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The Universal and the Particular Conservatism, Nationalism and Post-Liberalism

One of the marks of the present moment is the rise and pre-eminence of post-liberalism and the increasing distinction and debate between post-liberal thinkers. Unsurprisingly, and I write as a post-liberal, we often all broadly agree on the relative demerits of liberalism and differ, sometimes sharply, on the remedies required. It's a mark of intellectual and analytic success that it is now a commonplace to admit that our current travails are in part generated by the presiding beliefs of liberalism, when some 10 to 15 years ago the very idea that liberalism had any serious intellectual limits or opposition would have been laughed at.

The central message of the Post-Liberal, at least when I articulated it back in 2010 in *Red Tory*, was that social liberalism and economic liberalism were the same phenomenon, and both were to be repudiated. Why? Because liberalism was and is the governing ideology of a segregating, divisive and decadent class that in its ascension has un-homed humanity and unhinged the world from its continuance. It has, moreover, exposed the West to its enemies who are clearly both foreign and domestic.

Back then post-liberalism had no contemporary advocates in any sort of power in the West. Virtually everyone on the left was a social liberal and virtually everyone on the right an economic liberal. This is no surprise they had happily conspired as such from the 1960s onwards, allies unbeknownst to themselves, against better, older, higher things. Today, remarkably, everything has changed. The post-liberal has defined the last decade and is very likely to determine the next.

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Post-liberalism is in power, has had power (and mostly squandered it), or is on the verge of getting power. The post-liberal often encompasses both populism (think Italy and Trump) and populist events (such as Brexit), as well as the election of mainstream parties (captured in part by post-liberalism) and insurgent parties campaigning most notably for immigration reform. Post-liberalism occurs overwhelmingly on the right (surely a cause for reflection), and the most important lesson for centre-right parties seems to be: adopt elements of this offer or perish, as the CDU did in Germany in 2021 and the Australian Liberal Party in 2022.

We should not really be surprised by the collapse of mainstream liberalism. Economically, modern liberalism, founded as it is on the fiction that extreme autonomy provides for everyone, has dramatically widened inequality in the West. In dubious alliance with failing welfare states, liberalism has proved utterly unable to distribute and share economic gains equitably. Modern liberalism has presided over the creation of new vast monopolies and oligopolies, concentrations of market power that would have made the executives of Standard Oil blush. Modern right-liberals are manifestly (for they do nothing about it) in favour of monopoly, oligopoly, and the plutocracy that inevitably results. And modern left-liberals, happy in sinecures at the aforementioned state/market monopolies, feel themselves deeply righteous in administering the welfare states that ensure the survival and subsidy of the indentured working class; but, equally they ensure that none will escape the new feudal bonds and a servile class is permanently on hand to tend to their needs.

Socially, liberalism atomises. It makes the family unit unviable and increasingly restricts the formation of strong families to the upper echelon that liberalism now exclusively serves. Social liberalism enfranchises family formation above (increasingly it is only the upper class that marry) but penalises the birth and care of children below. It eschews and demeans all wider forms of social and civic fraternity as it privileges the maintenance of the ascendant class and its autonomy above all else – which is why of course its children have crafted and embraced woke culture.

After all, the aim of political identity politics is to mask the reality and cost of class (which remains the most pernicious and widespread Western disadvantage)

by denying the possibility of shared values and wider goals that can alleviate or remove the penalties of placement at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Cancel culture allows the children of the haute bourgeoisie to remove any impediments to their own advancement. The argument from elite replacement theory is in this regard not without merit, the children of the ascendant class must fight for the continuance of their privilege and erecting new morals and codes to ensure that it is ringfenced for them, and them only, is how it is done. For in the end, the culture that is cancelled is anything that is not of them and for them. So conceived, social liberalism suppresses the lives and hopes of ordinary people, and it is the means by which their agency and purpose can be contained, denied and ultimately eclipsed.

Politically, liberalism achieves the opposite of what it promises. Because it denies the importance of tradition, social cohesion and the formation of shared values, it produces a fragmented and warring populace that requires the Leviathan to police it. Far from being anti-statist, liberalism introduces the state as an absolutist policing power that ensures partisan rule by empowered and enriched minorities over subjugated majorities. The freedom it secures is the freedom of the abandoned, the freedom not to have a home, and the freedom for example to pitch your tents on the grass verges of America's highways – perhaps the last genuine commons in the United States. The ultimate political legacy of liberalism is an isolated individual, bereft of family and friends, utterly powerless against an absolutist state and a monopolised market.

