THEORIA

Development and Ethics

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A Journal of Studies in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

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Editorial Panel

Editorial Consultants

About Theoria

Theoria, a scholarly, non-disciplinary journal in the humanities, arts and social sciences, is intended primarily to serve the purpose of encouraging reflection on, and engagement with, the more important intellectual currents and social, artistic and political events by which the contemporary world is configured. The compass of the journal is wide, and the editors believe that this purpose can be served in a variety of ways – ranging from recondite scholarly meditations on the early historical forces that gave shape to our world to sharp critical interventions in contemporary public debate. Thus, any matter of moment – whether it be the epistemological implications of new research in the neurosciences, the impact of post-modernist styles in architecture, new departures in philosophy or literary criticism or exploration of development strategies in southern Africa – will, in principle, be able to be addressed in the pages of *Theoria*.

The editors have, however, decided that although each issue may carry contributions in a diversity of fields, the contents of each issue will be largely dictated by one or more governing themes. In order to secure contributions in good time, these themes will be announced well in advance of publication.

The editors are, furthermore, of the view that the purposes to which the journal addresses itself will be best served if contributions take a variety of forms. In particular, we wish to encourage, in addition to 'conventional' articles, communications from readers designed to further debate around issues dealt with. Also, we hope to establish a review essay tradition in *Theoria* – in our view an important genre that has not been well served in South African journals – as well as a book review/book note section.

Note to Contributors

Contributions are invited both in response to advertised themes and on any topic within the general fields covered by *Theoria*. Contributors using word processor software are requested to submit two hard copies and a disk copy (any major word processing package will be accepted). The Harvard style of referencing is preferred. *Theoria* does not use footnotes; if contributors elect to use endnotes these must be included in a separate file. The authors of manuscripts not prepared on a word processor may be required to submit a disk copy if the article is accepted. It remains in the discretion of the journal's editors and referees to amend or reject manuscripts.

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Editorial

The forces of modernization in South Africa are beginning to issue in a form of state – a constitutional democracy – that is functionally more appropriate to its level of industrial and economic development than was the old order of racial estates. The construction of such a democratic order marks, however, not only a triumph for administrative and economic rationality but a moral victory as well. Yet it is precisely at the moment of such victory that the multiple promises of modern developmental projects – promises of equality, social harmony and genuine political freedom – will come to be seen in all their fragility and potential unredeemability. For the history of the twentieth century is in substantial measure a history not only of the success, but also of the dismal failure, of great experiments in modernization to deliver those goods – moral and material – encoded in the emancipatory visions by which they have been both guided and legitimated. Indeed the history of twentieth century modernization has been a history of a number of such projects that have gone catastrophically wrong. One need only mention Stalinism and the Holocaust to make the point.

It is to the ambiguities of modernization and development that South Africans of the present generation – legatees themselves of Apartheid, yet another twentieth century disaster – will need to address themselves. For modernization, with all that it entails, is no panacea for the many ills of a society born of such a pathology. On the contrary, the processes of modernization and development will, in the context of constitutional democracy, tax every reserve – intellectual, moral and physical – that the inhabitants of the sub-continent have at their disposal. For without further modernization they are doomed to poverty, disease and economic ruin in a global economy that is hostile, forbidding and unforgiving. Yet modernization brings with it no guarantees of wealth and good fortune, no ticket of admission to some secular Elysium. Rather, the acceptance of the multiple challenges of continued modernization implies the need to negotiate as skilfully as possible the dangerous path that lies ahead. This requires careful and studied monitoring of the steps taken, the diligent mapping and re-mapping of the terrain to be negotiated and continuous reflection on the wisdom of the way the journey is being made.

It was with the magnitude of these challenges in mind that the editors of *Theoria* decided in this issue to focus on the question of development. For the very multidimensional nature of development

invites an engagement that is multidisciplinary. The process has consequences for the texture of urban life, the articulation of economic policy, the interplay of cultures and languages as the relationships of social power come to be reconfigured, for the plausibility of political programmes and, not least, for the fate of those 'institutions of reflexivity' – such as universities – which are so pivotal to modern systems of power. Thus the developmental process raises not only issues of a technical kind, but issues of a profoundly theoretical and moral kind. It taxes, severely, the skills of political and development economists who are invited to examine and re-examine the scope and categorial frameworks of their disciplines; it urges geographers to pause and reflect upon its implications for the lived environment and the spatial organization of our public lives; it demands of linguists that the vexed and complex problems of language policy be engaged with and it requires of political theorists that the tasks confronting those concerned to build a democratic culture and polity be identified with precision so as to be informedly addressed. Finally, insofar as the processes of modernization and development have an irreducibly normative component to them, the question of the extent to which these processes define limits to ethical discourse needs to be explored.

The editors have endeavoured to make this issue of *Theoria* as comprehensive as possible, and each of the issues identified above has, in some measure, been addressed.

* * *

Theoria 79, currently in press, will be a special issue on civil society and the state.

Theoria 80 will focus on the themes previously advertised for issue 79:

(a) the tasks and challenges facing indigenous literatures in South Africa; and
(b) the role of Eurpoean and North American literature in South Africa.

Contributions should be sent before 30 June 1992 to: The Editors, *Theoria*, University of Natal, P.O. Box 375, Pietermaritzburg 3200.

Theoria 81/82, a special double issue to be published in the second half of 1993 will focus on the theme 'Our Catastrophic Century'. Potential contributors are invited to communicate with the editors.

THE EDITORS

Language, Power and Emancipation

A South African Perspective*

Elizabeth de Kadt

It is a great honour, and at the same time a considerable responsibility, to speak on the occasion when, each year, we remember and commemorate Richard Turner's contribution to the intellectual and political life of both this university and its wider society. His commitment to the creation of a democratic South Africa constantly, and in a variety of ways, acted as an inspiration to those around him, his friends and his students. Turner was well aware of the need to learn languages – some of my happiest memories of him are the hours we spent together when he was learning German – and at the end of his life he was beginning to explore the philosophy of language within the framework of critical theory. It is as someone who had the privilege of friendship with him that I hope that what I have to say about language today will be concordant with his life and ideals and, in its own small way, contribute to furthering the same goals.

One of the more important trends in the study of language over the last decade has been the long-overdue initiation of discussion around language and power. The realisation that language and power are interlinked has finally challenged the main-line preoccupation with purely formal studies and enabled the development of a branch of linguistics which looks critically at the ways in which language is implicated in societal power relations. For language, which pervades every aspect of our lives, is never neutral, it empowers and disempowers; and any talk of a 'better society', any hope for emancipation, requires as a precondition informed knowledge about the mutual dependancy of language and power. The discussion to date, associated with the names of Andersen 1988, Bourdieu 1991, Chick 1987, Fairclough 1989, Kachru 1986, Kramarae *et al* 1984 and Wodak 1989, has demonstrated widely diverging perceptions of this relationship, depending on perspective and object of study. There seem, however, to have been few serious attempts to consider the metaphor 'the power of language' rigorously and to develop a more general model which might be applicable, contrastively, to different languages. In this lecture I will therefore be attempting a first

* Richard Turner Memorial Lecture delivered on 19 September 1991, University of Natal, Durban.

Theoria, October 1991, pp. 1–15

approximation to such a model, testing its applicability to English in South Africa, and drawing a few tentative conclusions.

The traditional conception of power, as developed by the Anglo-American school, sees power, in the main, as exercised over others; of particular interest to us are the views of Steven Lukes and John Kenneth Galbraith. Lukes's critique of the lengthy discussion of overt power alone, of observable behaviour and conflict, led to his moving to include covert manifestations of power. In his view, 'the supreme and most insidious exercise of power (lies in) . . . shaping (peoples') perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things . . .'. (1974:24) The importance of this conception for an understanding of contemporary power is confirmed by Galbraith. In seeking to locate the sources of power in the context of later mid-20th century modernisation, Galbraith points to the 'rise of organisation as a source of power and the concurrent lessening in the comparative roles of personality and property.' (1986:219) This results in 'a hugely increased reliance on social conditioning as an instrument for the enforcement of power' (*ibid.*): 'conditioned power . . . exercised by changing belief' (*ibid.* 214) has gained enormous ground in the second half of the twentieth century. This conception of power will prove to be crucial when we turn to language.

Michel Foucault, on the other hand, rejects the idea of the agent exercising power. He urges that 'the analysis should not concern itself with power at the level of conscious intention or decision . . . it should refrain from posing . . . the unanswerable questions "Who then has power and what has he in mind? . . ."'. (1976:233) Rather, it is the 'real and effected practices' of power that should be studied, '. . . how things work at the level of ongoing subjugation, at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviours etc. . . . we should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts etc. We should try to grasp subjection in its material instance as a constitution of subjects.' (*ibid.*) Hence Foucault sees power as 'something which circulates, . . . as something which only functions in the form of a chain . . . . Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power . . .'. (*ibid.* 234) Hence Foucault's concept of power differs from the traditional understanding, in that he sees *all* individuals, even the most powerful, at the same time as *subject* to power: all people are in equal measure constituted by the various power mechanisms of society.

Clearly, Foucault is highlighting different issues and proferring different explanations. The existence of such radically different conceptions of power leads us to William Connolly, who in his investigation of the language of power has sought to understand why it is seemingly impossible to find a satisfactory definition for the concept. Connolly has firstly highlighted the link between definitions of power and ideology, and secondly he has given further backing to Lukes's thesis, that the concept of power is 'essentially contested'. Connolly hopes to 'dissolve the appearance of neutrality in conceptual analysis, to help render political discourse more self-reflective by bringing out contestable moral and political perspectives lodged in the language of politics . . . to delineate the point of view from which power is formed in our way of life, the standards and judgements, presumptions and prohibitions, expressed in the language of power.' (1983:213) He offers an explanation for why a generally-accepted definition of power is unlikely today.

> The concept 'power' . . . is one of the sites of a struggle between rival ideals of the good life competing – though not on equal terms – for hegemony in our civilization. If modernity is marked by rivalries in which efficiency and community, democratic citizenship and the imperative of economic growth, utility and autonomy, rights and interests, domination and appreciation of nature all compete for primacy, it is not surprising . . . to see microcosms of this rivalry inside the concepts which help to constitute that way of life. (*ibid.* 225)

Hence the thesis proposed by Lukes and Connolly that the concept of power, as, too, other central concepts of the discourse of politics, is 'essentially contested', which Connolly elucidates as follows:

> To say that a particular network of concepts is contestable is to say that standards and criteria of judgement it expresses are open to contestation. To say that such a network is *essentially* contestable is to contend that the universal criteria of reason, as we can now understand them, do not *suffice* to settle these contests definitively. The proponent of essentially contested concepts charges those who construe the standards operative in their own way of life to be fully expressive of God's will or reason or nature with transcendental provincialism; they treat the standards with which they are intimately familiar as universal criteria against which all other theories, practices and ideals are to be assessed.' (*ibid.* 225–226)

I have quoted Connolly at such length as his thinking points towards what I consider one of the most important manifestations of the 'power of language': the ideological nature of language, which wields all the more power in that it generally remains unperceived. As Joseph and Taylor have stated, 'Any enterprise which claims to be non-ideological and value-neutral, but which in fact remains covertly

ideological and value-laden, is the more dangerous for this deceptive subtlety'. (1990:2) Joseph and Taylor are referring to scientific language, but in fact our every-day language is equally 'ideological and value-laden'. We will return to this point later.

Let us now turn from the consideration of the concept of power to language, beginning with the phrase which first led me to this topic, 'the power of language'. For all of us who have grown up as English-speakers, this phrase is a truism: of course language has power – yet as soon as we begin to question the phrase we find it difficult, if not impossible, to come up with its precise meaning. 'The power of language': this implies that 'language in general' has power. What is 'language in general' – language in a vacuum? Does it exist? How can it 'have' something? Is power something that can be 'had'? We may conclude – and it would not be an unwise conclusion – that the phrase may well be leading us astray, leading us to accept something which is not necessarily correct – but have we not then caught language in the act of exercising power over us after all? Ah – but what is here exercising power over us? – not 'language in general' at all, but the English language as spoken in a particular setting at a particular time. And so the problem is solved: 'language in general' does not have power (or rather, it has a potential power to which we will return in due course); it is rather specific languages, located in specific societal contexts, which exercise power, a power, however, which is largely a function of the particular roles these languages fulfill in 'their' society: a language mediates the power relations pertaining to its societal context.

But few societies are egalitarian; and similarly, few language communities are egalitarian. The possibility of differential linguistic power relations in a language community rests on language variability. Every language community uses a continuum of differing codes: these can be constituted by slight differences in pronunciation or vocabulary, by what are considered different dialects, or finally, in multilingual communities, by different languages. These various codes are used for different functions, ranging from formal, public settings to informal, private ones. Such variability also contributes substantially towards 'social stratification', the definition of the social situation. These differing codes will be more or less powerful in the given speech community, according to the power relations of that society.

In what, then, does the 'power of language' consist? I will attempt to tease out several distinct strands, beginning, in Lukes's terms, with the differentiation between overt and covert power, although often there will be no clear boundary. Linguistic power manifests itself overtly in two different ways: as *pragmatic* power, based on the

communicative dimensions of language, and as *symbolic* power, drawing on the emotive and symbolic aspects of language. The pragmatic power of a language, the measure of the extent to which language has power as a means of communication, is by no means simply a function of the number of people who speak it: much more decisive are the answers to Fishman's famous questions, Who speaks what language to whom and when? For a language to attain significant pragmatic power, its speakers will have to have significant political and economic power, so that their language will be used for public purposes; use of the language in the private sphere is of little moment from a point of view of pragmatic power. On the other hand, the symbolic power of a language, which estimates and explains the esteem in which a language is held, derives in the main from the interpretation of the language as a symbol. Kachru, for example, has listed a number of symbolic components which contribute to explaining the worldwide domination of English: English is seen as a bearer of civilisation, of religion, of culture, knowledge and modernity. (1986:128f) Of course, the perception of a language as a bearer of negative forces could also lead to a symbolic power with negative implications: in parts of post-colonial Africa English has also been seen as a symbol of colonialism and has been rejected.

It should be noted that pragmatic and symbolic power are by no means mutually dependant. A language can rate high or low as regards pragmatic and/or symbolic power; any combination is possible; for these two types of power are codetermined and realised by factors external to language – by the political, economic and social relations obtaining in the society under consideration. In this way it would be possible to determine aspects of the linguistic power relations of a society, by assigning to each participating code a value for its pragmatic and symbolic power respectively.

In addition to this overt power, language also has covert power, power which it exerts over its speakers. We will provisionally term this the *signitive* power of language. Signitive power derives from the fact that reality is to a large extent linguistically constructed. This can be in part due to manipulation from above, but on the whole it arises from the mutual dependancy between language and its location in a specific society. Even though the stronger versions of the linguistic relativity thesis have been rejected, it is generally accepted that the daily linguistic habits of ordinary people, which have developed over the years in a process of accommodation between linguistic system and environment, economy, culture, history etc., propagate a view of reality and at the same time a set of values and concepts which are then taken for granted. As this is normally at a subconscious level, such an interpretation of reality exercises a kind of compulsion on every

speaker of the language. (For example, in English we speak of the sun rising – and is this not the way in which we 'see' what is in reality 'earth-rise'?) Clearly this power is inherent in any language and even exists as potential power in 'language in general'; yet in the context of a given society a dominant language may become 'imperialistic' and prescribe 'its' reality to speakers of other languages. In this way a language with a higher rating for pragmatic and symbolic power will of necessity gain in actual signitive power. Hence Lukes's 'third dimension or power', or Galbraith's 'conditioned power' becomes crucial for a consideration of linguistic power.

Let us at this point again refer briefly to Michel Foucault, who postulates a perhaps even more fundamental form of linguistic power. Language has power, language *is* power, he claims, in that it is one of the 'multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, thoughts etc.' (1976:233) by which people are constituted in the particular discourse prevailing in their society. Foucault sees these organisms etc. constituting people as individuals or subjects, in that he limits his investigations to Western society where the discourse of the subject prevails. The open question remains as to the prevailing discourses in other parts of the world – the ways in which people are constituted elsewhere by the respective organisms etc. of those societies (which include language); and this especially in the areas of Africa which are relevant for us.

In the following we will seek to apply our analysis of linguistic power to the English language in South Africa, and subsequently ask in what ways language, and the consideration of languages, can contribute to emancipation.

Individual and societal multilingualism in South Africa lend themselves to a discussion of linguistic power. From the outset it will be clear that numbers alone will bear little relationship to the actual power of our individual languages. There are substantially more first language speakers of Zulu, Xhosa and Afrikaans than of English, but the pragmatic power of the latter two languages is entrenched in the constitution and further ensured by the dominant position of English- and Afrikaans-speakers as regards political and economic power. English and Afrikaans are the chief languages of what Fishman has termed 'nationism', being used for administrative functions, for education etc. While Afrikaans is probably dominant in the present bureaucracy, English is the language of capital, and to a large extent the language of access to the international community. English has furthermore been the almost exclusive medium of instruction in DET schools since 1977, and is at present the focus of a large quantity of literacy and adult education work. As a first language, English may be of lesser demographic importance, but as a second language it is

rapidly gaining in stature; and this tendency is likely to continue. This privileged position of English seems to be little questioned by speakers of indigenous languages – doubtless in large part because competence in English, theoretically open to all but in practice only achieved by relatively few, has so far eased access to employment and certainly to status. It is English, not Afrikaans or Zulu, that is continually spoken of as the lingua franca – although, as Rene Dirven (1990:26) has pointed out, if one simply takes numbers into consideration, Afrikaans and Zulu are at least as much lingua francas as English.

As is to be expected, however, a large number of varieties of English exist: among native speakers these range from the present standard, so-called Respectable South African English, to Extreme SAE with its somewhat negative social connotations. Access to the standard has to date been carefully controlled through education policy and social apartheid, and so it remains unavailable to the majority of second language speakers, who speak a range of nativized varieties which tend to be classed together, somewhat controversially, as South African Black English. This has consequences, because, as Braj Kachru points out, 'Native speakers (of English) have traditionally viewed non-native innovations in (and nativizations of) English with ambivalence. Nativization has essentially been seen as *deficiency*, not as *difference* . . .' (1985:213) (The use of SABE by no means necessarily implies the imprecise use of language, leading to 'muddled thinking'; any more than the use of Respectable South African English necessarily leads our mother-tongue students to think precisely and with clarity.) Clearly, quite apart from the greater or lesser communicative success of first- and second-language English, the societal power these speakers wield will be a function of their closeness to the standard: our society recognizes the educated users of English, not of the vernaculars, as elites. In this way, the power relations of society are perpetuated in and through language. These linguistic power relations will only change if and when English is restandardised away from SAE in the direction of SABE, when a wide range of different varieties gains equal acceptability, and when it is realised that second-language speakers of English, not first-language speakers, are the norm in our country.

The privileged position of English in South Africa cannot be explained through pragmatic considerations alone; these are complemented by a highly effective symbolic power, at present seen largely in terms of the 'language of freedom'. This is a surprising turn in the history of English as one of the languages of colonialism, but can be explained by our particular political constellation. As antagonism towards English was here appropriated by white Afrikaners, Kathleen Heugh notes, it

> has, to a very large extent, been played down in Black politics, and the opposition to the colonial language has been and is currently directed towards Afrikaans in black circles. The irony lies in the emergent attitude towards English as the vehicle for ideologies of freedom and independence. (1987:206)

Certainly this is a central component, but I would suggest that more is involved: command of English is also seen generally as an indication of education and hence social status. Be this as it may, Heugh has detailed the attitudes of the various black political groupings towards English and has concluded that English will almost certainly remain the dominant language, at least in the immediate future.

But this – if we bear in mind the signitive power of English – may have more than the foreseen consequences. Accepting English as *lingua franca* means simultaneously – and generally unwittingly – accepting a particular interpretation of the world, and at that one which is located in the context of colonialism and apartheid. This was first pointed out by Njabulo Ndebele in 1987, who, in an important lecture to the English Academy of South Africa, rejected the idea of the 'innocence of English' and continued:

> The problems of society will also be the problems of the predominant language of that society, since it is the carrier of a range of social perceptions, attitudes and goals. Through it, the speakers absorb entrenched attitudes. In this regard, the guilt of English then must be recognized and appreciated before its continued use can be advocated. (1987:11)

This issue was taken up again by the People's English Commission in the context of the NECC. In speaking of the aims of this commission, Bronwyn Peirce notes:

> The intention . . . is not to distinguish People's English from British English or American English, but People's English from Apartheid English. The issues at stake here are *not* the linguistic features of English spoken in South Africa, but the central political issue of how English is to be taught in the schools; who has access to the language; how English is implicated in the power relations dominant in South Africa, and the effect of English on the way speakers of the language perceive themselves, their society, and the possibility for change in that society. (1990:8)

It is doubtless a reflection of the pragmatic power of English that awareness of these considerations remains limited. But surely this suggests that at the very least the dominant goal of state-of-the-art foreign language teaching, communicative competence, should be reviewed, for the development of native-like competence in the

foreign language must of necessity include its ideological aspects. In this way, the best-meant foreign language teaching can unwittingly contribute towards the perpetuation of the dominant class configurations and power relations.

Yet in Foucault's terms it could be argued that the English language has a still more encompassing power over us; but at this point my argument can no longer focus solely on English. Together with the other societal power mechanisms all South African languages (but perhaps especially the two most dominant ones) have contributed, each in its own way, to what might be called the discourse of apartheid in South Africa, in terms of which we have all been constituted and constrained as creatures of apartheid. This poses all the more sharply the question as to how – or whether – it is possible to free ourselves from this discourse – to become, in some degree, emancipated.

I have hitherto attempted to show how languages in South Africa, and especially English, are implicated in the power systems of apartheid. Clearly, there has been little space for emancipation in apartheid South Africa. Apartheid has not only resulted in highly visible external constraints for the majority, but also in less visible but equally stringent internal constraints which affect all of us. The high degree of closure in apartheid society has conditioned us to fear and reject the wealth of 'otherness' around us. With the coming transition to majority rule we have the opportunity to seek to realise a form of society in which a greater degree of freedom might be possible for more people, freedom from physical and material needs, as well as freedom of action and thought. I would suggest that language can make a substantial contribution to this process, through the choice of a language policy with emancipatory potential, which on the one hand presupposes knowledge about the links between language and power, and on the other leads to a greater awareness of the nature of language.

Let us consider the question of language policy. To judge by the recent National Language Forum conference on language planning, the language debate in concerned circles is now firmly centred on English. Although it is assumed and proclaimed that our indigenous languages will be supported and further developed, the impetus of the debate seems to have moved to the question how English can be made more accessible to all, to the restandardization of English, to the problem of empowering teachers towards competence and confidence in their task of teaching English. Certainly these are important matters; but if the indigenous languages are in practice as well as in theory to be accorded equal status with English, clarification of a number of key issues is imperative: the possible consequences and dangers of such an empowerment of English, the crucial question of

ethnicity and language, the means to achieve the necessary spread of linguistic power across a number of languages. And these issues must be addressed within the context of the modernity that characterizes advanced industrial societies – for South Africa is clearly such a society in the making.

In a previous Turner lecture Raphael de Kadt analysed the highly discordant concept of modernity. He distinguishes two central strands, modernity with its conception of the person as a free, equal and rational being, and modernisation, the enormous surge of scientific and technological progress from which have evolved the principal institutional forms of modern societies: 'the market as a system not only of exchange but of power, the state as a labyrinthine and often inscrutable apparatus of surveillance, administrative control and coercion.' (1989:50) Zygmunt Bauman, moreover, elucidates the concern of modernisation with the 'quest for order'; he sees it as 'effected and sustained by design, manipulation, management, engineering' (1991:7), and in this, clearly, language will play a central role. De Kadt argues that advanced industrial societies are characterized by a 'tension between the values of modernity and many of the forces and consequences of modernisation' (1989:50), a tension which preserves the hope of retaining the values of modernity in the face of the overpowering forces of modernisation. In South Africa, this tension has taken on a unique form. The exercise in social and political engineering, in ordering and disciplining which became apartheid, can be seen as a distorted extension of modernisation, embedded in our local context. Yet apartheid is also concerned with the ideal values of modernity. As Bauman has put it, 'all visions of artificial order are by necessity . . . inherently asymmetrical and thereby dichotomizing. They split the human world into a group for whom the ideal order is to be created, and another which enters the picture and the strategy only as a resistance to be overcome . . .'. (1991:38) Hence apartheid, the 'democracy for some' based on a complete violation of human rights for the majority, is a logical consequence of modernity as well as of modernisation. Yet however distorted South African modernity may be, it is modernity which contains the promise of emancipation – in occidental terms.

Even after the removal of apartheid from the statute books, these skewed versions of modernity and modernisation will continue to structure our society. But it is important that we work towards resolving these in some form of, perhaps, post-modern society which will be able to reconcile positive aspects of modernity with elements of African cultures. A future language policy must be able to contribute to this. Clearly, the imperatives of modernisation point to the use of English as single dominant language. English has the

greatest potential for mass communication, it has already developed the categories and vocabulary requisite of language in an advanced industrial society, it can cope with the transnational or multinational trend of all modern economies. But the question must be posed as to whether such a language policy would have emancipatory potential: would not this simply perpetuate to a large extent the present internal and external constraints on the autonomy of our citizens? Only 8,68% of our total population speak English as a mother tongue; just over 40% of our population can communicate in English. Choosing English as a sole official language would immediately preclude direct access to the mechanisms of power such as administration, law courts etc. for over half our population – and for the presently disempowered sectors of our population. To help redress this imbalance, a massive and sustained teaching input would be required. Do we have sufficient and adequately trained teachers? Do we have the financial resources? A restandardisation of English is seen as a precondition for its future central role: written English is to remain more or less unchanged (to allow access to the world community), whereas tolerance of a wide range of spoken varieties is to be encouraged. Crucial, however, as Eric Hobsbawm has pointed out, would be what varieties will be spoken for public purposes. Without a policy of deliberate promotion of today's non-standard forms, it is likely that the prestige automatically accorded to an official language would again lead to a continued dominance of forms approximating to the written version and so seriously jeopardise any attempts to give other spoken varieties equal status. Furthermore, would not the elevation of English to sole official language simply reconfirm the 'second-rate' status which has been the lot of African languages under apartheid? And finally: Western-style thought patterns and value judgements would continue to be given legitimacy, and through English would dominate and constitute the discourse by means of which the 'new South Africa' is created. In short: English as sole official language would in a variety of ways mitigate against an increased autonomy of South Africa's presently disadvantaged citizens; and it would certainly not encourage English-speakers to break out of the limitations of their own language.

