
Principalities & Powers

by *Samuel Francis*

The Jungle of Empire

One of the redeeming features of imperialism is that it makes for great adventure stories. The works of H. Rider Haggard and Rudyard Kipling and the literature of the American West from James Fenimore Cooper to Louis L'Amour would not have been possible without the empires and imperial problems that provide the setting for their tales. The reason for the relationship ought to be fairly obvious.

Empires offer all the standard fare of blood, guts, intrigue, romance, and action: villains plotting to overthrow civilization, heroes striving to protect it; crumbling cultures and uncharted jungles that house mystery, danger, and immense rewards for those bold enough to seize them. Empires may make deserts and call them peace, but at least they also offer a lot of entertainment that sometimes lasts longer than the civilization that imagines it is perpetuating itself through territorial expansion.

Today, we still have empires, or at least one, but the literature it spawns makes the penny dreadfuls and potboilers of the Victorian Era seem like the stuff of Homer and Vergil. I can think of no great adventure tale to emerge from the consolidation of what may turn out to be the largest transnational apparatus of power yet to appear in history, and the cosmopolites of the American megapower will have to pass their idle hours with Stephen King and Tom Clancy. The best spy novels produced by the Cold War, such as those of John Le Carré, so far from celebrating empire, in fact are somber introspections on what power demands of human beings and what it takes from them.

It is precisely because contemporary globalism is so uninspiring and because its power is not acquired through the combined exertions of muscle, bone, and brain that it produces few compelling tales of what it cost to create. Indeed, the costs of modern imperialism, like the bonds that hold it together, remain invisible. Unlike the regimes

constructed by the British, the Romans, or the Macedonians, the one that flutters about the world today was not built on force and human risk but on an entirely different kind of power.

Machiavelli distinguished between two kinds of rulers. There are those who, imitating lions, base their power on force, and those, imitating the fox, who base it on cunning. Ideally, insofar as Machiavelli permitted himself ideals, a ruler ought to combine the two traits, but he recognized that human psychology being what it is, few potentates were capable of doing so for very long. Several centuries after Machiavelli, another Italian, Vilfredo Pareto, revived his distinction and elaborated it into an entire psychology of power.

Pareto discussed two classes of what he called "residues," his term for basic instinctual drives that underlie human behavior. "Class I," as he called one group of residues, consists of "the instinct for combinations," and those in whom it is strong tend to be innovative and manipulative, or, in a word, cunning. They tend to respond to problems by "combining" different elements—ideas, people, institutions, resources—to produce new instruments that can resolve the problem.

Residues of "Class II" or the "instinct for the persistence of aggregates," on the other hand, yield behavior that is socially conservative. Those in whom they are powerful dislike and avoid change—their ideas and behavioral habits are "aggregates" that tend to "persist"—and they typically respond to problems by appeals to group solidarity. Hence, family, race, class, nation, community, religious sect, and other group identities are important bonds for those in whom Class II residues are strong. They tend to avoid innovation and manipulation and, like lions, to rely on force to deal with problems.

In some societies, Pareto argued, Class I residues (or the people in whom they are dominant) rise to the top, while in others, Class II types emerge. Whichever type emerges, it forms an elite and seeks to perpetuate its power and construct a society that reflects and

supports its mentality and habits. Pareto believed that ancient Athens in its so-called "Golden Age" of empire and cultural brilliance was a rather good example of a Class I or manipulative regime, in which commercial classes, political demagoguery, and intellectual and artistic expression were prevalent, while Sparta in the same period was a classic case of a Class II or "leonine" elite: unimaginative, strongly attached to traditional identities, and relying on force. His typology corresponds more or less to what Aristotle said of the two societies, and the Greek philosopher argued that the weakness of Sparta was that it recognized only "one kind of goodness," namely skill in war.

To Pareto, a lion was not necessarily better or worse than a fox, and like Machiavelli (or Aristotle), he believed that a human being or a ruler or a society in which one kind of residue was predominant to the exclusion of the other was particularly weak. Since each type tends to respond to problems and challenges only by means of the behavior, attitudes, and ideas that its dominant instinct recognizes, it is unable to deal with crises on which such responses don't work.

Hence, a society or a regime in which foxes are predominant will be unable to prosecute wars effectively or respond to challenge from enemies that rely on force. Similarly, a society or a regime in which lions are the dominant class will tend to stagnate and to meet every challenge with force, sometimes brutally. Sooner or later, the habitual responses of each type fail to work. Sooner or later, each type runs into problems that its characteristic style of behavior and thought can't solve, and it is overwhelmed. The result is the fall of one elite and the rise of another, leading Pareto to comment in a famous phrase that "history is a graveyard of aristocracies" or elites.

