

# Quo Vadis?

## Or How the Democratization of Ideas Leads to their Dogmatization

**Sophie Dulesh**

### I. The times they are a-changin’... dialectics!

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was already acknowledged that social priorities diverged in the Western world. Liberal societies valued individual rights and autonomy, while nationalistic and religious societies upheld a collective identity, in which the concept of the dignity of every human was applied exclusively to members of the group (a xenophobic “us versus them” mentality). In the 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> century, broad economic issues were at the centre of politics in the West – as seemed only natural. The Left craved income equality, rights for the poor and a strong government to enforce a more fair distribution of resources; the Right favoured the expansion of free enterprise and less controlling governments, confident that in the final analysis all human progress is defined by the economy. In that sense, the opposing poles were about maximum equality versus minimum restrictions on the individual.

In the last half-century, however, Western liberal democracies have undergone tectonic shifts of remarkably surreal unpredictability. Where are we going and why? Good questions...

Following the American civil rights, feminist, and antiwar movements, the student protests and the soaring costs of the military-industrial complex, which by 1968 all culminated in the global struggle against imperialism, colonialism, and nuclear technology, the revolutionary goals of Neo-Marxists and the Left shifted

from an economy-based class war to a culturally based war. The main culprit spawning imperialism, racism, misogyny, climate change and every possible wrong was no longer the exploitation of the working class but “white privilege” with its “unhealthy” dominance of Western values and culture.

Marxism absorbed both Hegelian dialectics and the rationality and scientific method of the Renaissance, with assumed continual upward progress as the basis for the equally assumed superiority of modernity.

Hegel cannot be severed from Marx, analysis of the Left cannot be severed from Hegel. ...dialectical movements are hardwired to see in everything that exists today the need for its being negated for tomorrow, which will always be better precisely because it represents the forward movement of history.<sup>1</sup>

Why is the dialectic so important? Because it is the Left’s magic wand for mass-manipulation, for spreading their ideas in a manner reminiscent of the irresistible march of newly founded religions in the past, promising justice even if only in the afterlife (like early Christianity and Islam). As early as 1915, a leading theorist of cultural Marxism, Antonio Gramsci, predicted, “*Socialism is precisely the religion that must overwhelm Christianity.*”<sup>1</sup>

In the past half-century, this new social paradigm has shockingly emerged from the

shadows. “*Today’s Left enjoys a 10:1 advantage in faculty that, as is becoming obvious, has become increasingly brazen...*”<sup>1</sup> 10:1! Why?

Because Western moderates have pathetically little to counter the far Left’s dazzling promise of all dreams coming true as soon as people destroy the current capitalism-based liberal democracies. What do the moderates have to counter-offer? “Capitalism is best: it has already elevated two billion from poverty”? It may be true, yet not quite convincing: “Yeah, really? Not in my village!!” Or another offering from the moderates: “Liberal democracy is best as proven by human experience.” (Or, in the words of Churchill, “...*democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time...*”) “Yeah... all is good and well – for YOU white men! Not for us though... #Occupy!”

And the poorly educated angry masses flock to the far-Left who are dialectic, that is, prepared to negate the present for the ‘always better’ future.

Social justice is justice administered by socialists. Social justice has been the primary mission of the interfaith movement. This would be a Christianity that Marx would exploit and that the Left co-opts.

The entire ‘social justice’ narrative can be sourced to Marxist efforts in its interfaith lines of effort that can be sourced to the Comintern.<sup>1</sup>

That’s exactly the same pie-in-the-sky as the siren song of religions that recruits the masses so successfully. Not only all religions but also all historically meaningful social movements have been based on this universal psychological diktat: people will accept dire circumstances if

they are promised a sunlit future that they can believe in and struggle for together. The totally pauperized population of the officially secular

Soviet Union, deprived of even the hope of an after-life, believed: no shoes or milk for the children today because they sacrificed everything for the communist future of tomorrow! This sentiment was so well captured in the lyrics of the famous bard Okudzhava: “As every soldier believes that all fallen reside in heaven...” We are ready to invest in our future.