Philosophically, liberalism is founded on the exercise of untrammelled human will, as ontologically liberalism has already vacated the idea that we live in an objective world whose universals exist and can be known. Instead, human fiction supplants truth and is enthroned over it – such that sex, for example, is now made mutable and men are now claimed to be women and women lose all ontological distinction and purpose. Far from liberalism freeing women from patriarchy and domestic oppression, it has erased them entirely.

Theologically, liberalism is atheist in belief and nihilistic in practice. Liberalism denies the existence of objective goods. It expunges objective universals from the reality of the world and replaces them with subjective assertion, which

in a cruel parody it then declares is the sole self-evident universal. The only law or constraint we can know under such a rubric is that which we give ourselves. In a Feuerbachian inversion, all that is human is recast as a new divinity, and all that transcends us is denied any purchase on reality or the world.

Given all the aforementioned, it is not surprising that with the financial crash in 2008, rising concern about mass migration, and the ongoing offshoring of industry and manufacturing that what is termed 'populism' was at least partially enthroned. Inchoate and outraged, with marginalised majorities fearing their relegation was about to deepen, a new politics repudiating the liberal legacy was born.

The results are all around us, from Brexit in the UK and Trump in America to the gilets jaunes protests in France and the many irruptions of the anti-migrant vote in Italy and most recently the Netherlands with Geert Wilders election victory in 2023. Populists cum post-liberals attained power in America; in Britain and in Italy and they made inroads; and they had moments of political opportunity virtually everywhere else. Post-liberalism was always an element of this resistance, but it never held the hegemonic position in the ideological matrix that came together under personality and charisma to resist the Western liberal legacy. If there was any coherence it was all too often around a reduction of post-liberal philosophy to a nationalist politics and offer.

This equation is not necessary fatal. In central Europe post-liberalism allied with nationalism has governed very effectively in Poland and in Hungary. It has its limits which I will explore later but the domestic success of its policies cannot be denied. But elsewhere this mix has failed – and failed spectacularly.

From Trump's post-factual claims to electoral fraud and then an erstwhile coup, to Boris Johnson's ambush by birthday cakes and parties, the absurd and the fantastical have combined in the post-liberal Anglo-Saxon demise. In France, Marine Le Pen was easily beaten by Emmanuel Macron. Even if the subsequent parliamentary elections left him domestically moribund, his Presidential authority still gives him great agency as can be seen with his subsequent and successful attempts to drive through pension reform. In Brazil, an incoherent and demagogic Bolsonaro lost to a cogent leftist platform that sought

to secure ordinary people. In Spain a new centrism parasitic on the failings of the left, pervades the right, while the country's political spectrum continues to fragment and polarise. In America as mentioned above, the travails of 6 January 2021, still suffuse the Republican Party. Its base now ineluctably working class, is caught between the return of Trump which despite or because of his many indictments looks almost certain, and a new paraclete that might yet align the middle classes to working class interests into a new Republican majority.

The overwhelming conclusion on post-liberalism outside of central Europe is that despite clear opportunity it has been a manifest and ongoing failure. There is a conventional explanation of this which is not wrong – but by the same token is not right enough – and that is the absolute lack of any serious policy offer from post-liberals or those populists who purport to be.

In Britain the Conservative Party simply ignored the needs of the new electorate and recycled ersatz Thatcherism instead. Inexplicably they disregarded the demographics of Boris Johnson's 2019 victory when the working class shifted decisively in just the right places, towards the right. They still to this day behave as if a Tory majority can only reside in the affluent southeast of the country, and they are continually demanding as a consequence, that we perpetually re-offer the policy ideas of the 1980s.

In America, with Trump the shift towards the post-liberal has been somewhat more pronounced: we saw successful tariff-led protectionism direct policy abroad, but witnessed the avid continuance of monopoly practices at home. A coherent narrative to secure the nation and its workers and their families was patently available, but never delivered.

The second and for me more telling account of post-liberalism's demise is that we have not been romantic enough, that we have disastrously eschewed the language of the universal and ignored the innate idealism of human beings. In short, looking at the major nations where the opportunity has been the greatest – America, the UK and France – the post-liberal right has taken the nationalist path. This is historically odd but sociologically predictable as all of these countries are currently or formerly empire nations with multi-ethnic polities coupled with increasing migration and a sense of impending cultural threat.