What type of language policy might be more emancipatory? As stated in the Freedom Charter, language equality would first seem to require the positive recognition of our many different first languages – and as an important resource, not as a problem. Yet this on its own would simply perpetuate inequality: as Hobsbawm has succinctly pointed out, 'To be monolingual is to be shackled, unless your local language happens to be a *de facto* world language.' (1990:116) Rather, as Michael Gardiner has suggested, this recognition could be

implemented by asserting the right of all South Africans to proficiency in at least one local language and in English – and knowledge of a second local language (as is many cases already exists) should certainly be encouraged. While attempting to make the necessary provision for the continued learning of English, this suggestion does not solve the problem of the dominance of English. A closer approach to equality could only be achieved by consciously instituting the use of some indigenous languages for public purposes in contexts where hitherto only English or Afrikaans have been spoken, such as in a general Parliament, and in this way symbolically and practically laying claim to their rightful positions in our country. Simultaneous translation could ensure that English-speakers would be no more disadvantaged than Blacks have been hitherto. In this way, the pragmatic power at present held by English could, in time, be spread across a number of languages and so institute a more widely-based access to power.

Clearly, such a policy is not without its problems and dangers. I will not attempt to address the logistical problems here – whatever language policy we adopt, enormous logistical problems are involved; but it must be asked whether the promotion of indigenous languages might not lead to a regression into anti-modernistic stances such as ethnicity and language-based nationalism. Certainly our indigenous languages have through Government policies become constituted on the basis of ethnicity, and it would be unwise to try to ignore this. Rather we should seek a mode of accommodating different ethnic groups in a way which might, as Joshua Fishman suggests, eventually lead to 'simultaneously transcending ethnicity as a complete, self-contained system, but of retaining it as a selectively preferred, evolving participatory system'. (1989:18) A policy of individual multilingualism might well contribute to this, in that it would facilitate the development of multiple cross-cutting identities and hence hopefully reduce the potential for ethnic conflict.

Similarly, the greater use of indigenous languages would not, *in itself*, promote nationalist movements. As Eric Hobsbawm has pointed out, 'problems of power, status, politics and ideology and not of communication or even culture, lie at the heart of nationalism of language.' (1990:110) It is these questions of power, etc. which need to be addressed, if we are to avoid these 'reactions of weakness and fear, attempts to erect barricades to keep at bay the forces of the modern world' (*ibid.* 165); and gaining clarity about the linkages between language and power may be one way of contributing to this.

But the policy of individual bi- or multilingualism I am advocating would benefit not only the presently disadvantaged, but also the

advantaged. It is, after all, we English-speakers whose traditions probably incline us most strongly to the poverty and constrainedness of monolingualism – and I say this in spite of the great English-language achievements in literature, philosophy etc. Yet South Africa has particularly rich linguistic resources, in that it includes languages representing a wide variety of language families and cultures. In depth learning of a further language, especially when it is an adult learning a language of a completely different type, is not simply a matter of acquiring a new set of grammatical and sociolinguistic routines, but simultaneously involves opening a window onto a different interpretation of the world; and this brings with it the experience of the contingency of one's own perceptions, the perceptions and habits with which one has grown up. It is this type of experience which may lead to openness to the other, to the overcoming of linguistic – and other – intolerance. But are we to replace intolerance with toleration, which, as Zygmunt Bauman has pointed out, often means: 'you are abominable; but I, being generous, shall let you live'? (1991:8) 'Shared fate would do with mutual tolerance', muses Bauman, but 'joint destiny requires solidarity'. (*ibid.* 236) For 'the right of the Other to his strangerhood is the only way in which my own right may express, establish and defend itself'. (*ibid.*) The insights into the Other obtained through acquiring competence in his or her language may help to achieve the paradigm shift from intolerance/tolerance to solidarity, and to emancipation. And similarly we proponents of the values of occidental modernity may come to realise that Africa, too, may have something to offer our changing society: qualities and ideas as yet so unrealised by our academic discourse that we do not have the concepts in which we could talk about them.

Finally I wish to ask: how does this concern us at the University of Natal, an English-medium institution? I most certainly do not wish to denigrate the sterling efforts of some sectors of our university community in Student Support and the various enrichment programmes; nor would I wish to deny that it is crucial for our students – for any students of this day and age in a globally-linked society – to learn English. Yet I wonder whether we have ever considered seriously possible roles of indigenous languages at our university – other than in their 'correct places' as an academic discipline and as the language of the cleaning staff. Have we perhaps accepted our role as an English-medium institution somewhat too readily? Certainly we strive to be tolerant – but have we, in our present context, any real hope of achieving solidarity? Are we ignoring an opportunity to work towards emancipation?

I would like to suggest that we attempt to draw on the linguistic riches of our context by cultivating a conscious ethos of multi-

lingualism among academic and administrative staff and students. After all, if we have grown up here, we are already potential if not practicing bilinguals – yet perhaps we still tend to view the South African situation with Western eyes, accepting monolingualism as the norm and multilingualism as something which, somehow, should be overcome. From our present English-Afrikaans bilingualism it is a big step, but, I would suggest, a crucial one for our country, to include an African language. Certainly learning a new language requires considerable time and effort, which we could well put to other very legitimate uses. Yet: do we insist that all teaching activity takes place in English on purely academic grounds – or more for reasons of our own convenience? Might bilingual teaching not, in part, be an answer to some of the problems facing our first-year non-mother-tongue students? Should a certain fluency in, say, Zulu, not in due course come to be expected of academics on the Natal seaboard? We expect our students to acquire English and are at times somewhat concerned at their lack of success – perhaps we academics, given our supposed intellectual competence and the decidedly superior resources at our disposal, might be more successful in acquiring Zulu. Might there not be this linguistic component to our responsibility to society, with its stress on change and innovation, effectiveness and justness, as detailed by the Mission Statement? I do not pretend to have answers to these questions – but I find it crucial at the present time that these issues begin to be discussed on campus.

In conclusion: as an English-speaking academic I have here attempted to explore the power implications of language in society – and especially those of my, and our, language. Perhaps it is the sheer familiarity and ease of our first-language use of English which tends to deprive us of the realisation that, in our given context, when we speak English we are of necessity exercising power, a power which may frustrate our best efforts to achieve a more egalitarian society. It is under a deliberate policy of multilingualism, I have argued, that such a society is more likely to emerge.

But the power of language is not only a power over others, made possible through language; it is also the even more pervasive power that language wields over us. And with this insight it becomes possible to view multilingualism not as a burden, a duty, but as a gateway to the worlds of the 'Other', as a means of realizing something of the contingency of our own occidental world-views and, to adapt Nietzsche's image, of escaping to some extent from the prison-house of our own language. (Jameson 1972)

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On Culture and Development

Robert Klitgaard

The waves of democratic and free-market reforms now sweeping the world are bringing the cultural dimensions of development and change to the forefront. People from cultures as different as those of Eastern and Central Europe, Africa, and Latin America are asking for help – not for blueprints or turn-key projects, but for help in learning from the mistakes and successes of others, for help in thinking through the adaptation of institutions and practices to local conditions. Can they and we do ten percent better by taking cultural variables into account? Can social scientific knowledge about cultures help in some way?

Many choices of policies, political processes, and management systems probably interact with cultural variables. An urgent practical task is to understand how and how much, under what conditions. This means transcending tired debates. Yes, we know that policies and systems adapt to culture and cultures to them, that policies can change cultures, that cultures have their own dynamics of change, that valuations of developmental ends and means are themselves shaped by culture. We also know that the issues are not binary, that for example necessary or sufficient cultural conditions for 'free markets' or 'multi-party democracy' are not in the cards. And so it is time to get down to questions of degree in a multivariate, recursive framework. What have we learned about the positive and negative outcomes of various processes and policies under various cultural and other conditions – with what probabilities and at what costs?

Unfortunately, theoretical research on culture rarely touches the practice of economic and political development. We are familiar with arguments of the kind, 'Project X or policy Y failed because it didn't take the local culture into account.' Economists in particular are accused of making assumptions and promoting policies that are inconsistent with indigenous ways of life. But if one asks, 'Isn't development about change? How *should* one take cultural diversity into account? What alternative assumptions *should* be made?' one tends to get a shrug of the shoulders in response. Polly Hill's anthropological critique of economics is typical when it says: 'Just as an art critic seldom gives artists practical advice on how to improve their work, so it would seem the height of arrogance for an

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anthropologist like myself to make practical suggestions on working methods or subject matter to economists. Nothing like that is to be found here.'[1]

The metaphor of the arts is telling, for much of anthropology has departed from the agenda set down by its founding fathers and mothers. In the 1920s Marcel Mauss could write that the ultimate goal of sociology was to help chart the course of societies, help evaluate choices, and humbly but helpfully add sociological knowledge to the debate. In 1952 Margaret Mead led a team of authors in a Unesco volume trying to apply anthropology to development; two years later Georges Balandier completed two volumes on anthropology applied to problems in Africa.[2] But already by the 1950s this agenda was being eclipsed. Worried by the involvement of their anthropological predecessors in the colonial enterprise, which was then coming to a close; troubled by commingling with concepts of culture and race, which Nazism had discredited as useful analytical devices; imbued by a relativist agenda, now consciously combined with the seeking of one's own self through ethnographic encounter: with all this in mind, a new wave of anthropologists shifted the *problématique* of anthropology. Culture, they pointed out, is not static, ahistorical, or uniform; it is multiple, defined at the edges and in conflict, complex yet holistic. Not only are 'we' unable to judge another culture, we should question our abilities even to apprehend it. The early anthropologists' concerns with scientific description of *le fait sociale totale* and the analysis of functional relationships in primitive societies was undercut by critiques of such 'constructions' of reality. The new preoccupation was with the creation of scientific (or pseudo-scientific) authority as well as of colonial authority; and it was implied that somehow the two must be linked.

In this process, practical questions of economic and political development were submerged. Yes, the anthropologist could call for the preservation of local cultures – at least, until a new generation of feminist anthropologists asked whether sexual subjugation and genital mutilation were simply to be waved aside, indeed defended, in the name of cultural survival. (Abuses of human rights posed similar problems.)[3] But 'development' was always placed in quotes, always the subject of prior analysis but seldom of practical, constructive, empirically driven research.

True, especially in the United States, applied subfields did persist and arise in the backwaters of the academic fields of anthropology and cultural studies. But they have tended not to involve the application of scientific models or theories of culture, nor the specification of culture-by-policy interactions, nor what Roger Bastide thought might be applied anthropology's contribution to science – the chance to test

and develop scientific theories under conditions of planned change. Instead, one finds a willingness to listen to what the poor say their problems are, what they know and don't know about the solutions, and what they think they need. This is welcome and useful, but it is not the practical use of cultural studies that anthropology's founders had in mind. Maurice Bloch puts it this way: 'Anthropology is of as much use in practical problems as almost any other social science, and no more important than common sense and the ability to listen to people . . . I am still hoping that there will be some successful applied anthropology.'[4]

As an economist trying to learn from anthropology, I have therefore confronted an interesting puzzle. If culture is evidently important to 'take into account' in policymaking and management – something economists and practitioners seldom attempt – and if social scientists have been studying culture for a century or more, why have anthropology and other fields that study culture made such meager practical contributions?

I think I have uncovered several reasons:

- What might be called 'cultural differences' within academia, between theorists and those interested in practical applications, between anthropologists and economists, and more generally between humanists and scientists;
- The sheer scientific difficulty of specifying the ways that cultures and policy choices interact;
- A limited and I believe misguided notion of policy analysis, with a peculiar top-down view of the possible applicability of cultural and social analysis: a notion that perpetuates the myth of planning;
- A fear of misuse: that 'taking culture into account' will lead to oversimplification, discrimination, and sins of commission even more damaging than the sins of omission that occur by leaving culture out.

I have described these tentative conclusions in a recent progress report.[5] Here I want to focus attention on the first factor – the cultural differences that seem to make anthropologists and other students of culture want to keep the economists and practitioners at bay. And vice versa. I do so with the aim of demystifying these cultural differences and, I hope, thereby helping all of us move toward the joint pursuit of new, practical applications of cultural knowledge.

Us versus them

Today such joint pursuits are rare. Gaps have grown between the concerns of decision makers and economists, on the one side, and those of anthropologists and students of culture. The Swiss anthropologist Annick Tonti was called by the Swiss Development Corporation to coordinate aid projects in Bangladesh. 'I realized that I had no difficulties in communicating with the Bangladeshis,' he said, because he was an expert on that country, 'but that I had great difficulties in speaking with the economists, with whom I had to work in that very office. I wasn't really able to communicate with the technicians or engineers, who were involved in our different projects. Perhaps worst of all, I had no idea about development management.'[6]

Those who study culture, of course, are not culturally monolithic. Indeed, even within the field of cultural anthropology, there are many approaches, schools, tribes, subcultures. But if anthropologists come in many brands, they tend to rally together against common enemies. What particularly galls them is the assumption that things work the same everywhere (across styles of life and thought, customs and religions, 'cultures'), an assumption that leads to many failures in development – enough, writes Bastide, to fill an entire chapter. Economists are particularly prone to attack on this score.

> First of all the discomfort of economists when they become convinced that models of economic growth that they have elaborated on the basis of what has happened or what is happening in Europe or North America do not function in the Third World; they begin with easy solutions, which permit them to retain intact their conviction that their mathematical models have universal validity; one needs only to adapt them to changing circumstances and new situations, without thereby modifying them – complicating them only by taking account of other variables.[7]

In these times of disciplinary fragmentation, many anthropologists tend to define themselves by what, or perhaps whom, they stand against. When Clifford Geertz gave a pep talk to his peers – later published as a 'distinguished lecture' in the *American Anthropologist* – he entitled it 'Anti Anti-Relativism'. This brilliant polemic reinforces a central tenet of cultural anthropology by arguing against those who are against it. It is telling, too, that Geertz defines anthropology's contribution in terms of the others it upsets: 'We have, with no little success, sought to keep the world off balance; pulling out rugs, upsetting tea tables, setting off firecrackers. It has been the office of others to reassure; ours to unsettle.'[8]

Hostility and prejudice against anthropology are cited by Michael M. Horowitz, co-director of the Institute for Development Anthropo-

logy in Binghamton, New York. The villains are 'centred mainly in liberal economics, whose paradigm based on scarcity and competition is accorded a universal validity' and whose 'dismissal of the field–oriented anthropologist' is 'surely a defense of turf against the new boy on the block.' The economists dismiss anthropology as:

> (a) soft, unquantitative, without adequate statistical basis for its judgments; (b) antiquarian, protective of tradition for moral and aesthetic rather than scientific reasons; (c) slow, requiring long-term intense field study; (d) negative, elaborating a multitude of reasons why not to carry out some program of change, and ignoring all the, to economists, persuasive reasons to adopt it; (e) arcane and esoteric, unable to communicate why its findings are germane to some proposed action; and (f) non-collaborative or non– team-playing, unresponsive to the requirements of the host country and donor organization to move rapidly from design to implementation (stemming in part from the anthropologist's tradition of working alone, of not welcoming visitors to the field, and in part from the opposition between the consultant, often an academic, and donor-organization career personnel).

'These accusations,' Horowitz concedes, 'although a caricature of anthropological *praxis*, are not wholly without foundation'; and he goes on to flesh out some of the weaknesses described.[9] 'With few exceptions,' Horowitz adds, 'twentieth century British and American anthropology – the two traditions I know best – eschewed a problem orientation for a focus on ethnographic description.' Change was studied, 'but only as a phenomenon to comprehend and not as a process to influence.'[10] Or in Bastide's words, 'The idea that dominates applied ethnography is that the population that is being subjected to change (and a change that comes from outside) is more important than the program of development that someone wants to introduce into the community.'[11] We are with Them, against the rest of Us.

As we know from ethnic studies, language like Horowitz's, with enemies unfairly protecting their turf, is symptomatic of an oppressed group's consciousness. Another similarity is envy of that same, resented, powerful Other. Anthropologist Polly Hill's polemical attack on development economics contains a short chapter that she calls 'a pause.'

> I think that many anthropologists have a secret reverence for (perhaps combined with a fear of) economists. Anthropologists cannot avoid being overawed by a powerful academic discipline which commands financial resources vastly superior to their own, and which continues to exert so much authority in the world despite its inability to solve the problems of inflation and unemployment in industrialized countries.[12]

We are in the domain of stereotypes, group consciousness, envy, and hostility: does this not recall a clash of cultures, this time academic cultures, with one group perceiving itself as oppressed?

Different methods

Anthropologist Renato Rosaldo relates this anecdote:

> . . . [O]n a foggy night a short number of years ago I found myself driving with a physicist along the mountainous stretch of Route 17 between Santa Cruz and San Jose. Both of us felt anxious about the weather and somewhat bored, so we began to discuss our respective fields. My companion opened by asking me, as only a physicist could, what anthropologists had discovered.
>
> 'Discovered?' I asked, pretending to be puzzled. I was stalling for time. Perhaps something would come to me.
>
> 'Yes, you know, something like the properties or the laws of other cultures.'
>
> 'Do you mean something like $E = mc^2$?'
>
> 'Yes,' he said.
>
> Inspiration unexpectedly arrived and I heard myself saying, 'There's one thing we know for sure. We all know a good description when we see one. We haven't discovered any laws of culture, but we do think there are classic ethnographies, really telling descriptions of other cultures.'[13]

Like most scientists, economists tend to favor rigorous mathematical models; in contrast, anthropologists admire detailed and for the most part non-mathematical description – those 'classic ethnographies'. Economists favor cross-sectional and longitudinal data analysis where hypotheses are tested. Ethnographic research is defined by the long-term, in-depth microstudy, the generalizability and value of which economists tend to criticize – especially when anthropologists themselves emphasize that each village is different. When anthropologist Sol Tax published his study of ten years of analysis of the economic activities in a village of 800 Guatemalans, he asked an economist what she would have done differently with the data. 'The considered reply was unexpected to me, yet wholly obvious,' he reported. 'As an economist, she would not have spent years in a community of 800 people.'[14]

Methodological propensities may flow from deeper, almost cultural differences. Consider, for example, the disagreements that emerged at a recent conference on the seemingly confined topic of data-gathering in rural areas in India.

Economist T.N. Srinivasan bristled when he heard anthropologists employ some of their favorite distinctions, such as between the

nuanced participant-observation and the clunky, quantitative survey, or qualitative versus quantitative research, or holistic versus whatever its antonym is.

> If the description of nuances can vary with the observer in a conceptual sense, then there is no scientific point in attempting to describe them anyway. Conceptual subjectivity is to be distinguished sharply from the standard survey problem of 'investigator bias'.
>
> The quantitative *versus* qualitative argument is again a phony one. If by qualitative one simply means an ordinal measure of ranking of a characteristic rather than a cardinal one, it is *still* quantitative.

But anthropologist Arjun Appadurai suggests that 'deeper' epistemological issues separate the economists and anthropologists. There is an analogy to the Heisenberg uncertainty principle (where the investigator distorts the reality he observes, making it fundamentally unknowable), which economists tend to ignore. Appadurai questions 'whether problems of social life (and standard of living) can be reduced largely to their quantitative dimensions (and still remain significant).' Moreover, he asks 'whether the problems of how rural people talk and think can be divorced from the fact that serious differences of world-view and terminology separate them from the social scientists who study them.'

In response to these concerns, Srinivasan is again unsympathetic. He refuses to debate what he calls Appadurai's 'interpretation' of the Heisenberg principle, and he does not 'wish to quibble with him about what is 'knowable' since I believe, with the Hindu philosophers, that true knowledge lies in knowing what one does not know and cannot even know!'

> My point is simple: any debate about methods of studying rural change can be joined only if there is a common understanding among the participants at a *conceptual level* of what is to be studied. If the term 'qualitative' as applied to a factor simply cloaks the conceptual fuzziness as to what that factor means, there is no point in attempting to assess how it has changed! . . . If the gaps between the language, terminology, thought processes, and the world-view of rural people are so different from those of the social scientists as to be indeed insurmountable, neither the survey method nor the participant observation can ever generate knowledge about rural folk.

Appadurai retorts: 'One might mix metaphors here and suggest that the larger desert is a phony problem to the ostrich with his head in the sand.' He quickly adds, however: 'Anthropologists, likewise, will have to worry a lot more about their long-standing fetish concerning 'holism,' a fetish I have criticized elsewhere.' Appadurai refuses to

accept that 'measurement is the *sine qua non* of social science.' He concludes the volume with this expression of what might be a cultural difference between most economists and most anthropologists:

> This volume opens a dialogue which, in my judgment, is most important because it exposes our differences at the level of our ideologies of measurement, of epistemology, and, dare I say it, of 'science' itself. Without admitting and addressing this problem, all talk of solutions, including my own, is probably over-optimistic.[15]

Different ends?

Do different means flow from different ends, and both from different 'cultures'? One objective is Mauss's science, built on careful fact-collecting and the empirical construction of something like scientific laws. 'It is through the particularities of institutions that we seek the general phenomena of social life,' Mauss says. 'It is only by the study of the variations in institutions, or in similar notions that societies follow, that we define either the constant residues that these variations leave or the equivalent functions that one and the other fulfill.' But not just the points in common: 'We detain ourselves, on the contrary, through this method, before the differences that characterize special environments; it is through these characteristics that we hope to uncover laws.'[16]

Analytically separable from this agenda is K.J. Gergen's call for 'antagonistic theorizing' to challenge 'dominant interpretative modes in society': 'The generative theory is one that challenges the guiding assumptions of the culture, raises fundamental questions regarding social life, fosters reconsideration of that which is "taken for granted" and thereby furnishes fresh alternatives for social action.'[17]The objective is not the collection of facts, the construction of scientific laws, or the instrumental use of cultural variables to improve interventions in real life. On the contrary, writes Jeffrey C. Alexander of contemporary approaches to the study of culture: 'All start with an interest in meaningful rather than instrumental action and with a commitment to the autonomy of symbolic systems from noncultural kinds of determination.'[18] Geertz, Marcus and Fischer, and other anthropologists connect the new agenda of their field with other manifestations of post-modernism. 'The most significant intellectual movements of the last two decades – hermeneutics, symbolic anthropology, semiotics, structuralism and poststructuralism, critical theory, and feminism – have placed cultural analysis at the center of the human and literary disciplines,' writes Steven Seidman. 'The most significant political and moral struggles of our time, at least in the

industrial West, focus on cultural issues concerning personal identity, community building, social legitimation and inclusion, moral order, and everyday ethics.'[19] Culture is right in the middle of it all – whatever such a thing might be that could be so placed.

Neither in its ends nor its means, then, does much of today's anthropology resemble science – at least, not the sort of ethnography advocated by anthropologists like Clifford Geertz. The objective is, he admits, difficult to describe – it is something like reading a text or experiencing a piece of music. The anthropologist's distinctive contribution is 'thick description,' the immersion in the details of a culture but not without constant cycling back to big questions like 'What does it mean to be a person in this culture?' The process is intellectual, not one of emotional communion; the 'characteristic intellectual movement' is

> a constant dialectical tacking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure in such a way as to bring them into simultaneous view. In seeking to uncover the Javanese, Balinese, or Moroccan sense of self, one oscillates restlessly between the sort of exotic minutiae (lexical antitheses, categorical schemes, morphophonemic transformations) that make even the best ethnographies a trial to read and the sort of sweeping characterizations ('quietism,' 'dramatism,' 'contextualism') that make all but the most pedestrian of them seem somewhat improbable. . . .
>
> When an *explication de texte* critic like Leo Spitzer attempts to interpret Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn,' he does so by repetitively asking himself the alternating question 'What is the whole poem about?' and 'What exactly has Keats seen (or chosen to show us) depicted in the urn he is describing?' emerging at the end of an advancing spiral of general observation and specific remarks with a reading of the poem as an assertion of the triumph of the aesthetic mode of perception over the historical. In the same way, when a meanings-and-symbols ethnographer like myself attempts to find out what some pack of natives conceive a person to be, he moves back and forth between asking himself 'What is the general form of their life?' and 'What exactly are the vehicles in which that form is embodied?'
>
> Understanding the form and pressure of, to use the dangerous word one more time, natives' inner lives is more like grasping a proverb, catching an illusion, seeing a joke – or, as I have suggested, reading a poem – than it is like achieving communion.[20]

This 'understanding the form and pressure of . . . inner lives' is unlike the understanding that most scientists and economists seek. What Geertz and many other of today's leading anthropologists are up to is more like learning a language or interpreting a text; culture is that language, that text. And so it is that anthropology, a subject that began as a science, ends up as literature.[21]

Internal pressures against application

Academic culture matters in other ways. Within American and European anthropology, there is a strong sentiment against the application of cultural knowledge to policy making and management: it is better to remain theoretical and pristine, with clean hands. To some extent, this same tension between applied and theoretical branches can be found every academic field. But in anthropology the stakes seem higher, as if the field's own cultural values are at stake. Applied anthropologist Michael Horowitz attributes this view to

> an ideological position that an anthropologist involved in development is culpable of accelerating the process of incorporation or, worse, of legitimizing it. Having at first ignored relations of dependency between rural non-Western peoples and the industrial northern countries for 100 years, anthropologists today are prepared to recognize their intellectual centrality, but as an evil to be fought through diatribe. Their hostility draws strength from the clear participation of some anthropologists *on the wrong side* in the internment of Japanese-Americans during WWII, in Project Camelot in Latin America, and in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam war.[22]

And so the application of anthropology to the problems of development remains a marginal activity within the (small) discipline of anthropology. True, in the United States in 1986, 42 percent of new Ph.D.-holders in anthropology sought work outside of academia – up from 29 percent two years before.[23] But applied work does not carry prestige within the discipline. An anthropologist working on education described the situation to me this way:

> The dichotomy of theoretical versus applied anthropology and the status associated with it has become very closed. 'Oh, he's an applied anthropologist,' is a put down. But there was a time when people like Sol Tax and Margaret Mead were very much interested in improving the world and weren't looked down upon for doing so. Today I think it's very hard for anthropologists to talk about this . . . Then you get the James Clifford stuff, which says that even modest claims by anthropologists to truth are themselves false. If we can't even write a valid ethnography, how can we tell people what to do? It's a funny position – the main thing we accomplish is to say that all you other people coming up with solutions are being simplistic. It's useful when you're around people who think they've found the answer – you need a few cynics around – but it's a very easy role to play. Too easy.

