

## The Invisible Behemoth: The Moral Legacy of the Cold War

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In ancient Egypt there was a belief that, after death, all the good a person had done in her life was placed on one side of a scale that was held by the god, Osiris. All the bad that the person had done was placed on the other side of the scale. If the good outweighed the bad, the dead person's soul went to the land of the dead. If the bad outweighed the good, the dead person's soul was devoured by the crocodile-headed deity, Amenti.

In this paper, the reader is invited to play the role of Osiris in weighing the good and bad done by the USSR and the United States and the West during the Cold War. After outlining how the concepts of 'good' and 'bad' will be used, they will be deployed to judge the morality of major U.S./Western and Soviet Cold War initiatives and activities. It is concluded that, in moral terms, the former USSR was the clear winner of the Cold War. But the moral superiority of the former USSR over the West was not reflected in the Cold War's short-term outcome. The good guys lost. The West emerged from the Cold War with a legacy of immorality that is immense, but largely unrecognized.

### **Good, Bad, and Well-Being**

Research by George Lakoff and other cognitive scientists suggests that our moral notions of 'good' and 'bad' are based on a conception of Well-Being which involves our experience of being healthy rather than sick, being strong rather than weak, being free rather than coerced, being happy rather than unhappy,

enjoying close ties to a community rather than being isolated, etc. (Lakoff 1996). These are some of the major components of Well-Being. We metaphorically conceive of Well-Being as a quantity which can be gained or lost, given, withheld, or taken. (Metaphor is "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" Lakoff and Johnson 1980:5).

In most if not all cultures, morality is metaphorically conceived in terms of a balance between giving, taking, withholding, receiving, and rejecting Well-Being. Moral acts are generally aimed at promoting or increasing Well-Being, and immoral acts are generally aimed at decreasing Well-Being. As well, morality often involves repayment of moral debts. It is moral to help those who have helped us; but it is also moral to get even with those who have done us harm (Lakoff 1996).

Giving or taking Well-Being can be metaphorically equated with weights on the 'scales of justice.' This equation is present not only in the notion of Osiris as a moral judge, but in the beliefs of many contemporary Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and others. While many religious people regard morality as divinely ordained, it actually originates in everyday experiences and transactions involving Well-Being, not in the realm of the supernatural.

The metaphorical linkages involved in moral reasoning and transactions often occur at an unconscious level. Lakoff writes, "...most of our thought is unconscious—not unconscious in the Freudian sense of being repressed, but unconscious simply because

we are not aware of it. We think and talk too fast and at too deep a level to have conscious awareness of everything we think and say” (1996:4)

### **Morality and Work**

Work/labour and Well-Being are conceptually linked in the sense that work is necessary to provide goods that are essential to the maintenance and enhancement of Well-Being. We all must eat in order to survive, and food production requires work. To the extent that some people who do not work are maintained by consuming or using goods produced by others, they have taken Well-Being without repaying it. They are thus ‘exploiters’ and deserve retribution. This moral analysis is close to Marx’s labour theory of value (Bartels 1999). Marx argued that the rates at which commodities are exchanged in market/capitalist economies are ultimately determined by their labour inputs (Marx [1865] 1985; [1867] 1935). An elegant thought experiment in support of this theory was proposed by the late Marxist economist, Ernest Mandel. He suggested that in a totally-automated society, where all productive machines—i.e., robots—are owned by capitalists, there would be no waged workers—i.e. humans—to buy the goods produced by the robots. Hence, capitalists could not make profits (Mandel 1970:27-28).

More concrete evidence for the labour theory of value was found by the Canadian sociologist, Joanne Naiman, who quoted the following Florida Chamber of Commerce advertisement from June, 1978: “In Lakeland, Florida, your company could receive a yearly bonus of \$12,769 in value added by manufacture per production worker. Workers give back \$5.25 in value added for every dollar they’re paid. That’s a whopping 44.2 per cent above the American average” (quoted in Naiman 2000:94).