Where post-liberalism has manifestly succeeded is in Central Europe, with Poland and Hungary. Here an exclusive focus on the fears of mass migration can command popular support – yet is it highly questionable that either Fidesz in Hungary or the Law and Justice Party in Poland have sustained their massive popular support as governing parties through an exclusive focus on the dangers of non-white and/or Muslim migrants. Rather they have both developed a sophisticated pattern of government intervention and support for families and those who are economically marginalised. They both favour the rural periphery over the cosmopolitan centre and have developed effective policy means of securing the welfare of their citizens and crucially of distributing assets and social and cultural security to their populations.

This more than anything else has enabled them to govern successfully. Sociologists and anthropologists would agree that ethnic homogeneity helps foster civic and social solidarity. But for both nations such an ethnic concentration was achieved at a horrific price. Before the 20th century both countries were parts of wider empires: Hungary increasingly powerful within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Poland unhappily partitioned across the territory of three different empires. In terms of the composition of their population, they were then highly variegated, with Germans, Russians, Croats, Slovaks, Romanians and Jewish people all living in multivalent but shared societies.

One might conclude that places where the disasters of the 20th century have destroyed multi-ethnic polities and replaced them with ethnostates are the only context in which post-liberalism or post-liberal nationalism might succeed. Yet I do not think such is a necessary precondition of Polish or Hungarian post-liberal success. Indeed, when one looks at the unprecedented Polish embrace of the Ukrainian population that fled the Russian invasion, and the military support and succour unilaterally offered by Poland one senses at least in part a Christian idealism more than a desire for ethnic homogeneity, and crucially an appeal to the Western universal in defence of Ukraine and her citizens. As such, one can discern in Poland an emergence from nationalism in the face of a threat from an imperialist and deeply nationalist Russia and an opportunity to form a broader more coherent philosophy and polity. And perhaps this universalism played a role in the 2023 elections

in Poland where Donald Tusk won back the country through a coalition against Law and Justice. This result, a victory for liberals, perhaps testifies as I will go onto argue that nationalism is not enough, and that Polish voters wanted to be part of a broader Western universalism that the Poles felt was being eschewed.

The above notwithstanding the malfunction of post-liberalism in the Anglo-Saxon world lies in a failure to choose and think clearly. No doubt because so many party members and political representatives remain either economically or socially liberal or indeed both. Hence the peculiar and incoherent hybrid of post- and neo-liberal policies which the American Republicans and the British Conservative Party have followed. And in Western Europe the relative demise of post-liberalism lies with a monomaniacal focus on migration, coupled with an inability to tackle that issue and an inability to turn political attention and policy formulation to anything else.

But in all these places post-liberalism's error lies mostly with a failure to cater to the needs of the working class and a consequent inability to persuade the middle class of the merits of such an endeavour. Happily, there are attempts – especially in America – to address this, but unfortunately that effort too, in its nationalist guise, is a cul-de-sac.

In 2022 *The American Conservative* published a statement of principles for National Conservatism.² It attempted to encapsulate and legitimise the new nationalism that conservatives in America and elsewhere are avowing as their best defence against “universalist ideologies seeking to impose a homogenizing, locality-destroying imperium over the entire globe”.

By such a recasting, nationalism becomes for them the succour that will save us all. It will restore: patriotism, loyalty, religion and family. Globalist liberalism has undermined the general welfare through imperialism and the imposition of liberal norms on differing populations and diverse peoples. In contradistinction nationalism will deliver us freedom, security and prosperity.

As a conservative, one is sympathetic to the outcomes claimed for such an approach. After all, globalised markets in people and production alike

² See www.theamericanconservative.com/national-conservatism-a-statement-of-principles.

have despoiled the life, security and hope of the American working class, and indeed those of the working class throughout the developed Western world. Through mass migration and the offshoring of manufacturing and services, wages have been depressed and the idea of supporting a family through ordinary labour at median wages now appears delusional. Moreover, an unconstrained individualism that eschews human solidarity has shattered the nuclear and extended family. It has deprived the marginalised of societal security and has begat a class of fatherless children who will also repeat this social structure when fully grown.

The signatories to National Conservatism's manifesto then rightly decry racism and propose that their nationalism escapes any reduction to ethnicity and (somewhat magically) restores the rule of law and therefore social and political peace as well.