Here is an example of how strikingly anti-dialectic the moderate Western terminology can become. Influential political philos-

opher Francis Fukuyama, in his book *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), submits: “...with the ascendancy of Western liberal democracy... humanity had reached not just ... the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such... Western liberal democracy [is] the final form of human government.” No less!

“The end of history” was the term coined by French philosopher Antoine Cournot in 1861 “to refer to the end of the historical dynamic with the perfection of civil society” (Wikipedia): a post-dialectical history, which is directional with the endpoint in capitalist liberal democracy. But, to quote Saul Alinsky, “*In the world as it is, the solution of each problem inevitably creates a new one. In the world as it is there are no permanent happy or sad endings.*”<sup>1</sup> Ironically, having described his ‘post-dialectical’ position, Wikipedia further advises: “*Fukuyama drew upon the philosophies and ideologies of [the fathers of modern dialectics! – S.D.] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Karl Marx...*” Did Fukuyama really do that – and consistently so? Glaringly anti-dialectical positions disarm the moderates and help the far-Left.

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## II. What else is new?

It's all grounded in the economy. Since the 1980s, thanks to the Western technology, economic inequality between rich and poor countries has plummeted with the successful upswing of even the least developed countries (as in sub-Saharan Africa). But within-country inequality has soared relatively speaking: the middle-class in the developed countries and working class whites lacking a college education (numerically, the biggest part of the population by far), experienced the lowest income growth if any. "*Rural people, who are the backbone of populist movements, often believe that their traditional values are under severe threat by cosmopolitan, city-based elites.*"<sup>2</sup> This perceived threat to the middle-class provided the grounds for soaring populist nationalism and identity politics. In times of poor economic growth, populist politicians always do better in voter support (up to a third better). So what are the stripes and spots of this suddenly victorious far-Left shift, its *a, b, c...*? The points below provide a sketch of the powerful social shift that is currently overwhelming the West.

(a) Identity politics (by definition anti-individualist and pro-collectivist), the dogma of supremacy of ethnic diversity, and the "therapeutic approach" (a term from Freudian psychology), all widely and wildly play out at most Western universities and colleges, which have fallen into the grip of fanatical followers of the far-Left (10:1!) who have achieved the near-complete suppression of any different opinions. Also critically important is the fact that Islamists have successfully injected themselves into Leftist identity movements (and are notoriously known to employ victimization narratives that are the building blocks of the Leftist "therapeutic" politics), which constitute a threat comparable to the Sharia law. Fukuyama submits,

In France, Muslims became the new proletariat, with part of the Left abandoning its traditional secularism in the name of cultural pluralism [*no*

*longer just a shift but rather an astounding reversal – S.D.]. Criticisms that Islamists were themselves intolerant and illiberal were often downplayed under the banner of antiracism and countering "Islamophobia."*<sup>2</sup>

(b) "Intersectionality," a term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, denotes the interconnectedness of social categories such as race, religion, gender, and ethnicity. Victimology terms such as racism, colonialism, "Islamophobia," and misogyny, applied to an individual or a minority-group, all add an overlapping and interdependent insult to the injury of discrimination and disadvantage. And "political correctness" is the socially efficient preferred treatment.

"Political correctness is the enforcement mechanism of the multicultural narratives that implements Neo-Marxist objectives [cultural Marxism]." "It is also an existential threat." "Owing to the ongoing success of political correctness enforcement regimes, average Americans now find themselves unable to speak their own minds..."<sup>1</sup>

Social justice warriors declare that women, non-whites and LGBT people (together constituting a vast majority of humanity) are all oppressed by the white man. "[Linda] Sarsour ticks all the intersectional boxes: She's Muslim, hijab-wearing, a woman of color, and a daughter of immigrants. So am I," begins Qanta A. Ahmed, only to proceed with a deadly critique of the Sarsour's falsity:

The tendency for some on the left to assign the prestige of select victimhood as the pinnacle of American culture, allows them to be duped into believing Islamism is de facto Islam and not its appalling impostor. In reality, Islamism's right-wing supremacist totalitarian origins are only masked as a minority religion. Add to this the ill-disguised but virulent anti-Semitism that passes for anti-Zionism among some on the left, and American democracy has now mainlined Islamism into a presidential election.<sup>3</sup>

Paradoxically though, antisemitism/anti-Zionism, unlike Islamophobia, is quite acceptable from far-Left to far-Right to fundamentalist Islamists. Aren't the Jews a textbook case of the most and longest victimized minority? "It well may be but their case is unique as it does not matter!" How come?! This perversion is rooted in at least three major dogmas: i) two millennia of relentless Church efforts (Jews are bad just by being Jews) have turned antisemitism into an unquestionable axiom consumed with mother's milk; ii) a no less important point: most everyone needs a scapegoat (and Jews have been made perennial scapegoats); and iii) the very concept of a scapegoat is invariably grounded in a double standard.