In Europe the situation may be even worse. In Germany, notes Hans-Dieter Evers, development-oriented research plays an extremely marginal role in sociology and anthropology. He adds that 'no

major German journal of sociology has carried a single publication dealing with socio-cultural factors in development issues during the past ten years.'[24] Annick Tonti, writing of the situation in Switzerland, is blunt: 'Social anthropologists coming from the university generally don't know much, some of them nothing at all about development, but this does not prevent them from regarding the subject of development negatively.'[25] In France I encountered similar phenomena.

Deconstructing ethnography

An important new emphasis in anthropology moves even further from applied science: the questioning of ethnography's claim to objective understanding. Classic works of anthropology have been 'deconstructed' to reveal the rhetorical techniques used to gain authority, the hidden assumptions (often sexist and culturalist despite all the purported liberalism), and the weaknesses of theoretical argument.[26]

'The stance of the ethnographer who speaks as an insider on behalf of his or her people is a familiar one; it is a stock role of the ethnographic liberal.' So writes James Clifford, using the great French anthropologist Marcel Griaule as the prototype.[27]

> Griaule's paradigm of initiation functioned to transform the ethnographer's role from observer and documenter of Dogon culture to exegete and interpreter. It preserved and reformulated, however, the dominant themes of his earlier practice: the logic of the secret, an aspiration to exhaustive knowledge, a vision of field work as role playing. It expressed also the sense one has throughout Griaule's career of his Dogon counterparts as powerful agents in the ethnographic process, initially clever tacticians and willful resisters, later teachers and colleagues.

Griaule played all the parts of the stock, or perhaps better the ideal, role of the classic anthropologist. He served as advocate and mediator in the Sanga region, effecting a reconciliation between traditional Dogon authorities and the new chiefs installed by the government. In a variety of forums, he urged respect for African traditions. 'He portrayed,' Clifford writes, 'in elaborate detail a mode of knowledge to rival or surpass the occidental legacy of the Greeks. Speaking personally, in the voice of an initiate, he could report about the Dogon that "with them, everything seems truer, more noble, that is to say more classical. This may not be the impression you have from the outside, but as for me, each day I seem to be discovering something more beautiful, more shaped, more solid."'

Griaule's later arguments display a progression that might be called a cultural pattern in anthropological writing.

> Ogotemmêli [Griaule's priestly informant] and Sanga [the site of the field work] stand for the Dogon, the Dogon for the traditional Sudan, the Sudan for Black Africa, Africa for *l'homme noire*. Griaule moves freely from level to level, constructing an elemental civilization strikingly different from that of Europe; but difference is established only to be dissolved in a totalizing humanism. Once traditional African essence is characterized and sympathetically defended, it is then portrayed, in the last instance, as a response to 'the same great principle, to the same great human uncertainties' that Western science and philosophy have engaged. The ethnographer speaks as a participant in two civilizations that by means of his initiatory experience and special knowledge can be brought together at a 'human' level.

One more anthropological presumption, seldom articulated but discernible in argumentation, is that the ethnographer at some point 'presents himself as someone who knows Africa and who knows too what is good for Africa.' Traditions must be understood in order to produce constructive change. At the same time, some if not all moral values, institutions, and cultural riches of the local culture must be preserved. The anthropologist's is the privileged position to do this – not the local who has become Westernized. (Griaule was blunter than most anthropologists when confronted with those in the Dogon or Sudanese world who objected to his portrayals of their traditions. Their resistance to his characterizations and his desire to preserve local cultures was, Griaule said, the unfortunate consequence of an unbalanced education – 'You can't be simultaneously at school and in the sacred grove' – and of a victimization by the West, 'that kind of "leading astray of minors" which all colonial powers have indulged in.')

Marginality

Few anthropologists today emulate Griaule; many make a living criticizing the classical ethnographers and their conceits. But when anthropologists talk with economists and policy makers – or indeed with psychologists, sociologists, and philosophers – one may discern some common traits. For example, the identification with the marginal while demystifying the 'dominant culture' (the anthropologist, goes the witticism, is the person who respects every culture but his own); the rejection of value judgments, the call to recognize difference and diversity and celebrate it, while at the same time emphasizing the complexity, value, and meaning-creation of each culture; the unwillingness, however, to take those differences seriously from the point of view of allocating resources, people,

attention; the desire to pull out the rug, upset the tea cart (in other words, violate civility – in the name of reason but with the bad boy quality of the *enfant terrible*).

This constellation is familiar: it is that of the marginal man (or woman), who is seeking his or her own identity – understanding his or her otherness – and at the same time justifying and defending *being different*. In a description that could apply to the objectives of many students of culture, Steven Seidman notes a rejection, or redefinition, of science.

> Postmodern science is oriented to discerning differences and analyzing heterogeneous forms of life; it is more accepting of theoretical incommensurabilities and pursues innovation and experimentation rather than theory-building, integration, and consolidation. Paralleling its epistemological break from the foundationalism and theoretism [! – RK] of modernism, postmodernism stands for a political agenda that highlights diverse local struggles. . . . Finally, the modernist utopian ideal of a posthistorical epoch of a liberated humanity is replaced by an ideal of a more open, decentralized society that values differences and permits fluidity in desires, identity, and institutional order.[28]

Why should this recognition of diversity necessarily lead to its defense? 'Awareness of diversity,' observes the British philosopher Sybil Wolfram, 'need not, of course, lead to an appreciation of the excellences of others. It might, and at one time precisely did, lead to anthropologists' reaffirmation of the superiority of their own society. But at the present time others, and especially the underdogs, the powerless and oppressed, are particularly popular in the subsociety made up by anthropologists.'[29] The explanation may have more to do with ideologies and preferences than with science; and these in turn may perhaps be understood, though of course never explained away, in sociocultural terms. Like the subjects of their study, anthropologists are themselves marginal to the dominant culture. 'Marginal natives abroad and marginal academics at home,' notes Morris Freilich, who has written a book entitled *Marginal Natives: Anthropologists at Work*.[30] They are often marginal, too, in other senses. 'Both British and American ethnographic enterprises,' note George E. Marcus and Michael M.J. Fischer, 'attracted women, foreigners, Jews, and others who felt themselves marginal,' but who were at the same time privileged members of their own societies.

> The twentieth-century tradition of cultural criticism in anthropology had its roots in this qualified marginality of its practitioners. Thus, anthropologists as cultural critics developed a liberal critique; they expressed

> sympathy for the oppressed, the different, the marginals, as well as emphasizing the modern dissatisfactions with privileged middle-class life.[31]

'Structural anthropology,' writes sociologist John Murray Cuddihy in his analysis of the clash of the traditional and the modern exemplified in Jewish intellectual history, 'is the last of the classic ideological "remedies" for the cultural status-wound inflicted on intellectual Jewry by its emancipation into the West.'[32] Like Marxism, 'an uneasy melange of cognitive relativism and ethical absolutism,' the subject 'appeals to an intellectual clientele at once cynical about the "situation of social action" and utopian about the "ends of social action."'

> Thus, the allure of these ideologies for a dissociated theoretical sensibility consists of their appeal to moral passion in the language of social science. A passionate social conscience is licensed as dispassionate cognitive science. . . . A pitilessly punitive and sceptical objectivity unmasks a given world of fact; a homeless revolutionary longing projects a new world of value.[33]

Claude Lévi-Strauss 'tackles the contradiction inherent in the anthropological version of the paradox of "sceptical fanaticism," namely, that while fiercely critical – even culturally subversive – of Western usage (*moeurs*) and modern society, he [the anthropologist] became, in the face of other, exotic, and earlier cultures, uncritically accepting, whatever their defects.'[34] Lévi-Strauss writes:

> At home, the anthropologist may be a natural subversive, or convinced opponent of traditional usage: but no sooner has he in focus a society different from his own than he becomes respectful of even the most conservative practices. . . . How shall we have the right to fight them at home if, when they appear elsewhere, we make no move to protest? The anthropologist who is a critic at home and a conformist elsewhere is therefore in a contradictory position.[35]

To Cuddihy, all of this relates to a deeper marginality. 'The demeaning status-implications of Western modernization theory, the place it assigned to Judaism and, by implication, to Jews, was the bullet Lévy-Strauss could not or would not bite (in common with all the classical Diaspora ideologists). This fact, I believe, is what sent him (a) *back* to the primitives, and (b) *up* into the platonic heaven of ahistorical structuralism.'[36]

Can we overcome our cultural divides?

It is difficult to judge the validity, indeed the meaning, of these analyses of stock roles, intellectual predispositions, and sociological origins. Whatever cultural critique accomplishes when applied to the very fields that study culture, it does make evident that something like cultural differences exist between fields like economics and anthropology, between science and cultural criticism. Different ends are sought, different means are employed, misunderstandings and communications that fail to connect are common. Common, too, is suspicion and perhaps hostility, in ways that can be compared to ethnic or cultural groups in the society at large.[37] Table 1 schematizes some of the differences.

What does it entail that there are different 'academic cultures' concerning the study of culture? Let us consider what it does not entail. The hypothesized origins or sociological correlates of a view should be irrelevant to its validity, predictive power, or 'decentering' impact. Just as in the case of communication across the cultures of this world, cultural differences do not mean that communication or joint progress are impossible.

The existence of cultural differences *does* mean that we should be attentive to our premises, predilections, and academic reflexes. Cultural anthropology (and cultural studies more broadly) asks different questions from economics (and predictive social science more broadly). Yet the concerns also overlap, or should. Yes, Clifford Geertz is correct that a sonata is not a set of rules for writing sonatas; yes, philosopher Stanley Cavell is right that a language is not a set of rules of grammar plus a frequency table of word usage.[38] But it is also useful for some practical purposes to know the rules for writing sonatas and forming sentences – or, concerning a 'culture', to discover patterns and rules of behavior and to develop predictive models which are not, themselves, behavior or culture. This discovering and modeling is not the only end of the study of culture, but it is a valid and potentially important one.

Over the past fifty years this practical agenda has been deemphasized in cultural studies. Marvin Harris complains that today's anthropologists have undercut the field's older, more scientific objectives: 'While it is true that they were interested in "honoring" cultural differences, they seemed to have an even greater interest in dishonoring the attempt to achieve a science of society.'[39] Anthropological writings have tended to become an accretion of microstudies with few attempts at synthesis or the developments of substantive theories. Roger Bastide writes:

Table 1. Some stylized differences between economic and anthropological 'cultures'

Economic	Anthropological
The more modern, the better.	The less modern, the better.
Assume identical utility functions.	Assume (indeed celebrate) diverse utility functions.
One system can be said to be strictly better (more efficient) than another (Pareto preferred).	Cultural relativism precludes cross-cultural judgments of better or worse.
Everything is connected to everthing else, as in a thermodynamic system.	Everything is connected to everything else, as in a language, a literary text, or a personality.
Individualist.	Sectarian (egalitarian).
Construct.	Deconstruct.
Marginal improvements.	Radical critiques.
Analytical; mathematical.	Holistic; literary.
Questions of degree: variables are continuous and cardinal. Fact and value can be separated.	Questions of type: 'variables' are ordinal or binary. Fact and value cannot be separated.
Surveys (across localities, often cross-sectional, random samples).	Thick description (local, long-term, nonrandom samples).
N is important.	N is not important ('another country heard from').
Policy analysis: top-down use of model to enable individuals to create better outcomes.	Policy analysis: bottom-up process without preconceived model to enable a group to affirm itself (its meaning, confidence, solidarity).
Prescription instrumental.	Prescription: listen learn, reflect, leave nature as you find it.
Anthropology is: the description of preferences, capabilities, and institutions that affect contracts, information flows, and incentives – and how they change.	Anthropology is: a means for reconsidering meaning, person, authority; a commitment to stand up for diversity and autonomy.
Economics is: a science of choice built on simple behavioral assumptions, leading to better predictions of social as well as economic phenomena.	Economics is: a view of the world and a language that oversimplifies to the extent that the most important features of life – even economic – are distorted or missed.

> This is one of the logical consequences of the evolution of general anthropology; after the failure of the grand syntheses, such as evolutionism or the historical-ethnological theory of cultural circles, the subject increasingly oriented itself toward the study of tiny 'communities,' in-depth analyses of every aspect, technological, economic, demographic, social, political, religious; the number of monographs has gone on ceaselessly growing, to the detriment of general theories.[40]

'The predicament of modern social and cultural anthropology, then,' George Marcus and Michael Fischer point out, 'is that it settled for the primary function of systematically describing cultural diversity across the world, while the encompassing project of achieving a generalized science of Man had effectively withered.'[41]

What was left for anthropology to offer? In America, at least, a method. Careful description, born more of long field experience and patience rather than of a difficult-to-acquire technical methodology.

'One can add a dimension – one much needed in the present climate of size-up-and-solve social science; but that is all,' said Clifford Geertz. 'There is a certain value, if you are going to run on about the exploitation of the masses in having seen a Javanese sharecropper turning earth in a tropical downpour or a Moroccan tailor embroidering kaftans by the light of a twenty-watt bulb. But the notion that this gives you the thing entire (and elevates you to some moral vantage ground from which you can look down upon the ethically less privileged) is an idea which only someone too long in the bush could possibly entertain. . . . Ethnographic findings are not are not privileged, just particular: another country heard from.'[42]

Unfortunately, this evolution has tended to leave out many of the contemporary puzzles of development, including its cultural dimensions. For practical purposes, a science of culture and society should be able to contribute much more than a detailed ethnographic description of one place, then another – 'another country heard from' – and much more than useful reminders about the existence of different systems of meaning. Empirical generalizations, rules of thumb, cultural tendencies should also be sought:

> Knowledge of a particular Indian tribe is less important than knowledge of North American Indians in general, and this in turn is less important that the most general laws, concerning human nature, society, culture and the ways it is transmitted from one generation to another or from one population to another; the most necessary thing to have before acting is not therefore a good empirical description of the community that one will try to affect but a good general theory, meaning anthropology.[43]

Such generalizations , although inevitably tentative and imperfect, would help everyone, not just anthropologists, address central

questions of social science. Why are some cultures so much poorer economically than others? Why are some more democratic, others less? Why is corruption such a problem in some settings and not others? Under what cultural conditions do ethnic groups conflict, and when do they coexist? Posing these questions does not suggest simple cultural determinism; the name of the game for practical purposes is *interaction*. For my point is the need for a new applied anthropology, an applied cultural studies, that would be relevant to today's most urgent practical questions as well. How do cultural variables *interact with* economic, political, and environmental variables to affect economic advance, democratic governance, the control of corruption, and the reduction of ethnic strife?

These questions are crucial. If such interactions can be identified, even if they are mild, it is possible that policies can be chosen to take advantage of them. Policies and participative processes may need may need to be different under some cultural settings than under others – even if the same ends are being sought – just as they may differ as a function of the economic, political, and physical environments. Moreover, cultures may change as a function of policy choices. Depending on decisions taken, changes along various cultural dimensions may be speeded up or slowed down. Understanding these interactions should not only aid the transitions of different cultures to their own versions of democracy, free economic activity, and popular participation; they may also help all of us rethink what these various ends of social action mean, in different contexts.

Many of the founders of anthropology emphasized the potential practical importance of their science. Marcel Mauss, for example, said that contributing 'efficiently' to 'the art of directing a society, action, administration, command' was 'the final problem of sociology.' Sociologists cannot hide behind 'let us stay pure and purely theoretical' because, Mauss wrote, people demand more of them than that. 'Let us not therefore fear to pour our ideas and our facts into the debate. Will our practical conclusions be rare and of little immediate application? All the more reason to bolster them liberally and with energy.'

> Apart from that can we do more? Very little. But that already would be good. Whoever among us would be able to study, at the same time practically and theoretically, the new ideas and the old, the traditional usages and the revolutionary novelties of societies that, in these troubled moments, search a way of nurturing their own future. If some young people, mindful of this great enterprise, would know how to do this, the political givens of our times and of each society, facts and ideals, could be studied without prejudice. The first stage of a positive political science is this: to know and to say to societies in general and to each one in particular

> what they are doing and where they are going. And the second stage of morality and political science properly called consists in telling them frankly whether they do well, practically and ideally, by continuing to go in such or such a direction. The day when, along with the sociologists, some political theorists or some sociologists themselves, pointing toward the future, arrive at this firmness in their diagnostic and at a certain sureness in their therapeutic, in their propedeutic, in their pedagogy above all, on that day the cause of sociology will be won.[44]

Mauss was humble about the practical contributions of sociology and anthropology, and properly so. But he envisioned practical applications as an eventual aim, a noble quest, of the social sciences. It is to this aim that we should return.

I believe an essential step in development studies and policymaking is a renaissance of anthropology as a practical science, not to the exclusion of cultural critique but as an additional area of investigation and application. This, I think, is also what the French anthropologist Jean Copans is calling for:

> One should not confuse polemic with scientific debate, and my 'golden age' [twenty years ago] was more a dialogue of the deaf than an exchange of ideas and of facts. . . . For the periphery (African, American, Asian) also has a need of an anthropology tuned to today, to the crisis; of a social anthropology in the classic sense of the term, that of social and cultural change.[45]

NOTES

1. Polly Hill, *Development Economics on Trial: The Anthropological Case for a Prosecution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. xi.
2. Georges Balandier, *L'Anthropologie Appliquée aux Problèmes des Pays Sous-Developés*, Fasc. I and II, prepared for a course at Institut d'Études Politiques, Université de Paris (Paris: Les Cours de Droit, 1954–55).
3. See *Human Rights and Anthropology*, ed. Theodore E. Downing and Gilbert Kushner (Cambridge, MA: Cultural Survival, Inc., 1989), especially the articles by Clifford R. Barnett ('Is There a Scientific Basis in Anthropology for the Ethics of Human Rights?') and Sybil Wolfram ('"Human Rights": Commentary').
4. Gustaaf Houtman, 'Interview with Maurice Bloch,' *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1988), p. 19.
5. Robert Klitgaard, *In Search of Culture: A Progress Report on Culture and Development*, draft, June 1991; available from the African Technical Division, The World Bank, 1818 H Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20433.
6. Annick Tonti, 'The Model of Swiss Development Cooperation,' in *The Socio-Cultural Dimension in Development: The Contribution of Sociologists and Social Anthropologists to the Work of Development Agencies*, ed. Michael Schönhuth, Sonderpublikation der GTZ, No. 249 (Eschborn, Germany: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische, 1991), p. 54.
7. Roger Bastide, *Anthropologie Appliquée* (Paris: Payot, 1971), p. 41, my translation.
8. Clifford Geertz, 'Anti Anti-Relativism,' *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 86, No. 2 (1984), pp. 276, 275.
9. Michael M. Horowitz, 'Development Anthropology in the United States,' in *Ethnologische Beiträge zur Entwicklungspolitik* 2, ed. Frank Bliss and Michael Schönhuth (Bonn: Politischer Arbeitskreis Schulen, 1990), pp. 190–1.

10. Horowitz, p. 192.
11. Bastide, p. 135, my translation.
12. Polly Hill, *Development Economics on Trial: The Anthropological Case for a Prosecution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 66.
13. Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon, 1989), p. 33.
14. Sol Tax, *Penny Capitalism: A Guatemalan Indian Community* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute of Social Anthropology, 1953), p. iv.
15. T.N. Srinivasan, 'On Studying Socio-Economic Change in Rural India,' pp. 240, 245; and Arjun Appadurai, 'Small-Scale Techniques and Large-Scale Objectives,' pp. 276–8; both in *Conversations Between Economists and Anthropologists: Methodological Issues in Measuring Economic Change in Rural India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).
16. Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, 'Introduction à L'Analyse de Quelques Phénomènes Religieux,' in Mauss, *Oeuvres*, ed. Victor Karady, Vol. I (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1968 [1906]), pp. 37–8, my translation.
17. K.J. Gergen, 'Towards Intellectual Audacity in Social Psychology,' in The *Development of Social Psychology*, ed. Robin Gilmour and Steve Duck (London: Academic Press, 1980), p. 261; the original was italicized.
18. Jeffery C. Alexander, 'Analytical Debates: Understanding the Relative Autonomy of Culture,' in *Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates*, ed. Jeffery C. Alexander and Steven Seidman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 10.
19. Steven Seidman, 'Substantive Debates: Moral Order and Social Crisis – Perspectives on Modern Culture,' in *Culture and Society: Contemporary Debates*, ed. Jeffery C. Alexander and Steven Seidman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 235. Co-author Alexander notes that contemporary theorists agree in their insistence that culture is not determined by anything else – for example, it is 'autonomous' from social structure. But 'approaches to culture differ from one another in describing precisely what such autonomy implies. . . . Finally, there is extraordinary disagreement over what is actually inside the cultural system itself' (Jeffery C. Alexander, 'Analytical Debates: Understanding the Relative Autonomy of Culture,' in *Culture and Society*, p. 25).
20. Clifford Geertz, '"From the Native's Point of View": On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding,' in *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*, ed. Richard A. Shweder and Robert A. Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 134, 135.
21. Louis Dumont, 'Une Science en Devenir,' *L'Arc*, issue devoted to Marcel Mauss (Paris: Librairie Duponchelle, May 1990).
22. Michael M. Horowitz, 'Development Anthropology in the United States,' in *Ethnologische Beiträge zur Entwicklungspolitik 2*, ed. Frank Bliss and Michael Schönhuth (Bonn: Politischer Arbeitskreis Schulen, 1990), p. 193.
23. Robert M. Wulff and Shirley J. Fiske, 'Introduction,' in *Anthropological Praxis: Translating Knowledge into Action*, ed. Wulff and Fiske (Boulder, Co: Westview, 1987), p. 10.
24. Hans-Dieter Evers, 'Optimizing the Use of Social Science Know-How in Development Cooperation,' in *The Socio-Cultural Dimension*, ed. Schönhuth, p. 23. Professor Evers notes that in his five years as editor of *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 'we did not print any specific articles on this topic; not because we did not want to, but because no such articles were presented to us for publication.' For similar problems in British anthropology, see Allen W. Rew, 'The Link Between Advisory Work and Academic Research and Teaching: Perspectives from a Supplier Institution for Development Cooperation,' in the same volume.
25. Annick Tonti, 'The Model of Swiss Development Cooperation,' in *The Socio-Cultural Dimension*, ed. Schönhuth, p. 54.
26. For example, Michel Leiris, *L'Afrique Fantôme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1950 [1934]); *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986); George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of

Chicago Press, 1986); Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); and Marianna Torgovnic, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), especially chaps. 5, 11 and 12.

27. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), p. 87–8.
28. Steven Seidman, 'Substantive Debates,' p. 234.
29. Sybil Wolfram, '"Human Rights": Commentary,' in *Human Rights and Anthropology*, p. 107.
30. The quotation is from Morris Freilich, 'Is Culture Still Relevant?' in *The Relevance of Culture* (New York: Bergin & Garvey, 1989), p. 5. His book *Marginal Natives* was published by Harper and Row in 1970.
31. Marcus and Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, pp. 130, 131.
32. John Murray Cuddihy, *The Ordeal of Civility: Freud, Marx, Lévi-Strauss, and the Jewish Struggle with Modernity* (Boston: Beacon, 1987 [1974]), p. 151–7.
33. Cuddihy writes that the Frankfurt Institute members – Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse – 'are famous for their indignant repudiation of all sociology-of-knowledge attempts to relativize their radicalism by exploring its possible connections with their cultural marginality and ethnicity.' 'Their target of their criticism,' writes H. D. Forbes of the Frankfurt group, in words that might equally apply to cultural anthropology, 'was not the philosophical idea of a free and rational society, but the philistine complacency that views the events of this century as the realization of that ideal.' H. D. Forbes, *Nationalism, Ethnocentrism, and Personality: Social Science and Critical Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 191.
34. Cuddihy, p. 155.
35. Claude Lévy-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John Russell (New York: Atheneum, 1961 [1955]), pp. 389, 390.
36. Cuddihy, p. 160.
37. The hostility between anthropologists and policy makers may be greater still. Consider this outpouring by the French anthropologist Jean Copans, speaking of his dealings with French government: 'The absence of policy, of cultural strategy, of technical directives, of purely administrative rationality. . . . defies all good will. The technical and intellectual incompetence surpasses understanding. . . . The diplomatic tribalism, the ethos of the closed space par excellence. . . . all of these constitute a coded universe where the distinction between appearance and reality has truly lost all sense. . . . [During my time in Africa] I remained super marginal [to the official culture].' Would anyone make such statements about, say, a cultural group that Copans was studying, that person would be accused of narrow-minded bigotry. Jean Copans, *La Longue Marche de la Modernité Africaine: Savoirs, Intellectuels, Démocratie* (Paris: Karthala, 1991), pp. 52, 53n, 53, my translation.
38. Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).
39. Marvin Harris, *Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1980), p. 235.
40. Bastide, p. 80, my translation.
41. Marcus and Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, p. 19.
42. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 22, 23.
43. Bastide, p. 139, my translation; he refers to Sol Tax, 'Anthropology and Administration,' *Amer. Indigena*, Vol. V (1945) and to similar conclusions by Clyde Kluckhohn, *Mirror for Man* (New York, 1949).
44. 'Divisions et Proportions des Divisions de la Sociologie,' *Année Sociologique*, Nouvelle Serie, Vol. 2 (1927), in Mauss, *Oeuvres*, Vol. III, ed. Victor Karkady (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1969), pp. 239, 242, 243–4, my translation.
45. Jean Copans, *La Longue Marche de la Modernité Africain*, pp. 72, 69, my translation.