But unfortunately, it is not remotely clear that any of this is true. Nationalism as a first premise does not lead to any of these purported outcomes. One need only turn to history for the refutation. It is a historical axiom that the great killing organisation of the modern age is nationalism in the form of the nation-state. Nationalism is not historically civil; rather it almost universally tends to the monocultural and monoethnic, and in its modern form it is often marked by a reduction of an earlier and far more plural political and racial identity to ethnic homogeneity. Hence it is the nation-state that historically has tended to extinguish diversity and racial heterogeneity; whereas empires that encompassed many nations are those that have sustained ethnic and religious diversity and protected minorities.

In addition, the economic globalism that National Conservatism's authors protest was not created by an ill-defined cadre of globalists but by nation-states (the very entities they eulogise) that wished to dominate and determine the international trading system. The entire liberal global trading system that came into being after the Second World War was implemented and driven not by many nations but by one following its own quite explicit self-interest: the United States. Globalism in its current form only happened because it was deemed to be in the interests of the most powerful nation on earth.

Not only is the entire thesis as to the merits of nationalism wrong historically, it is also wrong politically, philosophically and theologically. Politically, nationalism does not provide peace and security; on the contrary it provokes conflict both domestic and foreign. Externally nationalism cannot forge common bonds and shared values with other nations, as doing so would compromise the inalienable sovereignty of the nation-state and its “people”. Indeed, almost by definition the nationalist state must always be in actual or suspended conflict with others, as any affinity or shared purpose between states is a dangerous chimera that suggests governance by the supranational and dissolution of the nation.

Similarly, in terms of domestic concerns, I know of no “civil” nationalist state either historically or currently. There are certainly states that are civil and peaceful, but they are largely social democratic (think Scandinavia). There are states that one might call “nationalist” but they are ethnocentric states – again, think of Poland and Hungary – yet such states are not necessarily peaceful or if they are it is because of the empire that protects them and sustain them (America and the West). If they were really on their own – they would have suffered the fate of Ukraine. Bosnia and Serbia are ethnically segregated and in effect nationalist states and not unsurprisingly conflict appears likely to break out at any moment, and is only prevented by the presence of ‘international peacekeepers’. And most clearly China is an ethnic nationalist Han state and its intentions are global, expansive, violent and imperial.

Moreover, the state that this idea of conservative nationalism is crafted for, the United States, is particularly ill-suited to peace through nationalism, again largely because it is a multicultural empire composed of many racial groups whose civitas relies not on nationalist but on imperialist foundations. Avowedly nationalist parties always have to justify exactly who they speak for and what indeed constitutes, or does not constitute, the nation. It is self-evident that the overwhelming majority of nationalist appeals and politics in the past and at present are ethnically grounded either tacitly or explicitly. And it is hard to see how it could be otherwise in large multi-ethnic nations. Nationalism falls neatly under Carl Schmitt’s rubric of the political, defined as friend–enemy

relations where the overwhelming mark of belonging lies in the intensity of an association or disassociation. As such the word “civil” applied to nationalism is really a misnomer.

In short civil nationalism does not exist, but nationalism certainly does, and the nationalist states that do exist are neither necessarily civil nor peaceful – rather they are violent and imperial. Both Russia and China are expansionist nationalist states. The claim that nationalism delivers peace appears to be utterly bizarre.

Philosophically the authors of the National Conservative statement of principles are understandably, and rightly, trying to marshal conservative forces against liberalism and the damage it does to human flourishing in general and to working-class life in particular. It is then doubly perplexing that the authors chose nationalism as their means, for nationalism is liberal in both origin and practice. All the great nationalist revolutions in Europe after 1848 were liberal revolutions that went on to construct nation-states that then engendered the carnage of the 20th century. Each ethnic state destroyed the multiculturalism of the empires or polities they broke up, and any number of these new nations pursued subsequent war and colonisation. The paradoxical truth is the liberal regimes and revolutions of the 19th century eradicated the very differences that they claimed they wished to protect, and they created in ideation the ethno-nationalist states that then produced in the following century, inestimable conflict and destruction of human life.