Those are the pathetic reasons that antisemitism is not perceived by the far Left as oppression or discrimination (while concerns about Islamic extremists are labeled racist or Islamophobic). That explains the astounding 10:1 ratio: people are acutely sensitive to (and recoil from) their reputation being smeared, so they simply follow the crowd. There is a bitter joke attributed to Jews: "Keep away from him! Something about him... either he stole someone's coat or his coat was stolen... just keep away!"

Appiah in his discussion about "mistaken identities" argues that race is a category of pseudo-science and national identity is irrational; the only coherent identity is social class.<sup>4</sup> And it is exactly social class that is being gleefully erased in identity politics in favour of religion, race, gender, and ethnicity. If people vote not

according to their moral values but rather their identities, democracy is dissolved.

(c) Conformity, a universal human drive, forces the group towards extremism even when individual members may have been more moderate.

Sometimes the objective of the groups is not truth but providing an ideological echo-chamber that can transform moderate beliefs into extreme dogma. "Mark Twain, like Tocqueville, feared the invisible shackles of social conformity almost as much as he feared oppressive institutions... The most luminous career in the history of American democracy, the most morally edifying career in the history of world politics, took its bearings from the principle that there is more to the American purpose and more to justice than majorities having their way."<sup>5</sup> And social platforms now hugely distort perceptions of reality. For instance, a mere 22 percent of the American public uses Twitter, and 97 percent of their politics-

related tweets originate from only 10 percent of Twitter users, mostly Leftists aged over 65. But the tweets look like they express the opinion of everyone.

"Civil liberties are in greater danger today from the intolerant hard-left than from the bigoted hard-right. This may seem counter-intuitive... But the influence of the hard-left on our future leaders is far more pervasive, insidious and dangerous than the influence of the hard-right... We often forget that the concept of "political correctness" originated in the Stalinist Soviet Union, where Truth – political, artistic, religious – was determined

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by the central committee of the Communist Party and any deviation was regarded as unacceptable... Stalin murdered those who deviated from His Truth, while “workers” generally shun and discredit [sometimes with violence]... those who deviate from their Truth. But both produce a similar result: less dissent, less reliance on the marketplace of ideas and more self-censorship... Affirmative action for speech! ...If they believe someone is guilty, he must be. Why do we need a cumbersome process for determining guilt? The identities of the accuser and accused are enough... That is why... today the “woke” hard-left is more dangerous to civil liberties than the right.”<sup>6</sup>

(d) A few more features of the far Left: “*What is now popularly called “fake news” and the “deep-state” are better understood as propaganda and the counter-state... The Left creates a counter-state or mass line that includes a parallel legal system that is international in nature, ideological in its application, and superior to the [American] Constitution.*”<sup>1</sup>

(e) “*Cancel culture*” as a term with multifaceted meaning is also newly popular on the social media. It’s a way for the oppressed to hold the powerful accountable; sometimes, a show of toxic mob ideation and for some social activists a safer path to deny any criticism as impermissible. George Will argues that the American individual is vanishing. While America’s premise is that government should facilitate individual striving – the pursuit of happiness, the collectivist agenda is a threat to that idea.<sup>7</sup>

**We all have equal rights to dignity, to equal opportunity, and before the law – by virtue of our shared humanity, period. In all other aspects, including what people make of their opportunities in real life, no equality is achievable; nature simply does not work this way.**