The Scope and Methods of Political Economy*

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The creation of a chair in political economy at the University of the Witwatersrand is a new venture in South African social science; as far as I know there is no similar post anywhere else in the country. This dictates the form of the first incumbent's inaugural lecture in two related ways. First, basing itself on the relevant scholarly traditions, it has to build up an account of what political economy is. Secondly, announcing a new enterprise, it cannot be an elegant retrospective look at literature already thoroughly mastered and research results achieved within its framework. Instead, it has to be prospective – an inventory of possible lines of enquiry, some of which will inevitably prove to be more fruitful than others.

Any discussion has to start with assumptions. I shall make two of them. The first is that political economy has to do with the study of the interface between the political and economic systems. These always interact, but their interaction assumes a particular interest at a time when everything seems to be at stake. Of course, cooler historical analysis always unearths fixities and the working out of slow, long-term trends during even the most revolutionary periods. An accurate account of circumstances therefore requires that the sources and effects of both continuity and change be identified and analyzed. This is not a simple task. Familiarity with a number of different approaches to the analysis of social issues is needed. So are both the gentle quality of perceptiveness and the tough quality of courage. Hardest of all is the inevitable disorientation and re-orientation which is the condition of the most creative work. For those who can see it, the inner landscape can easily be as rugged as anything in the external world.

The second assumption is that analysis is to be undertaken with a practical end in mind: namely, that of shedding light on the current debate about how to achieve the most rapid possible sustainable rise in popular living standards in South Africa and in the sub-continent of which we are a part. Since a more theoretical orientation could also

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have been defended, this is a personal choice which has informed the selection of all my research to date. However, relatively little will be said explicitly about current South African issues in this evening's lecture; rather, these feature implicitly as concerns with which one examines the relevant theoretical and comparative studies literatures in an effort to gain new and useful insights. The argument will take the form of identifying the intellectual traditions to which a study of contemporary political economy can relate, followed by a discussion of the particular problems of semi-developed countries (of which South Africa is one). A concluding section will draw out a few implications for the local debate.

Before proceeding, I should like to say how honoured and pleased I am to have been appointed to a chair bearing the name of Helen Suzman. There have been many tributes to her intelligence, energy and determination in representing liberalism during a long parliamentary career. In particular, fighting alone in the House of Assembly during a highly illiberal period displayed a fortitude which earned her not only the love of her friends, but the respect of her opponents. Helen Suzman's example guides those who would follow her; the task of defending universal principles against particular passions is never over, though the position of the battleground changes over time. Part of the front runs through the universities; though often quiet, they have seen major struggles for over thirty years and will no doubt see them again during the next decade. The clear thinking and courageous action exemplified by Mrs Suzman will be greatly needed if South African tertiary education is not to be wrecked in the rapids of political transition.

In the development of political economy, one may identify three major phases, though the phrase has not been used in all of them.

The first dates from the early and middle nineteenth century. David Ricardo and John Stuart Mill both produced major texts entitled *The Principles of Political Economy* and Karl Marx's *Capital* was subtitled 'A Critique of Political Economy'. Ricardo's major project was to explain what is now called the functional distribution of income, i.e. the distribution of income between the factors of production (land, capital and labour) and therefore between three social classes: landlords, capitalists and workers. Inherent in his account was progress towards a stationary state (in the absence of continuous technical progress), beyond which no economic growth would be possible. This state would be reached when all cultivable land had been brought into production, capital had been accumulated to the point where the rate of return had dropped to zero and the population had reached a size which would ensure that it received only the wage necessary for subsistence. All remaining net product

would accrue to landlords. In Marx's hands, the classes reduce to two: capitalists and workers, with workers still receiving a subsistence wage and all surplus accruing to a decreasing number of capitalists in a crisis-ridden process also characterised by a tendency for the rate of profit to fall. Accompanying Marx's economic theory is a political theory of class conflict ending in revolution. Mill likewise developed related theories of economics and politics but the nexus between them was different, with the political theory containing much more explicitly normative reasoning based broadly on utilitarian premises. Instead of a theory of class struggle, the liberal project consisted of making a case for enlightened legislation backed by appropriate attitudes, namely those of tolerance and respect for freedom, making it possible for individuals to pursue their own happiness without harming others. It is quite possible to reconstruct this liberal project along deontological (roughly, rights-based rather than consequence-based) lines, as both Robert Nozick and John Rawls did on rather different premises in the 1970s.

Here is an important difference between liberal and Marxist political economy. It has been characteristic of liberalism to draw careful distinctions between positive and normative analysis, this practice being underpinned by a respect for a diversity of values. Within Marxism, the positive and normative were skilfully fused and the whole presented as a scientific theory of history. Separating out positive and normative elements has been a major task of a group of scholars (known as analytical Marxists) over the past decade or so; it has taken quite a lot of work to realise that the seemingly absurd question 'is (Marxian) exploitation unjust?' is not absurd at all. The claim of Marxist theory to both comprehensiveness and objectivity (as opposed to the increasing compartmentalization of liberal economic and political analysis following the marginalist revolution in economic theory) meant that the very use of the term 'political economy' came to indicate a Marxist orientation. There is no logical reason why it should.

The second phase of the development of political economy was associated with the rise of Keynesian economics and the welfare state. It really consisted of two major elements not theoretically related to one another, but part of the same historical process. Both changes represented attempts to improve the conditions of the working class in the wake of severe class conflict in Europe and North America in the periods before and just after the First World War. (In the light of our own recent history, the period which T.S. Eliot once referred to as the 'twenty largely wasted years, the years between two wars' would seem to repay some study. For instance, it is not uninteresting that according to the Deane and Cole estimates of British national product

and population, real per capita incomes in that country did not exceed their 1913 levels until 1934.) On the one hand, a new function was added to the conduct of monetary and fiscal policy, namely that of maintaining a full employment equilibrium, since this is not seen by Keynesians as an inevitable consequence of the operation of the markets making up a modern economy. This involved altered behaviour on the part of the state through the central banks and departments of finance. On the other, changes were introduced in the form and extent of government spending, involving expansion and restructuring of much of the civil service. Low unemployment removes a major cause of poverty and the welfare state was designed to establish a minimum consumption safety net through which it would be hard for households to fall. It all worked well from 1950 to 1970 and to many it seemed that a new era had been entered which would last indefinitely. In particular, unemployment was low in the advanced industrial countries during this period, while standards of housing, education and health care rose.

The accompanying political development was the establishment and strengthening of centrist consensus. In much economic analysis, the implicit political assumption was that the state functioned as a 'Platonic Guardian state', to use Deepak Lal's phrase, by impartially maximising a social welfare function. A full account of how all this was possible would be complex. It would range from a discussion of the development of new international financial arrangements to a discussion of the ways in which new functions were grafted onto older state forms. Important details varied across countries, depending on their histories and situations within the world economy. For instance, a recent study suggests that the Swedish welfare state fared best during long periods in which the kronor was undervalued – a possibility for a relatively small, peripheral economy but not for a large central one. The ways in which Britain, Germany and the United States traversed the terrain also differed in important aspects given differences in their political institutions and economic structure. Studies of emerging dysfunction in the 1970s can reveal as much as analysis of the construction of the system thirty years earlier.

The third phase of development grew out of the second. From the economic side, it has taken the form of the development of economic theories of democracy, public choice theory, new discoveries in the fields of taxation and state expenditure and the debate about public ownership. The expansion of the economic role of the state has called forth work which has undermined earlier assumptions about the determinants of its behaviour. A celebrated early result of this work was Arrow's demonstration of the impossibility of aggregating individual preferences directly (i.e. without the intermediation of

markets) into a social preference, given certain reasonable assumptions. Another important set of results relates to the difficulty of reaching efficient decisions about the allocation of resources to the production of public goods (i.e. goods, such as national defence, from the benefits of which it is impossible to exclude inhabitants). Relevant here is the median voter theorem, which demonstrates that majority voting in a democratic system will result in an outcome reflecting the preferences of the median voter, themselves partly formed by the system of taxation in force. Political science has also made a contribution. Investigation of alternative constitutional systems demonstrates both that different decision-making rules lead to different substantive outcomes and that even the order in which issues are tackled can affect outcomes. Agenda-setting, as has increasingly been realised, is a form of power.

Just as interesting are demonstrations that systems of taxation which look very different (e.g. taxes on wages and taxes on consumption) are identical in their effects, at least under reasonable simplifying assumptions. Optimal taxes may therefore consist of quite a small subset of all the possibilities. Piling on more and more ostensibly redistributive taxes may not help the cause of redistribution at all, while imposing additional efficiency costs. Technically more complex, but even more important than the study of static efficiency-distribution trade-offs, is the analysis of dynamic trade-offs – in particular, the impact of taxation on savings and hence on growth. A newer field is that of agency theory which investigates the difficulties that principals (shareholders, for instance, or citizens) have in getting their agents (managements or legislatures and civil servants) to act in their interests. In general, modern studies of organisational behaviour reveal a rather different picture from Max Weber's classical sociological description of bureaucracy. Weberian ideal-type bureaucrats are, for instance, heavily regulated by a Kantian ethic; one would not expect to find them 'on lunch' at three in the afternoon or appointing their sons and daughters to lucrative positions within the system.

A clearer appreciation has also emerged that the government does not have complete control over economic outcomes in a mixed economy (and all actual economies are mixed). The response of the private sector has to be taken into account when assessing the impact and hence desirability of proposed state policy. The development of computable general equilibrium models has led to much more penetrating analyses of such impacts. Secondary consequences may reinforce or work against the intention and primary impact of policy. For example, cross-subsidisation of poor areas from rich areas within the jurisdiction of local authorities is a widespread practice and the primary impact is desirable from a distributional point of view. But

local authorities have to balance their books and so become reluctant to develop areas which will have a net negative impact on this goal while keen to promote development of affluent neighbourhoods. The result is that densities rise in poor areas with an accompanying rise in housing costs for the poor. Studies in North America have demonstrated that poor policy can result in undesirable secondary effects cancelling out or even exceeding the desirable primary effects.

In short, a great deal of new knowledge has become available, especially during the last couple of decades. This is capable of supplying new techniques for the design of political and economic institutions. This is to the advantage of late comers to the process of development, in just the same way that medical advances have held out at least the potential for lowering mortality rates in developing countries below those experienced historically by advanced industrial countries at corresponding levels of real per capita income. Our isolation means that we have much catching up to do and we had better work hard at it, instead of compounding our ignorance with an autistic, nationalist rejection of a changing international order and intellectual climate.

This is an appropriate point at which to introduce the second major theme of the lecture: the importance of a study of other semi-developed countries as they struggle for economic growth, the elimination of mass poverty and, at the political level, for democratisation and the reduction of reliance on coercion. New countries are finding their voices in all sorts of ways and are managing to interest an international audience. South Africa is not least among them; contemporary international consciousness of the travail of our particular path towards modernity testifies at least to a considerable national talent for dramatic communication and (for those who care to look more deeply) a far from extinct tradition of moral conscientiousness. One aspect of this flowering is a rapidly growing crop of social scientific studies of semi-developed countries of which this university is fortunate to have a substantial collection, contained mainly in the library of Jan Smuts house. From this literature, one can extract five themes of particular interest.

The first is the problem of uneven development and effective national unification, especially in deeply divided societies. Capitalist development has impinged on semi-developed countries from outside rather than transforming slowly from within, incorporating different groups in different ways.

Particular problems arise when differential incorporation coincides in substantial measure with boundaries between ethnic groups. If Donald Horowitz's remarkable study of ethnic groups in conflict is

right, more energy goes into attempting to maximise differences in the welfare of in groups and out groups than into maximising their joint welfare, with adverse consequences for the possibilities of building the national political and economic institutions required for development. Gordon Tullock has argued that this is an additional reason for preferring market-based rather than state-led economic growth in deeply divided societies. In itself it is, but the secondary effects of different paths on distribution have to be taken into account. In so far as they lead to worsening differentials between groups, the possibility of heightened conflict is created. The only long-term hope is to make ethnic boundaries less salient; the happiest outcome would seem to be when ethnicity becomes decorative in a high income economic environment . This is likely to be the work of decades, perhaps of centuries; even so, appalling retrogressions always seem to remain possible.

The consequence of deep divisions is that there is likely to exist an unusually large number of prisoner's dilemma situations. (The prisoner's dilemma arises when partners in crime are apprehended and held separately. The prisoners will be jointly better off if they do not inform on each other, but each prisoner will be better off if he informs on the other, while the other does not inform on him. Attempts at individual maximisation may lead to both prisoners informing on each other which leads to the worst joint outcome. The dilemma arises because of the absence of the opportunity for co-operation.) Under such conditions, negotiation skills are at a premium. There are also advantages in the acceptance of a deontological liberal philosophy which (in the shorthand of political philosophers) places the right over the good. This involves seeking to regulate social relations by just procedures while leaving individuals as free as possible to pursue their own, diverse conceptions of the good life. Such an enterprise has a better chance of success if its conception of justice implies that attention should be paid simultaneously to the reduction of poverty.

The analytical Marxist Adam Przeworski has analyzed analogous problems which arise in the case of severe class conflict. In his view, social democratic compromises are held together by virtue of the propensity of capitalists to reinvest part of their profits with the effect of increasing worker incomes in the future. Class compromise is made possible by two simultaneous expectations: workers expect that their incomes will rise over time, while capitalists expect to be able to devote some of their profits to consumption. In conditions of severe class conflict, these expectations about the future become uncertain, time horizons shorten, workers become militant, capitalists disinvest and political instability results. Three forms of resolution are

available: stabilising external intervention, negotiation or renegotiation of a social contract or the strengthening of the position of one or other class by a shift towards conservatism or revolution. Przeworski's sternest warnings are to Marxists who assume that revolution and the introduction of socialism are the inevitable outcomes of a crisis.

The second theme in the literature on semi-developed countries has to do with their position within the world economy. Three related sub-themes can be identified.

Firstly, there has been a debate about the forms and limits of the diffusion of industrialisation. Dependency theory – now somewhat out of fashion, since its predictions of severe limitations on industrialisation in developing counties have been falsified – asserted that relationships between developing and developed countries are such as to keep the latter in perpetual economic subordination. The contrary thesis – that advanced industrial countries have had to deal with increased competition arising from quite widespread diffusion – now seems more plausible. Lester Thurow, for instance, has argued that the increase in inequality in the United States since the late 1970s is to be attributed neither to the Reagan's administration tax and welfare policies nor to demographic change, but to intense international competitive pressures coupled with high unemployment.

Secondly, some theorists have asserted that a process of the 'globalisation of capital' – unprecedented opportunities for international movement of short-term and long-term capital – has removed the possibilities of national reformism (i.e. class compromise reached at the level of the nation state) and is ushering in a period of global class conflict. If there is any truth in this hypothesis at all, it would have to be qualified both by a careful study of precisely how the capital (and trade) flows of the 1980s differed from those of earlier periods and the sorts of changes in national policy choices capable of delivering a broadly-based rise in living standards which follow from these differences. Even if some options may have disappeared, it does not follow that new ones are not available.

Finally, there has been a pre-occupation with the problems of structural adjustment (in both developed and developing economies) necessitated by a changing international environment. Structural adjustment is a subject for both economic and political analysis. At the economic level the issues of maintaining macroeconomic balance, changing industrial and manpower policy and protecting the poor against a period of deflation which is – or seems to be – necessary in many cases, all have to be considered. Political problems arise when it comes to the distribution of the burdens of adjustment and the creation of new capacities for development. Lack of ability to handle structural

adjustment problems can lead to a variety of outcomes, from the shifting of a large part of the burden of change to future generations (as both the United States and Brazil have done in recent years), to loss of control at the macroeconomic level leading to rapid drops in living standards, hyperinflation and/or defaults on international obligations, political instability and even regime change. Identification and study of the capacities available to avoid undesirable outcomes are of considerable interest.

The third theme in the semi-developed country literature is that of the relationship between economic inequality and political conflict. Characteristically, semi-developed countries have more unequal distributions of income between households than developed countries. It used to be thought that inequality peaked at the intermediate stage of development, partly because of limitations of the spread of education (and therefore of human capital) and partly because low-paying sectors continued to account for a substantial proportion of employment. Recent evidence has thrown doubt on the view that inequality necessarily increases during the early stages of development; it is much clearer that it tends to decrease during the later stages. The relationship between economic inequality and political conflict is also complex: studies of cross-national correlations between indicators of the two phenomena have led to unclear, even contradictory results. One reasonably robust result is that revolutions at a relatively early stage of development have much to do with inequality in land holdings. But coherent findings in semi-developed countries are virtually non-existent. Part of the reason for this is mindless number-crunching with insufficient attention paid to the theoretical tradition dealing with conflict and revolution. There is probably quite a lot to be said, for instance, for the Hobbesian view that the proximate cause of violent conflict is itself political in the form of the weakening of the power of the state. Economic factors may also matter, but among these, income distribution may be relatively unimportant and improvements may play as significant a role as deterioration.

Rational actor models of regime change have recently appeared in the political science literature. John Roemer, for instance, conceives of revolution as a two person game between the present ruler (whom he calls the Tsar) and a revolutionary entrepreneur, whose name is Lenin. In his attempt to overthrow the Tsar, Lenin can propose redistribution of the fixed pie of income. The Tsar can announce a list of penalties which define what each agent who chooses to join Lenin will forfeit, should the revolution fail. Each possible coalition of the population has a probability of succeeding in making the revolution, depending on its size and composition. Lenin chooses the income redistribution which maximises the probability of overthrowing the

Tsar and the Tsar in turn chooses the list of penalties which minimises this maximum value. The solution to this minimax game defines the instability of the regime, i.e. the probability that it will be overthrown. From game theoretical results, Roemer is able to draw conclusions about the strategies of the players according with experience. For instance, the Tsar will treat the poor harshly and let off the rich lightly if the conditional probabilities of revolution by coalitions are the least bit sensitive to the penalties announced. Lenin, on the other hand, will only propose a progressive redistribution of income as his optimal strategy under some circumstances. Highly probable revolutions are highly polarised revolutions.

Lurking in this literature is also the issue of whether a coherent distinction can be made between revolutions and other forms of regime change, but exploration of that issue would require a lecture of its own.

The fourth theme in the semi-developed country literature concerns the bearers of the capacities for economic development. In no society are these likely to be located wholly within the state or within the private sector. Instead, rather complicated networks able to mount major initiatives may straddle both the public and private sectors. In some semi-developed countries described as 'bureaucratic-authoritarian', it may even be the case that some parts of the state continue to act with leading components of the private sector to manage economic development, while other parts of the state induce periodic crises by losing macro-economic control.

Two debates in political science are relevant here. The first concerns the nature and functions of civil society. In its classical use by Adam Smith and Hegel, civil society refers to a social system sufficiently productively advanced and regulated by morality and law to be able to support both the division of labour and the institution of private property. Hegel throws in the police and the civil service as regulators of last resort for good measure. The term 'civil society' has been taken up in recent South African debate, sometimes in a rather quaint fashion – one contributor to a recent seminar defined it as consisting of the trade unions, civics, the SA Council of Churches and the Kagiso Trust! Marxists have criticised liberals for representing the interests of a part as the good of the whole; liberals, it seems, are not the only people capable of making that mistake. A more interesting redefinition of the term has been proposed by Michael Lipton who reserves for it institutions forming neither part of the state nor part of the market, but whose influence may make both state and market function more efficiently. The original definitions are probably the most useful; in terms of them, the strengthening of civil society is indeed a prerequisite for development. It amounts to developing new

specialisations, to building institutions with new capacities and to creating the attitudes and legal framework necessary to support these endeavours. Much of the time, these changes will evolve from existing resources and capacities. But there are also periods of rapid and discontinuous change in which the positions of major groups within societies are fundamentally changed. This amounts to a social and economic revolution, which may or may not be accompanied by a political revolution. At the analytical level, the classical Marxist conflation of the social, economic and political processes is a serious distortion. At the political level, versions of the Marxist formulation have been used to represent the most grinding political oppression as inaugurating social and economic emancipation.

The second political debate is about corporatism. This refers to a situation in which powerful organised interests play a major role in political life as opposed to individuals organised into political parties in a liberal democratic system. Indeed, to the liberal ear, the term 'corporatism' has an authoritarian sound about it. Powerful organised interests, of course, exist in liberal democracies but these function as interest groups with no formal political status. Corporatism emerges when political institutions are shaped to include them. An important distinction needs to be drawn between democratic corporatism where these arrangements are subject to choices made by the electorate in regular elections and authoritarian corporatism where they are not. Fascist Italy and some Latin American countries provide examples of the latter and the European democracies examples of the former. The mildest form of corporatism is probably tripartite institutions comprised of trade unions, employer organisations and state departments. These participate in the determination of macroeconomic and/or labour market policy in advanced industrial countries, the whole process being described as that of a 'social contract'. Democratic corporatism is subject to changes depending on changes of opinion within the electorate; particular forms put together by left of centre governments are often modified or dissolved by succeeding conservative governments. Authoritarian corporatism, on the other hand, produces an oligarchical system based on deals between elites which sometimes deliver stability and economic growth, quite possibly for long periods of time, but which are not subject to popular approval. Indeed, they are characteristically accompanied by a substantial degree of repression. In this way they contain divergences of interest which would rip liberal democracies apart. Even in democracies, corporatist arrangements display a degree of inertia; it appears from the recent literature that the welfare state has been more resistant to conservative dismantling in European countries in which corporatist arrangements have been well developed. They also deliver control; it

has also been suggested that corporatist structures (as well as a highly competitive configuration) in the labour market result in lower real wages than collective bargaining between employers and industry-wide trade unions. Democratic systems in which linguistic, religious and ethnic identities perform the function of corporations are referred to as consociational and have some of the same authoritarian logic as corporatist systems.

The final theme of interest in the literature on semi-developed countries is that of the transition from authoritarian to democratic rule, the subject of a major scholarly enterprise directed from the Woodrow Wilson International Centre at Princeton University about a decade ago. Alfred Stepan pointed out that there are a number of distinctive paths leading to democratization: in some, warfare and conquest play an integral part, as in Europe after the Second World War. Here, three sub-cases can be distinguished: internal restoration of democracy after external conquest, redemocratisation after a conqueror has been defeated by external force, and externally monitored installation of democracy. In others, the termination of authoritarian regimes is initiated by the wielders of authoritarian power themselves. In yet others, oppositional forces play a major role in terminating authoritarian rule via diffuse protests by grass-roots organisations, general strikes and general withdrawal of support for the government, by the formation of a grand oppositional pact, possibly with consociational features, by organised violent revolt co-ordinated by democratic reformist parties or by Marxist-led revolutionary war (though the latter has usually led to the installation of an authoritarian successor regime). These are all ideal types with rather different dynamics; any actual process is likely to contain elements of more than one ideal type.

In a companion piece, John Sheahan observes that economic policy in support of democratisation must meet two conflicting requirements. On the one hand, economic growth requires the ability to limit claims which would seriously damage efficiency or outrun productive capacity. On the other, policy must deliver sufficient fulfilment of the expectations of politically aware groups to gain and hold their acceptance. Both external economic circumstances and internal political conflicts are capable of rendering impossible the striking of a viable balance between these requirements, with the result that the process of democratisation aborts. The position is complicated in countries which have a long history of import substitution resulting in high levels of protection but which now need to re-orient themselves in order to promote exports. In such cases, the timing of structural adjustment and increases in domestic demand pose tricky problems of economic management. The overall objective must be to permit the

most rapid and broadly based rise in domestic demand while maintaining external balance, subject to the constraints arising from the structure of the domestic labour market. Part of successful management must involve the greatest possible exploitation of new willingness to co-operate induced by the democratisation process itself. Adroit proposals are needed which reduce initially high risks and increase incentives to support economic growth among the principal parties at each stage in the process. Some reconceptualisation of interests is essential. Intelligent international support allowing constraints to be relaxed at crucial junctures is also of considerable importance.

It is sometimes supposed that the transformation of an authoritarian regime into a democracy is a fragile process, for the success of which a range of necessary conditions has to be present. In particular, it is argued both that a democracy has small chance of survival if it does not deliver social and economic improvements for the population at large and that democracies are unable to administer the economic medicine required by crisis conditions. A recent study of Latin American countries since 1982, however, finds that democracies not only handled economic crises as effectively as authoritarian regimes; they also achieved a far better record of avoiding acute crises in the first place. The puzzle turns out not to be the fragility of democracy, but its vitality. The suggestion is that the behaviour of both political elites and of their followers has been misdescribed. On the one hand, democratic governments that displace highly repressive or widely discredited authoritarian regimes may count on a special reserve of political support and trust to carry them through economic crises. On the other, elected officials may understand the self-defeating nature of enhancing their legitimacy by delivering material payoffs to the bulk of the population, even at the cost of financial disaster.

So far, this lecture has not been about South Africa, but has been concerned to identify intellectual resources which might be used when thinking about South African problems. Time permits only a sketchy application of some ideas to our present circumstances.

Let me start from the economic side. One of the more encouraging features of our economic evolution in the last few years is that, although real per capita incomes have declined, the evidence suggests that the distribution of income has improved to such an extent that the proportion of households in poverty did not increase in the years between 1985 and 1990 and probably declined slightly despite a drop in real per capita incomes. The burden of the decline has been borne by the relatively well-to-do if not by the very rich. This trend is unlikely to be sustained in the face of further economic decline. On the contrary, the prospects for the poor will be served by rapid economic

growth; far from there being a conflict between growth and equality in South Africa, the two processes will reinforce each other, especially given appropriate policies. In the light of the importance of a widespread improvement in standards of living to the sustenance of the process of democratisation, it is in the interests of all parties who desire a negotiated settlement to support developments which increase growth. But where is this growth to come from?