And nationalist states in practice operate very clearly on explicit and extreme liberal principles. Liberalism is not a nice ideology about being kind and sharing and welcoming to minorities. At base, in all its foundational works by Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, liberalism is an extreme panegyric to human freedom and the denial of any other value or standard except that of unconstrained human will. It denies relationships, solidarity, shared purposes and objective standards, and indeed objective reality. Its ultimate outgrowth is more akin to that of Nietzsche’s philosophy than any other political ideology. So, we should not be surprised that nationalism, which is liberal, behaves at the level of the nation-state pretty much as liberal individuals behave: prioritising their

own needs above all others' and sacrificing or denying any shared interest or concern. And since liberalism ultimately just endorses and celebrates power, which is what nationalist states also do, why would we think such states would somehow not produce tyranny, elected or otherwise?

Finally, it is simply untenable to argue one of the merits of nationalism is that it enables the defence of religion. The National Conservatives inveigh against universalism as if liberalism somehow owns all universals and particulars are where the good resides, while the domain of evil is the universally applicable. To avow Christianity and Western Civilisation – which of course includes the Greek legacy of Plato and Aristotle as well as the unique mediation of Christ – and then deny the claim of universalism is to say the least quixotic, and at the most it is patiently ignorant and indeed heretical.

Liberals also deny objective universals. They reduce them to their own subjective takes which they then claim are the only possible things one can think. Liberalism denies the existence of universals (e.g. God or objective things) saying they do not exist and if they did they still could not be known, and all that exists is human projection and human assertion. Monotheism is ineluctably universalist: it says that truth, beauty and goodness are real qualities in the world and the cosmos, and these transcendentals can be known and followed by all of humanity regardless of their race, locale, or culture.

Of course, Catholic monotheism is a story of mediation, not of univocal religious Maoism where everything must be the same. Not one thing stands for God, so many things are a better account of Him than one thing. A philosophy of mediated universals is what Christianity is best understood as – it accounts for, generates and protects distinction, cultural difference, and differential expression through participation in a universal which sustains but exceeds all example.

What is foundationally at play here is a particularly idiosyncratic reading of Judaism. God is first known by one people, but Judaism is not just a religion of one people, it is the faith that is enjoined to introduce God to all the nations of the world. Monotheism by its very nature refuses a reduction to particularism: if there is but one God, he is therefore also a God of all of creation

and all the peoples of the earth. It is a curious reading of Jewish history and theology that ignores Genesis 12:1–3 where all nations are blessed through the blessings that are given to Abraham and that through his actions (Exodus 9:14–16) God's name will be proclaimed across all the earth. Israel was consecrated as a priestly nation so that all nations of the earth shall praise God and be judged and governed by him (Psalm 67). Analogously, Christianity is not just for one people or one nation but for all the people on the earth.

If one is generous, nationalist mistakes stem from a false opposition currently in vogue in American conservatism. Many conservatives rightly wish to oppose libertarianism's domination of conservatism. They have opposed it with nationalism. But they are in fact only opposing extreme liberalism with extreme liberalism. They would be better advised to embrace universalism in the manner of Edmund Burke did by moving from love of the particular to love of all mankind.

What has happened here is that the transition from love of the particular to recognition of the universal that intellectual reflection would normally facilitate, has stalled in American conservatism. In part, these nationalists are so appalled by liberal universalism and the world that it has created, that they recoil from universality as if it belonged for all time and by right to liberalism. Yet they remain resolutely and properly attracted to the protection of the particular – their own nation and the people who live and work in it. They have backed into nationalism because it looks at first sight, like a solution to the unhinged universalisation of liberal ideology. But this is to misread the universal and to surrender the language of truth, goodness and beauty to the liberals – who, unopposed and philosophically uncontested can then happily deny the existence of such things.

To endorse a particular socio-economic and cultural practice and then seek metaphysical and philosophical justification for it is not unusual. Indeed, it is how most ancient civilisations proceeded when thinking about themselves. What this tended to do was to legitimise the status quo and preserve the ascendancy of those already in command. If we remain in this intellectual mode – which is the philosophy that conservative nationalism in effect spouses – it will

prove to be a dangerous paradigm, as it will sacralise the existing power structures of liberalism when they are ascendant and relegate any opposition to a lower philosophical and ontological level.

Universalism did not come about to oppress us. The birth of the universal is the origin of freedom, and of politics. For only by positing a power beyond that currently ascendant, can one posit how we ought to live and what we should value and do. To abjure the universal and embrace particulars is to retreat to a losing position and rely on little more than human assertion backed by violence.

The relationship between state formation and philosophical conceptualisation has a profound, if under-examined, philosophical history. The merits of the universal and the limits and dangers of a nationalism focused on the nation-state are best discussed in this context.

