

Liberalism, affect control, and emotionally intelligent democracy*

DMITRI SHALIN

Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return
(W. H. Auden)

If ancient Greece is the birthplace of democracy and Athens its earliest incarnation, which deity in the illustrious pantheon of Greek Gods and Goddesses qualifies as its benefactor? No major figure inhabiting Olympus comes to mind, but once you consider the second-tier deities, you find a plausible candidate in Peitho, the Goddess embodying ‘the spirit of agreement, bargain, contract, consensus, exchange, and negotiation in a free *polis*,’ which, according to Alexander Mourelatos, makes her ‘the patron of civilized life and of democratic institutions.’¹ What makes Peitho such an intriguing candidate for the part is that she is also the attendant and companion of Aphrodite, whose capacity to attract and persuade, it would seem, has something to do with the art of living in a democratic polis.²

The discursive strategy linking democracy, civility, and affect is central to the thesis I wish to develop in this essay, namely, that democracy is an embodied process that binds affectively as well as rhetorically and that flourishes in places where civic discourse is not an expedient means to be discarded when it fails to achieve a proximate goal but an end in itself, a source of vitality and social creativity sustaining an emotionally intelligent democratic community. I begin my discussion with a blueprint for democratic polity formulated in ancient Greece and its critical reception at the time. Then I consider the difficulties that fledgling democracies encounter on the way to civil society as they struggle to put behind their historical legacy. Next I make the case that civic discourse is inseparable from the civic body which has been misshapen by past abuses and which takes a long time to heal. Finally, drawing on Norbert Elias’s work on the civilizing process, I speculate about the emotion, demeanor, and the body language of democracy, and explore from this angle the prospects for democratic transformation in countries that are struggling to shake their totalitarian past.

Athenian democracy and its critics

The earliest sustained defense of the democratic ethos in the Occidental world dates back to 424–403 BC. It comes to us via Thucydides,³ who offers a spirited defense of the Athenian democracy in his *Peloponnesian War* where he pictures an Athenian statesman Pericles railing

*Parts of this paper were presented at the International Conference on Globalization, Civil Society and Philanthropy, The Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York, 5–7 June 2003.

against the despotic Sparta. ‘Here each individual is interested not only in his own affairs but in the affairs of the state as well,’ explains Pericles the ways of Athens; ‘even those who are mostly occupied with their own business are extremely well-informed on general politics – this is a peculiarity of ours: we do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business: we say he has no business here at all.’ ‘When it is a question of settling private disputes, everyone is equal before the law,’ Pericles continues.⁴ ‘We give our obedience to those whom we put in positions of authority, and we obey the laws themselves, especially those which are for the protection of the oppressed, and those unwritten laws which it is an acknowledged shame to break.’ Poverty is not an obstacle for participating in the democratic process, the orator goes on to say. ‘No one, so long as he has it in him to be of service, is kept in political obscurity because of poverty . . . [W]hat counts is not membership of a particular class, but the actual ability which the man possesses . . . We regard wealth as something to be properly used, rather than as something to boast about. As for poverty, no one need be ashamed to admit it: the real shame is in not taking practical measures to escape from it.’

Astutely, Pericles ties democracy to unfettered commerce – a key benefit, if not a precondition, of democratic living. ‘Then the greatness of our city brings about that all the good things from all over the world flow in to us, so that to us it seems natural to enjoy foreign goods as our own local products.’ Equally prescient in light of the issues confronting democracy today appears Pericles’ defense of tolerance and diversity:

Our city is open to the world, and we have no periodical deportations in order to prevent people observing or finding our secrets . . . We do not get into a state with our next-door neighbor if he enjoys himself in his own way, nor do we give him the kind of black looks which, though they do no real harm, still do hurt people’s feelings. We are free and tolerant in our private lives . . . [O]ur city is an education to Greece, and I declare that in my opinion each single one of our citizens, in all the manifold aspects of life, is able to show himself the right lord and owner of his own person, and do this with exceptional grace and versatility . . . When we do kindnesses to others, we do not do them out of any calculations of profit or loss; we do them without an afterthought, relying on our free liberality . . . This makes our friendships all the more reliable.⁵

One more feature distinguishing the democratic lifestyle needs to be singled out here – its affinity with art and recreation. This is how Pericles renders this point, according to Thucydides: ‘When our work is over, we are in a position to enjoy all kinds of recreation for our spirits. There are various kinds of contests and sacrifices regularly throughout the year; in our own homes we find a beauty and a good taste which delights us every day and which drives away our cares . . . Our love of what is beautiful does not lead to extravagance; our love for the affairs of the mind does not make us soft.’⁶

As one can gather from the above, the political, economic, social, and cultural domains are intertwined in the Athenian polis where all citizens partake in politics and are equal before law, where merit drives political appointment and commerce ranges free and wide, where diverse lifestyles are respected, individual autonomy is supreme, and domestic life is infused with good sense and beauty.

If this paean to democracy sounds like wartime propaganda, it is probably because it was just that. The contemporary reality in Athens was far less benign, with slaves, women, and servants excluded from civil exercises, laws applied selectively, judges influenced by the powerful, and public offices far more accessible to the propertied classes than to the lower orders of society. Fittingly, one critic calls it ‘the first Cold War document.’⁷ We can find a

more skeptical account of democracy in Pericles' contemporary, Socrates, whose views were preserved for posterity by his student Plato.

Efforts to run society democratically are doomed, explains Socrates to his interlocutor enamored of democracy. They run afoul of the hard facts of human nature. The 'madness of the multitude' is incurable, 'the inevitableness of the degeneracy of the multitude'⁸ can be gleaned from the regularity with which democratic governments degenerate into a tyranny. This debacle happens because 'democratic city athirst for liberty gets bad cupbearers for its leaders and is intoxicated by drinking too deep of that unmixed wine.'⁹ People drunk on liberty follow their own counsel, ignoring the voice of reason. In time, they come to resemble

horses and asses [which] are wont to hold on their way with the utmost freedom and dignity, bumping into everyone who meets them and who does not step aside. And so all things everywhere are just bursting with the spirit of liberty . . . [which] render[s] the souls of citizens so sensitive that they chafe at the slightest suggestion of servitude and will not endure it . . . [T]hey finally pay no heed even to the laws written or unwritten, so that forsooth they may have no master anywhere over them . . . And so the probable outcome of too much freedom is only too much slavery in the individual and the state.¹⁰

This pernicious dialectics of freedom and slavery is set in motion whenever the demos finds itself in power. Democracy pushes up side down the natural order of things: 'And the climax of popular liberty, my friend, I said, is attained in such a city when the purchased slaves, male and female, are no less free than the owners who paid for them. And I almost forgot to mention the spirit of freedom and equal rights in the relation of men to women and women to men.'¹¹ (A prospect so ludicrous requires no further comment, Plato thought.) Thus, it is only a matter of time before 'the demos trying to escape the smoke of submission to the free would have plunged into the fire of enslavement to slaves, and in exchange for that excessive and unreasonable liberty has clothed itself in the garb of the most cruel and bitter servitude.'¹²

If the blueprint offered by Pericles/Thucydides lays emphasis on diversity, civility, and individual autonomy, the guidelines laid down by Socrates/Plato underscore uniformity, compliance, and the authority of the elite. Both blueprints for good government make room for social pedagogy, but where the former presupposes a liberal education infused with aesthetic sensibilities, the second requires an illiberal education that nurtures intellect and suppresses emotions. The 'scientific art of statesmanship'¹³ practiced in 'a well-governed city' calls for schooling that permits 'only pleasures which reason approves.'¹⁴ Traditional art, like poetry, is to be shunned, for it 'associates with the part in us that is remote from intelligence.'¹⁵ Music is to be indulged in gingerly, with the enthusiasm-filled Phrygian mode strongly favored over others. Even gymnastics commonly taught in school at the time is suspect on this account because it 'is devoted to that which grows and perishes, for it presides over the growth and decay of the body.'¹⁶ The problem with all such disciplines is that they leave too much room for emotions and sensual desires which threaten to overwhelm the intellect. The latter must assert its mastery over the senses, turn the soul toward the eternal and everlasting good:

And so in regard to the emotions of sex and anger, and all the appetites and pains and pleasures of the soul which we say accompany all our actions, the effect of poetic imitation is the same. For it waters and fosters these feelings when what we ought to do is to dry them up, and to establish them as our rulers when they ought to be ruled . . . [W]e can admit no poetry into our city save only hymns to the gods and the praises of

good men. For if you grant admission to the honeyed Muse in lyric and epic, pleasure or pain will be lords of your city instead of law . . . and the general reason as the best.¹⁷

One more ancient authority to be cited here weighed in on the debate about the merits of democracy. I am talking about Aristotle, who broke new grounds relevant to our argument. You cannot call Aristotle a friend of democracy; his own preference is for what he calls ‘polity’ – the ‘limited monarchy, or kingship according to law,’¹⁸ which designates a constitutional government strong enough to rein in the destructive social forces. Democracy, in this reckoning, is a deficient form of constitutional government in which ‘the many and the poor are the rulers’ and in which ‘the authority of every office is undermined [by] demagogues [who] make the decrees of the people override the laws.’ These conditions are conducive to civil unrest, anarchy, and usurpation.¹⁹