All the contemporary evidence suggests that the balance of payments is critical. It is possible to argue in theoretical terms that there ought to be no such thing as a balance of payments constraint. But there is no policy purchase to be had from a static comparison between our present situation and a superior one. A path from the one state to the other has to be specified. There are two difficulties in doing so. Firstly, the path to a better state depends on what other countries are doing. Prisoner's dilemmas certainly exist at the level of international trade as the very existence of the GATT system testifies. Secondly, since the process has to be supported politically, the distribution of the costs of adjustment born by domestic actors has to be taken into account. Either the costs have to be imposed unilaterally by the exercise of political power or compensation has to be negotiated, assuming sufficient gains from liberalisation have been captured domestically. Studies of interest group battles over the determination of the various aspects of balance of payments policy is certainly a topic in political economy. Another major determinant of macroeconomic policy in recent years is the desire of the state not to make itself vulnerable to international sources of political pressure through loss of control over external balances. This would have meant risking the loss of control over the timing and extent of concessions. Monetary policy, for instance, has been mainly discussed in terms of domestic variables, notably the rate of inflation. But avoidance of adverse developments on the short-term capital account must always have been a major consideration. Here, analysis of domestic interest groups does not help at all; it will take favourable developments on international markets or purposeful risk reduction to permit a more expansionary policy.

The second issue involves efficiency gains from improved taxation and expenditure policy. So far, a discussion of the economic role of the state has largely consisted of old-fashioned arguments over size and ownership, which have been driven by (often imaginary) conceptions of political interest. But a determined effort to raise popular living standards will require quite a different approach. Its principal component will be a restructuring of government expenditure, particularly that relating to social services, urban infrastructure and rural development in order to create new opportunities for

formerly discriminated against or excluded groups. As Professor McGrath has observed, there are more gains to be had from restructuring the expenditure side of government economic activity than from changes on the revenue side. There are both normative and positive approaches to this question. The positive approach would observe that the restructuring of state expenditure is already under way and would seek to relate it to two developments, significant from the point of view of public choice theory: first, the lowering of the income of the median voter associated with the introduction of the tricameral parliament and secondly, the rise in power of the extraparliamentary movement. The latter has led to a growing expectation of its political incorporation via the universal franchise leading to an anticipatory set of adjustments. A normative approach could be based on an investigation of what is required to minimise an appropriate measure of poverty.

At the political level, an advance in the positive account of what our political system is becoming is most urgently needed. Accounts of competing normative positions and the similarities and differences between them abound. So do narrative accounts of particular political episodes. But a deeper analysis of fundamental concepts – power in its various aspects, the nature and dynamics of transition, the incentives facing various actors and their strategic choices, the real scope and prospects for legality and, above all, whether steering capacities are being lost or gained by the political system – virtually all remain to be carried out in a convincing fashion. On the quality of the terms on which the new public order is created will depend the efficacy with which the private sector can function and evolve. For this reason, and because it requires rather more than animal spirits, it is the quality of what goes on in the public sector that is the test of the degree of civilisation achieved in any society.

History may be servitude, history may be freedom. Liberalism is nothing if not the defence of freedom. The South African liberal tradition has two components, borne by two rather different social groups. Business liberalism presents a robust, generally optimistic face (though subject to a degree of affective disorder during the recessionary phases of the business cycle); all things considered, it has done quite well during the past decade, playing a considerable role in the dismantling of coercive political structures. But business liberalism represents only a part – essentially the material progress part – of a rich tradition. It has been left to an always fragile – and now almost extinct – missionary and philanthropic liberal tradition to try to interpret its cultural aspects. The clearest defences of this part of the liberal tradition in South Africa have been the most poignant contrasts of visions of freedom with the imposition of new forms of servitude –

a missionary bishop denouncing colonialism in its most brutal, shortsighted form, a professor of philosophy foreseeing with harsh clarity the consequences of the political rise of Afrikaner nationalism. Against the intolerant, coercive forces in our midst, liberalism would do well to take its stand on the two central concepts of Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy: individual autonomy and universalisation. Unshackling individual fates from state-imposed racial identities is a great step forward to the achievement of individual autonomy. But the liberal programme will not be realised if social structure continues to dominate individual capacities in determining what people may become. The creation of an open political system and attending to poverty are both central. There are many who claim that the denial of the former is an essential requirement for achieving the latter. Neither international experience nor a close reading of our domestic circumstances supports such a view.

Universality – equality of respect – is always and everywhere a greater problem, since, unlike autonomy, it is not an interest but an acknowledgement of the interests of others. Great cultural heterogeneity makes it even harder to achieve; in South Africa, moreover, the destructive logic of ethnic conflict (which militates against the habit of counting 'each person as one') has not yet come to an end. There are many fields of action, many forms of life; the prospects for liberalism now depend on people coming to see attachment to their own fields of action in a broad enough perspective not only to tolerate others, but to enjoy them.

The University in a Period of Reconstruction*

James V. Leatt

The University is 'the corporate realisation of man's basic determination to know'. (Karl Jaspers)

South Africa and reconstruction

The University of Natal was founded in 1909. Its first Council met in 1910, the year in which white domination was entrenched in the South Africa Act, approved by the British Parliament and its Crown. Boer and Brit had fought a brutal white man's war to determine who should wield power in South Africa. The National Convention which designed the Union of South Africa excluded blacks from its deliberations and its final solution.

A fateful fault-line was thus formed which divided South Africa on racial lines. Soon the African National Congress was founded, among other oppositional parties, to fight for the inclusion of blacks in the political process. And the die was cast for the next eighty years of South Africa's history.

The racial fault-line worked its way through the system until it finally errupted into an ever more repressive apartheid regime, locked in unremitting conflict with anti-apartheid forces – a state at war with itself and with the world at large.

Now, some eighty years later, South Africa is making the painful transition from white authoritarian rule to a democratic, non-racial order.

It is perhaps commonplace these days to quote O'Donnell and Schmitter's monumental comparative study of societies which have attempted to make the transition from authoritarian rule. We know it is an uneven, uncertain, and precarious process.

At best we can say that South Africa has a more than even chance of successfully making its transition. The reasons are complex. The roots

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of segregation go very deep; the legacy of apartheid as a structural manifestation of racial segregation has massively skewed our development. And ours is a society which has long experienced economic decline and endemic violence. It is not clear whether we can develop patterns of behaviour which will encourage the democratic practices and economic growth necessary to succeed.

The burden of the past is heavy. Ownership and control of South Africa's land and wealth are vested in a small, largely white minority. Rural blight and urban poverty on a massive scale make the problems of modernisation and development daunting.

Resources have been grossly skewed in favour of whites in health care, education, social services, housing, infra-structural and human resource development.

In short, South Africa is now entering upon a period of *reconstruction* analogous to the post-World II reconstruction of war-torn Europe and Japan. It took nothing short of a Marshall Plan to achieve reconstruction then, and it will take nothing less here.

But reconstruction is imperative because poverty, unemployment and the scars of violent dislocation are not conditions in which the fragile plant of democracy can grow. And unless conditions are created in which democratic institutions can grow, our transition from authoritarian rule will fail and we could relapse into an even worse state.

Even if we do succeed in bringing to birth South Africa's first democratic government based on a non-racial constitution, the problems of development and reconstruction are going to require social engineering on a massive scale. And, as John Hall has recently reminded us, social development or social engineering is not benign and is not usually 'achieved under the aegis of soft political rule.' If industrial development is to be achieved, ethnic and language rivalries must be offset, land usage must be redefined, traditional authority structures will have to be modified. Such measures are socially brutal and put the transition to democracy at risk. Experience in developing countries shows that counter-modernising forces are extremely resilient.

But there can be no doubt that some 80 years after the Union of South Africa was formed we are launched upon a fundamentally new path towards a *non-racial democracy*.

The university and reconstruction

It is at this dangerous time of hope that I take office as Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Natal, one of South

Africa's pre-eminent liberal universities. What is the role of a university like this at this momentous time in our history? How may it contribute to, and itself be part of, this period of reconstruction?

We are just emerging from one of the most repressive periods in our history, when South Africa came close to being a national security state. In that dark period the role of a liberal university was reasonably clear.

The liberal university was to keep the doors of learning open. That meant, in turn, ensuring that the university decided who was to teach, what was taught and who was to be taught on academic grounds alone. It meant trying to preserve the open and frank exchange of ideas and the pursuit of knowledge. It meant providing a haven for persons and programmes critical of the state.

We are perhaps too close to that period to be able to assess how well liberal universities acquitted themselves of their task. Certainly they too were trapped in apartheid and bear the imprint of that sad period in our history. But there is no doubt that they count among the few institutions which survived that critical period with some credibility – thanks to the courage and tenacity of students, academics, university executives, and the Councils of these universities.

But, what role should the university now play in this period of reconstruction?

The academy – to use the name for the garden near Athens where Plato taught – is an institution for the study of the arts and sciences. The academy, or university, is a place where the intellectual elite are educated and where the frontiers of knowledge are extended.

It has become commonplace to use the word 'elite' pejoratively in South Africa. But it means 'the choice part, or flower of society.' Elitism is clearly wrong when the 'choice part' is determined on grounds of race, gender and class. And because this has happened grossly in South Africa elitism has earned its pejorative meaning.

But, given the daunting task of reconstruction, South Africa cries out for a determined effort to seek out the choice parts or flowers of our society so they can receive the training to make their contribution as the intellectual elite that South Africa so desperately requires – in the academy, in the public and private sectors, in trade unions, in community organisations.

And, what is the role of the intellectual in the academy at this time in our history? Does it differ from their role elsewhere in the world? In order to avoid the parochialism that often marks discussions of this sort in South Africa, I want to draw on the debate about modernity and post-modernity which is currently occupying social theorists world-wide.

Modernity refers to the world created by the Age of Reason and Science. Technology and massive institutional change swept away all traditional types of social order. In principle, the typically modern view of the world is one of an essentially orderly totality which can be explained and controlled. Knowledge about the world of nature and the social world is, in principle, attainable.

Stephen Toulmin, in his important recent book, calls this vision of modernity 'Cosmopolis' – a society as rationally ordered as the Newtonian view of nature. This vision fuelled extroardinary advances in all fields of human endeavour, while perpetuating the delusion that human nature could be fitted into precise and manageable rational categories.

The typically modern strategy of intellectual work, says Zygmunt Bauman, is best characterised by the metaphor of the 'legislator' role. The intellectual has access to superior knowledge and can therefore arbitrate in controversies, legislate in disputes. The intellectual can therefore ameliorate society's problems and guide social change. Not surprisingly the intellectual elite in some societies is also the political elite and Party leadership 'lays claim to a monopoly over the interpretation and application of . . . scientific theory of social development' (Lindblom). The intellectual, in this analysis, is the 'meta-professional' (Bauman).

Scholars who speak in the idiom of *post-modernity* point out that the Englightenment project has failed. Philosophers, social theorists, and latterly even some powerful political elites, have discovered this. In the words of Anthony Giddens, 'nothing can be known with any certainty, since all pre-existing "foundations" of epistemology have been shown to be unreliable; that "history" is devoid of teleology and consequently no version of "progress" can be plausibly defended'. In short, as John Stuart Mill said, 'everyone well knows himself to be fallible'.

The typically post-modern strategy of intellectual work, on Bauman's analysis, 'is best characterised by the metaphor of "interpreter" role'. There is a gross mismatch between the complexities of the social world and intellectual capacity. No synoptic theory of social change exists to guide society, nor can it ever. We have scattered, partial theories; we live with contingency and uncertainty. The intellectual as interpreter can translate statements made in one community-based tradition so they can be understood within another. And since *no* correct solution is possible, the intellectual – and the academy – must ensure openness, free enquiry, criticism, and self correction. These are the essential values of the academy and of the scientific community. They are also the essential values of democracy. Moreover, on this model, issues cannot finally be scientifically

decided. At some point they must be decided democratically – by the broadly-willed preferences of the people.

I want to draw some lessons from this analysis for intellectuals in universities in South Africa. The first is that the role of the intellectual as 'interpreter' is clearly more modest and proximate, or provisional, than that of 'legislator'; but it is nonetheless crucial.

The second is that the intellectual and the community out there in the real world have to develop interactive processes to solve real problems. As Charles Lindblom says, processes such as the democratic vote, market forces, collective bargaining agreements, codes of conduct to control political violence, will not produce perfect solutions. But they will often be superior solutions to those attempted directly by the intellect. Since no perfect solutions are possible problem-solving interactions must not be suppressed because they take time and trouble.

* * *

By way of pulling all this together let me give you a concrete illustration.

In the mid-sixties I visited some of the 'Evangelical Lay Academies' in Europe. These academies were run by the Church. They developed after World War II in West Germany as residential conference centres designed to contribute to reconstruction. In effect, the church was saying, 'From within our tradition we have some insight into the human condition. But we have no special insights into the problems confronted by the professions as they attempt to re-establish themselves after the Nazi nightmare.' So the church invited lawyers, journalists, academics, medics, etc. to come to the academy. There on neutral ground they could discuss reconstruction and the rebuilding of their professional integrity. The church offered such insight as it had, but made no claim to be all-knowing.

The University, the academy, in South Africa can in like manner provide the space in which problems of reconstruction can be addressed. But the academy is only one of the players. In true Socratic style, it must play the role of interpreter. And, since the problems of reconstruction in South Africa are fundamental, the academy's contribution, and that of the intellectual, is to uncover and make explicit the theoretical basis of what, on the surface, appear to be practical problems. Shelter, health care, urban poverty, rural development, political violence – to name but some of our more intractable problems – require that we go to the root causes. The intellectual can

unveil these and lay them bare. But that is only part of the task, and a modest one at that.

The reconstruction of the university

There is another sense in which the academy, the university, is part of the reconstruction process. The academy itself must undergo reconstruction.

The University of Natal is in the fortunate position of having a broadly-willed Mission Statement – a testament to what it wants to be. Its role in South Africa can be summarised from the following extracts:

- The University of Natal strives to serve all sections of its community through excellence in scholarship, teaching, learning, research and development.
- The University of Natal seeks to honour its commitment
  – to being an equal opportunities/affirmative action university;
  – to promote, internally and externally, the achievement of a free, just and equitable order.
- The University of Natal strives to achieve excellence in learning 'by admitting students of high academic potential and by providing conditions that will enable them to realise their academic potential'.

These are admirable values, ones I want here publicly to endorse. To give effect to these values will require that the University of Natal is itself reconstructed – a process which began before I arrived and must now be taken further.

* * *

It is a tragedy of enormous proportions that when this University wishes to undergo reconstruction to meet the challenges of our times its subsidy has been drastically cut. This means

- there is less money for research and development;
- less money to meet the increasing demand for financial aid for students with the potential to succeed but who lack resources;

- less money to institute a substantial student development programme in each faculty to offset the deficits of black schooling;
- less money to introduce imaginative means to attract women and black persons to academic and administrative posts.

In the absence of a national policy to fund universities adequately the University of Natal's commitment to its own Mission Statement will be sorely tested in the years ahead. It will need to cut costs, trim its sails, and operate with maximum efficiency in order to protect its core activities and fulfil its stated mission.

With the support of the Council and the Senex of the University I have therefore instituted a Vice-Chancellor's Review. A small team of wise and experienced people from this University, with the help of outside experts, will be asked to tackle the following tasks: first, to review our administrative and executive structures; second, to review our elaborate committee system; third, to develop in broad terms a comprehensive strategic plan for the University of Natal for the next five years. The plan will need to be provisional because South Africa is in transition and it is not clear what a new government's higher education policy will be. Also developments in tertiary education in this Eastern Seaboard Region are in flux.

This review must be completed by July 1992 so that, in keeping with our democratic values, its findings can be tested by the constitutent parts of the University before final implementation.

My intention is that the final outcome will be reflected in the budget of 1993. No aspect of our university's structures is sacrosanct – all will be subjected to serious review. The review is a means to enable the University of Natal to achieve its stated ends as described in our Mission Statement.

To do this is going to require what Julius Nyerere once described as 'hard-nosed analysis and utopian vision'. But, from what I know of the people of this University they are equal to the challenge. And, we build on the sound foundation laid by Professor Peter Booysen, my esteemed predecessor.

* * *

Our forebears in this great University chose *Stella Aurorae* as their motto in those historic days of the founding of the University and Union. Today we work expectantly towards the dawn of a new nation.

Stella Aurorae, star of the dawn, symbolises the role of the University in dispelling darkness and casting light on these momentous times. May we be equal to that challenge.

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On an Economic Limit to Ethics

Rationality and the Explanation of Action

Johann Fedderke

When economists come to explain marriage as a contract intended to reduce search costs for sexual gratification, or analyze the decision to have children as the consumption of durable consumer goods (see for example the discussion in Becker 1981), they are faced by more than the usual charges of ahistoricism and excessive individualism from colleagues in the social sciences. They are accused of excluding that which is quintessentially human, of being incapable of understanding 'real' humans. A central concern here is that the sorts of explanations of action economists advance, in terms of the teleological account of the maximising agent, is not sensitive to important aspects of human action (see Hindess 1988). Culture, morality, the norms and commitments of society, it is argued, should surely enter into deliberations concerning development strategy, of how to better the lot of those affected by economic policy.

The corollary to such concerns contains considerable misgivings about the central role economists play in the shaping and planning of modern society in their advisory capacity to governments. Such misgivings inevitably extend to the tendency of economics to colonise its fellow social sciences (see Harcourt 1982). Economics, it is charged, might do better if it listened more carefully to its sister disciplines, and above all developed some ethical sensibility.

This paper takes such concerns seriously. Moreover, it springs out of the awareness of limitations that attach to the conceptualisations of action that are possible given the current tools of micro-economics. Economics has demonstrated the power and also the limitations of the concept of rationality based on the action-theoretic concept of the maximising agent. It does not lay claim to being the only foundation for the explanation of action, emphasises that it is at most one possible interpretation of action, and demands that it be supplemented by the perspectives provided by other disciplines.

If such concerns are taken seriously, however, they can be made to extend to prominent attempts to formulate a general (by which I mean applicable to all situations, irrespective of time and space) ethics. Given the diversity of circumstance faced in policy formulation by

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economists, it is a general ethics which is required. The paper begins by examining some criticisms which have been levelled at the desituatedness of the moral agent in perhaps the most prominent of modern attempts at formulating a universal ethics, John Rawls's model of justice as fairness. The argument suggests that while it is legitimate to express discomfort at the choice situation in the Original Position, it is not the moral agent or its characteristics which constitutes the problem. Rather, it is the concept of rationality, that of the maximising agent, which is deployed by Rawls in the contracting procedure which raises doubts concerning the generality of the principles of justice. The reflexive awareness of the limitations that economics has of its most fundamental action-theoretic concept, suggests the legitimacy of doubts concerning the generality of any principles of justice founded on it.

It is this potential limitation that is the concern of this paper. The examination continues with a discussion of a possible vindication of the generality of justice as fairness, despite the apparent particularism of the concept of rationality which underlies it. Failure of this vindication leads on to the examination of a generalised concept of rationality, formulated by Habermas, which in turn has formed the basis of a general ethics.

Unfortunately I must conclude on a sceptical note. The Habermasian concept of rationality also appears to contain within it the teleological moment on which the fundamental economic action-theoretic concept rests. This is a surprising result, given that Habermas is explicitly concerned to formulate a concept of action which is capable of embracing all the more particular conceptions of agency provided by the various social sciences.

This leads to a conclusion which can do no more than raise a number of questions. Is it correct to say that the teleological conception of agency, with which economists work, is too particularistic – given that the teleological moment reappears even in systematic attempts to avoid it in the formulation of an alternative standard of rationality? Both Rawls and Habermas, seem, in the final instance, unable to escape from it. Given the tenacity of its appearance, is the problem not perhaps the charge of particularism that is levelled against it? Perhaps it has a degree of generality, a generality which might vindicate the economic approach to policy formulation? How would an answer to such questions look, and are they meaningful in the first instance? The second question that is raised is whether the implicit assumption that underlies the body of argument within the paper, viz that a general ethics requires to be underpinned by a general concept of rationality, is vindicated. Can an account of ethics not be general, despite a particularistic concept of

rationality at its foundation, if the concept of rationality should prove so limited? Is this only sometimes permissible, under certain circumstances, always, or never?

It is as a plea to an answer to these questions, that the paper is best understood.

Objections to Rawls's *Theory of Justice*

Rawls's model of justice as fairness promises principles of justice which satisfy the requirements of economic policy formulation. Justice as fairness is a search for principles of practical reason to serve as a touchstone for all actions, irrespective of time or place, promising a complexity-reducing mechanism of the highest order.

Yet Rawls's *Theory of Justice* has come under sustained attack for the desituatedness of its moral agents. Such desituatedness, it is argued, makes it impossible for the moral agents to have a proper moral sensibility, and makes the generality that Rawls claims for his principles of justice either meaningless, or, worse, pernicious, since it does not show sufficient sensitivity to the particularities of situatedness. Three such problem-types centre on the knowledge conditions of the Original Position, the basis of the justification of the principles of justice, and the thin theory of the good.

The knowledge conditions in the Original Position

There are two distinct, though related, types of objections to the knowledge conditions characterising the Original Position that I wish to address here. Both question the possibility of formulating the type of knowledge claims that Rawls deems necessary for the Original Position to fulfil its purpose. These doubts translate into serious misgivings about whether the principles of justice produced in the Original Position, behind the Veil of Ignorance, are applicable to humans situated in social and historical reality.

The first line of argument questions the possibility of formulating *general* knowledge of social phenomena (see Barber 1975, Wolff 1977:120–32). Theories of social phenomena and processes are argued to be distinct from those of the natural sciences in terms of their generality and certainty. Historical and spatial contingency lie at the core of social phenomena and their development, emptying any abstraction from these contingencies of meaning or explanatory power. Or, such 'general' knowledge claims as are formulable, provide a profoundly ahistorical view of political, economic and social knowledge, of society as an object governed by immutable laws not subject to change. Such a framework is argued to be of little use in

the interpretation of historical and spatial contingencies, of the dynamic characteristics of real existence. The general knowledge that Rawls wishes to rely on to formulate his principles of justice is thus not available, or not meaningful to the formulation of such principles.

The second line of criticism stresses the linkedness of Agency and Structure in social phenomena and processes. Society, it is argued, does not have an independent existence from the knowledge of individuals about that society (see Habermas 1983:76, Wolff 1977: 120–32). The personality of agents is developed as an internalisation of a conception of social reality, and sustained and altered through its expression in social interaction. Structure and Agency are thus not separable, but interdependent, and one cannot be understood, indeed actualised, without the other. The implications for our purposes are twofold. First, knowledge of society and societal processes is inherently historical. Moral agents in the Original Position, behind the Veil of Ignorance, must thus always know which society they are concerned with in their contracting if they are to know anything at all about that society. Second, since knowledge of society is self- or identity-constituting, the moral agent must, by virtue of that knowledge, garner further information about his/her own personal traits. The contracting procedure in the Original Position is thus irreducibly tied to a consideration of particular information about the contracting moral agents. The distinction of general as opposed to particular information concerning the agents appears to lose its meaning.

The reasoning for the principles of justice

Perhaps the major controversy engendered by the argument for the principles of justice, surrounds the use of the maximin principle to justify the difference principle. Rawls himself specifies the conditions under which the maximin principle is appropriate: where probabilities of final outcomes are not available, where the decision-makers care little about attaining more than the pay-off entailed by the maximin solution, or where unfavourable outcomes entail great risks. Any of these conditions are sufficient though not necessary for the use of maximin (see Rawls 1971:26).

I wish to concentrate on Wolff's (1977:ch. 14, ch. 15) arguments against the last two of these, since the absence of probabilistic knowledge is difficult to maintain given the retort to these objections below. Wolff's arguments against the latter two justifications of maximin point in a common direction. First, the suggestion that agents in the Original Position care only for a minimum of primary goods is contingent on a kinked utility function. Second, the riskiness

of unfavourable outcomes to the contracting process will entail the maximin solution only if the agents are risk-averse. Both of these characteristics are empirically contingent. Since justice as fairness is explicitly intended to abstract from contingent characteristics of the contracting agents, both these justifications for the maximin principle, therefore, appear to violate a fundamental requirement of Rawls's theory.

The thin theory of the good

The criticism I wish to concentrate on here is the charge that the concept of rationality employed by Rawls is the rationality typical of the firm, time-less and unchanging. Instead, it is suggested, for individuals rationality changes its nature over the life-cycle of the individual (see Wolff 1977:ch. 14). The concept of rationality Rawls embraces is that most often found in economics, and which lies at the heart of rational choice theory. Rational action is that action which maximises the returns (both pecuniary and non-pecuniary) from the activity of the agent (see Rawls 1971:§25, §64).

Wolff finds such a view of rationality unacceptable. In particular, he argues that such rationality cannot be considered typical of individuals, or persons, but is the rationality associated with firms. Moreover, it presumes the preferences of persons to be static and unchanging, a suggestion he finds untenable.

A retort

It is useful to bear in mind the object of the Original Position and the Veil of Ignorance: the prevention of contingent characteristics of the contracting moral agents from coming to hold moral force (see Rawls 1971:§3, §13).

The point is best understood in a functional sense, since the Original Position with its associated Veil of Ignorance is after all only a thought experiment, intended to highlight those considerations which are, and those which are not, considered to be morally relevant.

The contracting procedure could be viewed as one which proceeds on two distinct levels. The first, or cognitive level, is concerned with the identification of the distinguishing characteristics of social forms, their Structure-Agency symbiosis, and the workings of the societies in question. This level would include the unique and distinguishing features of all the relevant categories of agents in that society necessary to understand the functioning, and relative placement of all classes of agents within that society.[1]

The second level is a moral one. In the latter, while a full understanding of the cognitive level is presupposed, not all of the information contained within it is *morally* apposite. In particular the contingent features attaching to the contracting agents need to be precluded (even if such information was necessary on the cognitive level), in order to prevent specific interests from shaping the principles of justice agreed on. Choosing principles of justice, must be undertaken from a position which leaves aside the contingent characteristics of the self. But such choice would be made after understanding had been developed at the cognitive level of how contingencies come to influence or shape the position of agents in society.