The moral linkage between work, Well-Being and exploitation, may have inspired many of the revolts and egalitarian experiments which have occurred in societies where there were great disparities in wealth and power between different groups. These revolts and experiments included the prohibition of receiving “income derived from the work of others” in twelfth-century Cistercian monasteries (Burton 1994:65), Gerard Winstanley and the

Diggers in 14th century England, the Levellers during Cromwell’s time (Morton 1938), the Hussites in 16th century Bohemia (Macek 1958), the peasant revolt led by Thomas Munzer in Germany in 1525, and the Taiping Rebellion in 19th century China (Hsü 1990).

### **Capitalism vs. Socialism**

Almost all of the revolts and egalitarian experiments mentioned above were brutally suppressed. But the emergence of a socialist movement based on the growing class of industrial workers in 18th and 19th century Europe meant that pro-capitalist states could no longer rely exclusively on violence to suppress socialist and egalitarian movements. In a socialist society, the major means of production are owned by the state and/or co-operatives. Surplus produced by enterprises is used by the state to improve the living standards of working people. Socialist movements, often inspired by the writings of Marx and Engels, sought to re-mould society along egalitarian lines by instituting workers’ control of the major means of production and exchange. There was, and remains, much disagreement among socialists regarding the means to achieve this goal. Socialism was, and remains, morally appealing because the aim of many socialists is to eliminate exploitation and to improve overall levels of Well-Being.

In addition to the legal and physical repression of socialist movements by pro-capitalist states, an ideological defense of capitalism emerged. (‘Ideology’ is a set of sometimes inconsistent beliefs which provides answers to certain questions about a society: (1) why is it the way it is? (2) Is its present form good or bad? (3) what should be done to change society, if anything?) The moral/ideological critique of capitalist exploitation presented above was counterposed, beginning in the 18th century, to the notion that the overall Well-Being of a society or nation increases when each individual is allowed, within limits, to promote his or her own Well-Being.

This view, often identified with the Doctrine of the Invisible Hand proposed by the 18th century Scottish political-economist, Adam Smith, is presented by Lakoff as follows: “If each person tries to maximize his own well-being (or self-interest), the

well-being of all will be maximized. Thus, seeking one's own self-interest is actually a positive, moral act, one that contributes to the well-being of all... Correspondingly, interfering with the pursuit of self-interest is seen in this metaphor as immoral, since it does not permit the maximization of well-being for all" (1996:94-95).

The aggregate of individuals' efforts to maximize Well-Being is metaphorically equivalent to an invisible hand which compels capitalists to continually lower prices and improve quality of goods in order to attract canny consumers. Thus, at least theoretically, the invisible hand perpetually increases overall Well-Being. Socialist political parties and states supposedly impede pursuit of financial self-interest and the operation of the invisible hand by taking property away from capitalists, taxing the rich, providing low-cost, state-supported housing for working people, providing state-supported education, providing state-supported medical care, providing state-supported childcare, etc. Thus, the doctrine of the invisible hand is sometimes used to morally justify political activity and/or war against socialist political movements and states.

The doctrine of the invisible hand forms the basis of the academic discipline of economics and is presently a major component of the dominant ideology in our culture. Critics of the doctrine of the invisible hand point out that it does not take into account the major role played by imperialism and slavery in Western history, or the periodic economic crises—e.g., the stock market crash of 1929 and the subsequent economic stagnation—that seem to be endemic to capitalism (Hunt 1995). Although Adam Smith warned that the invisible hand cannot operate if major industries are monopolized by one or a few firms, emergence of monopolies has never been effectively curbed by pro-capitalist states. (In the absence of competition, monopolies are able to dictate prices.) At the same time, pro-capitalist states have sometimes attempted to suppress trade unions on the grounds that they represent monopoly control of labour and thus prevent workers from competing in offering their labour to employers for the lowest possible wage (Hunt 1995).