While it is classified among the three known ‘perversions’ of government (the other two being ‘tyranny’ and ‘oligarchy’), ‘democracy is the most tolerable of the three.’²⁰ At some point Aristotle appears to be making a case for the ‘constitutional government to be really a democracy,’²¹ i.e. a democracy constrained by laws and governed by elected representatives. This is not to suggest that we are dealing with a precursor of modern constitutional democracy – Aristotle thought that ‘no labourer can be a citizen’ and that ‘the working classes had no share in the government – a privilege which they only acquired under the extreme democracy.’²² But his willingness to acknowledge democracy’s strength is important, and so is his emphasis on the middle class as a backbone of the sound government:

Thus it is manifest that the best political community is formed by citizens of the middle class, and that those states are likely to be well-administered, in which the middle class is large, and stronger if possible than both the other classes, or at any rate than either of the extremes form being dominant. Great then is the good fortune of a state in which the citizens have a moderate and sufficient property; for where some possess much, and the others nothing, there may arise an extreme democracy, or a pure oligarchy; or a tyranny may grow out of either extreme . . .²³

Aristotle makes one more point relevant for the present discussion, which postulates a bond between government and character. ‘For each government has a peculiar character which originally formed and which continue to preserve it. The character of democracy creates democracy, and the character of oligarchy creates oligarchy; and always the better the character the better the government.’²⁴ Character is what sustains political institutions, character is what makes political discourse civil or uncivil, character is a personal space where both citizen and the state show their true colors. Building the right character, henceforth, is a paramount goal for every constitutional state. Aristotle does not say much about the characters bred by the inferior forms of government, although his treatment of tyrants, oligarchs, and demagogues makes it fairly clear,²⁵ but he talks a great deal about character traits befitting a mature polity – a gift for friendship and prudence, a capacity for compromise and rhetorical persuasion, an ability to manage one’s emotions and show civic courage, as well as ‘doing kindnesses; doing them unasked; and not proclaiming the fact when they are done.’²⁶ His social pedagogy spells out the sensibilities consistent with good government, character traits that would come to be associated with civility and civitas.

While Thucydides seems content to let diverse tastes flourish in Athens and Plato sets out to regulate tastes by decrees, Aristotle looks for a middle path between the two extremes. A well-thought education is crucial for turning the populace into virtuous citizens, aesthetic education no less so than the intellectual one. Because human nature has rational and

irrational parts, it is not enough to shape pupils' minds – their bodies and senses must be engaged through habit-forming, emotion-ennobling, taste-refining exercises which enable citizens to function in the public and private spheres. 'Again, from the exercise of any faculty or art a previous training and habituation are required; clearly therefore for the practice of virtue . . . And as the body is prior in order of generation, so the irrational is prior to the rational . . . Wherefore, the care of the body ought to precede that of the soul . . .'²⁷ Alongside traditional gymnastics, exercises must extend to arts, including poetry and music, which have 'the power of forming character, and should therefore be introduced into the education of the young.'²⁸ Whereas Plato was willing to admit into his utopian city only the martial Phrygian mode, Aristotle endorsed the mild Dorian and the mournful Mixolydian musical tone systems.²⁹ There are limits to what Aristotle was willing to tolerate in matters of taste. Thus he opined against the harp that requires learning too complicated skills, cast aspersion on the flute as 'too exciting,'³⁰ and demanded to 'banish pictures or speeches from the stage which are indecent.'³¹ Still, the notion that training minds as well as forming corporeal habits and refining emotions is essential to happy life – 'the life according to virtue lived without impediment'³² – was a significant departure from his philosophical predecessors.

I have descended into this well-mined historical shaft not so much to unearth the new veins of discursive ore as to show how relevant this ancient debate is for the age of democratic revolutions. All three perspectives on democracy have retained some currency in our time. The Thucydides/Pericles' thesis offers us a benign view of democratic society whose strength derives from its citizens' direct involvement with politics, their willingness to accept alternative lifestyles, pursue their private interests without state interference, and cultivate civic virtue and esthetic sensibilities. This civility centered approach grounding government in civic society comes in for a sober appraisal in Socrates/Plato who finds the masses inherently unfit for self-government. According to this view, a sound government must put limits on individual freedom, shrink the private sphere, and invest authority in the hands of the philosophically minded elite empowered to suppress destructive emotions and tastes in the name of reason and the public good. Then there is a third way endorsed by Aristotle, who splits the differences between the Scylla of unbridled democracy and Charybdis of the administered state by valorizing a constitutional polity based on law, eschewing the extremes of wealth and poverty, and providing for a personal space where well-educated citizens can enjoy leisure consistent with the demands of decency and civic virtue. The fate of liberal democracy in modern times gives substance to these abstract creeds.

Democratic reform and illiberal democracy

Few would argue today that democracy inexorably breeds tyranny (more commonly known today as totalitarianism), but most would agree that democracy unfettered by constitutional guarantees and unleavened by civic virtue can be a cruel affair. Here is a smattering of headlines appearing in the *New York Times* in the last few years: 'In failed states, can democracy come too soon?,' 'When democracy and liberty collide,' 'America finds democracy a difficult export,' 'Democracies that take liberties,' 'What is democracy anyway?,' 'Does democracy avert famine?,' 'What makes nations turn corrupt?'³³ The recurrent refrain in this discourse is that placing power in the hands of the people does not a viable democracy make.

'Elections are only one element in a democracy; others include a free press, an independent judiciary, and respect for minorities,' writes *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristoff. 'Without these checks, countries can end up with elections that (as in Pakistan) are used by

drug lords as a convenient way to install their pals in important offices. Once in place, they can use their power to steal money and murder critics.³⁴

‘From Haiti in the Western Hemisphere to the remnants of Yugoslavia in Europe, from Somalia, Sudan and Liberia in Africa to Cambodia in Southeast Asia, a disturbing new phenomenon emerging: the failed nation-state, utterly incapable of sustaining itself as a member of the international community,’ concurs Steven Ratner, a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.³⁵

‘Law and order must be first priority,’ agrees Morton Halperin, who headed the policy planning staff in Clinton Administration. ‘The main thing is developing a capacity to help a country through a transitional period in a way that allows a democratic process to take hold.’³⁶

Politicians and civic leaders in ex-communist countries have sounded a similar alarm about the treacherous path toward civic society and the dearth of viable democratic institutions. Ex-dissidents whose commitment to liberty and justice seem beyond reproach have found the realities of democratic governance bewildering and frustrating. This is how Alexander Solzhenitsyn summed up his impressions upon returning from exile to his native Russia:

The price of human life has dropped to zero in a country where criminal bandits have unleashed their deadly cynicism. From the start of great reforms, criminals have been thriving in Russia . . . The general atmosphere is that of utter disunity, of the complete indifference toward each other, with each person licking his own wounds and nurturing his own pains; the feeling of hopelessness and psychological exhaustion drives everybody to a morbid thought that life has come to naught, that control over one’s existence is totally lost.³⁷

From Victor Pelevin, an intellectual of a different generation and completely different aesthetic sensibilities, comes a kindred judgment. ‘Living in Russia drains you if you are an intelligent person. We have no civil society, and people have no protection from corrupt rule. Ordinary people are much worse off than they were under Communism; you simply cannot survive on your pension or money from the state.’³⁸

Vaclav Havel, a man who saw first hand the democratic transformation in the Czech Republic, is also full of foreboding and doubts about the outcome of the Velvet Revolution. Now that the ‘transition from epic poetry to the tedious and tawdry details of everyday political life’ is under way, it becomes painfully clear that ‘freedom of speech and a free vote do not easily translate into wealth, foreign investment or happiness, that totalitarian habits of mind die hard and that Western Europe, with its own divisions and economic problems, is in no hurry to bring them into full membership in the European Union.’³⁹

Jere Pehe, a former Havel aid, concurs as he looks wistfully on the aftermath of Havel’s first presidential term: ‘People don’t yet understand that democracy is more than just democratic institutions, but the democratic spirit of compromise and tolerance.’⁴⁰

Disappointment with the pace and direction of reforms in fledgling democracies has given rise to a current of opinion among experts in this country who urge politicians to give the benefit of the doubt to authoritarian states, which in some cases offer more protection to their citizens than their quasi-liberal counterparts. The gist of their argument is that neither well-drafted constitutions nor reasonably free elections automatically produce a society free from human rights abuses and political corruption. Saddam Hussein’s Bill of Rights guaranteed Iraqis basic freedoms on paper while denying them in practice, elections in Kazakhstan are technically free, and the Russian army’s brutal actions in Chechnya enjoy

popular support.⁴¹ By contrast, authoritarian governments in China and Singapore have secured for their citizens a modicum of freedoms and economic rights lacking in some openly democratic nations. ‘Were China to have suddenly become a parliamentary democracy in 1989 at the time of the Tiananmen Square uprising,’ contends Robert Kaplan, ‘the average Chinese citizen would likely be worse off today, and dramatically so.’⁴²