The real question, then, is not the nature of the knowledge conditions in the Original Position, since these are palpably artificial and unrealistic, intended merely to conduct the reader through a thought experiment designed to rank knowledge according to its moral relevance. The real question is whether contingent characteristics of the moral agents are morally relevant. For Rawls the answer to this question is clearly negative, on the basis of a series of considerations.

Rawls's starting point in the *Theory of Justice* is the existence of objective and subjective circumstances of justice (Rawls 1971:§22). It is the material and psychic benefits which flow from cooperation between individuals in social structures, and the pervasiveness of scarcity, that make the principles of justice necessary in order to distribute the benefits (see De Kadt 1989, and De Kadt 1990 for further discussion of the relationship between justice and scarcity).

Given the finiteness of human capacity, not all information can be taken into account when deciding on the right distribution. The question thus is which information should be ignored, and which counted as relevant. For Rawls, in moral contexts it is information which relates to the contingent characteristics of the moral agents which should be ignored. His justification is as follows.

First, on a purely formal note, if the moral agents are forced to ignore their contingent characteristics in formulating the general principles of distributive justice, the principles decided on should be stable (see Rawls 1971:§20, §29). Since each contracting moral agent cannot allow his or her contingent characteristics to influence his/her choice of principles of justice, each moral agent should arrive at the same principles of justice. Once the contract is also public, and known to be such, the principles agreed upon are robust against *ex post* revision. The outcome of the contracting process is unaffected by the number of contractors.[2] This has the advantage that the social contract becomes one of personal commitment given the circumstances of

justice, and safeguards the continued existence of that which gave rise to the circumstances of justice, viz the cooperation between moral agents raising the need for distributive principles.

Further, the exclusion of contingent characteristics is justified on the grounds that it ensures impartiality (Rawls 1971:§190, §30), a priority of right over good (Rawls 1971:§4), that contracting parties are ensured to be equals (Rawls 1971:§4), that it provides a means to obtain principles which are a final court of appeal to override law, custom and social rules, prudence and self-interest should this be necessary (see Rawls 1971:§23; this might be appropriate where law, custom, and social rules take the form of apartheid, for instance). In short, it is a means of ensuring generality and universality for the principles of justice (Rawls 1971:§23).

Yet while this is the formal argument presented by Rawls, it is not conclusive. It is not clear that the exclusion of contingent characteristics is the only means by which the above considerations could be satisfied. And hence, it does not follow that the argument is sufficient to demonstrate the necessity of excluding contingent features of moral agents.

I wish to suggest that the real motivation for the exclusion of contingent characteristics is perhaps not to be found in Part One of the *Theory of Justice*, but rather in Part Three. In Part Three the argument rests on the primacy of human worth and the sense of worth, without which moral agents cannot hope to achieve a sense of self and of dignity (see for example Rawls 1971:§50, §68).

It is to the establishment of this fundamental worth of the moral agent, qua moral agent, that the argument for equality as a primary value in §77 of the *Theory of Justice* is aimed. The primacy of equality as a value is justified on the basis of the moral subject's capacity for a conception of (its own) good and of a sense of justice (see Rawls 1971:19, 509, §77). But perhaps most importantly, it is the recognition and positive acceptance of the irreducible *plurality* of identity of moral subjects, the integrity of such an identity, and the inherent ability of moral subjects to realise a sense of dignity, to self-actualise no matter what contingent form their identity may have, which deserves recognition and protection in any concept of justice (see Rawls 1971:28, 127). Such plurality can only be protected by giving each contracting party in the contract a position of equal influence on the final principles of justice chosen, and barring the possibility of strategic behaviour (see Rawls 1971:12, 120, §87). It is only when the equality of contracting agents is guaranteed, that it is certain that the agents will be in a position to choose their ends themselves.

Only the possibility of being able to choose their ends themselves, of being able to construct their identity, to express it in their pursuit of

their conception of the good, is the basis for the realisation of worth of moral agents. Without the recognition of the foundational importance of the possibility of realising self-respect by accepting that each agent is of absolute value, the pursuance of good has little meaning. The sense of worth of agents is only possible if the agents are able to choose and form their sense of the good.

In short, the moral irrelevance (in the sense defined) of contingent characteristics of agents, entails a priority of self over ends, emphasises that what is important is not that agents have, but that they *choose* ends. For Rawls, given the circumstances of justice, and the plurality of human existence, the impetus to moral agency is a constitutive element of the identity of the contracting agents.

For both objections to the knowledge conditions of the Original Position combined with the Veil of Ignorance, the retort can be the same. It may be true that knowledge of social phenomena may not have the degree of generality that principles of natural science may assume, and the relationship between Agency and Structure may indeed be symbiotic. But this may be reflected in the knowledge of the Original Position, as long as the particular contingent features of the contracting agents are prohibited from carrying weight in the deliberations leading to the choice of the principles of justice. The real question, I have argued, is not the epistemological plausibility of the contracting agents, but whether one accepts the argument for the irrelevance of contingent characteristics for moral claims, or not.

This clarifies why Wolff's argument that the reasoning for the maximin principle as the decision criterion for the principles of justice carries more weight. For the point of the argument is that the justification of the maximin principle introduces just the contingency that Rawls must avoid if the objections to the knowledge conditions of the Original Position are to be averted. Not only is the nature of the choice situation under attack at this point, but the very principles which led Rawls to the specification of the controversial choice situation appear to have been violated.

Yet here too the objection fails. For Rawls, given the circumstances of justice and the plurality of human existence, the impetus to moral agency is a constitutive element of the identity of the contracting agents. Such identity can only be realised if the fundamental worth of the moral agent, the dignity of the person, and the possibility of self-actualization are recognised and safeguarded. A minimum, threshold level of primary goods is necessary to ensure the realisation of such identity. Persons would not be persons, would not be moral agents if the possibility of self-actualisation, of a self-realisation of dignity were not possible, and it is this purpose that the primary goods serve. Wolff's objection begs the real question. As long as the

necessary enabling condition of human identity is located outside of all contingent characteristics, any conceptualisation of the good, i.e. the nature of agents' objective functions over which they maximise, and their attitude toward risk is simply immaterial. It is on the identity of the moral agents that the objective functions and risk-attitudes are founded, and the minimum quantity of primary goods are designed as enabling conditions for the formation of such an identity. And more fundamentally, since the identity of the agents is foundational to the rest of the possible experiences of agents, and is prior to the possibilities that the agent may experience, it is beyond considerations of risk-management.

The argument against the thin theory of the good takes a step toward circumventing this retort. By challenging the rationality which underpins the choice of agents in the Original Position, the nature of Rawls's conception of agents' identities is questioned. The concept of rationality is argued to apply to firm behaviour, rather than to agents, and to be far too static to be of use in analysing the activity of agents.

This is not entirely correct, however. The concept of rationality as maximisation is employed by rational choice theory and micro-economics, for *both* individuals *and* firms.[3] What differs between the two classes of agents is not the concept of rationality, but the preference structure. Whereas firms are held to have fairly uni-dimensional objectives, the maximisation of profit, individuals have considerably more differentiated goals.[4]

What might be more appropriate to argue, is that whereas the preferences of firms are relatively stable,[5] those of individuals are not. As an individual ages, the nature of the preferences of that individual may come to change. But this is a different matter altogether from challenging the concept of rationality. It is not the concept of rationality, viz. the maximisation principle, but rather the preferences, the objective function across which the individuals are maximising, which is subject to change. Such changes to the objective function are recognised, if contested,[6] by the rational choice literature, and to some extent dealt with by the terms of rational choice theory itself (see Ackerlof 1991, and Elster 1979, 1985).

That preferences are not stable over time, or may be inconsistent, does not question the concept of rationality used by rational choice theory. It may point to some paradoxes which follow from its use in certain circumstances, but maximisation remains intact as the reference-point of the analysis. Now it is not clear that such paradoxes are entailed by the Original Position.

What is more, there is no contrast between the concept of rationality in use for the analysis of firm behaviour, and individual action. Nor is

the contrast with regard to the stability of the preferences underlying the concept of rationality between firms and individuals as great as Wolff argues. The concept of rationality is not implausible on the grounds that Wolff advances. It may be maintained, even in the face of multiple selves.

Interestingly, the instability of the preference structures of moral agents could be argued to strengthen the basis on which Rawls wishes to exclude contingent characteristics of agents from carrying moral force. If agents know that plurality is a feature not only between but also within agents over time, the importance of allowing such difference to be reflected in the choices of agents becomes reinforced. Again,primary goods are simply the necessary, though not sufficient prerequisites for the fulfilment of any life-plan, in full recognition of the diversity that life-plans may come to evince. In short, the recognition of the existence of multiple selves is the motivation for the introduction of the Original Position–Veil of Ignorance combination.

A remaining concern about justice as fairness

All of the above criticisms are focused on the choice situation in the Original Position. All of the criticisms moreover, centre on the moral subject and its characteristics in the Original Position. It is the knowledge claims of moral agents (ahistorical and incapable of reflecting the symbiosis between Structure and Agency), the nature of their utility functions (kinked or changing over time, creating the problem of multiple selves), and their attitudes toward risk which are at issue.[7]

But there is another direction in which discomfort with the choice situation can be taken. Wolff comes closest to articulating such discomfort, by raising the question of the rationality-type that is used to conceptualise the Original Position, the rationality of *homo oeconomicus*, of the maximising agent (see Rawls 1971:§8, §25, §64). The maximin principle was after all developed in Rational Choice Theory. From economics we know the power of this tool of analysis. It is capable of accommodating constraints on the information at the disposal of the agents. Risk,[8] and more tenuously uncertainty,[9] are both being modelled. Implications of various informational inefficiencies are explored in the newer institutional literature (see Hodgson 1988 for an overview) while constraints on information-processing abilities of agents are also capable of being accommodated (see Heiner 1983) within the framework of the maximising agent. Applications of the concept of the maximising agent have burgeoned, from the obvious economic contexts, to preserves formally considered sociological (see Becker 1976c), that of political theory (see

Hahn 1990 and Becker 1976b), history and anthropology (see Smith 1975) and psychology (see Ackerlof 1991 and Becker 1976a).

The concept of the maximising agent has considerable explanatory power, and has proved robust against criticism of its purported lack of realism. It has continued to provide the core of a research programme which has been able to accommodate the concerns of critics, in part by the increased mathematisation of the discipline of economics.

However, most sophisticated proponents of the use of the concept of the maximising agent do not claim for it the status of the sole explanatory tool of action at our disposal (see for instance the comments to this effect in Hahn 1990). In the light of advances in psychology, in political theory and sociology, such claims would be palpably absurd. All that is claimed is that it is a powerful tool amongst others, that it provides us with an important insight into action and interaction of agents.

I wish to pursue this further with regard to Rawls's justice as fairness. For Rawls uses the concept of rationality based on the maximising agent to the exclusion of all else (see Rawls 1971:§25, §64).[10] Economists realise that their action-theoretic concept of rationality is but one possible basis for the interpretation of the activity of agents, and that there are other possible conceptions of action – normative, expressive, dramaturgical, communicative – besides the teleological concept dealt with in economics.

The question that this raises for the Rawlsian theory is whether the principles of justice, if based on a partial conception of rationality, can hope to capture and provide guidelines to the full complexity of human practical activity, even if it is concerned only with the issue of the distribution of the benefits of such activity. Can we trust it to regulate adequately actions which have a structure different from that entailed by rational choice theory? Should our moral principles not be based on a more differentiated concept of rationality? It is these concerns after all, which drive the misgivings of social scientists about economic explanations of action, with which this paper began.

> The core concern is that there may be action-types, or aspects of action which the concept of the maximising agent is not able to differentiate, engendering doubts about the action-theoretic foundation of Rawls's principles of justice. Should these concerns be meaningful, I wish to argue that their resolution rests on the nature of the relationship between reasons for action, and actions. For it is in the differentiation of this relation set that differences between action types come to be captured.

Rawls's reliance on the economic concept of rationality would be vindicated if it were possible to show that the relationship between reasons for action and actions were causal. The causal conception of the relation set between reasons and actions suggests the existence of necessary and sufficient conditionship relations between reasons and actions, which are the basis of any explanation of an action.

The concept of causality deployed here is that argued for by Von Wright (1971), viz that causality can be expressed in terms of necessary and sufficient conditionship relations between the *explanantia* and *explanandum*, which respectively lead to 'How-possible?' and 'Why-necessary?' type of explanations of the *explanandum*. Some further requirements for causal explanation are that the *explanantia* and *explanandum* are logically independent, and that the phenomena related by the causal explanation be 'generic' (that is, may obtain or not obtain on given occasions, and may obtain or not obtain, repeatedly) (see Von Wright 1971 and Hempel 1966).

Important in this regard is that the affirmation of causal explanations of action does not entail that teleological explanations, explanations in terms of means-end chains, are meaningless. While some theorists of explanation wish to assert that teleological explanation is distinct from causal explanation and legitimate in its own right (see the discussion in Von Wright 1971, ch. 3 for instance), a considerable school of thought argues for the inherent reducibility of teleological to causal explanation (see Wright 1976 for an overview, and Woodfield 1976 for further discussion). According to the latter view, teleological explanations are simply causal explanations in another guise, or expressed in convenient short-hand.

If it is correct to say that the relationship between reasons and actions is always causal, there is a respectable credential for any concept of rationality which carries at its core a conception of agency which is teleological. It would simply be a short-hand reflection of the causal foundation to action, and would thus have the generality we require of it. It would, after all, be appropriate in the explanation and moral evaluation of all action. The rational choice framework favoured by Rawls would be vindicated, and the doubts concerning the generality of the Rawlsian principles of justice dispelled.

This conclusion follows only if it is correct to say that actions do indeed stand in a causal relation to the reasons for the action, that this is a necessary feature of agency. Precisely such a claim is forwarded by proponents of the causal conception of reason-action relation sets. For Davidson, for example, any rationalisation (by which he means explanation) of an action must posit a link between a primary reason

and the action, where a primary reason is the conjunction of a pro-attitude toward actions of a certain type, and a belief that a particular action is of that type. Such a primary reason is held to be a cause of the action (all of Davidson's work on action argues, or is based on this point, but see for example, Davidson 1980a:4, 1980a:9, 1980b:31, 1980d:73, 1980d:76, 1980e:83–4). For any explanation of action, such a primary reason would be sufficient to rationalise the action (This is symptomatic of the early Davidson – particularly Davidson 1988a. As will become obvious from the discussion below, Davidson's views progressed over time, in response to various problems which are apparent in the causal conception of the reason-action relation set. As a consequence, the claim to sufficiency is relinquished to be replaced by a claim to necessity.)

But this view is problematic. Consider the case of Oedipus and Jocasta. Oedipus was of the opinion that his marrying Jocasta was an expression of deep, sincere love and appreciation of Jocasta's qualities, that his being drawn to her was a demonstration of the respect in which he held Jocasta. If asked on his wedding day, what the reasons for his action were, he might have stated a primary reason to this effect, couched in terms of a statement of intent. Thanks to Freud, however, we know now that the real reason for Oedipus' marrying Jocasta was the desire to possess his mother. All talk of true love and respect is but a cover for deep inner drives in Oedipus.[11]

How are we to understand this phenomenon in terms of the causal account of action? We have an instance of an action in which the agent is convinced of his reasons for action. He would have fought for his honour if anybody had slighted his motives, and, after all, his response to the discovery of the true state of affairs was quite drastic. And yet – they were not what moved Oedipus to marry Jocasta. He really wanted to possess his mother. What he intended to do was one thing, what caused the action was quite another reason.

Such examples obscure the causal conception of action. The why and the how of the conditionship relations between reasons and intentions, reasons and action, and the intention and the action are obscured. Why and how is it that the conscious primary reason which the agent believed to have causal efficacy, did not come to have such efficacy, and the unconscious desire to possess his mother was the pro-attitude which was truly causally efficacious? What is more, what role does intention have to play in such a conception of action any longer? The intention of Oedipus seems to bear no relation to the performed action whatever, and this despite the fact that action is generally conceived of as intentional doing, such that definitionally intention is central to that which is an action (see Von Wright 1971, Davidson 1980a, Williams 1979).

Davidson has a potential response. Prior to any action the agent holds a plurality of reasons, and the causal conception of action must account for how some primary reasons come to dominate others, to hold causal efficacy, while others do not. His answer argues that action is the conclusion to a practical syllogism (see Davidson 1980a: 15–6, 1980e:84, 1980e:98–9). This has the appealing corollary that we can argue that the Oedipus/Jocasta problem is not very serious after all. It is often the case that we are mistaken about causal claims, and that we are convinced of our errors through reasoned argument. I might think that the loud bang outside the door of my office is caused by a slamming door. In fact, it is caused by the bursting of a balloon. This is something that I may be convinced of, given satisfactory evidence. So, we might say, Oedipus was merely mistaken about his reasons for marrying Jocasta, and reasoned argument managed to convince him of the true reason.

The primary reason for the action is thus no longer a sufficient condition for action, does not suffice to explain the action, but is at best a necessary condition providing the basis for a 'How-possible?' type of explanation. Full explanation requires the practical syllogism. This in itself does not challenge causal explanation, but nor does it truly address the Oedipal puzzle. Oedipus could be said to have held the causally inefficacious primary reasons on the basis of a practical syllogism. That he loved and respected Jocasta, and wished to express his love for her in marriage could have been presented in an appropriate practical syllogism before psychoanalysis. And nevertheless, it is not this, but quite another reason which comes to hold causal efficacy, *overriding* the practical syllogism offered initially. The puzzle is that it is not the practical syllogism that Oedipus consciously derived, but one which he did not which came to hold causal efficacy.

But there is a further problem with the practical syllogism response to the Oedipus dilemma. The relation between reasons and actions is not of the same order as the relations between states of affairs and events in the natural world. My knowledge and experience of the primary reasons that I associate with my actions is of far greater intimacy than my knowledge of the popping balloon before my office door. The evidence which convinces Oedipus that his real reason for his marrying Jocasta is couched not in terms of external events, but in introspection. Oedipus becomes convinced only since he experiences the desire to possess his mother with the same, perhaps greater, degree of intimacy or immediacy as his earlier primary reason for marrying Jocasta. It has to be a practical syllogism that the agent him/herself has to be capable of embracing, which comes to supersede any earlier reasoning for action, and this merely leads us to an infinite regress.

For Oedipus was already once before at the concluding point of a practical syllogism, and that turned out to be wrong, and, in fact, not causally efficacious. How are we ever to tell which is the true cause? We think that reasons cause given actions, but so did Oedipus, and his conviction did not serve.

Obscurity is still very much a feature of the causal account of action, and certainly it appears as if the conjunction of primary reason and practical syllogism is not yet the specification of sufficient conditions for action. We need to establish why it is that some practical syllogisms come to carry causal efficacy, and others do not, and how we go about establishing this.

Are we to fall back on merely necessary conditions for action, and 'How-possible?' rather than 'Why-necessary?' types of explanations? Even this line of defence is blocked, and by Davidson's own admission. Davidson addresses the problem of *akrasia* (see Davidson 1980b), to provide an account of weakness of the will in terms of the causal conception of the reasons-action relation set. The problem is related to the puzzle I formulated with regard to Oedipus. Here the question is how it is possible for reasons which conclusively and genuinely are considered to be weaker than others which the agent holds, nevertheless come to hold causal efficacy. The final answer for Davidson is an admission that for actions that are an expression of the weakness of the will, there are, in the final instance, *no* reasons. This is startling. We have a practical syllogism which definitively backs one (the stronger) primary reason. Yet the practical syllogism backs the primary reason which turns out *not* to be causally efficacious. Davidson has to say that here we have an action for which for which we have to say that there is *no reason, no cause.*

It is no longer clear what causality means in connection with action at all. If primary reason and practical syllogism were to be necessary conditions for action, which is the sense one could salvage for the causal account of action from the argument above, then here we have an action for which primary reasons and practical syllogism ostensibly do not play any role whatsoever. In this instance at least, the primary reason-practical syllogism conjunction does not constitute a necessary condition for the action, and how then are we to know that it does so in other cases?

What remains for Davidson is an admission that what is meant by 'agent causality' is not what is meant by causality generally (see Davidson 1980c). Under such circumstances it is not clear why the term should be used at all, and what it *does* signify.

But I am not satisfied as yet. There is for me another set of difficulties of material importance that attach to the causal conception of the reason-action relation set. The practical syllogism is a

formalised expression of what we might more mundanely call 'deliberation' a term that Williams prefers in this regard (see Williams 1979). Clearly deliberation is a complex term, which I do not profess to have the expertise to unpack. Yet it does not seem odd to class the formulation of practical syllogisms as deliberation, nor does it seem odd to talk of deliberation as a (mental) action. The difficulty for the causal conception of the reason-action relation set here is that the explanation of the logical structure of action is in terms of yet another action. We have not entered into the structure of action at all, but have merely pointed to another, earlier action. There is a circularity at this point, a doubt about the logical coherence of the causal account of action.

To take the query further. If the practical syllogism does indeed fulfil the function Davidson envisages, and it is itself simply another action, why is it that this type of action is given veto-powers over others? After all, we have other decision-making actions, flippings of coins, listening to ancestral voices in the dark of the night, chanting rhymes to choose between alternatives, plucking daisy petals, and so on. What is it that gives practical syllogisms precedence, for the causal conception of action, over other actions which fulfil the same function?

Lastly, if deliberation is itself an action, it too must presumably be related to a primary reason if the causal account of action is to be consistent (unless of course we wish to claim that *this* action type does not have to fulfil this condition; but why this should be the case, needs justification). Now if the agent concerned does not have a pro-attitude to deliberation, according to the causal conception of action the agent does not, and cannot have a reason to deliberate (nor is it clear how it could be established that though the agent does not he/she ought to have the appropriate pro-attitude).

I wish to rest the case against the causal conception of action at this point. While the dismissal of the arguments of a single philosopher cannot serve to establish that a coherent exposition of a causal conception of action-reason relation sets will not be articulated (though I suspect that it will not, since arguments in principle against the causal conception exist), we do not to my knowledge have such an account at present. This closes the door on the defence of a teleological conception of agency and Rawls's concept of rationality. It places the question as to whether Rawls's justice as fairness is truly differentiated enough to capture the full breadth of human experience on the agenda once again. The generality of the Rawlsian project remains in doubt.

An alternative general concept of rationality

The argument above has been that the causal account of action is not available to defend the Rawlsian concept of rationality. But is there no hope that a general ethical theory is attainable, perhaps on other grounds? I wish to explore this possibility on the basis of the link between reason and action.

I argued above that the causal conception of the link between reason and action is not tenable.[12] Yet the causal account seems initially plausible precisely because we are aware of the intimacy of the link between reasons and action. The dismissal of the causal account of action does not question this intimacy, indeed sharpens the question of what the nature of the link is.

The answer I wish to suggest, is to conceive of the link between action and reason not in ontological terms, but linguistically. Reasons are not ontological, but linguistic, propositional entities. As such they can provide *grounds*, not causes for actions (since causes are frequently conceived of as having ontological status). The link between reasons and actions is conceptual and logical, while that between cause and effect is factual and empirical.

The argument for this position is simply that actions are not logically independent of their reasons, that an action is only individuated with respect to the intention with which it was performed. To be able to tell what an action *is*, we have to know the intention with which it was performed. I wish to advance three sets of considerations in support of this contention.

Consider the drinking of a glass of water by an agent. Drinking a glass of water is a doing which has specific physical features, viz that the agent raise a glass filled with clear fluid of a certain density, mass and viscosity to the lips, to tilt the glass in order to allow the fluid to enter the mouth cavity, that swallowing motions convey the fluid into the stomach of the agent. While this description may be inadequate, it (or some description like it) is one speakers of English would recognise as the drinking of a glass of water.

Such drinkings of glasses of water are performed identically (in some sense) by millions of agents daily. It is correct to say that such performances may be indistinguishable from one another. And yet there is a crucial difference between the drinking of a glass of water performed with the intention 'to quench thirst', and a drinking performed with the intention 'to take part in a welcoming ceremony'. The two drinkings are not the same action despite their physical similitude.

Adding luridness to the example may make the point somewhat clearer. Agent A's butchering of B out of pure sadistic pleasure, is not

the same thing as A's butchering of B out of self-defence. The two actions may be physically identical, but it is strange to say that they are the same (type of) action. We distinguish sufficiently between them, so that we would wish to treat A quite differently under the two circumstances. More tellingly, we might hesitate to call the act of self-defence a 'butchering'. The individuation of actions seems to be intimately connected to the intentions with which they are performed.

Of course, many actions we readily or easily identify for what they are, because they are caught in a tightly circumscribed set of rules, they are routine, familiar, we have discussed them at length with the agent, and so on. Yet if I am followed doggedly by a man in a Trilby hat, with a calabash pipe and a large magnifying glass, I wish to know *what* it is that he is doing. And the what is answered not by a description of slinking, and the nature of his attire, but by his intentions in his behaviour. Part of what it is that an agent is doing can only be captured by reference to the intention with which it was performed.

A similar point becomes clear when we consider the means by which we distinguish genuine, from deliberate mistakes (the examples are taken from Davidson 1980b:45). The intentional misreading of a text, misinterpretation of an order, underestimation of a weight, miscalculation of a sum individuates from the unintentional mistake only on the basis of the intention out of which the action was performed. The genuine mistake flows from an action which intends a correct reading etc, and where the slip is inadvertent. The intentional mistake intends the slip, such that the incorrect performance is in fact a correct performance relative to the intention of the agent. Again, the intentional and inadvertent mistakes are quite distinct actions, but the distinction is possible only with respect to the intention with which they were performed.