Samuel P. Huntington's thesis of a clash of civilisations explains part of where we are. We need to realise that the idea of "The West" is operative again and that its recovery is paramount to our survival. But before we tackle the subject of the West, we must speak of what the philosophy of nationalism purports to anathematise: empire. To oppose both universalism and empire is tantamount to being against the two organising principles of human history itself.

Most human beings that have lived, have done so under the auspices of empire. Once one moves from kith and kin social structures one inevitably moves not into nation-states but into empires. Apart perhaps from certain geographically isolated polities (and they often do not develop beyond tribe) the nation-state does not really exist outside modern human history. What there is, however, is the perpetual competition between smaller states that to a greater or lesser extent are all imperial and that process of competition itself produces empires – often, paradoxically, in resistance to outside imperial incursion. In short, humanity was either in an empire or trying to build one in order to defend from imperial intrusion. If indeed the overwhelming majority of human beings emerge from tribal settlements into quasi-federal and imperial structures, where they are in suzerain or vassal relations or contesting such roles, then empires rather than nation-states are the more natural historical

structures for humankind. Even the Greek city states are not independent precursors of self-defining polities: on the contrary, they were all imperial and trying to be so to secure themselves against each other. Even today's late-modern European nation-state emerged from the breakup of Empires, yet it too either becomes a form of empire itself (the EU for example) or is secured by another empire, such as America.

Yes, America is not a nation-state, it is an empire. To pretend the contrary is to make a category mistake. American supremacy, for better or worse, has kept the peace in Europe and much of Asia for over half a century and has secured nation-states that would otherwise have been overrun long ago by other empires, most obviously those of Russia or China. There is no truly autarkic state in Europe that survives without the protection of an empire like America, and many of Europe's states depend economically on the civic imperial variant that is the European Union. Note that I believe empires can be civil. And if one needs proof of empire's inexorability even in Europe, consider the fates of Belarus or Ukraine – the first now absorbed into the Russian empire and the second the subject of an expansionist invasion by the same, with quite possibly the Baltics next. And by parallel the fate of Taiwan is tied precisely to the writ of the America Empire and the coalition it is trying to assemble to contain China.

There are few regions of the world where such contests between power blocs and competing empires are not playing out. And the conflict is values-saturated and cultural rather than merely the product of mechanistic or anonymous forces.

Here one should mention the work of Eric Voegelin. He traced the rise of universals in emerging empire cultures and linked these developments inextricably and rightly. For Voegelin realised that it was the violent imperial extension of empire that gave birth to universality. Before such extension, humanity had been in a closed universe where the cosmos related only to them and their kin – but upon expanding and encountering others' beliefs and gods this internal group cosmology had to adjust. In some expansive cultures, it became ever more repressive, producing a closed empire that subjected the dominated to permanent slavery and suppression. In other, more ecumenical imperialisms,

the universal expanded and incorporated those it conquered into the polity itself – in the case of Rome, making them equal citizens within an astoundingly short period. Voegelin's essential insight is that empire cultures create universals that then apply to the multitude of people that live under empire. And even though empires at first proceed with violence, it is often the universal values they generate that domesticate this ferocity and extend civilisation.

Perhaps nationalism is best understood as a form of cultic citizenship in tension with the philosophical tendency of universalisation. The West, though, is not and never has been a mere collection of nation states – it is a politics and a philosophy turned by Plato and Aristotle away from the particularisms of self-interest to the idea of participating in universal and abiding goods and truths. And it is a polity shaped ineluctably by Catholic Christianity, which fashioned the ideals of Roman participation into a vision of full equality for all humanity and all that that required. To hand this universality over to liberalism seems to be at best ill thought through, and at worse acquiescing to evil.

All politics is about universals, and human conflict is both between and within universal frameworks. What those of us who are opposed to both economic and social liberalism often forget is that liberal hegemony has come to pass *because* we have ceded the universal to liberals. Yet the very things most post-liberals want to defend, such as religion and order, have historically only been defended by a more universalist account of what is at stake than nationalism provides. We now know that liberal universalism itself only serves a narrow, empowered and self-interested group. Better to recover the defence of national difference through the notion of subsidiarity, within and under the auspices of the universals that we in the West share and that others outside the West want to have and uphold as well. Paradoxically, it is universalism that can best sustain nations, for if nations do not buy into something bigger than themselves, they will be erased by those that do. This is the unavoidable lesson of history.