Fareed Zakaria is probably the best known advocate for this view. In his much-quoted 1997 essay in *Foreign Affairs* and subsequent articles, he points out that ‘Democratically elected regimes, often ones that have been reelected or reaffirmed through referendums, are routinely ignoring constitutional limits on their power and depriving their citizens of basic rights and freedoms. From Peru to the Palestinian authority, from Slovakia to Sri Lanka, from Pakistan to the Philippines, we see the rise of a disturbing phenomenon in international life – illiberal democracies . . . Democracy is flourishing; constitutional liberalism is not.’⁴³ Half the democratizing countries these days fall into the category of illiberal democracies, according to Zakaria, and even though their rulers spurned democratic tenets, their populace often fare better than people who enjoy the right to vote and say what they wish. ‘Despite the limited political choice they offer, countries like Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand provide a better environment for the life, liberty and happiness of their citizens than do illiberal democracies like Slovakia and Ghana. And the pressures of global capitalism can push the process of liberalization forward. Markets and morals can work together.’⁴⁴

There is more than a whiff of elitism in the notion that flesh and blood democracies are marked by crude tastes, messy politics, and unpredictable outcomes, that people in emerging democracies may be better off with authoritarian leaders. One also senses here a tacit polemic with Isaiah Berlin, who famously contended that ‘negative liberty’ protecting the individual from state encroachment is more precious than ‘positive liberty’ empowering the elites to impose on society a scheme that allegedly benefits everybody.⁴⁵ The list of philosophers, intellectuals, and politicians willing to sacrifice ‘freedom from’ to ‘freedom for’ is long indeed, going back to Plato’s *Republic* and sporting such landmarks as Thomas More’s *Utopia*, Campanella’s *The City of the Sun*, St Simon’s musings about the United States of Europe, Comte’s anthem to the New Christianity, and Marx’s vision of the communist paradise. There is a reason why Marx and his followers render Hegel’s *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft* not as ‘civil society’ but as ‘bourgeois society,’ which belongs to the past and must disappear with an onset of a glorious post-capitalist future.⁴⁶ Looked at from this angle, individual liberty is but a means to be deployed for the purposes of achieving a true goal – social harmony, and when the former gets in the way of the latter, the collective well-being takes precedence.

I am not suggesting that those endorsing the illiberal democracy thesis see China or Singapore as ‘eutopian’ places. Zakaria knows how abusive authoritarian governments can be, casting such regimes chiefly as a detour on the way to more democratic mores. But the accent on the collective well-being achieved at the expense of individual liberties and the benign neglect with which these theorists view civil rights’ abuses in authoritarian states reveal this paradigm’s blind spot.

There is much to be said about the role that global markets can play in improving people’s lot. But then, one can also argue that illiberal practices in authoritarian states corrupt their politics, hamper progress toward civil society, and ultimately stymie economic development.⁴⁷ Critics of this model, which offers itself as ‘a new theoretical foundation for American foreign policy,’⁴⁸ rightly point out its tenuous empirical base and the undue optimism about the free markets’ ability to foster civic virtue. To expand the latter argument, I wish to lay out the thesis that repressive regimes reproduce the affective-somatic conditions injurious to civil society, that citizens unwilling or unable to learn Peitho’s art of compromise, persuasion, and emotional intelligence are bound to relive their totalitarian past.

Shedding the totalitarian legacy

Politicians struggling to shed their countries' nondemocratic legacies would do well consulting the above political blueprints.

Consider Vladimir Putin, Russia's president who took over from Boris Yeltsin and now presides over the country's reform in the post-perestroika era. Confident, level-headed, hard-working, Putin exemplifies the qualities associated with the new breed of leaders pushing beyond totalitarianism without completely discarding their authoritarian heritage.

He came to power with the promise to bring stability to a country ravaged by doubt and mismanagement in the go-go days of the Yeltsin's hyper-liberal democracy. So far as popular opinion is concerned, he delivered on his pledge. In 2001, rejoiced the labor daily *Trud*, 'Russia objectively lived the best year in its modern history.'⁴⁹ In less than two years, Putin affirmed Kremlin's authority in the restive regions, reined in provincial governors, clamped down on the privatization excesses, brought some sanity to the tax legislation, pushed for legal reforms allowing jury trials, submitted a package of laws promoting market relations in agriculture, encouraged foreign investment, and aligned Russia with the West in the struggle against terrorism.⁵⁰ Private markets, stock exchange, futures trading, foreign trade – the signs that the market economy is becoming entrenched in today's Russia are multiplying daily. The same cannot be said about civic society, whose institutions have been retrenching ever since Putin came to power.

Having disposed of economic tycoons Boris Berezovsky and Alexander Gusinsky, Putin moved against the independent media outlets which dared to quarrel with the president. NTV and Channel 6, the country's only privately owned TV stations, are now owned by private companies in which the Russian government holds majority stock.⁵¹ Radio Echo of Moscow, noted for its free-wheeling interviews and innovative cultural programming, had its board of directors pushed aside.

War in Chechnya continues unabated, as government troops wage their battle against the rebels, matching them in ruthlessness and disregard for the civilians' plight. Journalists reporting the unvarnished truth about daily life in Chechnya, human rights activists interviewing civilians, foreign observers seeking access to the region, find themselves harassed by the local and federal authorities.⁵²

Putin's administration moved aggressively to prosecute scholars for alleged violations of the newly buttressed secrecy laws, obtaining convictions in several dubious cases clumsily put together with the express purpose of dissuading others from fraternizing with foreigners.⁵³ In a parallel move, the Russian Academy of Sciences issued a directive requiring scholars to stay away from foreign nationals, report on their trips abroad, and submit their papers for prepublication review, even if they are not based on classified data.⁵⁴ Russian intellectuals and civil rights activists now take for granted that their telephone lines are tapped and their correspondence surveyed.⁵⁵

Pro-Putin activists from government-inspired youth groups (sometimes called 'Putin-Jugend') conduct demonstrations calling on patriotic forces to unite against cosmopolitan intellectuals and decadent writers. The young nationalists rail against popular tastes, sexually explicit publications, the influx of foreign movies, and disregard for patriotic themes in Russian art. Relentless attacks on Igor Kon, a country's leading sex educator, is one example. Another is a lawsuit against Vladimir Sorokin, in which the self-appointed defenders of Russian mores charged the author with indecency and pornography in his novel *Blue Lard*.⁵⁶

There has also been a dramatic rise in ethnic strife, pro-Fascist gatherings, and skinhead demonstrations which often turn violent. Their favorite targets are Jews, people from the Caucasus region. Most such events proceed under the watchful eyes of the police and go

unreported, except when the victims are foreign diplomats, as in the recent case involving Ghana's envoy to Moscow, who was severely beaten at the World War II memorial.⁵⁷ Since 2000 there have been over 149 racially motivated attacks against foreign students, diplomats, and business people in the Russian capital.⁵⁸

Then there is a wave of assassinations, often carried out in broad daylight, flooding the nation's political arteries. 'Politics in Moscow more dagger than cloak,' reads a headline of an article reporting gruesome assassination statistics against Russian businessmen, state officials, and parliamentarians.⁵⁹ Most politicians murdered are associated with shady economic transactions. Some are shot because they knew too much, others because they refused to accommodate a favor-seeking tycoon. But several victims, like Galina Starovoytova and Sergei Yushenkov, are politicians with no stakes in business and impeccable liberal credentials who just happen to be critics of the Russian government.

Add to this Putin's successful campaign to restore the Soviet era national anthem, to place the hammer and sickle onto the state regalia, and to allow the red star as an official symbol of the Russian armed forces, and you will agree that reasons are ample to sound alarm about the state of civil society in the Russian Federation.⁶⁰

Notice that this precipitous decline in civic society runs parallel to the upswing in the Russian economy. Private markets are chugging along, foreign contracts are being signed, the country continues to pull its weight in the international arena, but the promised civilizing effect that the globalization and market economy are supposed to have brought in their wake has failed to materialize. Members of the liberal faction in the Russian parliament headed by Grigory Yavlinsky declared at a meeting in St Petersburg that 'Russia was becoming a society with the trappings of freedom, but controlled in reality from the top.'⁶¹ Boris Nemtsov and his colleagues from the Union of Right Forces representing middle of the road reformers have expressed a similar concern that 'Russia could become a liberal economic state controlled by an authoritarian regime.'⁶² Whether Russia's economy will continue to grow after the sky-high oil prices come down to earth is uncertain, as is the health of Russian market economy in the wake of recent attacks on Yukos Oil and its owners. What is not in doubt is that its civic culture will continue to stagnate as long as the authoritarian tendencies in Russian society continue unabated. The behavior of top Russian leaders furnishes ample proof for this conclusion.

Soon after Putin came to power he warned the Chechen rebels, 'If we catch them in the toilet, we will rub them out in the outhouse.'⁶³ This is a well-known taunt in Russian criminal slang, promising murder, torture, personal vendetta. The nation loved the tough language. Following the episode, the president's popularity topped the 80% mark. Meanwhile, civilians in Chechnya began to disappear at an even more alarming rate.