### III. The Problem

There is an inherent unsolvable problem though: humans are born with different capabilities and “*some people need to be valued at a lower rate than others.*”<sup>2</sup> Every society needs and develops some social hierarchy. But nothing is doable with what became a new and powerful far-Left therapeutic dogma: everyone has equal rights regarding any emotional demands, complaints and desires – only *this* is ‘real’ equality and social justice. Hence the new creed: we can’t be judgmental if we are to promote universal self-esteem. But no non-totalitarian society can survive with this dogma: people unavoidably have innately different capabilities. We all have equal rights to dignity, to equal oppor-

tunity, and before the law – by virtue of our shared humanity, period. In all other aspects, including what people make of their opportunities in real life, no equality is achievable; nature simply does not work this way. Some ideas like the universal basic income could alleviate consumption inequality but might also have negative effects such as triggering inflation and perpetuating falling labor force participation rates, confirming again that there is no panacea.

And what happened to the famed American principle of meritocracy? Consider the therapeutic approach of affirmative action for university admission. It is sometimes called ‘reverse discrimination,’ namely, a direct injustice toward those students who lost out to someone else despite outperforming that other person.



The real harm is deeper: i) the action is grossly inefficient, and ii) it lowers the bar of professional skillfulness: mediocre applicants usually make mediocre graduates. Consequently, we get mediocre surgeons, accountants, engineers, and teachers.

Of course, help in ‘catching up’ for the historically deprived is needed. But it is far too late by the time they apply to college. Craving for knowledge, reading habits, “high expectations,” must all be taught from kindergarten on; affirmative action can never replace them, it can only be a harmful surrogate, a false pretense, a cover-up for the lack of real help.

#### **IV. Democratization of ideas results in their dogmatization. Dignity rules.**

The therapeutic model arose directly from modern understanding of identity... The rise of the therapeutic model midwifed the birth of modern identity politics in advanced liberal democracies. Identity politics is everywhere a struggle for the recognition of dignity... Over time, the sphere of equal recognition has expanded... Dignity was being democratized.<sup>2</sup>

The therapeutic model was a critically important social development – and it delivered the next critical social step: the more ideas are democratized, the greater is their dogmatization, with inevitable simplification and petrification. The further they spread to millions of poorly educated people of different cultures, the greater the collective tendency to turn an

idea into a slogan, a surrogate of fossilized and sanctified ‘final truth,’ an unquestionable belief

– a dogma that thrives on the shared enthusiasm of a crowd rather than reasoning. Hence an unrelenting tendency to drive it *ad absurdum*. As some say at Harvard, “[Some] people like bumper-sticker guidance,” and as *The Economist* declared on the past Remembrance Day, “Poorly educated voters hold the keys to the White House.” They crave an easily accessible decoding of social events that may otherwise be beyond their comprehension; the democratization of ideas in our times of social media and mass involvement leads to their devaluation through dogmatization. In the process, intellectual breakthroughs are somehow alchemized into worthless banality, no longer enlightening or ennobling, and top moral admonitions (such as “Do unto others as you would have

them do unto you”) become absurd caricatures and socially destructive “therapies.” Could it be a matter of inadequate education, where a better one could save the day?

“*Morality requires us to recognize that every human being has...a fundamental right to respect that we term dignity.*”<sup>2</sup> When you decline to do wrong just because it is wrong, you are motivated with what Kant called a good will and considered the only unequivocal good thing in the world. Freedom and free will are not the states of being unhinged, undefined, or uncontrolled, but rather of being defined and controlled by reason. As Marx famously said, “*Freedom is the consciousness of necessity.*”

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It is true that we are sometimes motivated just by what seems right in our own eyes. But quite commonly we are motivated by how we expect others to assess our actions. Humans cannot help being sensitive to the opinions of others: we crave respect for its own sake – our evolution shaped us this way. Appreciation by the tribe must have been critical for individual survival.

Identity politics is all-indulging in its concern about everyone's self-esteem. Imbued with a sense of their own rectitude, legions hear the siren call and march toward the mirage of total uniform equality. They centre the meaning of 'dignity' on compassion. Sure, compassion breeds kindness, it is critical for human cooperation, hence survival. But not extreme compassion: what is necessary, indeed, is a sensible compassion.

