

production, or, as he glosses this, between these new technologies and the existing framework of private property. A new model of agency will be necessary if the full potential of these new technological and scientific developments is to be realized. Unfortunately, Cohen does not explain the exact nature of the contradiction at work here. In his discussion of digital society, he wavers between the suggestion that file sharing necessitates a more cooperative model of profit seeking, and the pessimistic claim that a new kind of individual is emerging: “a being that seems deprived of a clear awareness of itself, simultaneously in exteriority, under the constant gaze of others, and in inferiority performing under the multiple masks the unsatisfied portion of his or her fantasies” (94). The discussion of advances in the science of genetics manifests a similar oscillation between calls for a more open sharing of knowledge than is likely to occur under current economic pressures, and the expression of concerns about the impact of the genetic reengineering of the human body. All this produces the impression that, despite his obviously negative assessment of *homo economicus*, Cohen is far from sure about how to replace this model, or whether attempting to do so will unleash new monsters.

This impression is reinforced by one of the strangest sections of the book. In chapter 3, Cohen draws an analogy between the increasing inequalities in the later years of the Roman Empire and its growing reliance on war as a source of revenue, and the contemporary West. These tendencies were reined in by the advent of Christianity, which provided a new conception of selfhood, the origin of modern individualism, and a counter to Roman hierarchy. Cohen wonders whether “a spiritual revolution of the same scope is conceivable today, one provoked by the return of new social tensions, and the difficulty of making intelligible the way the world is moving” (41). It is, of course, heartening to encounter a work by an economist that displays a broad interest in history and social theory, and a quite impressive imaginative and literary breadth. It is disconcerting, however, to find buried at its heart a vague call for spiritual renewal.

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François Furet: *Lies, Passions, and Illusions: The Democratic Imagination in the Twentieth Century*. Trans. Deborah Furet. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014. Pp. xxxv, 89.)

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When François Furet died in July 1997, at the age of seventy, he was the world’s leading historian of the French Revolution, occupying distinguished

teaching positions in Paris and Chicago. Two decades earlier, he had successfully challenged (in *Interpreting the French Revolution* [English trans., Cambridge University Press, 1981]) the Marxist social-economic interpretation of 1789, which contested the *sans culottes* and the Jacobins and viewed the events of 1789–94 exclusively through the lenses of class struggle and economic factors. Furet famously asserted at the beginning of his book that “the French Revolution is over” and went on to challenge the image of the Revolution as a source of viable political alternatives for future generations.

Furet’s critics denounced him as an ideological opponent of the Revolution, a capitalist adversary of Marx, and a bourgeois historian who had sold his soul to the cause of market liberalism and American capitalism. Furet relished the controversy and watched with satisfaction the return of liberalism to Paris while Communism’s charisma was waning all over Central and Eastern Europe. As the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain fell in 1989, Furet began searching for an explanation for the fascination exercised by October 1917 on so many intellectuals in the West. *The Passing of an Illusion*, published in 1995 (English trans., University of Chicago, 1999), was an instant market success in France and consolidated his reputation as one of the greatest analysts of modern revolutions.

Furet was in a good position to try to explain the spell of Communism, for he had joined the French Communist Party in 1949. (He eventually resigned at the end of the 1950s before turning to journalism.) How can one explain the fascination of the Communist ideal for almost three-quarters of a century, given its terrible outcomes in practice? That was Furet’s main question and as a historian, he tried to explain how the Communist hope was grafted onto a tragedy of historical proportions.

*The Passing of an Illusion* was a very French book belonging to an old tradition. Over the past couple of centuries, many French liberals (including Tocqueville) turned to history in order to find convincing proofs and arguments for the legitimacy of their own principles. As such, their interest in history was not simply antiquarian, but served a well-defined political agenda. Given the contested legacy of the Revolution, its uncertainties and dilemmas, looking back into the past was also a way of looking forward into the future. Furet’s book was a history of the illusion that Communism would be able to build a perfect society free of the sins of capitalism. He offered the story of a powerful myth that, instead of the much-promised world of peace and freedom, brought misery and suffering to many.