During his recent trip to Brussels, Putin came up with this remark in response to a reporter's query about the human rights situation in Chechnya: 'If you are determined to become a complete Islamic radical and are ready to undergo circumcision, then I invite you to Moscow. We are multi-confessional. We have experts in this sphere as well. I will recommend to conduct the operation so that nothing on you will grow again.'⁶⁴ This insult came out of nowhere, with nary a provocation, revealing the Russian president's not-so-quiet rage waiting to burst out at an opportune, or inopportune, moment. It is hard to say whether the remarks were calculated (they were excised from the official text that appeared on the Kremlin's web site), but they tell volumes about the Russian president's – and the nation's – mood. This temper tantrum reminds one of Aristotle's advice to ladle your anger with care. Passions are to be displayed properly, counseled Aristotle, 'to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way is . . . virtue.'⁶⁵ Indeed, character and government are intertwined.

The verbal violence cited above offers an insight into the emotions ravaging today's Russia. We are not talking here about 'black looks which, though they do no real harm, still do hurt people's feelings' that Pericles warned against in his famous oration, but about verbal attacks that stop just short of physical violence. Putin's threat to rub off in the toilet Russia's enemies and castrate recalcitrant journalists is a study in incivility, featuring a calculated display of ill-will toward anyone who dares to differ. One wonders if the Russian president's schooling in the KGB arts has something to do with such emotional displays. Putin's demeanor brings to mind what Jack Katz calls 'hardman,' a personality marked by an impenetrable countenance, a readiness to strike without warning, and a determination to 'seize[.] on chaos as a provocation to manifest transcendent powers of control.'⁶⁶ For all its heart-rending complexity, Putin's decision to poison the attackers, which left over 100 innocent people dead in the 23 October hostage-taking incident in a Moscow theater, illustrates this point. The government's steadfast refusal to conduct an independent investigation of the hostage relief operation is also hardly reassuring.

As a country's president, Putin serves as an emotional leader shaping civil discourse in the nation, his intolerance reverberating throughout the republic. We can see this in Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's performance in the Russian parliament, where he grabbed a colleague by her hair and slammed her face to the table. A calculated threat can be inferred from the menacing treatment Sergey Grigoryants received from the security police when they took him off the plane bound for Washington DC, interrogated him for five hours about a seminar he was going to attend, warned him to watch his step, and then let him go. A well-known figure in the Russian civil rights community who spent 10 years in the Soviet Gulag, Grigoryants was spared the physical abuse that might have befallen someone without his name recognition. Other victims sustain more than emotional wounds.

Symbolic violence at the top is fanned throughout the country, multiplying exponentially as we descend the layers of hierarchy. It comes to the fore in vicious attacks against foreigners, senseless beatings of innocent passerby, arbitrary arrests of people with non-Russian facial features, ritual humiliation of young recruits in the army, booby-trapped anti-Semitic placards along the highways, Chechen civilians seized from their homes and murdered by Russian soldiers – the indicia of the civil decay are everywhere in sight.

It would be a mistake to assume that Vladimir Putin plunged the country into this emotional cesspool. He is a symptom more than a cause of the civic crisis sweeping through his country. His personality disorder, if such can be identified, must be traced back to the Soviet regime and its determined efforts to shape the 'New Soviet Man' whose uncivil descendants roam the Russian landscapes today.

'Those to whom evil is done/Do evil in return,' wrote W. H. Auden in his poem 'September 1, 1939.' We should bear this dictum in mind when we try to fathom the Russian people's struggle with their harrowing past.

Emotional footbinding in a totalitarian state

Aristotle talks about 'character' – the sum total of emotions, habits, and beliefs – that informs, and in turn is informed by, a political system. I want to expand on this precept, beginning with the observation that the term should be applied cautiously to the personality type forged in the pedagogical furnaces of Soviet society. Men and women who came of age under the communist regime developed a chameleon-like quality that enabled them to conceal their true feelings, suppress politically incorrect thoughts, and engage in behavioral gambits dramatizing authorized identities. The very inconstancy and duplicity transpired here as the citizen's most characteristic feature.⁶⁷

Soviet citizens evolved remarkable flexibility and nimbleness, qualities that enabled them to switch on a moment's notice from lavish praise for a politician in good standing to an equally extravagant contempt for the same personage after the individual suddenly fell from grace. The peace treaty the Russian prime minister Molotov had signed with Hitler's Germany was the toast of the town in 1939; those murmuring doubts about it faced reprisals, but the moment Germany invaded Russia, any reference to the ill-fated pact had to be suppressed. Soviets knew how to suppress most natural sentiments, such as love for their parents, when the father or mother or both were pronounced enemies of the people and carted away to the Gulag. Simulation and dissimulation were the order of the day, the twin marks of a psyche in distress. The two combined to produce a kind of determined spinelessness steeped in repressed anger and nourished by fear that would come to characterize Soviets struggling to survive the communist ordeal. Even those bent on doing everything the regime prescribed could not be sure of survival.

The years 1937–1938 ('Ezhovshchina') nurtured in people a life-long horror as well as a peculiar indifference to one's conduct because a person's fate did not depend on his words, thoughts, or deeds. One would grow accustomed to daily horror and at the same time was not afraid to recount anecdotes or name names in personal conversations: if you tell a joke – you find yourself in prison, if you don't – you find yourself in the same place . . . You write a letter to Ezhov defending a friend, and nothing happens to you; or as a faithful informer you put behind bars one friend after another and still find yourself arrested . . . That is why it is so hard to understand this period, unique in the annals of history: the bond between cause and effect was completely broken.⁶⁸

The Pavlovian dogs exposed to conflicting signals experienced a nervous breakdown. The fate of humans conditioned by Stalin's pedagogues was not much different. The Soviet pedagogy was working overtime to 'publish,' in Trotsky's memorable phrase, 'a new, improved edition of Man,'⁶⁹ to secure what the Soviet psychologist, Lev Zalkind, called the 'mass construction of New Man,' or as Stalin's pre-eminent pedagogue, Anton Makarenko, would have it, to shape 'that type of behavior, those characters and qualities of personality, which are necessary for the Soviet state.'⁷⁰

This pedagogical system included sophisticated techniques designed to mobilize affect and harness it to the communist cause, including the notorious 'criticism and self-criticism' which called for periodic denunciations and self-denunciation, spying on your home folks as exemplified in Pavel Morozov's heroic betrayal of his relatives reluctant to join a collective farm, show trials with their requisite self-incriminating statements and public display of remorse, the massive pressure put on the country's leading intellectuals and artists to produce works flattering to the nation's leaders. In the perverse glasnost of the Stalinist era, one had to praise the very people who stole one's dignity.

People gifted with a voice faced the worst possible torture: their tongue was ripped out and with the bloody stump they had to praise their master. The desire to live was irrepressible, and it coerced people into this form of self-annihilation, just to extend one's physiological existence. The survivors turned out to be as dead as those who actually died.⁷¹

Soviet biologists renouncing the idealist genetics, physicists decrying the bourgeois theory of relativity, engineers railing against capitalist cybernetics – the debased speech was

everywhere in sight, backed by the requisite body language and affective display. Many victims of the high-pressure tactics would eventually identify with the oppressor, join the enemy's camp. 'Mandelstam always tried to make up his mind freely and check his actions against reality,' remembers the widow of a Russian poet, 'but even he was not an entirely free person: the noise of time, the noise of life conspired to suppress his inner voice: "How could I be right if everybody thinks otherwise?"' ⁷² Boris Pasternak wrote verses glorifying Stalin ⁷³ and so did Anna Akhmatova, to ease the plight of her son languishing in the Gulag. Mikhail Bulgakov wrote a play about Stalin's heroism, ⁷⁴ Mikhail Zoshchenko tried to win reprieve by writing children's stories about Lenin, Yuri Olesha took part in the literary venture that glorified the infamous Belomor–Baltic Channel project built by political prisoners. The struggle between the old and the new self was fierce. 'I seize my own self, reach out to strangle that part of myself which suddenly balks and stirs its way back to the old days. I wish to stifle that second "self," and the third self, and every "self" which comes to haunt me from the past.' ⁷⁵

'Is there anybody among us,' recalls Zinaida Gippius, 'the most farsighted and incorruptible person imaginable, who is not haunted by the memories of the compromises we were forced to make in the St Petersburg's captivity, who did not plead . . . for something or other or ate stale bread from the enemies palms? I know the taste of such bread, of this damn ration, as well as the feel of Soviet money in my hands . . . ' ⁷⁶ Very few had the wherewithal to withstand this pressure. 'Theoretically, I know that one should not compromise, but how could I urge somebody to throw caution to the wind and not to compromise, to forget about your children. To all my friends I counsel – compromise,' wrote Nadezhda Mandelstam. 'There is one more thing I can add: do not bring children into this monstrous world.' ⁷⁷