## **Well-Being and the Former USSR**

The former USSR has sometimes been characterized as state socialist (Bartels 2002). All the major means of production, communication, and exchange were owned or controlled by the state, and surplus from enterprises was used by the state to protect socialism and to improve the living standards of Soviet citizens. Despite Western and Japanese military intervention during the Civil War (1918-1920) between the Bolsheviks/Communists and the pro-capitalist Whites (Kinvig 2006; Jackson 1972), rapid collectivization of agriculture (Kilmister 2000; Hill 1971), rapid industrialization (Kilmister 2000; Longworth 2006), Stalinist purges during the 1930s (Longworth 2006), devastation inflicted by the Nazi invaders during World War II (Werth 1971), and the economic burden of the arms race during the Cold War, the living standards of Soviet citizens improved vastly over the 74 years that the USSR existed (Parenti 1997; Szymanski 1984). This occurred largely because the wealth created by workers was not appropriated by capitalists, but mobilized instead to improve the Well-Being of Soviet citizens. While the priorities and inefficiencies in state allocation of resources in the former USSR have often been criticized, the loss of Well-Being incurred by such policy errors pales in comparison to the gigantic and ongoing theft of Well-Being that is the engine of capitalism.

## **The USSR and the Moral Legacy of World War II**

Despite attempts by elements within the capitalist classes of the West to use Hitler and Nazis to eliminate Soviet socialism (Pool and Pool 1978; Higham 1983; Cockburn 1973), and despite the loss of over 20 million of its citizens, the Soviets were able to defeat the bulk of Nazi military forces. It seems that Churchill only allowed the Western invasion of Nazi-occupied France after it became clear that the Red Army alone would be able to drive the Nazis out of Eastern Europe, Germany, and, ultimately, all of Europe (see *World War II: When Lions Roared*, 1994, Gideon Productions).

The moral debt owed by the West to the former USSR for bearing the brunt of the struggle

against the Nazis was apparent during the conflict. Immediately after the war ended, US and British intelligence services organized and armed clandestine Fascist gangs throughout Western Europe in order to resist an ephemeral Soviet occupation and to sabotage Western European Communist parties. These gangs carried out various terrorist attacks during the Cold War (Ganser 2005). One can only wonder about the extent to which British and US intelligence services betrayed Communist resistance fighters to the Nazis before the war ended (see Charlotte Gray, Warner Brothers, 2002).

### Western and Soviet ‘Imperialism’

Soviet relations with the former Warsaw Pact countries and with various overseas socialist countries such as Cuba and Vietnam did not involve a drain of wealth to the USSR. Rather, there was an overall transfer of wealth from the Soviet Union to Eastern Europe, Cuba, Vietnam, and other lesser-developed countries (Szymanski 1984). Well-Being was thus given by Soviet workers to Eastern Europe and to various lesser developed countries (LDCs). In contrast, there is an ongoing drain of wealth from LDCs to capitalist classes in the West, Japan, and elsewhere (McGrew 2000). It is thus perversely misleading to lump together as ‘imperialist’ capitalist plunder of LDCs and Soviet relations with Eastern Europe and LDCs. And it is perversely ironic that many of those in the Ukraine and Eastern Europe who protested against ‘Soviet domination’ now regard the disappearance of subsidized oil and gas from Siberia as unfair.

The world-class education and health systems of Cuba show what socialism can accomplish despite the constraints of the US blockade. Perhaps other LDCs might have achieved similar results if the US and other Western states had not intervened openly or covertly, to subvert socialism all over the world (Blum 2000).

Cheap labour and raw materials in LDCs during the Cold War allowed capitalists to provide relatively cheap consumer goods in the West and Japan. At the same time, Western working classes were expected to support military establishments whose major aim was suppression of governments and political move-

ments which attempted to end capitalist exploitation and establish socialism. The French and US military follies in Vietnam are prime examples.