Lastly, any action has potentially infinite physical descriptions. Davidson's (1980d) flipping of a light switch, is also the turning on of the light, illumination of the room, alerting of the prowler outside the window, disturbing the bird roosting in the tree before the window, providing a beacon to the traveller through the darkness of the night, as well as the movement of air molecules, activation of electron flows, electromagnetic waves, and so on. It is absurd to say that the agent 'did' all of these, that they were all a part of the action of the agent. While Davidson on his causal account is forced to accept that only the hand-movement, the actual flipping of the switch, is a 'true' action, I suggest that the action is individuated by the intention that the agent holds in flipping the switch. The intention contains conditions of satisfaction which specify what must follow from the doing of the

agent, in order for the intended action to have been fulfilled (this specification owes much to Searle 1983). Thus the agent could have intended the illumination of the room, and it is correct to say that the agent's act was one of illuminating the room. However, since he did not intend to disturb the bird before the window, the disturbance was not part of the action (as defined by the conditions of satisfaction of the intention of the agent in flipping the switch), though it was a consequence of the action.

To distinguish actions from the potentially infinite consequences of an intervention in the world, requires reference to the intention with which the action was performed. That the room was illuminated as a result of the flipping of the switch, is distinguished from the movement of air molecules and the alerting of the prowler, by the fact the illumination was intended, and the other results of the doing of the agent were not. It is the intention which provides the means by which consequences which do belong to the action, and those that do not are distinguished. Intention in the doing of the agent allows us to provide descriptions of the action, as opposed to descriptions of bodily movements and their consequences.

The doing of the agent comes to be an action, to be distinct from a mere (reflex) doing of an agent, only when linked in a relation set to a reason (which I have here taken to be identical to an intention) for the action. And the link is a conceptual one. The action is *defined* as a slaking of thirst, with reference to the intention with which it was performed. Any substantive action comes to stand in a conceptual link with a substantive intention.

Reasons thus stand in a conceptual link to action. They impart *meaning* to the doings of agents. The drinking of a glass of water carries distinct meanings if performed with the intention to slake thirst, or in order to give the appropriate signals in a welcoming function. Or the meaning of Oedipus' marriage to Jocasta is not independent of whether he intended to express his sincere love, or wished to possess his mother. The two acts are not the same, carry differentiated meaning, although they could both conceivably be embodied in the same spatio-temporal doing.

Two possible responses to this argument must be considered before we can continue. First, one might argue that intentions are important in identifying what an action is, but that this only means that we have identified its cause. But there are two difficulties with this response. Causal explanation requires logical independence of *explanantia* and *explanandum*, and this is contested by the conceptual link between intention and action. If the link between reason and action is analytic, it destroys the prospect of using reasons in causal explanations, and destroys it in principle. Further, the suggestion that the intention in an

action tells us what it *is* that the agent is doing, clearly places doings of agents on a different plane from events to be grasped by event-causality. The movement of ball A across the billiard table may have a myriad of causes. It may have been struck by ball B, I may have pushed it, the table may have been slanted, or bumped, there may have been an earth tremor. But what it is that ball A is 'doing', is quite distinct from any of these causes, and can be accurately described independently of its cause. With actions by contrast, part of what it is that agents are doing, depends on their intentions. Intentions are conceptually bound to actions.

Second, both Davidson (1980b:14) and Bhaskar (1979:ch.3) argue that it is odd to say that causal relations are empirical rather than logical. If A caused B, then the cause of B is A, and hence by substitution the cause of B caused B. Such a statement is also analytic, they argue, and hence causal statements are not incompatible with what has been argued above. But the objection does not serve. The analytic causal statement does not explain B, in fact it does not tell us anything more about B at all. With the intention-action linkage, we do learn more about the action, or rather what the action is. The abstract concept pairs of cause and consequence, intention and action, may both be conceptually linked. But the same is not true of substantive examples of cause and consequent (consider ball A moving because it was struck by ball B – there is no logical link here), whereas it is true of substantive intentions and actions (the illumination of the room was defined as the action by reference to the intention with which it was performed). Substantive intentions and actions are conceptually linked, whereas substantive causes and consequents are not.

Three consequences of this conception of reasons-action relation sets deserve emphasis for our purposes. First, it makes possible a more general conception of action than the concept of the maximising agent allowed – teleological, normative, expressive, dramaturgical or communicative (for an typification of such classes of action, see Habermas 1981:Part 1, ch.1). All of these types of relation sets between reasons and actions are permissible, depending on the type of nestedness, the meaning-context that we locate the action in.

Secondly, the conception of action can accommodate the fact that any one action may carry more than one meaning. Oedipus can genuinely express *both* his love for Jocasta, *and* live out his desire to possess his mother in the same doing. Or the agent may be both slaking thirst, and participating in a welcoming ceremony in the same drinking of a glass of water. Any one action may have more than one reason, without the puzzle about efficient causation that dogs the ontological conception of the reason-action relation set arising.

Thirdly, and most importantly, it opens the possibility of a more

general conception of rationality, which could be deployed toward a general ethics. It is this that Habermas undertakes in Part 1 of the *Theory of Communicative Action*.[13] Habermas argues on the basis of a normal language argument that at its most general, 'rationality' may be defined as the ability to *ground*, that is give justification for claims to knowledge, or actions, with due regard for the context in which the claim or action is located (see Habermas 1981:Part 1, ch. 1). Only if such grounding can be provided, do we accept as rational claims to knowledge, the efficiency of chosen means to desired ends, the normative correctness of action, the expressive appositeness of affective self-presentation, or the appositeness of symbolic expression.

Such a concept of rationality is thin, in the sense that it carries no substantive content. Rationality is the deployment of the justifications of knowledge claims and actions the life world of agents places at their disposal. Rationality is pared to a purely procedural concept. But it is also argued to be a general concept of rationality, covering the submission of knowledge claims, teleological action, normative action, expressive and dramaturgical activity, and the use or manipulation of shared standards of value, or symbols. It is a concept of rationality which is to be operative across and throughout the life world of agents, and to be able to capture the concepts of action operative within the social sciences as applications of this, more general concept, to specific circumstance.

Its generality moreover, is to serve as the basis of a universal hermeneutics, the basis not only of the comparison, but of the commensurability of different life worlds. It is this capacity which gives it the potential to provide the basis to a general ethics, and it is thus not surprising that it is toward this end that Habermas (1983) aims.

Two problems

I wish to raise two problems associated with the claim to generality of Habermas' concept of rationality. First, the concept is explicitly derived from a normal language argument, which raises the question as to whether it can serve to identify a *universally acceptable* concept of rationality. The normal language argument is couched in a specific, viz. late twentieth century occidental life world, and the question which faces Habermas is just how such a historically particular life world can come to provide the standard of comparison he requires for his universal hermeneutic.

One possible response to such a challenge for Habermas is provided in his discussion of Winch's challenge to any attempt to

construct a universal hermeneutic (see Habermas 1981:Part 1, ch. 2, Winch 1958). The argument is that *any* language game must, as long as it conveys meaning by means of symbolic representation, be engaged in the grounding of the different categories of knowledge claims and action, teleological, normative, expressive, or dramaturgical. It does not matter whether it is a life world employing myth and oracles as interpretative devices, or the late twentieth century occidental life world: the grounding of claims to knowledge, or the efficiency of chosen means to desired ends, the normative correctness of action, and the expressive appositeness of self-presentation is common to both, though the form such grounding takes may be quite distinct.

Winch is quite correct to point to the existence of networks of meaning between concepts, and that such meaning may well be intimately linked to pre-intentional practices of the agents in dealing with their environment, with a know-how rather than knowing-that which intimately shapes the sense agents have of their life world. But it is precisely this linkedness of concepts, of meaning, which makes the grounding of claims to knowledge, to normative correctness, and to efficiency of action, a necessary feature of linguistic interaction between agents. If it is correct that the life world of agents is but the symbiosis of interactively constituted intersubjectivities, it is precisely this that makes the process of argumentatively grounding claims a *necessary* feature of all life worlds.

As long as meaning is conveyed linguistically, therefore, the grounding of claims is not only a necessary feature of the life world of agents located in such webs of meaning, but central to any activity conducted within such life worlds. And this provides us with a point of purchase which allows not only the comparison, but the commensurability of life worlds, of different cultures. For if it is true that all life worlds ground claims of various types, locate the claim in webs of concepts, and of pre-intentional know-how, all activity located in such life worlds becomes one of interpretation. Once again Winch is quite correct in drawing this inference. But this does not entail the conclusion that, since all claims are but interpretations constructed from within a specific context of meaning, there is no means of making the interpretations commensurable.

Commensurability does not stem from the substantive content of the life worlds. On this level it is quite correct that the meanings that the life worlds embody are qualitatively distinct, and incommensurable. But on the *procedural* level, or the meta-interpretative level on which life worlds undertake a reflexive turn in order to examine critically the interpretative activities of the tools the life world provides, commensurability is possible. For *all* life worlds, meaning

is interpretation. Any life world which has become self-conscious of the contingency of its embodied meanings, and institutes procedures which formalise the possibility of a critical self-examination of the content of its claims and activities, has a greater claim to universality than a life world which does not. It embodies the possibility of identifying, and replacing not only substantive interpretations, but also the interpretative procedures which the life world embodies. Such grounding is more comprehensive, more differentiated, and unleashes greater powers of understanding and successful intervention in our world than any unreflexive acceptance of given interpretations can hope to achieve.

It is at this level that modernity, and the social institutionalisation of its epistemological project in science, the efficient use of scarce resources in the pursuit of its ends (eg. in economic policy), its regulation of normative claims in positive law, its sensitivity to the interaction of different dramaturgical conventions, and the engagement of expressive need, becomes superior to that of mythological life worlds. The concretism of mythological life worlds, with their naturalistic vision of society, and anthropomorphic understanding of nature, which stems from the analogical form of categorisation of phenomena, does not admit of the conception of interpretation *as* interpretation. Modernity, by contrast, has undertaken a reflexive turn, is aware of the interpretive character of its claims. Activity, identity, purpose, meaning in modernity come to be located no longer in the substantive content of the claims to which it admits, but in the procedures by means of which it comes to arrive at, verify and to revise its claims. Meaning is located no longer in the content of the life world of agents, but in the processes by which they reflexively and intersubjectively come to constitute that world.

It is in this reflexivity that the *sensitivity* to the possibility of faulty interpretation, and hence the capacity for revision of faulty interpretative devices rests. None of this is to say that modernity provides us with a utopian world. The experience of the twentieth century has put paid to any such idea. Bauman (1989) for instance argues that the occurrence of the Holocaust is intimately connected with the conceptual and technological apparatus which only modernity could provide. In particular, it is the awareness of the possibility of the systematic manipulation of social reality that the reflexivity of modernity provides, which is argued to be a necessary condition of the Holocaust and the Gulag. Sloterdyk (1983) provides further analysis of how the reflexive turn is available not only to the oppressed, but to the oppressor, empowering not only those who are disadvantaged, but allowing the advantaged to cynically employ precisely the sophisticated reflexive awareness of the variety of interpretative mechanisms

(including those of control and meta-control) in use, for the preservation of their advantage.

All of this is well taken. Modernity has its dark side of awesome proportion and consequence. But it also has the capacity to provide the self-awareness, the reflexivity, to identify, to isolate this darkness, and to activate defences against it. No matter what the subtlety of the subterfuge, and the awareness of the power of reflexive interpretation that the oppressor may have, the reflexive turn has placed the unmasking of deceit permanently on the agenda. It is this capacity, this quasi-escape from its own terms of reference that provides modernity with its claim to greater generality than that which came before, and continues to hold open the promise of increased emancipation.

The charge that Habermas' discursive concept of rationality is life world specific, can, therefore, be averted. But there is a second source of particularism which may be argued to attach to the concept. Habermas' concept of rationality is action-theoretic. It rests on the activity of grounding claims and actions in meaning-contexts provided by the life world of the relevant agents. An associated claim is that the concept of (communicative) action which underlies it is foundational to all substantive examples of action. Yet this is the source of the difficulty. One might argue that it is itself merely a variant of teleological, or goal-oriented action (in fact, in Habermas 1981:Part 1, ch.3, Habermas accepts that there is a teleological moment at the heart of his concept of rationality). The process of grounding, as exemplified in the theory of argumentation which underlies communicative action, is based on intentional activity of agents, oriented toward the development of intersubjectively shared situation definitions. Grounding knowledge claims, claims to normative correctness, etc., is goal-oriented, and hence is conceivable in teleological terms.

Again this raises doubts as to the generality of the concept of rationality based on such a conception of action, and the possibility of justifying the existence of a universal hermeneutic on such a concept of rationality. After all, the initial purpose of the Habermasian concept of rationality was to find a common foundation to all forms of action of which teleological action is but one.

In the first intermediate reflection of the *Theory of Communicative Action* (see Habermas 1981:369ff, on which the discussion below is based), Habermas provides the elements of a rebuttal of the notion that communicative action is itself teleological. He argues that communicative action is to be understood in terms of a model of language which precludes an intentional semantics. Language is not shaped by a semantics of representation (Carnap), nor by a semantics based on

the truth conditions of statements (Frege, Wittgenstein I, Davidson, Dummett), but by a semantics of speech acts (Wittgenstein II, Austin, Searle) or a use-theory of meaning. Such a semantics must be capable of capturing not only the representational function of assertions, but the appellative function of the submission of normative claims, and the expressive function of the portrayal of the internal experiences of agents also.

Habermas argues that Austin's concept of illocutionary, as opposed to locutionary and perlocutionary speech acts are foundational to communicative interaction. All linguistic activity presupposes the existence of a shared body of usage, embodying meaning not only in a representational sense, but in the identification of normative standards, and of expressive needs. The point is that made by Cavell (1976 – which is also strongly influenced by Austin's work), viz. that semantics is deeply rooted in, or interwoven with pragmatics. A statement we use cannot be made to mean whatever we choose, since it is always made from *within* a language. If a speaker is committed to communication with hearers of a language, he/she does not have a choice about whether to use the language or not, and using the language entails abiding by the rules of that language (Cavell 1976: 12f). Language imposes a normativeness, a context which includes intimately the way in which words, and combinations of words are used, under what circumstances. But it also shapes that context, in the sense that it provides us with enabling conditions which allow us to perform actions such as promises, make assertions etc. Learning a language is also learning a pragmatics (see Cavell 1976:19–20, 32, 33–4) which prevents us from being able to *choose* what we wish to mean to say by a word, statement or action. They are bound into webs of concepts, pre-intentional know-how, and pragmatic contexts which place them irreducibly into a public domain, give them meaning independently of what the speaker or agent intends to give them.

This much one can follow. But Habermas argues further that perlocutionary speech acts are quite distinct from illocutionary speech acts, on the grounds that the former are, whereas the latter are not, teleological. Illocution aims at communication, perlocution at the teleological manipulation of the hearer toward the ends of the speaker. The point is that perlocutionary manipulation of the hearer by the speaker, toward the speaker's desired ends, presupposes the existence of a shared pool of meaning, which can be strategically employed by the speaker.

Illocutionary speech acts by contrast are not teleological, but are aimed immediately, or directly at communication (Habermas 1981: 389, 394). Illocutionary acts are constrained by their vehicle. A statement exists, comes to be constituted only in public space, in an

intersubjectively shared space of linguistic practices. A statement cannot mean whatever the speaker wishes it to mean. Language is not private, so that the meaning of statements, and the acts that agents perform with such statements, are pre-intentional, in the sense that they precede the intention of agents in uttering such statements.

It is this sharp categorical distinction between illocution and perlocution that is a potential problem. It may be true that illocutionary acts are foundational to the deployment of all linguistic activity. Meaning is pre-formed by the practices of the linguistic space about us, and communication faces the *a priori* of networks of meaning and pre-intentional know-how, without which it cannot be. But the activation of meaning, the utterance of statements, or the deployment of illocution is surely dependent on linguistic agents, and their intentions? We do not just speak, we speak with purpose. Language is available to us as a pool of potentiality – but it remains for us to enter it, orient ourselves within it, and then to move, purposefully, within it so as to achieve our goals. Our speaking is not directionless, but oriented, purposeful, intentional.

The implication here is that illocutionary acts, being intentional, can also be conceived of in teleological terms. Far from being free from a success-orientation, it too has its own criteria of efficiency in the attainment of given goals.

We have arrived once more at a situation in which action is conceived of as goal-oriented, the source of the particularism that was attributed to economic explanations of action at the outset of this paper. Even Habermas' 'general' concept of rationality, with its explicit concern for embracing all forms of action, appears, at its core, to contain this particularity.

Conclusion

So what is it that we have achieved? I began by pointing to charges laid against economics that its fundamental action-theoretic concept, which simultaneously serves as its concept of rationality, is too particularistic to enable it to capture the complexity of social phenomena, let alone to serve as a sound basis for policy formulation.

The argument here has been that if one takes such concerns seriously, the same charges of particularism can be levelled at perhaps the most sophisticated attempt at a general ethics formulated over the past decades. Rawls too, at the basis of his model of justice of fairness has the same concept of rationality as deployed by economists.

Nor was the attempt to arrive at a more general concept of rationality along the lines argued for by Habermas more successful. There too, communicative action remained irreducibly teleological,

and hence not fundamentally distinct from the concept of action which economists deploy.

Two questions pose themselves as corollaries to this argument. The first is whether the implicit assumption that has underpinned this paper, that a general ethics requires a general concept of rationality as a foundation, is well founded. Is it necessary to have such a concept supporting a general ethics, or are conditions specifiable where this is not the case? This is another means of asking just what role rationality is to play in the formulation of an ethical theory and its application to social reality.

The second question is whether it is correct to say that the teleological conception of agency is indeed too particularistic. Again, this has implicitly informed the argument of this paper, and yet the teleological conception of agency and its linkage to concepts of rationality proves curiously intractable. All conceptions of rationality, even those that consciously attempt to escape the teleological action-theoretic base, seem to be forced back to it, to be unable to escape its power, or protean nature.

This paper does not provide many answers. But it does point out that the charge of particularism levelled at economists' conception of agency, if taken seriously, can be damaging beyond the scope of economics. It questions the generality not only of the work of economists, but points to limits in prominent attempts at formulating a general ethics, or a general standard of rationality to support such an ethics. And perhaps goes on to question the coherence of the charge of particularism which informed it.

NOTES

1. That a characterisation of social forms is possible according to the types of agency that it embodies, and is constituted by, Habermas himself argues for in Habermas 1981, see particularly ch. 2 of Part 1. Note also that such a characterisation of the knowledge conditions, may entail probabilistic knowledge of the placement of individuals in society.
2. This point might be defended against game-theoretic intuitions along the Hofstadter line, that agents are rational, and know each other to be rational, and hence capable of identical deliberations. Agents must thus always act on the assumption that other agents will choose in identical fashion. Choices of agents will thus tend to be cooperative, and mutually beneficial where this is possible – see H. I. Brown 1988: 3–6 for an exposition.
3. For an example almost at random, see the discussion in Varian 1984:1–6.
4. In fact Wolff is not, strictly speaking, correct in saying that the economics of the firm holds firms to such uni-dimensional objective functions. Managerial theories of the firm specify more differentiated objectives for firms. As a general question of degree, however, one may accept that firms have more limited objectives than individuals.
5. This is not necessarily the case. Luhmann 1967 argues that systems, or organisations, can come to change their goals under certain circumstances, and this is reflected in the literature on institutional economics.

6. See Hahn 1984, who argues that if objective functions are understood in terms of characteristics, rather than goods, they can be taken to be stable over time.
7. While I have argued that the arguments considered are not telling, Sandel 1982, in his comparison of the moral subject in Rawls and Kant, does offer a strong challenge to Rawls.
8. Risk characterises situations in which we have – perhaps subjective – probability distributions concerning the outcomes of our interventions in the world, see Hirschleifer and Riley 1979 for an overview, and Hodgson 1988:76.
9. Under uncertainty agents no longer have any information for probability distributions, even subjective ones; a rule of minimaxing regret has been suggested in this context, see Elster 1979:117–22.
10. At least this is the explicit position taken by Rawls. It may perhaps be argued that the view of the moral subject deployed above to defend the Rawlsian project, precludes such a narrow concept of rationality. See for instance Rawls 1971:§64, §68 for intimations to this effect.
11. The example chosen here is perhaps misleading. To make the point I do in the following discussion, it is not necessary to invoke deep inner drives. It suffices for my purposes that we may be mistaken about the reasons for our actions, at least some of the time. For instance, in a social setting I may take a drink purportedly because I am thirsty, yet accept without too much deliberation that the 'true' reason for accepting the drink was merely the need to appear sociable. It is such instances, which I believe to be common, where we associate reasons with actions which we come to reject of our own volition, or without the need for deep analysis, which are perhaps paradigmatic for the concern I voice at this point. I keep Oedipus and Jocasta merely for ease of reference.
12. To be precise, the causal account of action was dismissed only insofar as the causal link was posited between reasons and actions. Causal explanations of actions may well be, or come to be, available where the *explanantia* are not reasons. From what will be argued in this section, it should be clear that reasons are excluded from causal explanations of action in principle, however.
13. The development and clarification of the argument below owes much to extensive discussions with Raphael de Kadt, and Jenny Robinson on the work of Jürgen Habermas. Perhaps inappropriately, for a Habermasian communicative context such as those discussions provided, the conventional disclaimer applies.

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Theory, Practice and Development

A Geographical Perspective

Jeff McCarthy

For the more philosophically inclined, the title of this paper may evoke recollections of high levels of abstraction achieved by Jurgen Habermas. Habermas, of course, published an important book during the early 1970s, entitled *Theory and Practice*, but lest I should elicit false expectations at an early stage it should be clarified that my approach to epistemological issues in this paper is more pragmatic than philosophical. That is, it is primarily intended to assist in (intellectually) situating practical concerns within modern geography for the generalist within the sciences, humanities or social sciences.

In addition, a secondary purpose of the paper is to develop certain hypotheses that are relevant to the development of theory within the discipline of geography itself. Theory has developed, unfortunately, in a somewhat independent fashion from applied work in geography. Nevertheless, one hypothesis of this paper is that, in the geography of development at least, theory cannot be easily separated from practice.

Theory has on the one hand been at the leading edge of the growth of geography as a research-oriented discipline which, in turn, has led to applied relevance. On the other hand, the applied relevance of the field is itself now waiting to be taken seriously in the development of geographical methodology and theory – hence the emphasis upon epistemological issues and the interaction between theory and practice in the structure of this paper.

A final point that should be made by way of introduction concerns the rationale for an emphasis upon specifically urban and development issues in this paper on the more general field of geography. The urban emphasis derives partly from the author's history of specialised urban research interests. There is however also a broader motivation for both the urban and the development emphases that originates from a wider interpretation of the primary challenges facing our society as a whole in the decade ahead.

As has been argued elsewhere, these primary challenges relate to political accommodation and economic growth, and a satisfactory response to both will be partly dependent upon creative new

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approaches to specifically urban reconstruction and urban development.[1] In brief, the argument is that:

- For almost two decades now, South Africa's economic growth rate has lagged in relation to population growth, and the form of economic growth has been neither labour-intensive nor orientated towards the satisfaction of basic human needs. In consequence, unemployment has reached near tragic proportions, whilst there has been a neglect of basic urban services such as housing, water and electricity for the majority of the population. The primary development challenges therefore relate to the attainment of an economic growth path that both eases unemployment and satisfies basic needs.

- Politically, South Africa is being driven towards an accommodation of the major black and white nationalisms. Amongst the key challenges remaining are, first, to find new, unifying, political symbols around which accommodation can coalesce and, second, to establish mechanisms for the resolution of conflicts of material interest between supporters of these contending nationalisms. The achievement of an interim or coalition government, it is hypothesised, will be a critical initial stage in this process of political accommodation.

- The principal locational and demographic dimensions to both these challenges relate essentially to *urban* reconstruction and *urban* development. This is because it is in the cities and in the metropolitan areas that South Africa's people are overwhelmingly concentrating, and because local and regional political accommodation may well have to precede, or at least accompany, parallel moves at a national level. Moreover there is good reason to expect that a labour-intensive approach to the supply of state-subsidised, but small-business-implemented, basic services is essential to both economic recovery and political accommodation. At the very least such an approach to the cities could provide one ingredient of a new, post-apartheid economic policy framework, and it could also provide potential material rewards around which new, popular political constituencies might be mobilised.[1]

It is against such a background that the present paper seeks to explore some of the more challenging conceptual issues that lie ahead for those who are concerned with the growth of the field of development geography and, more particularly, the aspects of the field that relate to urban development.

It is the separation of theory from practice that will occupy centrestage in our analysis of these issues, although a discussion of such a tension must necessarily raise associated concerns. Specifically, the paper is structured into an analysis of the following derivative concerns: a discussion of geographical approaches to the concept of development; a consideration of the nature of theory in development geography; and an interpretation of the relationships between theory, practice and geography, including the subsidiary issues of: observation, participation and action; and action, context and locality. This gives rise to the penultimate section of the paper which focuses on an illustration of some of the relationships between local, regional and national development challenges, and the paper concludes with a brief prospectus for development geography during the 1990s.

The concept of development: a geographical approach

Despite its widespread usage, the concept of development itself is seldom precisely defined. Indeed, those who use the term widely seem comfortable with its polyvalence. A general feature of most meanings imputed to the term, however, is the notion of progression towards some assumed state of 'maturation'. The development of the child, in psychology, the development of management skills in business administration or the development of the forces of production in economics, for example, each share major elements of this meaning.[2]

One of the best known books on development which assumed this maturationist meaning was W.W. Rostow's *Stages of Economic Growth* – an influential work which incidentally had the subtitle 'A Non-Communist Manifesto'.[3] Paradoxically, like Marx who assumed an historical progression of all social and economic development towards the social 'end state' of communism, Rostow periodised the development of all societies along a continuum that ended in the so-called stage of 'high mass consumption' – an emulation, in effect, of American suburbia in the 1960s.

The use of the concept of development in geography has shared certain of these (often ethnocentric) assumptions, but to be fair it has also elsewhere focused upon the locally and spatially distinctive aspects of development *potential*. For this reason, geographers have tended to be more open-ended in their notions of the 'end states' of development. These states are generally seen as the relatively unique products of various local configurations of human and natural resources.

The analysis of these relatively unique combinations might include the study of certain common elements of socio-economic, environmental and spatial relationships. Indeed, at different stages in the development of the discipline, either the unique or the general have been emphasised, but both have always been there. Overall, the balance that is required in geographical research between spatial and environmental generalities on the one hand, and local and regional specifics on the other, has usually acted as a brake upon fixed or deterministic notions of 'outcome' within the geographical literature on development.