Soviet pedagogy had a profound impact on the Soviet character, on the demeanor of autocracy, with its signature capacity to mobilize affect in the service of the state. This kind of 'emotional labor' points to 'the emotional surplus meaning systematically extracted by the state from its members, condemned to work overtime in Potemkin-portable villages and dramatize the official reality as the only meaningful one.' ⁷⁸ To one extent or another, this phenomenon is present in all totalitarian systems, which use mass hysteria to buttress state policies, hunt down dissidents, and prevent others from airing their doubts publicly. What people lacked in conviction they could compensate by emotional violence. It was hard to know who was sincere in doing the required emotion work and who was not. 'Putting the show on,' to use Erving Goffman's term, ⁷⁹ would become a second nature, and so was lying, feigning, scheming. 'Without lying I would not have survived in those horrible days. I lied throughout my life – at work, to my students, to my acquaintances whom I couldn't trust completely, and those were the majority. . . . [Such] was the common mendacity of our age, the commonplace politeness of sorts. I am not ashamed of those lies.' ⁸⁰ Others feel more ambivalent about this defense mechanism as they look back on the horrific days when they had to keep quiet in the face of preposterous charges leveled against their friends and relatives. 'Even now, as I look back at my thinking, I am ashamed of myself,' confesses a survivor. 'I shied away from the truth [and] publicly repented, trying not to go beyond certain limits of decency.' ⁸¹

Olga Fridenberg, a prominent Russian literary scholar, summed up the noxious emotional climate suffocating the country after the first few decades of the Bolshevik rule:

Everywhere, in all organizations and homes, a nasty squabble [*skloka*] is raging on, the poisoned fruit of our social order, a new concept hitherto unknown to civilization and untranslatable into any other language. It is hard to explain what it really is: a mean-spirited, petty rivalry, venomous factionalism that sickens all against each, an

unscrupulous envy that breeds endless intrigues. It is sycophancy, libel, informers, the desire to unseat the rival, deliberate feeding of ugly passions, nerves perpetually set on edge, and moral degeneration that makes a person or a group run amok. Squabble is a natural state for people who are rubbing against each other in a dungeon, helpless to resist the dehumanization they have been subjected to. Squabble – is the alpha and omega of our politics. Squabble – is our methodology.⁸²

This climate changed after Stalin's death. Khrushchev's thaw brought a reprieve from the psychosis-inducing strictures of early Soviet pedagogy. It was now possible to close off the outside world and confide to a friend one's true feelings, as long as one refrained from overly critical gestures in public. But in some ways the situation became worse, for the gap between one's feelings and thoughts and the conformist public behavior grew wider, increasing the cognitive dissonance and requiring greater effort at justifying one's conduct to oneself and others. Cynicism, corrosive irony, and self-destructive behavior would spread throughout society. 'In the atmosphere of mendacity, all-consuming irony becomes a universal self-defense mechanism.'⁸³ Disaffected Soviet citizens, especially those from the younger generation, would resort to voluntary self-alienation, which is what Russian irony is, as a means of bridging the gap between the public and the private domains. Sarcasm and black humor were favored by the Soviet intelligentsia which took to parodying official symbols when it could not openly fight them. Emotional deviance would become ubiquitous. One of its more insidious forms was withdrawing from the official world, going underground, and in some cases drinking oneself into oblivion. A paradigm for such ritual self-destruction can be found in the dissident classic *Moskva-Petushki*, a novel by Venedict Erofeev, whose hero drives himself into the ground, and destroys his family in the process, by fanciful drinking, in much the same way as the author himself did some years later.

I wish to underscore that for a long time, a merely discursive performance did not suffice to insure one's bona fide as a Soviet citizen in good standing. One had to sign in the flesh no less eloquently than in plain language, with the devastating impact on the person's bodymind. The normative system burrowed in the corporeal lifeworld where it shaped the neurochemical and hormonal circuits in a manner that would scar a person for life. Neurological and psychological studies have demonstrated the toll that high stress has on people enduring 'emotional footbinding' for lengthy periods of time.⁸⁴ Among the more insidious consequences are persistent irritability, anxiety attacks, difficulties with retrieving old and forming new memories, depressive episodes alternating with the aggressive outbursts, the increase in escapist and self-destructive behavior, the immune system breakdown, heightened susceptibility to infection, and lowered life expectancy.⁸⁵ Many leading social and emotional indicators in Gorbachev's and post-Soviet Russia point in this direction, including the precipitous drop in life expectancy, pervasive alcoholism, skyrocketing suicide rates among children, increase in violent crime, and family breakdown.⁸⁶ Here is how Grigory Pomerants, one of Russia's sanest minds, diagnoses the country's mood in the post-Soviet era:

Where simulation and pretension once ruled the day, the inertia of decay has settled in, the lust for seeing things unravel, something I try to counter as best I can. So much in our life compels you to give up and embrace the chaos, no rational measures can stop this death spiral. What does the future has in store for Russia if this chaos continuous unabated? Neither preaching nor censorship can turn things around. What is to be done? How can we counter the will to death?⁸⁷

Masha Gessen, writing for *Newsweek* on the contemporary Russian rock scene (the article is titled ‘Rocking to Sad Songs’), observes the morbid quality of current lyrics. She quotes a radio programmer, Mikhail Kozyrev: ‘Russian rock is a very sad thing. If you take the Russian greatest hits of all time, made about 20 years ago, and today’s songs that are likely to be remembered, you will see that they are all united by a single mood: profound regret – perhaps for lost opportunities, perhaps for the land we call home.’⁸⁸

Mikhail Zhvanetsky, Russia’s leading satirist, has a more humorous take on the nation’s predicament, but his outlook on the country is also drenched with despair:

Our complaint has been diagnosed as being still uncivilized. The percentage of toilet-bowl, spittoon and trashcan misses is much too high. The language we use is much too coarse. We translate from Four-letterese. We readily understand and appreciate strength, and so we submit to dictatorship and criminals. In prison and in life. This is what I think.

1. We should stop hating each other.
2. Stop getting peeved.
3. Stop rushing about.
4. Stop feeling scared.
5. Stop listening to and start simply listen.
6. Stop begging.
7. Stop demeaning ourselves.
8. We should smile. Even if the smile is forced. Affected. As long as it is a smile.⁸⁹

Abused children tend to grow up into abusive adults who extend the cycle of emotional violence and abuse to subsequent generations in a vicious circle that impedes well-meaning efforts to plant democratic institutions on the infertile affective–corporeal soil. If the journey toward civil society turns out to be far longer than expected, and certainly more frustrating than reformers hoped for, it is in part because people in places such as Russia, Rumania, Nigeria, or Palestine have the habits of the heart going back for generations and centuries. This concerns not only common folks but reformers as well, whose emotional cysts have never been completely drained, whose conduct is sometimes every bit as uncivil as that of their arch-enemies, and who put too much stock in fighting the ‘system’ out there while ignoring festering wounds inside.

Discourse, emotion, and body language of democracy

‘Emotional footbinding’ is an apt metaphor for the process through which social forces inscribe themselves in the body. The impact is gradual, incessant, debilitating, and often irreversible. People surviving the emotional Gulags are affectively pockmarked and spiritually crippled to the point when they cannot function outside the familiar world. They are also apt to misrecognize their feelings, experience wild mood swings, and are slow to develop emotionally intelligent ways of coping essential to the deliberative procedures associated with viable democratic institutions. The quality that they need the most – civility – is conspicuously missing from their emotional tool kit. ‘Civility is the outlook which attempts to do justice to all the interests – which involves also holding them in check,’ writes Edward Shils, ‘and thus maintaining the traditional pattern of plurality within a common society which is of intrinsic value.’⁹⁰

Uses of civility are many. Civility can be used as a weapon – the weapon of the powerful, just as it can be a healing medium in which civil discourse flourishes. In this final section, I would like to join issue with Norbert Elias and build on his theory of the civilizing process that focuses on the interplay between social structure and affective life, a central theme of the present essay. My objective here is to show how Norbert Elias’s insights can help us understand the prospects for building civic society in ex-totalitarian countries, and in the process, suggest some revisions of his thesis.⁹¹

Norbert Elias’s theory traces the historical progression from ‘courtesy’ to ‘civility,’ two key junctures in the history of Western civilization.⁹² Courtesy is the first stage on the road toward psychological modernity, an affective-behavioral structure presupposing a sophisticated ability to monitor affect, your own and that of other people, as well as to control one’s body. Earlier advice to manner-minded courtiers would include such ditties:

It is very impolite to keep poking your finger into your nostrils, and still more insupportable to put what you have pulled from your nose into your mouth . . . It is very contrary to decency to blow your nose with two fingers and then to throw the filth onto the ground and wipe your fingers on your clothes . . . Moreover, it does not befit a modest, honorable man to prepare to relieve nature in the presence of other people, nor to do up his clothes afterwards in their presence . . . Listen to the old maxim about the sound of wind . . . The sound of farting, especially of those who stand on elevated ground, is horrible. One should make sacrifices with the buttocks firmly pressed together.⁹³

With time, such crude points would be replaced with more sophisticated counsel, centered on court appearances, suggesting that the more basic points were now well rehearsed. Keeping the proper posture during a court pageant, holding a fork properly, moving gracefully on a dance floor – such disciplines would grow in importance throughout the late medieval Europe, becoming mandatory by the sixteenth century. The *English Book of Courtesye* rendered detailed instructions on how courtiers can put on a show to please their superiors and pacify their equals. Special emphasis was placed on avoiding scenes, defusing tension. ‘Say nothing that can arouse conflict, or anger others.’⁹⁴ Refined demeanor did more than assure others that the courtier was not harboring hostile intent (the ritual of shaking hands originally meant ‘no knife’). It also marked class boundaries separating the higher orders of society from the lower ones. Wielding a fork or sporting a suave move on a dance floor would become more important as a status symbol in a court society than wielding a sword or dressing-down a hapless subordinate.

