

and how exactly it should be dealt with. I think that is the conversation we need to have.

RJ *So, you still believe that it is the state that must take action and that we should not be afraid of the state?*

I think we should certainly be sceptical and critical of the state, as we should be of any other institution that has power over it. **I just think that, considering the balance today,**

I think that's true and that this has probably always been the case. I don't think there is anything particularly different about that today. But yes, I think there can be no doubt about it that fear definitely sells. Again, if you actually look at all the private contractors that are involved in the terrorism-security business, you will see that it is a booming industry, so I don't doubt that idea at all.

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the real threat is not the state per se; it is very much the private sector. If you ask ordinary people what the source of coercion is in their life, it is actually not the state at all. It is their employer or abuse in relation to their spouse - it is private actors who are overwhelmingly the source of great intimidation for individuals.

RJ *One of the themes explored today is fear as a commodity. So, would you agree with the statement that fear today has become one of the best political commodities? Mass media sells fear, political parties sell fear, so can we say that fear is a good commodity.*

RJ *Does political fear have any positive functions?*

I am always weary about that. There has always been an argument that somehow political fear can be a unifying force and that it can bring society to deal with problems that it did not previously deal with before. However, I tend to think that those arguments are overblown. **It is not simple fear that brings a society together; it is an underlying vision of what matters to that society - what is good, what is worthwhile, what is worth pursuing.** That is what makes certain things fearful and others not

fearful. And it is that underlying unity of ideas that brings together a society. I don't think it is simple fear per se.

RJ *So, fear is a bad factor in terms of uniting a nation?*

The matter is that I just don't think a fear is what actually unites a nation. I think that has always been the position of certain intellectuals and political leaders to believe that fear can unite them, but the record shows that this is just not the case.

I think society is always united by ideas. It is a certain idea that brings a given society together, and it is that idea that then makes this society fear certain things rather than other things. So, for instance, let's look at the Tea Party today - what is it that animates the Tea Party? Well, they have a common fear of government, they have a fear of outsiders, they have a fear of Muslims, and they have a fear of terrorists. However, that is not what unites them; it is their underlying ideology about what America ought to be that unites them and makes them fear certain things rather than fearing other sorts of things. ■

Corey Robin was speaking with Dmitry Uzlaner and Alexander Pavlov

BEHIND THE WALL OF FEAR THERE IS THE PLEASURE FROM NEGATIVITY



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If you ask me about the political function of fear (or terror, panic, or anxiety — there are many synonyms that apply here) in the modern world, as a political philosopher, I would say the following: terror, as a political affect, is especially endemic in democratic societies. **Terror is ultimately no more than a search in vain for a sovereign, a paroxysm of negativity that assumes a 'sovereign place' in democracies.** Claude Lefort wrote about this in relation to the French Revolution.

In the present day, the political fear in the form of the free-floating anxiety and angst promulgated in the mass media is the only way for our deteriorating societies to *negatively* prevail over solidarity, and to run in imagination past a whole society, a whole city. It is not the unknown terrorist here that is important, but contact with this whole that matters. In this sense, the terror and fear that are mongering in democratic mass media are, on the one hand, a natural way to justify the institutionalisation of society. However, on the other hand, this is no more than a fear of fear itself — in other words, the portrayal of democratic negativity as being dangerous and reprehensible forms of repression.

However, **behind the wall of fear, we should also learn to see the pleasure that exists from negativity.** But for some reason, you (editor's note: the *Russian Journal*) are only asking questions about fear and not about pleasure. Is it due the desire to foment it, get rid of it, or share it with others? ■