

The conservative tradition generally draws its own roots to the philosophers of the Enlightenment. Conversely, much of the mainstream left —both in its post-modern identitarian form as well as its more classical branches— disregards the Enlightenment as either little more than the intellectual stream of a primitive bourgeoisie —a claim sustained sometimes by sophisticated reasons— or as the now hegemonic ideology of white and western men. But I have come to suspect both conservatives and progressives alike are wrong in this regard. A sincere examination of Enlightened thought leads to an unambiguous conclusion on the matter: namely, that the very men who are esteemed to be the intellectual guardians of liberal order would be petrified of horror if alive to witness the modern development of capitalism. Furthermore, so many common principles become apparent between these philosophers and those of the most various socialist traditions —from Marxist to anarchist thought— that it is impossible to disregard the hypothesis that they are, taken abstractly, almost identical, and that whichever differences exist result merely of the application of unvarying principles to distinct realities.

For example, common discourse puts classical liberalism as opposing the autocratic power of the European monarchies of the early modern period. But this is only partially true. In truth, the philosophers of the Enlightenment were opposed to *concentrated power*. It is a historical contingency that such concentration occurred at the time in the court, but it is short-sighted—to say the least—to abandon such position from the moment monarchies fell and onwards. Furthermore, it would be a double mistake to believe not only that they were opposed to concentrated power only as it was expressed in monarchies: concentration of power, instead in some exceptional cases, is a consequence of concentration of wealth—an obvious observation they were keen to make. In the spirit of all these virtuous thinkers was, almost with no exception, a profound repulsion for the concentration of wealth.

Take, for example, Rousseau's *Discourse on the origin and basis of Inequality among Men*. Should anyone had access to the content of the book while being somehow unaware of who his author was, he would surely guess to say the treatise was the work of a utopian socialist or an early libertarian thinker. Such guess would be justified for many different reasons, of which only a few I should wish to discuss as I advance this exposition. For instance, one may recall the passage:

Yo habría querido que nadie en el Estado pudiese considerarse como superior o por encima de la ley, ni que nadie que estuviera fuera de ella pudiese imponer que el Estado lo reconociese, porque cualquiera pueda ser la constitución de un gobierno, si se encuentra en él un solo hombre que no sea sumiso a la ley, todos los demás quedan necesariamente a la discreción de él (...).

In *The social contract*, a footnote that is seldom recalled by conservative writers reads:

Bajo los malos gobiernos, esta igualdad [la que establece el pacto social y es base de todo sistema social] no es más que aparente e ilusoria: sólo sirve para mantener al pobre en su miseria y al rico en su usurpación. En realidad, las leyes son siempre útiles a los que poseen y perjudiciales a los que no tienen nada. De esto se sigue que el estado social no es ventajoso a los hombres sino en tanto que todos ellos poseen algo y ninguno demasiado.

Furthermore, take Rousseau's conception of the nature of men. Such conception is usually said to be that men is good by nature, but although this is—in fact textually—his claim, it misses to convey the subtlety of the whole idea which the phrase attempts to summarize. The natural men Rousseau is talking about is a pure individual that has not yet entered a social arrangement, that is good because, lacking any moral capacity, it wishes nor does anything else but that which secures his existence or pleasure. It is good in an entirely negative sense.