Along with courtesy comes a new sensitivity to embarrassing conduct, in oneself and others, as the civilized body would respond spontaneously to situations where one’s demeanor did not accord with the etiquette. ‘. . . [T]he embarrassment threshold is raised. The structure of emotions, the sensitivity, and the behavior of people change, despite fluctuations, in a quite definite direction.’⁹⁵ The heightened sensitivity to embarrassing situations signaled a new stage in affect refinement – the willingness to exercise restraint. With time, skills crucial for courtiers would spread throughout society, preparing the grounds for the emergence of civil discourse in society at large.

The king requires this conduct as a ‘mark of respect’ from his courtiers. In court circles this sign of their dependence, the growing compulsion to be restrained and self-controlled, becomes also a ‘mark of distinction’ that is immediately imitated below and disseminated with the rise of broader classes. And here, as in the preceding

civilization-curves, the admonition ‘That is not done,’ with which restraint, fear, shame, and repugnance are inculcated, is connected only very late, as a result of a certain ‘democratization’ . . . to an argument that applies to all men equally, regardless of their rank and status.⁹⁶

I would like to point out that courtesy and verbal wit functioned as substitutes for violence, or perhaps a sublimated form of violence, a point that remains implicit and can be lost in Elias’s account. One of the absolutism’s key accomplishments was forcing destructive urges and conduct into new, acceptable channels. The same cannot be said about totalitarian polities, for they are steeped in an arbitrary, whimsical authority that flouts convention and common sense (e.g. Stalin could order Nikita Khrushchev to dance a Ukrainian folk dance or make politburo members dance with each at a party as a way to humiliate them). Repressed and driven inside, emotions did not lose their power to shape conduct and nourish imagination. However civilized, strong emotions – anger, rage, fear, envy, contempt – continue to work behind the façade, engendering complicated moods, fantasies, and discourses. A fine rendition of this precept can be found in the French film *Ridicule*, where the art of verbal insult serves as a substitute for, and in some cases a prelude to, a highly scripted physical violence (e.g. dueling).

Civility closely follows courtesy in its emphasis on body control and emotion management, with the steadily growing pressure to show consideration and polite inattention. In his famous treatise on manners, Erasmus offers this advice to his upper class charges: ‘Be lenient toward the offenses of others. This is the chief virtue of *civilitas*, of courtesy. A companion ought not to be less dear to you because he has worse manners. There are people who make up for the awkwardness of their behavior by other gifts . . . If one of your comrades unknowingly gives offense . . . tell him so alone and say it kindly. That is civility.’⁹⁷ The main difference between courtesy and civility is that the latter is no longer reserved for individuals of equal status, it is no longer a mark of blue blood. Civility is courtesy democratized, extended to the third estate, then to the professional classes, and ultimately to all educated members of society. To be civil was to affirm the dignity of the other regardless of the person’s class affiliation. Civility is what we owe to any person simply as a citizen in a nation state, and ultimately to every person as a member of the human race, a class to which every civilized person belongs alongside more immediately felt and less inclusive affiliations.

The term still had a certain estate/class significance. ‘Nonpersonhood’, so obvious under the regime of courtesy (an aristocratic lady may feel no qualms about disrobing in front of a male servant), reappears here in a more subtle way. A civilized person tends to hide one’s indifference, if not contempt, behind politeness. There is also a good deal of smoldering resentment and hatred toward the world waiting to burst out at an opportune moment – the point that Elias seems to overlook. Civility tends to be applied selectively. Someone acting civilly in public can be cruel behind the scenes toward another person lacking in power. Civility has not yet worked all the way into the body – it did not become a habit. It often works against character, which is why there is usually an element of hypocrisy in civility, a fact widely noticed in the Romantic era. The Romantic and bohemian intellectuals decried civility as superficial, rejected contrived rituals of courtesy, and opted for naturalness in the expression of emotions, which sometimes bordered on rudeness. Civility continues to be a sticky issue for the Old and the New Left,⁹⁸ whose members show predilection for physically, emotionally, and discursively violent means in furtherance of their allegedly humanistic agenda.

How do these observations link with the problems of building civil society?

A Harvard scholar, Samuel Huntington, has reportedly said that countries that did not pass through a full-fledged aristocratic phase have a hard time grappling with democratic institutions.⁹⁹ I think he has a point. The civilizing process makes room for sentiments and body language that the Greek Goddess Peitho would recognize as conducive to exchange, civilized discourse, respectful negotiation. Civil society is not in substance what it is in name until its members have mastered the art of dialogue and compromise, until they have agreed to disagree. The skills that make civil society possible are grounded in the habits of emotional intelligence which often part company with intellect and logical calculations.¹⁰⁰ Reformers seeking to overcome the totalitarian legacy need to focus on the affect dysfunctions and somatic ailments formed during earlier stages of a country's history. They need to consider what Antonio Damasio, a prominent neuroscientist, calls 'somatic markers'¹⁰¹ whose network frames body politic in the corporeally affective manner and not just discursively and normatively. Exporting US institutions to countries where citizens are 'wet-wired' for emotional violence and self-destruction, be this Iraq or Russia, is likely to backfire. We must pause to consider the full range of relevant structures in place – the normative system (constitutional, institutional, rational), the lifeworld (attitudinal, value-oriented, identity-fostering), and the bodymind (affective, somatic, neurochemical). What is worse, it is likely to discredit democratic institutions before they had a chance to sink roots. This is where I want to push Elias's thesis beyond his program and connect it with the pragmatist notion of civil society or emotionally intelligent democracy, i.e. a society in which '[h]uman intelligence is emotional just as emotions are intelligent.'¹⁰²

Important as courtesy and civility are for the progress toward civil society, these historical formations fall short of creating an affectively sound society. Courtesy is about court life, just as civility is about the life of the civitas – the state. Civility is what you owe to every citizen of the state, no more, no less. Violence – symbolic, affective, physical – is hiding in the interstices of civilized society. The forces of courtesy and civility were harnessed to promote centralized control, to deliver the monopoly over the means of violence in the hands of a monarch and the state. It is for the good of the state – first absolute and then constitutional – that members of society had to sacrifice their immediate gratification, rein in their violent drives. The destructive affect has not been vanquished, however. Submerged and repressed, it is lurking in the background, waiting to burst out and reveal the supposedly civilized people's darker colors. Indeed, civilized sentiments are often at odds with what we present under civil appearances (think about German Nazis). A civilized person knows how to simulate and dissimulate – both operations implying hidden agendas, a suspicion toward others, hoarding one's resources, in short, a strategic reasoning guided by the agent's self-interest. Civil society is bound to be prone to violence and less than emotionally sane as long as the civic bodies composing it remain affectively misshapen and crippled under their civilized veneer. The emotional substance of democracy impinges on its political profile. The process of democracy – in all its embodied forms – is no less relevant than its outcome, and often it is its most salient product, as James Madison and John Dewey used to point out. When the process is unseemly, it matters little who wins – the results are likely to be flawed, the scars will be slow to heal. When the process is fair it does not matter much who loses, because the democratic process itself will have a healing effect.¹⁰³

Given these considerations, it seems reasonable to add the third stage to the Elias's civilizing process – 'emotional intelligence.'¹⁰⁴ If 'courtesy' is about the court life (the habitus of a privileged estate), and 'civility' is about the civitas (the hexis of the national state inhabitants), then 'emotional intelligence' is about the humanity as a whole and the habits of the

heart we body forth when we deal with every human being, no matter where the person hails from. The third stage in the evolution of the democratic body politic is distinguished by its universal application. No one is denied here a civil treatment, not even individuals lacking in civility. People handicapped physically, impaired emotionally, disadvantaged legally, or lacking in citizenship rights altogether are part of the civic discourse. At the stage of emotional intelligence, civility inscribes itself not only in the community's legal statutes (the normative system) and our self-identities (the lifeworld), but also in our affective–somatic habits (the bodymind). Civic discourse moves beyond the exchange of formal signs of respect toward an affective–body work sustaining civil society and reproducing the affective infrastructure of democracy. Emotional intelligence relies on voice and not just discourse to achieve its civilizing agenda. It turns everybody you encounter into a concrete individual, compels you to treat a human being not as a status holder and a role-player but a flesh-and-blood person who inhabits various social niches, ranging from membership in the species-wide category of humanity to the social configurations formed by immediate face-to-face interactions.

