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Leonidas Donskis. *Identity and Freedom: Mapping nationalism and Social criticism in twentieth-century Lithuania*

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Leonidas Donskis. *Identity and Freedom: Mapping nationalism and social criticism in twentieth-century Lithuania*. London: Routledge, 2002.

When Barry V. Johnston and Lawrence Nichols place Sorokin within a grouping of other scholars, they perform much the same sort of service that Leonidas Donskis offers to Vytautas Kavolis. While there is masterful interpretation on both sides, there is *one* overriding difference. The scholars treated in the Sorokinian orbit are mostly rivals and critics of his views; those examined by Donskis are predominantly Kavolis' allies (still allowing for a few alternate nuances, as when Ernst Gellner allegedly oversimplified the notion of nationalism).

Donskis produced two challenging books which should enable Americans, given serious and sustained efforts on their part, to comprehend what Kavolis and his fellows are working at. The groundings in the interpretive basics, especially regarding civilizational analysis and the history of consciousness, appear in the earlier book, *The End of Ideology and Utopia?*

Donskis' second book, *Identity and Freedom: Mapping Nationalism and Social Criticism in Twentieth-Century Lithuania*, provides a much better explanatory payoff. In sum, it demonstrates what was Kavolis' "bottom-line," or ultimate goal, also those for his liberal allies Alexandras Shtromas and Tomas Venclova. Civilizational analysis is sharply focussed, then applied in great detail to Lithuania's present history, given both its long ethnic and cultural legacy and its very recently achieved independence. (I would note that Donskis gives us an illuminating inventory of Kavolis' analyses of the complex concept, "civilization," on page 46.)

Nationalism and liberalism are two notions in great dispute on both sides of the water. Yet they are indispensable, despite their quite varied interpretations and their usually being at odds. Kavolis' heroic efforts to present their multiform intelligibility and effect their reconciliation cannot but benefit even naive Americans, whose living contexts are more populist, and whose scholars are almost invariably more specialized, even technical. Indeed, given the motto *e pluribus unum* and our long time "melting-pot" tradition, monocultural ethnic nationalism (a hazardous and deadly aspect of Lithuania's legacy) requires an imaginative leap for us to understand it. Also, it is difficult for down-to-earth Americans to summon up sympathy for ideologies and utopias, given the zigzagging disputes among all those shrewdly labeled by Mary

Matalin as "wing-nuts," Old Left, New Left, Neo-Conservatives, Libertarians, et al. Utopias foisted on us usually by outsiders are unstable and morph into dystopias, expressed in innumerable ways in literary and popular culture.

In fact, European social thought, while not opaque, is never quite transparent to Americans. Why not? To generalize, our country is far more extensive, our backgrounds are quite varied (many diasporas being represented), our history is comparatively short, and changes, both economic and social, have been moving at breakneck speed. Most importantly, we have not been oppressed, as Eastern Europe has, by conquering ethnic nationalities nor regimented by hostile ideologies. Consequently, the problem of collaborationist Quislings has happily not arisen for us, and hierarchical traditions do not obtain here, given our restless social mobility. "Shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves in three generations."

American nationalism consequently is rather supra-ethnic than ethnic; Theodore Roosevelt had worried unduly about "hyphenated Americans." Our unstable conditions and irreverent egalitarianism also undermine respect for elite academics. There is great suspicion of advice and guidance coming from authorities, and so scholars gain greater status by specializing, and especially by garnering research grants from corporations and government agencies. (After Sputnik in 1957, the National Defense Education Act reinforced efforts by the National Science Foundation, and a dramatic report about public schools was entitled "A Nation at Risk," quite dire it was.)

Americans are not without worries and concerns, but these have been typically less urgent than those rightly expressed by Vytautas Kavolis and his allied thinkers, all examined in Donskis' two books. (The one exception, the American Lewis Mumford, is of a much earlier generation and he had been impacted by travails now far less evident.) When Clark Kerr wrote of the "multiversity," this of course was offensive to those whose ideals--and later their lip service--were more medieval, as had been the vision of Francis Cardinal Newman and later that of the historian Nathan Pusey, whose attempts to bring a unifying religious view to Harvard led to controversial and even comical results. But practically speaking, what unifies and centers alumni loyalties to a university tends to be its football program, and investments in that are easy to come by. Professors receiving large research stipends are not the occasion for tailgate parties, whatever the praise they may rightly

receive.

The very breadth of Kavolis' scholarship, and that of like European thinkers, can be a source of amazement to American readers. But those intellectual resources are surely needed, to be brought to bear upon issues of concern to confused Lithuanians today, and by analogy to the accommodations called-for among great civilizations. Kavolis looks for "polylogue" and the virtue of tolerance (not simply toleration) on the basis not only of locally competing European nationalisms but that of total civilizations threatening to clash upon the world stage. (Sorokin's counterpart prescription, of course, was the study of altruistic behaviors, and the best ways to generate them.)

—— Palmer Talbutt