights that no government can infringe, the individual feels powerless and enslaved with no hope for his own security and betterment in life, thereby rendering him a nihilist without a sense of purpose. Again, it is a question of natural law: who should possess greater priority and power, the people or the state? Psychologically, purposeless, insecure, and powerless individuals with no means of improving their lot in life become despondent and disillusioned and society ultimately stagnates while corruption grows. Ironically, the ruling elites of such governments reserve exclusively for themselves these very same natural longings and rights that belong to all people. So again, society was divided into the haves and have-nots. Social and economic equality was only a Utopian fantasy. How is this any different than the feudalism, under which they lived for centuries?

When you eliminate all the pedantic details, what differentiates capitalism and socialism is very simple. Free market capitalism is a messy, undisciplined system, which by historical experience wisely recognizes that any effort to change the fundamental nature of humankind is foolhardy, unnatural, and counterproductive. Instead, capitalism focuses its strategy to improve the wellbeing of individuals and society on exploiting immutable human nature—greed, selfishness, and self-serving ambition. Capitalism, built on a foundation of guaranteed fundamental individual human rights, creates a state of equal opportunity competition, by which the hardest working, most talented, most clever reap the greatest rewards and without artificially predefined limitations. Anyone who is willing to expend the effort and develop the necessary skills can reach unlimited heights of prosperity and choices. I, as a first-generation American who has witnessed my own family and many other immigrant families reap the fruits of their hard labor, can personally testify to this truth. It is not a fantasy or capitalist propaganda.

American economist, historian, and social theorist Thomas Sowell explained that the inherent concession or tradeoff of such a system is that a sector of society will be left behind; however, this is more a result of individual choice or failure than a diktat of the system (Sowell 1987, 19–27). Although greed, selfishness, and self-serving ambition are viewed as natural individual and societal weaknesses, they are constitutionally protected because experienced political leaders have learned over history that any attempt to legislatively eradicate these human weaknesses is

dangerously naïve and only leads to tyranny. As more and more individuals climb the ladder of prosperity and reap the benefits of their increasingly creative and skillful labors, collective society profits in many tangible and intangible ways, and individual liberty is preserved. Hence, in a truly free society, social justice is defined as individual justice and the wellbeing of collective society remains a naturally produced fruit rather than a dictated, artificial outcome.

Socialism is a melioristic ideology that demands fundamental changes in human nature; individual greed and self-serving ambition must be eradicated to achieve a socially just society, as defined by socialism. These changes do not occur naturally or spontaneously, nor do they occur voluntarily. For such fundamental changes in human nature to occur, they must be forced on individuals. However, from where should such force come? From nature? From collective society? From some supernatural source? No, the only answer that socialism has provided is that a small group of elites decide how the rest of society must live and behave. These enlightened elite individuals, who have allegedly progressed and outgrown greed, selfishness, and self-serving ambition, appoint themselves—archetypically, by force—as the leaders of such Utopian societies. These wise leaders grant themselves unlimited powers to take society by the hand and guide or force it to the apotheosis of perfect social justice—an engineered, predetermined outcome based entirely on forcefully remodeling fundamental human nature.

This takes us back to a very revealing quotation by one of the early architects of communism, the French political agitator, former Catholic priest, and journalist of the French Revolutionary period, commonly known as “the first revolutionary communist,” François-Noël (“Gracchus”) Babeuf. In February 1797, defending himself before the High Court of Vendôme against charges of inciting rebellion, Babeuf emphatically stated:

Society must be made to operate in such a way that it eradicates once and for all the desire of a man to become richer, or wiser, or more powerful than others.

Robespierre’s Republic of Virtue and 170 years of history have shown us that such ideology produces only tyranny and despotism. Some minor, superficial improvements in society are clearly evident, but they are the product of coercion and, in the end, even these improvements prove to be

far from ideal and merely measured by society's lowest common denominator. Individuals and society *in toto* find themselves imprisoned in a life of mediocrity, stagnation, despair, and disillusionment for the reasons already cited in this speech. So, while capitalism wisely acknowledges the immutable nature of humanity and exploits its less virtuous characteristics for positive results, socialism naively worships rationalistic humanism and meliorism, and insists that with firm leadership social justice can be achieved by fundamentally altering human nature, even if it requires coercion and tyranny.

Unfortunately, Slovaks—and a growing number of Americans—remain divided over this debunked ideology because some remain blindly and obstinately convinced the alternative is immoral. Sadly, their understanding of real morality has been poisoned and manipulated by rationalistic humanistic psychology—that mankind needs a new God, the collective state ruled by the wise authoritarian elite who will finally bring about the true social justice that has eluded the traditional God. In essence, rationalistic humanism has brainwashed the masses into believing that they can be like God and lift themselves up to a Utopian state. Does that lie sound familiar? Just read the third chapter of Genesis and the writings of rationalistic humanists Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Ludwig Andreas von Feuerbach, and their like. I warned you that ignorance of history causes it to repeat over and over again. But in the end, the hypocritical ruling elite in such socialist societies managed to replace the former aristocratic elite with the same outcome. It turns out that the proletariat possesses no moral superiority over the bourgeoisie. In the end, the dictate of the proletariat has produced only mediocrity, stagnation, despondency, and disillusionment because it has humiliated and demoted the individual to a life of enslavement in service to the collectivist state and its ruling elite. I ask you again, how is that any different than the feudal system under which they lived for centuries?

Ask yourself which system is most successful in lifting the collective society while preserving individual liberty. Ask yourself under which system would you prefer to live: one, in which a small elite dictate what is best for you and, thereby, for all of society, leaving you as a mere cog in the great wheel like Sisyphus or Faust always striving but never reaching true happiness; or one, in which you are free as an individual to choose your own value system and goals, and free to develop and maximize your greatest skills and talents for yourself in the open marketplace of ideas, thereby

leaving it to your peers and society to decide whether your skills and talents are valuable, and whether they produce the kind of fruit that benefits many along with the collective society. I believe the choice is clear; you do not have to sell your souls to the devil's advocate Mephistopheles.

These were the thoughts that motivated General Peter Vlčko when he fought fascism and communism and ultimately when he faced the terrifying decision to abandon his native country. What lessons have we learned from these historical experiences and the life of General Peter Vlčko? Is the old maxim correct that any effort to create a heaven on earth has only brought hell? Are efforts to achieve perfect social justice by government fiat actually counterproductive? Does humanity become tyrannical and evil when it strives to be like God rather than humbly submitting to God? Is submission to God an outdated, primitive concept in our modern, progressive society, too humiliating, and abhorrent to a liberated and enlightened mind? These are the sobering questions and lessons that I, in all humility, believe we should be sensitive to. I can only pray and encourage you to honestly ask yourself these painful questions. Without this kind of humble self-examination, history is doomed to repeat itself in even worse forms than we have witnessed in Nazism and communism, both of which, I remind you, began as social justice movements. There is no limit to the brutality of humanity when it believes in its own ability to achieve righteousness and moral superiority, especially when this self-righteousness is in direct opposition to natural law. And the only true foundation to natural law is God's Truth, which is a repudiation of rationalistic humanism and self-righteousness.

I thank you for this privilege of speaking to you about the life and legacy General Peter Vlčko and the timeless lessons that future generations can learn from him.

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