Sentimental education is valued here as much as intellectual and professional schooling. Emotional literacy, the backbone of civil society, is to be taught in school, emotional littering taken as a sign of emotional illiteracy. If allowed to fester, the latter will breed emotional, and eventually physical, violence. Emotional intelligence must become a habit that permeates personhood at every level, that signs itself across the signifying media – symbolic, somatic, and behavioral. In a long enough term, it is hoped, a person given to emotional littering would be seen in much the same light as someone relieving nature's calls without any regard for those present. Emotions displayed will be felt and acted upon in various social situations, with the violent and intolerant sentiments recognized and dealt with at their early stages. This blueprint is not meant to proscribe emotions such as anger, which plays an important part in mobilizing agency for righteous struggle, or frown upon melancholy, which correlates with empathy and creativity. The point is to find the right measure or 'mean,' to use Aristotle's favorite term, that allows you to recognize your feelings, express them honestly, and do so intelligently and creatively, i.e. in a way that does full justice to the issues involved and at the same time affirms the dignity of the other.¹⁰⁵

Implicit in this pragmatist outlook on civil society is the notion of 'moral imagination,' which may be construed as a phase in the evolution of a democratic polity toward an emotionally intelligent community. A society that lets itself be informed by moral imagination is marked by the equitable distribution of economic and symbolic resources which practically enable every member of society to participate in civil discourse. The political economy of civility comes to the fore here. If civility is the weapon of the powerful and the economically advantaged, then anger is the weapon of the powerless and economically handicapped. It is easy to be polite when you know your needs will be met at the end of the day, when you have enough power to ram your decision through the power circuits. It is much harder when you face unfair odds, are not allowed to do your best, struggle to speak when nobody is listening. Tempers flair more often as we descend the socio-economic ladder and so do instances of violence, emotional and otherwise. Socio-emotional indicators – physical health, emotional vitality, life expectancy – are known to correlate with the group's socio-economic status. We should heed Aristotle's warning that a democratic society stacking its economic deck in a way that benefits egregiously some while keeping others in poverty will reap the emotional bounty it sowed. A democracy that strives to be emotionally intelligent cannot afford to leave anybody far behind. It must furnish everybody with the capital – symbolic, economic, emotional – necessary to become a participant in a liberal democracy, as Pericles envisioned it in his famous oration.

Conclusion: toward an emotionally intelligent democracy

My students ask me occasionally when democracy will sink roots in Russia. The answer I like to give – when Russians stop interrupting each other and start taking turns in conversations – is not very satisfying. This surely is not a sufficient condition, but if the goal is an emotionally intelligent democracy, it is a necessary one. Achieving an emotionally intelligent democracy is a task that faces democracies all over the world. Building a legal, political, and economic framework for liberal democracy is not enough, unless we accept Columbine-style massacres as normal part of civil society. A viable political system requires changes in the citizens' affective life, in the habits of the heart. Such habits form the somatic–affective conditions of possibility for civil society – a society in which ‘emotions are intelligent and intellect is emotionally sane.’¹⁰⁶

Various organizations are dedicated to this civic ideal.¹⁰⁷ They ground their work on a sound premise that free speech, multi-party politics, constitutional checks and balances are central to building a viable democracy, but they tend to overlook the fact that democracy, in the worlds of Dewey, is also an ‘experience,’ an emotion. It thrives in the emotional culture which promotes trust, tolerance, prudence, compassion, humor, and it wilts when overexposed to suspicion, hatred, vanity, cruelty, and sarcasm. Emotional sanity is as central to democracy as discursive political rationality. Mistaken are those who pin their hopes on correct political ‘signals’ and dismiss emotional littering as mere ‘noise.’ The emotional medium is very much the message when it comes to politics. While emotions that confer dignity on the other are democracy’s lifeblood, violent emotions that hold others in contempt subvert its sacred thrust. No quantum of hatred we impart to the world disappears without a trace, nor does the quantum of kindness. Affective energy is conserved like any other, aggregating along the way in a manner that can produce staggering consequences. It may leave good will in its wake, as Martin Luther King’s nonviolent appeal has done, or it can shake the human world in a violent explosion, as the events of 11 September amply demonstrated. This is why civic reformers at home and abroad, all those who take an emotionally intelligent democracy for their North Star, need to guard civic discourse not only from political but also from emotional distortions.

I want to end this essay with a quote from Anton Chekhov, the famous Russian writer, and one of the most respected figures in Russia’s intellectual history. It is excerpted from a letter in which he sets up an agenda for self-transformation that a person aspiring to emotional intelligence – *intelligentnost* as Russians call it – ought to undertake. To use a more current expression, we might say that Chekhov was determined to turn himself into a work of art.¹⁰⁸ Although his efforts yielded mixed results,¹⁰⁹ his formulation remains apt, relying as it is on a powerfully corporeal metaphor for the task at hand and conveying a fair idea about the magnitude of the task facing reformers in fledgling and established democracies:

What if you write a story about a young man, son of a serf, ex-shop-keeper, a high school and college student, brought up to honor the rank, to slobber over priests’ hands, to genuflect before other people’s thoughts, who gave thanks for every piece of bread he received, was whipped repeatedly, walked through wet streets in leaking shoes, engaged in fights, tormented pets, loved to dine with rich relatives, casually lied to God and people just because he felt his nothingness – write how this young man is squeezing a slave out of himself, drop by drop, and how one glorious day he wakes up and realizes that it is not the slave’s blood that is coursing through his veins but real human blood.¹¹⁰

Notes

1. Alexander Lourelatos (1970) *The Route of Parmenides: a study of word, image, and argument in the fragments* (New Heaven: Yale University Press: 139).
2. See: <http://www.loggia.com/myth/peitho.html>.
3. Thucydides (1954) *The Peloponnesian War* (New York: Penguin Books).
4. Ibid.: 2. The following quotations from Thucydides appear on pp. 145–147.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Diane Ravitch and Abigail Thernstrom (eds) (1992) *The Democracy Reader* (New York: Harper Perennial: 2).
8. 'Republic,' *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, eds E. Hamilton and H. Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963: 726, 732).
9. Ibid.: 790–791.
10. Ibid.: 793–794.
11. Ibid.: 791
12. Ibid.: 797.
13. Ibid.: 752; Statesman, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*: 1071.
14. Ibid.: 814.
15. Ibid.: 828. A fine account of Plato's problem with poetry can be found in Richard Shusterman, *Performing Live: aesthetic alternatives for the ends of art* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).
16. Ibid.: 754.
17. Ibid.: 832.
18. Aristotle (1941) Politics. *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (The Random House: 1201).
19. Ibid.: 1186, 1213, 1240.
20. Ibid.: 1207.
21. Ibid.: 1209.
22. Ibid.: 1183, 1181. Along with Plato, Aristotle also believed 'that some men are by nature free, and others slaves, and that for these latter slavery is both expedient and right.' Ibid.: 1133.
23. Ibid.: 1221.
24. Ibid.: 1305.
25. More is said on the subject in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* where, for instance, he heaps scorn at the oligarch's penchant for material possessions: 'In a word, the type of character produced by wealth is that of a prosperous fool.' Ibid.: 1407. Worse still, are 'the newly rich [who] have all the bad qualities mentioned in an exaggerated and worse form.' Ibid. Elsewhere, Aristotle talks about tyrants who 'are always fond of bad men, because they love to be flattered' (*Politics*: 1258) and demagogues who stir popular unrest to drive 'out many notables in order that they might be able to confiscate their property' (Ibid.: 1240).
26. *Rhetoric*, Ibid.: 1388.
27. Ibid.: 1300–1301, 1305.
28. Ibid.: 1312.
29. Ibid.: 1312, 1316.
30. Ibid.: 1313.
31. Ibid.: 1304.
32. Ibid.: 1220.
33. Michael Massing (2002) In failed states, can democracy come too soon? *The New York Times*, 23 February; Eric Alterman (1998) When democracy and liberty collide, *The New York Times*, 3 October; Tina Rosenberg (1999) America finds democracy a difficult export, *The New York Times*, 25 October; Fareed Zakaria (1997) Democracies that take liberties, *The New York Times*, 2 November; Nicholas Kristoff (2002) What is democracy anyway? *The New York Times*, 3 May 3; Michael Massing (2003) Does democracy avert famine? *The New York Times*, 1 March; Serge Schmemmann (1999) What makes nations turn corrupt? *The New York Times*, August 28.
34. What is democracy anyway?, op. cit.
35. Quoted in Michael Massing, Does democracy avert famine?, op. cit.
36. Ibid.
37. Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1998) How can we breathe around here? *Argumenty i Fakty* (27 May 27–2 June).
38. Interview with Victor Pelevin, Jason Cowley, *The New York Times Magazine* (23 January 2000: 22).
39. Steven Erlanger (1999) A decade after his triumph, Vaclav Havel is crushed velvet. *The New York Times*, 4 November.
40. Ibid.
41. Anthony DePalma (1997) Constitutions are the new writers' market. *The New York Times*, 30 November 30.
42. Robert Kaplan (1998) Sometimes, autocracy breeds freedom. *The New York Times*, 28 June. See also his book *The Coming Anarchy: Shattering the Dreams of the Post Cold War* (New York: Random House, 2000).
43. Fareed Zakaria (1997) Democracies that take liberties. *The New York Times*, 2 November. See also his article (1997) The rise of illiberal democracy. *Foreign Affairs* (November–December).
44. Ibid.
45. Isaiah Berlin (1969) Two concepts of liberty, in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford University Press).