Compassion is a passion, and passions are... the problems to be coped with. Compassion is not, strictly speaking, a virtue. As a passion, it is disconnected from reason and often at odds with it. Hence compassion is an unreliable guide to justice, which must be defined by reason. Compassion may be put to the service of virtue; it may prompt virtuous action. But this is a contingent, not a necessary relation.<sup>6</sup>

## V. How do the far-Left ideas affect society?

They provide fertile soil for endless inflammatory conspiracy theories based on the wildest flights of imagination, such as that the Clintons run an under-age sex-trafficking ring from a pizzeria. Social media spreads ideas at lightning speed. Below are a few (of many) recent examples of excesses taken *ad absurdum*:

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– On November 19, 2019, the media reported: “*The French painter Paul Gauguin, who died in 1903, is still popular with curators, but he had sex with teenage girls and called the Polynesian people he painted ‘savages.’ Now, some museums are reassessing his legacy.*”

– Already we seem to accept as ‘natural’ that: “*Facebook may hide Likes on social media posts as advocates say they damage people’s self esteem.*”

– “*The University of Oxford has voted [on October 23, 2019] to nix clapping in favor of ‘silent jazz hands’ at their future commencement ceremonies to show solidarity with the hearing-impaired.*”

– Or take the vital sphere of public health: vaccine hesitancy (‘anti-vaxxers’) was named one of the top health threats by the World Health Organization for 2019 – why isn’t it outlawed?

– In December, 2017, an Oregon judge ruled against custody offered by the state to two babies born to parents with IQs considered too low for safe parenting – because state custody would allegedly be discrimination against the intellectually challenged. Wait, what? At the risk of the potential loss of the babies’ very lives? What able-minded parents wouldn’t trade any ‘discrimination’ for saving their baby’s life, providing no better options are available? Apparently, this priority, too, is inverted in the ‘therapeutic’ environment.

– Or this: hours after murdering 10 random pedestrians and injuring 16 others by ramming them with a rented van on April 23,

2018, Alek Minassian, 26, told Toronto police he was angry because he had been “incel” (involuntarily celibate), therefore, he volunteered that he wanted to “*shake the foundations of the world... I feel like I accomplished my mission,*” obviously expecting understanding and compassion.

– And then there is the ‘politically correct’ complaint brought to the Human Rights Tribunal of BC by Jessica Yaniv, a transgender woman who cried discrimination because estheticians advertising Bikini waxing specifically for women refused to wax her scrotum.

I’m not making any of this up. Does it sound incomprehensible? Not in this new therapeutic social environment. On today’s college campuses, “woke” students demand strict bans on anything deemed offensive to anyone with alleged victim status.

And there is yet another metamorphosis resulting from the democratization, hence dogmatization, of ideas: the wider the spread, the lower the moral bar – to make it accessible and to protect self-esteem of the least sophisticated. The result?

Identity politics in liberal democracies began to re-converge with the collective and illiberal forms of identity such as nation and religion, since individuals frequently wanted not recognition of their individuality, but recognition of their sameness to other people... The principle of universal and equal recognition has mutated into the special recognition of particular groups... Social media has succeeded in accelerating the fragmentation of liberal societies by playing into the hands of identity groups... And its anonymity removed existing restraints on civility...<sup>2</sup>

And far too commonly “...[*excessive*] *promotion of self-esteem enables not human potential but a crippling narcissism... People were not liberated to fulfill their potential; rather, they were trapped in emotional dependence... The narcissist ...cannot live without an admiring audience.*”<sup>8</sup>

Far-Left ideas are strongly and unfavorably affecting our society. We are witnessing a transformation that resembles the frightening appearance of a wolf before little Red Riding Hood rather than her benevolent grandmother.

Social media and the Internet have facilitated the emergence of self-contained communities, walled off not by physical barriers but by belief in shared identity... On the left, identity politics has sought to undermine the legitimacy of the American national story by emphasizing victimization, insinuating in some cases that racism, gender discrimination, and other forms of systematic exclusion are somehow intrinsic to the country’s DNA... On the right, some have retreated into earlier versions of identity based on race and religion... The remedy for this is not to abandon the idea of identity, which is too much a part of the way that modern people think about themselves... The remedy is to define larger and more integrative identities that take account of the de facto diversity of existing liberal democratic societies... The identities dwelling deep inside us are neither fixed nor necessarily given to us by our accidents of birth. Identity can be used to divide, but it can and has also been used to integrate.<sup>2</sup>

Hopeful words...