Pareto did not know or talk much about the United States in the 19th century, but if he had, he might have enjoyed himself. There he would have seen a protracted social conflict between two kinds of societies—one,

based in the American South and later in the West, that was strongly attached to such social groupings as community, region, family, race, and nation, and the other, based in the Northeast, that was innovative, more loosely attached to elemental social bonds and identities, and resembled in some ways the Athens of the Golden Age. The conflict between the two was resolved in the American Civil War, when the Northeastern foxes destroyed the Southern lions, though they did so not so much through their skill in war as through their successful and often brilliant manipulation of their economic and technological resources.

Having suppressed the challenge from the lions, however, the foxes of the Northeast proceeded to mold American society into a form more suitable for their continued power. Commercial, industrial, and technological skills became a main avenue to wealth and political power. Demagoguery, the manipulation of the population through patronage and the techniques of mass democracy, became a standard feature of American politics. Culturally, the ideologies of the era centered around the favorite themes of foxes: progress, individualism, innovation, opportunity, acquisition of wealth.

Eventually, the dominant groups in the new nation were destroyed by their

own success. Having built large organizations that relied on the manipulative skills of managers, not even the victors in the social and political revolution of the Civil War could hold on to the reins of power when corporations, mass political parties, unions, government bureaucracies, and mass universities and foundations replaced the smaller-scale institutions of bourgeois America. Lacking the instinctual group bonds and loyalties that characterize lions, the bourgeois foxes never knew what hit them, and to this day most of them still don't.

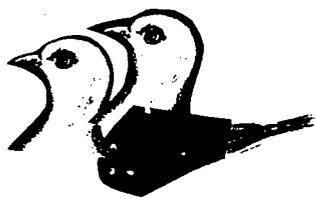
What has emerged in the 20th century is no less an imperial regime than those run by the Romans or the British, but unlike those empires, the managerial hegemony today is founded on the manipulative proclivities and skills of foxes. Hence, the elite of the imperial system thinks of social problems and challenges only in terms of manipulation. Instead of punishment for criminals, they respond with rehabilitation and therapy. Instead of war with foreign enemies, they try negotiations, foreign aid, exporting democracy, and applied social engineering. Instead of bluntly repressing domestic rivals and rebels, they meet them with discussion and social reconstruction to remove the "root causes" of discontent.

For all the murky conspiracy theories

concocted by the left about the "power elite" that supposedly plotted the murder of John F. Kennedy, clobbered the New Left, and leapt into the Vietnam War in a fit of 19th-century imperialism, the left has succeeded in grandly missing the point of the very regime it purports to oppose. The managerial regime doesn't assassinate much of anybody, and when it tries, as it did in the early 1960's, its efforts look like something out of *Get Smart*. Exploding cigars and poisoned wet suits were the weapons the CIA presented as the devices for the assassination of Fidel Castro, and with enemies like the pot-bellied spooks of Langley, the *caudillo* of Havana could expect to live to a ripe old age. The Black Panthers and the Weathermen of the 60's ran into trouble only when they encountered local and state police less attuned to the devices of the Higher Repression designed by the marshals of the managerial state, which simply rounded up the rebels, listened to their whines, and then sent them home to become TV celebrities and real estate tycoons. Having locked the malcontents into the pleasures of a managerial system that manipulates and dominates even as it rewards and entertains, the elite had nothing more to fear from the left, new or old.

As for war, foxes don't much care for it, though when they engage in it, as Pareto noted, "the sword is rattled only before the weak." The managerial regime has so far rattled its sword and thumped its chest in Vietnam, Grenada, Libya, Panama, and Iraq, while stronger powers such as the late and unlamented Soviet Union that conquer whole continents and massacre entire planeloads of civilians are too tightly locked into the global system of management to be the target of serious military force. What is striking about the way in which the managerial system "fought" the Cold War is not that the threat was contrived or invented but that, despite the reality of Soviet aggression and subversion, the Western managerial states did so little to confront and resolve the threat. It was never war but merely preparation for war that the system and its managers cared for; and the real purpose of all the vast apparatus of armies, navies, planes, bombs, and missiles was not to use them to defend the West in war

LIBERAL ARTS



WELFARE FRAUD

Wisconsin welfare recipients arrive by the bus load—from Chicago. A letter from Scott Savage published in the *Wisconsin State Journal* last June reported rampant welfare fraud, and state legislator David Prosser confirmed the story with his own investigation in January. Surprised to find taxis waiting at the Milwaukee Greyhound station, Savage was told by a taxi driver that "during the first few days of the month [when general assistance checks must be picked up in person] he picked up many fares at the Greyhound station, drove them and waited as they picked up their Wisconsin welfare checks and then returned them to the Greyhound station for their return trips to Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan."

with communism but to enhance the domestic power of those who designed, bought, built, and managed them and the bureaucracies that produced them.