46. See: Peter Beilharz (1992) 'The life and times of social democracy,' *Between Totalitarianism and Postmodernity* (Peter Beilharz, Gillian Robinson and John Rundell, eds) (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press: 57). See also: Dmitri Shalin (1980) Marxist paradigm and academic freedom. *Social Research* (no. 2).
47. See: Eric Alterman, When democracy and liberty collide: *ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*
49. Quoted in Alison Smale (2002) Russia's Leaders are different. It's the people who are the same. *The New York Times* (6 January).
50. *Ibid.* Celestine Bohlen (2000) Russian regions wary as Putin tightens control. *The New York Times* (9 March).
51. Michael Wines (2000) TV's impious puppets: on Kremlin's hit list? *The New York Times* (18 June).
52. Michel Wines (2003) Chechnya weighs a Russian offer of self-rule. *The New York Times* (23 March).
53. Michael Wines (2001) Some Russians are alarmed at tighter grip under Putin. *The New York Times* (14 June 14).
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Ibid.*
56. Sophia Kishkovsky (2002) Russian writer, facing charges, warns free expression is at risk. *The New York Times* (16 July 16).
57. Steven Lee Myers (2002) Ghana's envoy to Moscow hurt in latest racial attack. *The New York Times* (9 November).
58. *Ibid.*
59. Michael Wines (2002) Politics in Moscow more dagger than cloak. *The New York Times* (24 August).
60. Vladimir Isachenkov (2002) Some see red in Soviet star's return. *Las Vegas Review Journal* (27 November).
61. Michael Wines (2001) Some Russians are alarmed at tighter grip under Putin. *The New York Times* (14 June).
62. *Ibid.*
63. Michael Wines (2002) Why Putin boils over: Chechnya is his personal war. *The New York Times* (13 November).
64. *Ibid.*
65. Nicomachean Ethics, *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, op. cit.: 958.
66. Jack Katz (1989) *The Seductions of Crime: moral and sensual attractions of doing evil* (New York: Basic Books). Quoted in Stephen Lyng and David Franks (2002: 132) *Sociology and the Real World* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield).
67. For a detailed discussion of emotion work in Soviet society see Dmitri N. Shalin (1996) Intellectual culture. *Russian Culture at the Crossroads: paradoxes of postcommunist consciousness* (D. N. Shalin, ed., Westview Press); and (1996) Soviet civilization and its emotional discontents. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* (vol. 16).
68. Lidia Chukovskaya (1997: 493) Zapiski ob Anne Akhmatovoi 1952–1962. Vol. 2 (Moskva: Soglasie).
69. Lev Trotsky (1927) Neskolko slov o vospitanii cheloveka, in *Sochinenia*, vol. 1: 110 (Moscow).
70. Aron Zalkind (1930) Psikhonevrologicheskie nauki i sotsialisticheskoe stroitelstvo. *Pedologia*, no. 3: 309–322; Anton Makarenko (1937) Tsel vospitaniia. *Izvestia* (28 August). These quotations appear in a penetrating study of early Soviet psychology by Alexander Etkind (1996) Psychological culture, in Dmitri N. Shalin, *Russian Culture at the Crossroads: paradoxes of postcommunist consciousness* (Bolder, CO: Westview Press: 98–120).
71. Nadezhda Mandelstam (1970: 129) *Vospominaniia* (New York: Izdatelstvo Imeni Chekhova).
72. Mandelstam, *Vtoraia kniga*, op. cit.: 231.
73. *Idem.*: 134.
74. Quoted in Marietta Chudakova (1993) Bulgakov i Lubiianka, *Literaturnaia Gazeta* (8 December).
75. Quoted in Arkady Belinkov (1976) *Sdacha i gibel sovetskogo intelligenta. Yuri Olesha* (Madrid: Esiciones Castilla, SA: 264).
76. Gippius, *Ibid.*: 41.
77. Nadezhda Ia. Mandelstam (1990) *Vtoraia kniga* (Moskva: Moskovskii Rabochii: 82, 461).
78. Dmitri Shalin (1959) Soviet civilization and its emotional discontent, op. cit.
79. Erving Goffman (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday & Co).
80. Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Vospominaniia*, op. cit.: 25.
81. Efim Etkind (1977) *Zapiski Nezagovorshchika* (London: Oversees Publications, 1977: 196, 243).
82. Olga Fridenberg (1981) In *Boris Pasternak. Peregovora s Olgoi Fridenberg*, Elliott Mossman, ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovitch: 291).
83. Andrey Kolesnikov (1939) Chelovek kak tsitata, *Panorama* (24 November).
84. Peggy Thoits (1990) Emotional deviance. *Research Agendas in the Sociology of Emotions*, Theodore D. Kemper, ed. (New York: SUNY Press).
85. Bruce S. McEwen *et al.* (2002) *The End of Stress as We Know It* (Joseph Henry Press); Janice Kiecolt-Glaser (1994) *Handbook of Stress and Immunity* (Academic Press); Erica Good (2002) The heady cost of chronic stress. *The New York Times* (17 December).
86. Dmitri Shalin (1990) Ethics of survival. *Christian Science Monitor* (4 December); A malaise that plagues the Soviets. *Chicago Tribune* (19 October); Perestroika's ugly brother, anti-semitism. *Los Angeles Times* (25 July 1990); Why economic reforms have failed. *Chicago Tribune* (30 May 1990); The limits on Gorbachev's power. *Christian Science Monitor* (3 April 1990); A giant headache for Mother Russia. *Los Angeles Times* (25 February 1990); Glasnost and sex. *New York Times* (24 January 1990). No meat, no soap – and now, a crime wave. *Wall Street Journal* (5 January 1990); Settling old accounts. *Christian Science Monitor* (29 December 1990); Soviet economy advancing to the rear. *Los Angeles Times* (21 July 1989).
87. Grigory Pomerants (2002) Quoted in Grigory Ryskin, Ia Vernul'sia v Moi Gorod . . . *Panorama* (1–7 May).

88. Masha Gessen (2001) Rocking to sad song. *Newsweek* (19 March: 33).
89. Mikhail Zhvanetsky (2000) On ourselves. *Moscow News* (16–22 February: 9).
90. Edward Shils (1997) *The Virtue of Civility. Selected Essays on Liberalism, Tradition, and Civil Society* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund: 15).
91. The concept outlined in this section builds on the ideas presented by Dmitri Shalin (1999) in Discourse, emotions, and the body language of democracy, Stone Symposium of the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction (Las Vegas); and Norbert Elias and George H. Mead: the problem of embodiment in two sociological classics, *Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction* (Anaheim 2001).
92. Norbert Elias (1917) *The History of Manners. The Civilizing Process. Vol. 1* (New York: Pantheon Books).
93. *Ibid.*: 130–131, 147.
94. *Ibid.*: 80.
95. *Ibid.*: 116.
96. *Ibid.*: 159.
97. *Ibid.*: 81.
98. See: Edward Shills, *The Future of Civility*, op. cit.: 8.
99. I was not able to track the source for this observation.
100. Habermas misses this point in his theory of communicative action when he appeals to logical reasoning and more or less completely ignores the role of the somatic-affective factors in social reconstruction. See: Dmitri N. Shalin (1992) Critical theory and the pragmatist challenge. *American Journal of Sociology* (96:237–279); Lyng and Franks, *Sociology and the Real World*, op. cit.: 158–159.
101. Antonio Damasio (1999) *The Feeling of What Happens: body an emotion in making of consciousness* (New York: Harcourt Brace).
102. Dmitri Shalin (1992) Critical theory and the pragmatist challenge. *American Journal of Sociology* (no. 2: 256).
103. See: Dmitri Shalin (2003) Opening remarks at the Justice and Democracy Forum on ‘Judicial Election and Evaluation,’ sponsored by the UNLV Center for Democratic Culture and William S. Boyd School of Law, *The Nevada Law Journal* (Vol. 4 (1): 62).
104. I used the term for some years before it was brought into wide circulation by David Goleman (1995) in his book *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books). See also: Dmitri Shalin (1992) Critical theory and the pragmatist challenge. *American Journal of Sociology* (no. 2); Emotional barriers to democracy are daunting. *Los Angeles Times* (27 October 1993); Emotions and democracy. *Sociology of Emotion. Newsletter of the American Sociological Association* (no. 4, 1995); Emotion, agency, and the social production of affect. A research note. *Sociology of Emotions. Newsletter of the American Sociological Association* (no. 4, 2001).
105. Affect, emotion, agency: e-motion template chart methodology, Paper presented at the 2002 Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Chicago, August 16.
106. Dmitri Shalin, Intellectual culture, in: *Russian Society at the Crossroads*, op. cit.: 91.
107. For an example, see the mission statement of UNLV Center for Democratic Culture at (<http://www.unlv.edu/centers/cdclv>). See also: Dmitri Shalin (1993) Emotional barriers to democracy are daunting. *Los Angeles Times* (27 October).
108. Chekhov’s agenda lends political substance to what Richard Shusterman outlines in his proposal for ‘soma-toesthetics,’ a discipline seeking to foster body awareness and increase one’s emotional recall. See: Richard Shusterman, *Performing Life*, op. cit.: 137–153.
109. See: Richard Rayfield (1997) *Anton Chekhov. A life* (New York: Henry Holt & Co.); Dmitri Shalin (2001) Anton Chekhov, Russian intelligentsia, and the ethics of small deeds: a biocritical essay, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (Washington DC).
110. Anton Chekhov (1956) Letter to A. S. Suvorin, January 7, 1889. *Sobranie Sochinenii v Dvenadsati Tomakh*, vol. 11 (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura: 328–329).