## VI. Populism of the far-Right

Last but not least, the identity politics of the Left has provoked a backlash: an upswing of populism on the Right.

Both Right and Left focus on ever-narrower group identities that eventually jeopardize every communication and collective action. This facet of democratization of the universal support for dignity is appallingly socially harmful (Red Riding Hood’s wolf).

The populist upsurge ultimately originates from two major sources: globalization and the rise of left-liberalism... [However,] East Asia as a whole has essentially experienced globalization without immigration... The key difference, therefore, is the West’s demographic openness, which is a result of two cultural revolutions. First, the shift from na-



tional to cosmopolitan liberalism. ...After 1945, western judiciaries interpreted international human rights and refugee conventions in an increasingly expansive, transnational manner. ... The second revolution was the cultural turn of the left, from a focus on class and economics to a concern with disadvantaged race, sex and gender groups... Experts say white supremacy has evolved and now has a new face, driven in large part by the rise of the so-called alt-right. In the U.S., public white supremacist events have increased by 123 per cent since 2016.<sup>9</sup>

And yet, “*The vast majority of some 20,000 terror victims in the world, year after year, are not killed by white supremacists... As for terror specifically, the Islamist kind is the biggest threat... [while] white nationalism just isn’t that big a problem.*”<sup>10</sup>

Polarization has forced divisions within (and between) the Left and Right. What had been the modern centre for over a century is now drifting: while Republicans remain mostly modern, Democrats are becoming postmodern and destructive (‘deconstructive’ in their lexicon). And the postmodern voters prevail numerically. They are now the largest voting group.

**Pew’s Voter Typologies in 2017 by Cultural Worldview<sup>11</sup>**

| % of Engaged Voters |     |
|---------------------|-----|
| Postmodern Left     | 36% |
| Modern Left         | 13% |
| Traditional Left    | 6%  |

| % of Engaged Voters |     |
|---------------------|-----|
| Postmodern Right    | 10% |
| Modern Right        | 29% |
| Traditional Right   | 6%  |

**VII Quo vadis?**

Has anything similar ever happened before? In human memory, the West had two great upswings in social development, both with enormous and lasting consequences in economics and culture: the Golden Age in ancient Greece and the European Renaissance. And in Asia, the Golden Age of China began with the Song Dynasty in 960 and ended in 1279 with invasion of the Mongol Empire. The Song Dynasty unified China. Enormous commercial growth, paper money, tea-drinking, gunpowder, the compass and printing all emerged under the Song; the arts and science flourished. China became the source of much of Japan’s culture. All this – the Chinese Renaissance – was ruined by a random occurrence of foreign invasion.

What about ancient Greece and post-medieval Europe? The Golden Age of Greece lasted from 500 to 300 BC (and we still live with their foundational ideas). “*To understand the reasons for [their] long-drawn-out decline is one of the major problems of world history.*”<sup>12</sup> Historians have tried to

...blame political deterioration, loss of freedom, and economic decline related to the exhausting wars of the time, and to the deadly plague epidemics that killed nearly 100,000 (including Pericles) in Athens in 430 BCE – hardships traditionally connected to mass hysteria and increased searching for protection in religion. [Or the cause might be] slavery, a source of cheap labor inhibiting any incentive for the development of technology...<sup>13</sup>

Many historians blamed the lack of adequate mass education. But the very abundance of suggestions renders them unsatisfactory.

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Could the decline have same roots as for what was discussed above, namely that the democratization of ideas inevitably leads to their dogmatization and to their replacement with ‘bumper-sticker slogans’? The Golden Age in ancient Greece and in China each spanned over two to three centuries. The current Golden Age – the one of the European/Western Renaissance – has continued for five to six centuries. Might this mean that humanity, if it survives the population explosion, climate change, nuclear threats and antibiotic bacterial resistance, will still be doomed to repeat this cycle over and over: successful leaps forward to social and economic harmony followed by an inevitable recoil back into the ‘wilderness’? Could any sort of mass education ever be sufficient, fast enough and sufficiently widespread to successfully break this vicious circle?•

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