Instead of war and repression through force, the managerial system relies on the manipulative arts of modern communications, public administration, advertising, propaganda, and mass entertainment. In order to extend its reach to the fullest, it has to break down the institutional bonds and beliefs that resist such manipulation, and hence it undermines family, class, property, community, religious sects, and racial and ethnic identities.

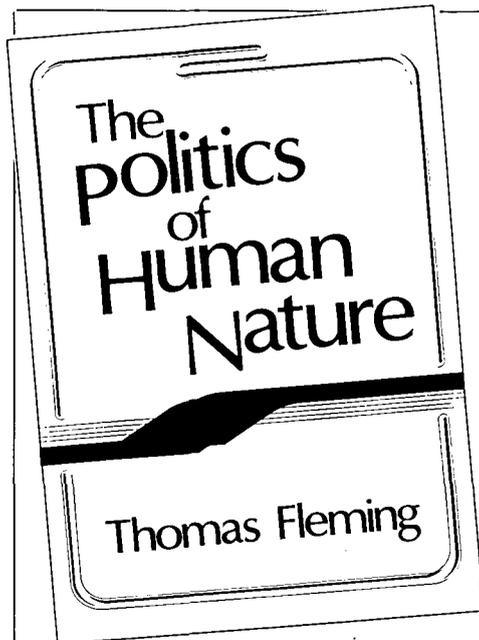
Having now perfected the manipulative arts to global scale, it is in the process of extending its dominion to the entire world, actually disengaging from its territorial base in the nation-state and constructing a transnational apparatus of power by which nations and their populations, resources, and cultures can be managed. There is a good deal of talk about how computers and other postindustrial technologies will lead to a radical decentralization of

organizations. Don't bet on it. The technology works both ways. It can be used to promote decentralization, but it also lends itself to tighter control from the center. Human nature seems to prefer more power and less responsibility, and my own bet is that postindustrial technologies will accommodate that preference.

The question, of course, is: will it last? Will human nature prove to be so easily manipulable that elites dedicated to infinite and eternal manipulation endure? If Pareto's analysis of the psychological anatomy of the regime of foxes is useful in understanding how and why it operates the way it does, his view of how it crumbles is also suggestive. The process of decline is almost Hegelian in its dialectic. Sooner or later, a regime based on the application of force and appeal to collective solidarity withers in the face of challenges to which its elite is unable to respond, given its own psychological and behavioral tendencies. Last year this is exactly what happened to the Soviet Union, when its elite, utterly clueless as to the

nature of the crises its regime was encountering and unable to manipulate its way out of these crises, collapsed rather like the wonderful one horse shay.

By the same argument, sooner or later a regime based almost purely on manipulation and its arts will encounter challenges that just can't be manipulated. Last year also, the American managerial system ran into exactly that sort of problem in Saddam Hussein, who simply ignored all the negotiations, threats, and peace marches mounted by his adversaries and who even succeeded in ignoring his adversaries' devastating military victory. But sooner or later, also, a manipulative regime will even run into a challenge that it not only can't manipulate but also can't even devastate or will refuse to devastate, and when that happens, the manipulative regime crumbles no less quickly than its counterpart based on force. This is not a happy situation, but, if Pareto is right, it seems to be a law of history. At least it makes for exciting adventure stories. 