Such a polemical (and political) book was supposed to be only the beginning of a larger debate, and Furet envisioned a sequel that was cut short by his untimely death. He engaged in a correspondence with the German historian Ernst Nolte, who famously wrote about the similarity between Fascism and Communism, and in 1996, he had a brief exchange with Paul Ricoeur. The present slim volume, *Lies, Passions, and Illusions*, ably edited by Christophe Prochasson (the author of a recent intellectual biography, *François Furet: Les chemins de la mélancolie* [Stock, 2013]), gives us a hint

about what that sequel might have been. The nine short chapters are edited from the exchange with Ricoeur and touch on the role of ideas and emotions, the importance of nationalism and its relationship with socialism and universalism, the attraction of Bolshevism, the similarities between Communism and Fascism (a major theme in the epistolary exchanges with Nolte and a point of disagreement between Furet and Ricoeur), and the concept of totalitarianism (which Furet disliked for the most part).

In this posthumous book, Furet continues to insist that Communism was both an illusion and a lie. The illusion was inseparable from the "Communist pretension and the belief that Communism could incarnate a more civilized future for humanity" (11). Such an illusion had, however, its own logic, since Communism (along with socialism) was the outcome of a long expectation about the end of capitalism and a series of dreams about the postcapitalist society. Although some of these dreams turned out to be unrealistic, the fascination with Communism grew stronger, no matter how much it was belied by facts. Yet there is a fundamental difference between an illusion and a lie. The latter refers to officially ratified contradictions between words and deeds and is "a deliberate act of deceit, by which the liar tries to mislead a third party" (4). Communism, Furet writes, was certainly the object of a systematic and collective lie buttressed by a vast propaganda apparatus and systematic brainwashing. Take, for example, the false idea that the Soviets were ever a workers' power or even a democratic one. In reality, the Soviet Union was a deeply inegalitarian society in which a minority of apparatchiks enjoyed considerable privileges denied to the majority of citizens.

For all of his firm rejection of Communism and contrary to what his opponents alleged, Furet was no ideologue and it is possible to view him as a centrist spirit in the great tradition of French political moderation originating in Montaigne and Montesquieu. His master was Tocqueville, who taught him a few important lessons about the ambiguities of democracy and the importance of political moderation. In an important lecture Furet gave in Lisbon in January 1997, entitled "Democracy and Utopia" (which was published in the *Journal of Democracy* in 1998 and could have been profitably included in the present collection), he explained the congenital instability of modern liberal democratic societies stemming from their chronic democratic deficit and the insatiable demand for more autonomy and equality. Furet argued that the modern world is particularly sensitive to the claims of utopia and he emphasized the psychological inevitability of utopianism in modern politics. In the exchange with Ricoeur, Furet acknowledged that "the Communist idea, as an abstract idea, did not die with the disappearance of the Soviet Union. To the extent that it was born of the frustrations inseparable from the capitalist society, and from the hatred of a world dominated by money, it is independent from its 'realization'; all it needs is the abstract hope of a postcapitalist universe" (11). This amounts to admitting that while the history of Communism may be a closed chapter, modern political

democracies will most likely be unable to live without some form of utopia. The question is which new type of utopia will appear on the horizon.

Furet refused the posture of a prophet and ended his Lisbon lecture, his true political testament, by leaving this question open. His entire work makes it clear that understanding our present condition requires that we reflect back on the complex legacy of hope and suffering bequeathed by the twentieth century. François Furet is one of the best guides we can follow on this journey of self-understanding and this short volume confirms it.

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Tzvetan Todorov: *The Inner Enemies of Democracy*. Trans. Andrew Brown. (Malden, MA: Polity, 2014. Pp. 200.)

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In some of his early writings, Todorov established a reputation in structural linguistics, semiotics, and poetics. But more recently he has moved impressively into historical and cultural interpretation and critique. This book offers a lucid and penetrating diagnosis of the inner ailments and congenital pathologies of democracy—a diagnosis intended not to downgrade democracy but to restore it to a more robust and healthy mode of public life.

The main challenges to democracy arise no longer from rival regimes (as in antiquity), nor even from recent hostile competitors, but from the fact that democracy “secrets within itself the very forces that threaten it” (6). “The people, [individual] freedom, and progress are constituent elements of democracy; but if one of them breaks free from its relations with others, thus escaping any attempt to limit it and erecting itself into a single principle, they become distinct dangers: populism, ultraliberalism, and messianism, these inner enemies of democracy” (10). The three derailments or pathologies are analyzed in detail, preceded by an introductory chapter dealing with the “ancient controversy” between Pelagius and St. Augustine—the former a champion of unlimited willpower and the second of pliant submission to divine grace—and the historical repercussions of their teachings.

The first major derailment and “inner enemy” of democracy is “political messianism.” Todorov distinguishes between three “waves”: the French Revolution and its aftermath; the “Communist project” after 1917; and the externally induced “regime changes,” especially after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1990. In the aftermath of the French Revolution, the millenarian