### Imperialism and the End of the USSR

The moral superiority of the Soviets during the last decades of the Cold War was not apparent to most citizens of developed Western countries because of emphasis by Western mass media on relatively low Soviet living standards, the prohibition of travel to the West for most Soviet citizens, restrictions on Jewish emigration, and Soviet military intervention in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan, etc. The role of capitalist exploitation in reducing Well-Being on a world scale was largely ignored by Western mass media. This omission affected Western public opinion and Soviet public opinion as well. Also, young Soviet intellectuals—that is, people with post-secondary education—were affected by the immense efforts of the CIA and other Western intelligence services to insert anti-Sovietism into all spheres of cultural life (Saunders 1999). While young Soviet intellectuals learned about capitalist exploitation in compulsory classes on Marxism-Leninism, they did not understand its severity because they had never experienced it directly. Soviet travel restrictions were partly responsible for this. Many young Soviet intellectuals seemed unaware that their relatively privileged and secure positions were a result not only of their personal academic achievements, but of socialist state policies that allocated wealth produced by working people to academic and scientific institutions, and for maintenance of an extensive social safety net. In addition, many young Soviet intellectuals associated Soviet socialism with Stalinist purges, and saw it as a barrier to the inclusion of Russia in the mainstream of ‘civilized’ European economic and intellectual development. These factors led many young Soviet intellectuals to see the middle-class living standards of the West as a product of ‘free market dynamism’ rather than the spoils of imperialism. The result was a disastrous erosion of Well-Being that accompanied Western-sponsored ‘shock treatment’ under Yeltsin (Klein 2007).

The end of Cold War competition between the USSR and pro-capitalist Western states over which

system—capitalism or socialism—could provide better health care, education, and ‘culture,’ has resulted in initiatives in many countries to reduce state support for health care, education and ‘culture.’ Wherever these initiatives have succeeded, overall Well-Being has declined.

### The Cold War ‘Victory’ and Environmental Crisis

During the Cold War, Western critics focused not only on an alleged lack of democracy and personal freedom in the former USSR and other socialist countries, but on alleged economic stagnation and environmental degradation as well. It was thus difficult for eco-socialists in the West to hold up the former USSR as an example to be emulated. People in the West who attempted to do so sometimes faced state-sponsored persecution, such as job loss and/or restricted employment opportunities (Fariello 1995).

The supposed impossibility that Soviet-style socialism could provide a good life and a good environment was symbolized by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster of 1988, and by the disastrous draining of the Aral Sea (Woodhouse 2000). But after the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, it became increasingly clear that profit-driven environmental degradation was not going to be seriously restricted by pro-capitalist Western states or by the unfettered gangster capitalists of the former Soviet Bloc. This created a dilemma for mainstream Western intellectuals. On the one hand, they know that corporate-controlled mass media divert public attention from the seriousness of profit-driven environmental degra-

ation. Thus, pro-capitalist ‘democratic’ states are seldom forced by public opinion to deal seriously with anthropogenic environmental problems. On the other hand, while it becomes increasingly clear that states must curb profit-driven corporate activity in order to forestall further environmental degradation, extensive state intervention in capitalist economies is widely seen as ‘Soviet’ or ‘Communist,’ and thus as a threat to ‘freedom and democracy.’ Anyone who advocates a socialist-style ‘command economy’ as a means to curtail profit-driven environmental degradation will be characterized as an Orwellian Big Brother who wishes to impede the invisible hand’s dispensation of prosperity.

The response of most mainstream Western intellectuals to the dilemma described above has been predictable. They ignore it. There are few novels, plays, or works of non-fiction that deal directly with these issues. Instead, the Western Cold War victory has brought largely unbridled propagation of pro-capitalist ideology in mass media. The notion that the free market/invisible hand provides the best means of solving environmental problems is largely unchallenged. This is disastrous because market forces have proven to be almost totally ineffective in curbing anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions (see <http://www.unep.org>). Without urgent international cooperation between states to regulate fossil fuel and related industries (Bartels 1997), the prospects for human survival are tenuous.

Because human extinction means a total loss of Well-Being, it is the ultimate moral outrage. If capitalism makes human life on earth impossible, Osiris and Amenti will be very busy, indeed.

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