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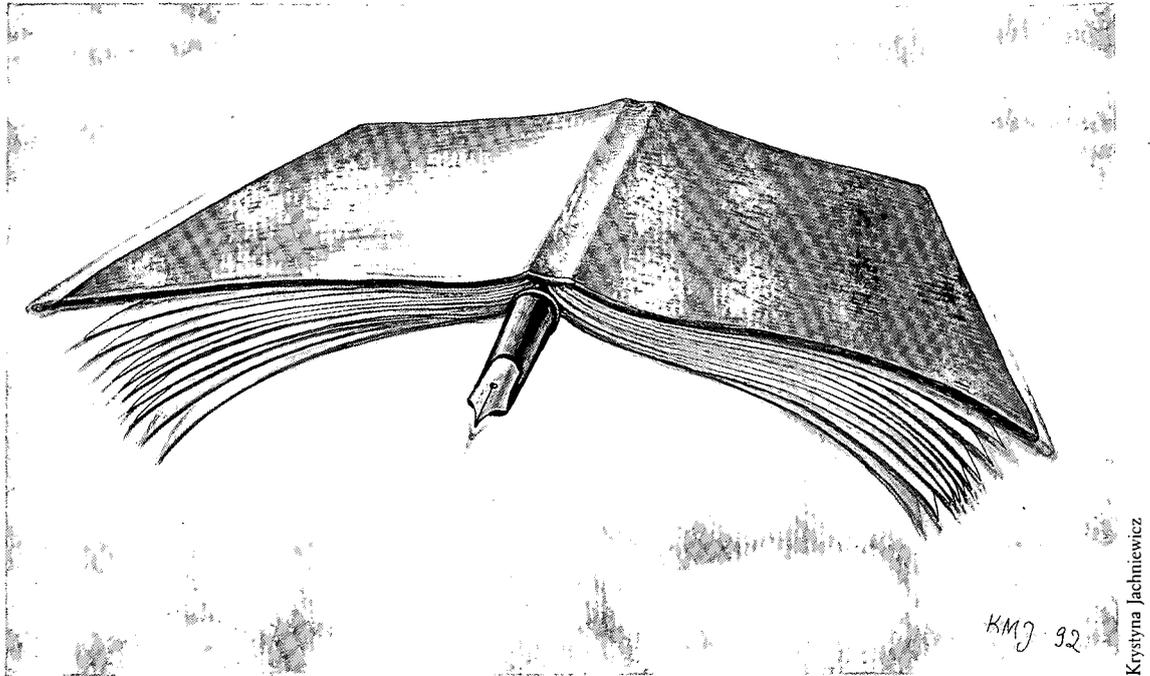


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Literature and Freedom

by Mario Vargas Llosa

Nothing has pushed forward cultural life as much as the invention of printing, nor has anything contributed more to its democratization. From Gutenberg's time until today, the book has been the best propeller and depository of knowledge, as well as an irreplaceable source of pleasure.

However, to many, its future is uncertain. I recall a lecture I heard at Cambridge a few years ago. It was entitled "Literature Is Doomed," and its thesis was that the alphabetic culture, the one based on writing and books, is perishing. According to the lecturer, audiovisual culture will soon replace it. The written word, and whatever it represents, are already an anachronism, since the more avant-garde and urgent knowledge required for the experience of our time is transmitted and stored not in books but in machines, and has signals and not letters as its tools. The lecturer had spent two weeks in Mexico where he had traveled everywhere, and even in the underground he had no difficulty, though he spoke no Spanish. For the entire system of instructions in the Mexican underground consists of nothing but arrows, lights, and figures. This way of communication is more universal, he explained, for it overcomes, for instance, language barriers, a problem con-

*Mario Vargas Llosa's most recent book is *La verdad de las mentiras* (A Writer's Reality). Last November he received the Ingersoll Foundation's 1991 T.S. Eliot Award for Creative Writing, for which this was his acceptance speech.*

genital to the alphabetic system.

The lecturer drew all the right conclusions, with no fear, from his thesis. He maintained that all Third World countries, instead of persisting in those long and costly campaigns aimed at teaching their illiterate masses how to read and write, should introduce them to what will be the primordial source of knowledge: the handling of machines. The formula that the slender speaker used with a defiant wink still rings in my ears: "Not books but gadgets." And, as a consolation to all those who might be saddened by the prospect of a world in which, what was yesterday made and obtained by writing and reading, would be done and attained through projectors, screens, speakers, and tapes, he reminded us that the alphabetic period in human history had in any case been short-lived. Just as mankind had, for thousands of years, created splendid civilizations without books, so the same could happen in the future. Why, then, should the underdeveloped countries insist on imposing an obsolete education on their citizens? So as to keep on being underdeveloped?

The lecturer did not think the alphabetic culture would totally vanish, nor did he wish it. He forecast that the culture of the book would survive in certain university and intellectual enclaves, for the entertainment and benefit of the marginal groups interested in producing and consuming it, as something curious and tangential to the main course of the life of nations.

The exponent of this thesis was not Marshall McLuhan,