In the sub-field of urban development, for example, a comparative analysis of urban growth trends between Bloemfontein, Harare and Pietermaritzburg might seem sensible from the point of view of their several commonalities: they are of similar size, they have been or will be subject to similar politico-economic tensions, and each is strongly biased towards rural service-centre and public sector administrative economic functions. Reflecting upon the future development prospects of these three cities, moreover, would require that we draw upon the now very substantial body of general development principles applicable to *all* cities – principles such as the distance decay function of land values and land use intensity, the role of intra-urban transport networks in shaping urban interaction, etc.

Nevertheless, and quite critically, a geographical analysis of the potential development futures of Bloemfontein, Harare and Pietermaritzburg would not imply that each will converge upon a similar end state. Each centre has its own local comparative advantages and its own historical, contextual template from which development will progress. Hence we are faced with the notion of development *contingencies* shaping the futures of these cities.

Theory, geography and development

The notion of the contingence of developmental outcomes in a discipline such as geography immediately raises the issue of the *theory* of development. Is it being proposed, it may well be asked, that theory, in the general scientific sense of that term, is impossible within the field of development geography? The answer to this question must be an unequivocal 'no', but in order to understand why this is so, it is necessary to appreciate what it is that most contemporary geographers understand by theory, and by contingence. First, let us briefly deal with theory.

At one time, theory in geography was seen as being very close to empirical regularity, and theory was often regarded as generalisation based upon such regularities.[4] Good examples of this within the field

of development geography were theories of core-periphery relationships, and theories of the diffusion of modernisation and development.[5] In simplified form, the propositions of these theories were as follows:

(i) The progression in Rostow's terms from 'traditional society' through a 'take-off' phase, and a drive towards an 'age of high mass consumption' has a distinctive spatial expression – development begins in a series of recently modernised enclaves, usually at the coast, and then it diffuses in a pattern of more or less contiguous expansion into a 'traditional' hinterland. Regional inequalities, in consequence, may be at their most pronounced during the take-off phase in the Rostovian periodisation. Ultimately however, there will be a spatial homogenisation of the social and economic characteristics of the society once the processes of social modernisation and economic development are complete.[6]

(ii) The temporal speeding up and geographical spreading out of social modernisation and economic growth are therefore seen to constitute appropriate missions for development planners. The development of a network of urban centres linked together as a functional whole through a system of modern communications, in particular, is regarded as assisting this process. The 'hierarchical diffusion of innovation' downwards through the evolving 'central place system' is regarded as a major element of this process of development, and almost a generation of development planners therefore became interested in the structure of intra-urban systems and the networks of communications and information linking these centres together.[7]

A variety of dependency and Marxist 'rebuttals' of this diffusionist theory occupied the attentions of several development geographers during the 1970s, but unfortunately development theory in geography itself did not advance very far through these. Rather, what most often happened was a simple standing of the principles of the older diffusionist theory upon their heads. Consider, for instance, the case of the diffusion of innovation and modernisation.

The Brazilian development geographer, Milton Santos, captured the dependency theorist mood of the 1970s with his book *The Shared Space: The two circuits of the urban economy in underdeveloped countries*.[8] Here Santos argued *inter alia* that, even in the most remote localities of Brazil, there was a systematic undermining of the consumption styles of traditional societies. This led to the increasing

dependence of poor, rural people upon goods offered for sale for cash, and their propensity iteratively to submit themselves to the exploitation of urban wage labour in order to procure such goods. A process of 'unequal exchange' was then assumed to take place between core and peripheral regions, based partly upon the diffusion of consumption styles from the core of the world economy to even the most remote regions of the periphery.

The dependency critique of modernisation helped to unmask the ethnocentricism of the diffusionist paradigm, and contributed the important ingredient of conflict and exploitation to the more general geographical theory of development.[9] Nevertheless, careful analysis of structures of development and underdevelopment, as opposed to the study of development-related events, awaited the contribution of a generation of Marxist-structuralists. Marxists were much less trite about the role of relationships versus events in the construction of theory, but they in turn often demonstrated either disdain for empirical work, or the expectation that such work should automatically illuminate the need for socialist revolution, as opposed to any other possible path towards development.[10] In consequence, the development debate during the early to mid-1980s became either obscure and over-theoretised, or highly polemical.

The emergence of a realist school of geographers in the mid-1980s, however, did much to bridge the gap between abstract theory and concrete research, and recovered some scientific basis for the field, in part by making allowance for a diversity of political perspectives on the same development condition.[11] In addition, realism's distinctions between necessary and contingent relations provided a means by which former dialecticians, amongst others, could retrace their way back to concrete research. The concepts of necessity and contingence, for example, are ones that are now well-known in local planning and development circles, partly as a result of the implicit application of realist methodologies within scenario-building projects.

In one such project applied in the South African context, we distinguished between 'rules of the game' and 'key uncertainties' in predicting different development outcomes for the Durban Functional Region (DFR). The various permutations and combinations of these necessary and contingent features of the region's dynamics provided us with realistic bases for the assessment of a range of possible development outcomes.[12]

To recap, therefore: the status of theory in development geography is now such that deterministic notions of development outcome are avoided, and a simple event-orientation is replaced with a more structured notion of the necessary and contingent relations underpinning causality.

Theory, practice and geography

Perhaps the most complex of conceptual issues that now confronts contemporary development geography, however, is the relationship between theory and practice. The reasons for this complexity are twofold. The first derives from a concern with the concept of objectivity, as developed within the traditional sciences and social sciences. This has led to the now apparently commonsense wisdom that engagement with one's objects of study results in 'biased results'. On the other hand, applied relevance in development work almost inevitably requires some level of interaction with one's objects of study. Let us examine this tension in a little more detail, before moving on to the second epistemological issue associated with theory and practice – that is, the locational context for social action.

Observation, participation and action

The separation of the observer from the observed is something that is seen to provide a logical point of departure – a state of 'naturalness' – for much of conventional social science. The main exception to this rule within the mainstream of the social sciences is to be found in anthropology (and in certain remote corners of sociology) where 'participant observation methodology' has enjoyed a measure of support.[13]

Participant-observation (PO) situates the academic observer within the group he or she is studying, and recommends the temporary submergence of the observer within the value systems of the observed. For example, if we are to understand the shifting agricultural practices of a tribe say in New Guinea, it is indicated by PO that we must suspend our own ethnocentric assumptions and live with the tribespeople for a while in order to grasp the particular cultural template that informs those agricultural practices.[14]

As Willis notes, however, even participant observation has its critics for not being *sufficiently* engaged:

> Participant observation has directed its followers towards a profoundly important methodological possibility . . . the possibility of *being surprised*; of reaching knowledge not prefigured in one's starting paradigm. . . . [However it is particularly in the] *interlocking* of human meanings that there is the possibility of 'being surprised' . . . in terms of the generation of 'new' knowledge, we 'know' what it is, precisely not because we have shared it – the usual notion of 'empathy' – but because we have *not* shared it. . . . It is time to ask and explore, to discover the differences between subjective positions.[15]

We have in this passage from Willis a rationale for what the South Americans now term 'participant action research' (PAR).[16] During a period of practical engagement with urban development issues in a variety of urban neighbourhoods in the early 1980s, this concept of PAR was the basis of our approach to both the theory and the practice of urban development. The case of Clairwood in Durban may assist in illustrating some of the elements of this methodology.[17]

In Clairwood during the early 1980s, a number of young academic activists, including the author, were locked in combat with City Hall and the City Engineer's Department. These local bureaucracies were intent on industrialising a neighbourhood that held considerable symbolic resonance for poorer, Indian people living in the area, and indeed for many people living outside the area as well. Even to an informed outsider, Clairwood today looks like a fairly modest, low-income settlement both in scale and in quality, but at one time it comprised the biggest settlement of Indians outside of India, which partly explains the density of its cultural symbolism.[18] Public opposition to the industrialisation was therefore strong, and there were convincing planning/technical arguments that could be made against industrialisation as well.

The monopoly of financial, legal and technical resources on the opponents' side was nevertheless intimidating since our group comprised only a relatively small group of junior academics and clerics, and a highly committed but poor group of tenants and home-owners. In conventional scientific terms we were way out-classed in the planning debate by the manpower, skills and information at the disposal, for example, of City Hall and the City Engineer's department. These employed hundreds of professionals, and had the benefit of decades of accumulated development experience.

Ultimately, however, the modest people of Clairwood prevailed. The reason for their success, in my view, derived ironically in part from their own wide network of shared information, but more particularly from their group-critical approach to this information in the process of practical problem solving. An anecdote might assist to bring this advantage into focus.

At one stage in the struggle to prevent evictions and property expropriations from poorer people in Clairwood, we were of the understanding that the City Council had given the order to their officials not to proceed any further down the road of undermining the residential viability of the area.[19] We were aware, through our previous attempts and representations, that the city bureaucracy was extremely hostile to our proposals, but we had also assumed that the then dominant liberal Durban councillors were our supporters, and that the moratorium would hold. Hence it was literally a period of

working at the drawing boards, identifying alternative industrial land and replanning the Clairwood neighbourhood.[20]

One evening we received an emergency telephone call from the civic association to the effect that a photocopy machine operator at City Hall had discovered an anomaly in our operating paradigm. An agenda for a very high level meeting had been intercepted, which several of the liberal councillors and senior officials were to attend. The agenda prepared by the city bureaucracy indicated an attempt to secure strong Council support for the industrialisation of Clairwood. A meeting of civic association members and academics late that evening allowed us to restructure our paradigm, to re-analyze our strategies and tactics, and to get to the liberal councillors prior to their actually receiving the offending agenda.

This move proved quite decisive in the overall Clairwood conflict, and allowed the civic association to divide at least some of the councillors from the antagonistic bureaucrats, and hence advance our own development purposes. Methodologically, the civic association had been apprised of the advantage of surprise, and this surprise had been permitted us through the information and insights of blue collar workers who were associated with a largely white collar academic team in the process of concrete, collective and critical problem solving at the metropolitan level.

In this context it is worth reflecting on the parallels with South American experience. In a recent volume of essays published by the International Sociological Association entitled *Globalization Knowledge and Society*, a South American contributor, Borda, reflects on the development of participant action research (PAR):

> It is obvious that the aims (of PAR) go beyond the academic traditions which have emphasised value neutrality and a positivist objectivity as prerequisites for 'serious science'. PAR does not negate the need for discipline and continuity in accumulating and systematising knowledge, and it hopes to draw such qualities from academe. However, it would induce a reorientation in teleological terms that would lead to more integrated and popular, or common-sensical, knowledge.[21]

To summarise, therefore, participation in action-oriented research can have distinct methodological advantages in the resolution of concrete problems. But the proposition that there is a potential convergence between the systematised knowledge accumulated by academe, and popular or commonsensical knowledge, is one that immediately raises a second complexity associated with theory and practice: the problem of the parochialism of social practices and their relationship to development theory.

Action, context and locality

A discussion of a tiny neighbourhood such as Clairwood evokes questions of parochialism. Hence, I begin this discussion with a paradox: on the one hand, sensitivity to the nuances of local change provides the advantage of grasping the existential relevance of development. On the other hand, limiting our intellectual horizons to local detail can lead to a theoretical parochialism. In order to escape such parochialism, one needs to become aware of how locality systematically structures our actions.

How often do we think of our social and development practices as being both circumscribed and informed by the localities and spatial relationships within which they are embedded? My own observation is that we are all quite naïve about such locational contexts by comparison, say, to our hypersensitivity to historical context.

Yet the British sociologist, Giddens, develops the argument that instead of 'period' being the primary context for understanding the interaction between human initiative and social context, we should broaden our analysis to understand human initiative within *time-geographic* contexts.

Giddens reflects, for example, on the role of micro-scale time-geographic regimens in the exercise of discipline and social control in schools:

> Modern schools are disciplinary organisations, and their bureaucratic traits clearly both influence and are influenced by the regions they contain. Like all forms of disciplinary organisation, the school operates within closed boundaries, its physical borders being cut off rather clearly from day to day interaction outside. A school is a 'container', generating disciplinary power. The enclosed nature of school life makes possible a strict co-ordination of the serial encounters in which the inmates are involved.[22]

This entrapment of 'inmates' within spatial structures is not, of course, limited to the school. Rather, the school becomes the place in which young humans become habituated to certain spatio-temporal disciplines required for employment in later life. The American sociologist Richard Sennett, in his book *The Fall of Public Man*, draws our attention to myriad examples of this same process in society at large, and he is particularly astute in his assessment of the role of modern corporate architecture in securing internal structures of managerial dominance and workforce control.[23]

A similar line of thought has been developed in France by Foucault on the birth of the prison system and he draws parallels between the prison and the use of space to control various forms of social deviance in a wide range of everyday life circumstances. In one of his essays

Foucault alerts his academic colleagues to their own potential confinement to their desks, offices, universities and, more especially to their disengaged philosophical paradigms.[24] It is here that we come closest to the challenges of intellectual parochialism in the development of theory and practice within academe, but it is also true that many find the philosophically orientated works of the likes of Foucault obscure, and difficult to translate into practice.

We might agree that many researchers become subconsciously trapped by their routinised time-space-rhythms into a theoretical parochialism, but the problem of academic confinement, and its relationship to conservatism and social discipline, does not rest simply upon associations with spatial confinement. It may be true that the office and the desk reinforce an alienated separation between the observer and the observed. But this distance derives perhaps more importantly from the observer's alienation from *engagement*, and his or her abstinence from conscious participation within processes of social change.

Yet, neither passivity nor engagement with processes of change are themselves entirely voluntarily adopted, and they depend partly upon the *spatial situatedness* of that passivity or engagement. Thus for example even the most active of participant-action researchers has tended to confine his or her research practices to a specific neighbourhood or metropolitan area. I shall have cause to reflect again upon some implications of this irony shortly when I consider the relationship between local, regional and national development challenges in South Africa's future.

Some illustrations

Before doing this, however, it may be helpful to travel metaphorically to other South African centres in order to illustrate some of the challenges that can be posed by the relationships between action, context and locality in concrete development work: the cases of inner-city neighbourhoods in Cape Town and Johannesburg may serve to highlight these challenges. Considering, first, the case of Cape Town, most South Africans will presumably be aware of the extraordinary symbolic resonance of District Six within a context of forced removals and the implementation of the Group Areas Act.[25]

District Six has more recently become at once a shrine to the historic follies of apartheid planning, and a development opportunity for the symbolic reconquest of urban space in the building of new, post-apartheid urban forms. In consequence, a great deal of practical and intellectual energy has gone into thinking about and planning for the redevelopment of District Six, much of it conceived and initiated

in the mid-1970s, and most of it pioneering in terms of what was possible in urban development at that stage. The work of Dewar and the associated initiatives of the so-called 'Headstart' redevelopment company in Cape Town deserve special acknowledgement here.[26]

However, as Dewar and his Cape Town colleagues would acknowledge today, there is a sense which District Six itself implicitly became a paradigm for early to mid-1980s urban planning thought in much of South Africa – thought which emphasised the need for densification and infill development, walk up apartments, the use of buffer zones of empty intra-urban space, etc. This paradigm is still helpful in the broader project of post-apartheid urban reconstruction, but it is not necessarily directly relevant to the most critical of development challenges in Cape Town today. These now lie principally on the windswept Cape Flats where hundreds of thousands of poor people huddle beneath plastic and tin in self-help squatter camps – camps which are currently growing at a rate which make Cape Town, and no longer Durban, the fastest growing urban centre in the country.[27]

District Six is of course far more visible within the everyday rhythms of life in more privileged society, being placed for example between the fashionable suburbs of Rondebosch and Constantia (and of course the University) on the one hand, and the Cape Town CBD and its latest associated leisure zones, including the fashionable Victoria and Albert Waterfront, on the other. But the mass of people living beneath plastic and tin are almost deliberately hidden from everyday view, and it requires a concerted effort to break out of the time-space rhythms of the average urban professional to bring them into focus. Such efforts have been made, not least by those who have been pioneers of the redevelopment of District Six, but it is nevertheless more difficult for such pioneers to 'sell' the upgrading of the mass of peripheral shack dwellers to a constituency of less adventurous urban professionals, than it has been to 'sell' the redevelopment of District Six.

In consequence, despite the best efforts of Cape Town's planning pioneers, development theory and practice in the city will likely remain influenced by the envelopes of everyday life routine adopted by Cape Town's more conventional civic and planning fraternities, notwithstanding the celebration of a popular, post-apartheid urbanism around District Six by all concerned. The same is of course true of other cities, and is applicable, for example, to Durban's development challenges where there is a temptation to focus effort on architecturally glamorous projects such as the redevelopment of the Point, and to neglect the challenge of everyday living conditions for the almost half of the DFR's citizens who live in informal settlements.

Considering now the Johannesburg inner city challenge, we can begin with the observation that, paradoxically, the Johannesburg inner city environment has elicited very little interest from academics either in geography or in urban and regional planning. This is despite the facts that there has been a rapid tendency towards slum development in certain areas, and yet about one half of South Africa's private office space is located in the nearby Johannesburg CBD, and a good deal of South Africa's pension money is tied up here, for example through the long term investment decisions of major insurance houses.[28]

Two exceptions to this lack of interest have been the work of Beavon and his colleagues and students at the University of the Witwatersrand on the one hand, and that of Fick of the Rand Afrikaans University's Department of Development Studies on the other. I shall concentrate here on the latter. Fick's concern with the Johannesburg inner city stemmed, at least partly, from his own pattern of engagement; in his case, as deputy chairman of the Management Committee of the Johannesburg City Council. Fick was particularly impressed, during the early 1980s, with the anomaly between the government's policy of Group Areas and the local settlement realities of downtown Johannesburg. By the mid-1980s inner-city neighbourhoods such as Hillbrow and Joubert Park had become almost 50 percent black in occupance, despite their formal designation as 'white' group areas. This hiatus between demographic realities and policy conditions was a major contributor to the demise of building quality and living conditions in the inner city.[29]

The work of Fick (who incidentally was a prominent Johannesburg member of the governing National Party) and his colleagues at RAU alerted national political actors – or at least those within Fick's camp – to the existence of local anomalies within a context of national policy. In Fick's view these anomalies were sufficient to justify a review of the policy itself.[30] It seems probable, however, that his contribution on local anomalies within group areas policy was inserted into the national policy arena in a manner somewhat different to that which he himself expected.

More specifically, it was this type of work that initially informed the policy move towards spatially circumscribed integration, in the form of the so-called Free Settlement Areas Act, and the designation of Hillbrow/Joubert Park as amongst the first so-called Free Settlement Areas.[31] In this case, research and action based upon specific localities, while it was meant to inform national change, became trapped by national forces into a narrowly local application.

Fortunately for Fick, and for us all, there were other dynamics of change at work at the national and international levels which were rather greater than those who wished to constrain desegregation to the

level of individual localities. Nevertheless, the point remains that local research and action for national change do not necessarily provide the intended national effects. With these observations in mind, we move to a consideration of the relationships between South Africa's local, regional and national development challenges.

The relationship between local, regional and national development challenges

Being conscious of the way in which local, regional and national development challenges intersect is an important part of the science of effective urban, rural and regional development. The confluence of these challenges is, however, a complex area which, in my own experience, often produces surprising results.

Let me begin with local development issues and their relationships to regional and national contexts. Consider, once again, the neighbourhood of Clairwood alluded to in earlier discussion of participant action research (PAR). On the one hand, Clairwood could have become a trap for intellectual parochialism in the urban development field. By comparison, say, with the vistas of space available in Durban's Cato Manor area – a vast urban tract from which thousands of forced removals were effected in terms of Group Areas legislation, and which still lies fallow today – Clairwood is minuscule and, in addition, the conflict there was over competing land uses, and not the use of an historically wasted resource, as is the case in Cato Manor today. Moreover, even Cato Manor, when viewed from a national context, appears a mere microcosm of a broader national claim for lower income housing opportunities nearer to the centres of our cities.[32]

The first point to be made in relation to such comparisons is that, clearly, it is important to link together such local issues in metropolitan practice. This is exactly what some populist organisations did during the mid 1980s. The issues of both Cato Manor and Clairwood, and others besides, were situated within the context of a critique of inefficient, apartheid urbanism, and the exclusion of poor people from local control over urban development through the undemocratic character of local government. Civic federations such as the Durban Housing Action Committee (DHAC) played an important role during the early to mid 1980s in making these connections clear.[33]

In addition, the insights provided by fairly conventional metropolitan geographical analysis contributed significantly in linking local issues together across both space and time. For instance, in our critique of the industrialisation of Clairwood, we were led to criticise the inefficiency of metropolitan planning for industry in the DFR in

general. The bulk of industry in the DFR, we pointed out in a 1983 publication in support of the Clairwood residents, was located to the south of Durban, whereas most housing development was occurring to the north. This led to costly and inefficient commuting patterns across the city, increased congestion and transportation infrastructure costs, etc. In consequence, it made sense to look for alternative sites for industrialisation to the north of Durban. In response to requests from liberal city councillors that we find alternative land for industry, we identified such land in the sugar fields just north of the Mgeni River.[34]

Strikingly, this identification has remained valid in a metropolitan planning context. In a broader planning forum for the DFR conducted some seven years later, and involving an almost entirely different group of individuals, the concept of a mixed use activity corridor, including major elements of industry in these same areas, was indicated as one of the priority 'action plans' for development.[35] The theory of metropolitan planning, therefore, not only exists independently of specific local contexts. It can be activated and reactivated by practical work at quite different times, and in a variety of local contexts.

Likewise, applied work at a regional scale can inadvertently cause breakthroughs at local or national scales. Consider, for instance, the coming challenges of regional development policy. At one time this scale of policy had little to do with regional complexity, and was rather a form of central planning applied to the intra-national location of industry. This so-called regional development policy has now failed world-wide, and has thankfully finally been replaced, even in South Africa, with an emphasis upon 'bottom-up' regional development.[36]

While the theory of bottom-up regional development is now positively *avante garde* in South Africa, the meaning of such work in practice remains unclear, not least because a debate on the nature of South Africa's future development regions themselves has not yet begun, let alone have we progressed to the point of specific, bottom-up development practices within particular regions. Nevertheless, it would be my hypothesis that when the debate on South Africa's new regions begins in earnest shortly, it will reverberate strongly at both the local and national scales.[37]

The National Party has, for example, already recently hinted at its regional-federalist vision for South Africa based, it would appear, partly upon the nine envisaged development regions for South Africa. Regional federalism is not something that one would want to disagree with in principle. But whether the nine development regions will prove acceptable to other major contenders in the constitutional arena

remains to be seen. In addition, in retrospect we can now see that the ostensibly technocratic work on the nine development regions by Development Bank personnel in the early 1980s, in practice, has become less than politically benign.[38] Regional development work, then, can have surprising impacts even at the national scale.

The penultimate point that should be raised under a consideration of relationships between various geographical levels of development challenge relates to that of national policy formulation in respect of new urban, rural and regional policy frameworks for the country. Over the past few years the author was fortunate enough to have been a participant in the formulation and production of at least one set of such policy frameworks – those developed by the Urban Foundation and published as a suite of policy monographs under the series heading *Urban Debate 2000*.[39] There are of course numerous points that could be made in relation to such an experience but, in the context of the present paper, one conclusion stands out strongly: that is, the methods of analysis and policy development were, ironically, remarkably similar to the participant action research (PAR) methods used, locally for example, by civic associations and, abroad, in urban social movements.

Of course, the scale of research and strategic activity was rather larger in the Urban Foundation work; but the basic concepts of collective, critical engagement with processes of change, and competitive interaction with structures of power, were there. In this respect there is considerable methodological continuity with projects that allegedly derive from a different political profile, and which are located more at the grassroots level, as opposed to that of the national policy canvass. Moreover, there was similarity in the relative success of such initiatives, and returns to efforts made. Since this is the case, perhaps the time has come for us to begin to formulate a more general theory of urban and regional process and policy development: one that is not necessarily fixed in a specific political ideology or rooted at a particular geographical scale.

Finally, however, to reflect now on the national scale, South Africa itself has unfortunately, over the past decade, become the background against which the boundaries of the South African development imagination have been framed. The reconstruction of South Africa's economy, polity and human landscapes towards new, post-apartheid forms must clearly be the top priority for any responsible pattern of engagement with the development challenges of the next decade. To do this effectively will require great sensitivity to the geographical legacy of apartheid and the variety of scars it has left behind, and also to the complex local, regional and environmental diversity that

characterises the South African whole. However, it will require, in addition, that South Africans begin to move out of their phase of relative international isolation, and in particular that they learn from international experience what is and what is not possible, and what is, and is not, desirable in the development of our cities, regions and rural areas.[40]

In looking outside of our national and nationalist consciousness, however, it would seem that one die has now been cast, partly as a result of recent theoretical work on the geography of development, and partly as a result of the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe. That is, we have now more or less reached the conclusion that there can be no universal, international theory of national development and reconstruction that can, on the one hand, reply to the legacy of previous national policies, and on the other draw inspiration from historical precedent. We have reached the end of hope placed in both historicist and maturationist development theories, and instead, it is geographically situated development complexes which are viewed as the relatively open-ended arenas for creative social practices aimed at improving the human condition. These practices, in turn, will now be judged more by their practical outputs, and less by their theoretical propositions.

Conclusion: a prospectus for the 1990s

In a recent, extremely popular book by the American geographer-planner Soja, entitled *Postmodern Geographies*, the author assembles a galaxy of European new left luminaries in support of the notion that 'geography matters' to the development of post-modern social theory.[41] Amongst those cited by Soja is the British art critic and novelist John Berger, who, in the midst of reflecting upon the form of the novel, also manages to penetrate into the roles of space and time in post-modern forms of exploitation:

> Prophecy now involves a geographical rather than historical projection; it is space not time that hides consequences from us. To prophesy today it is only necessary to know men (and women) as they are throughout the whole world in all their inequality. Any contemporary narrative which ignores the urgency of this dimension is incomplete and acquires the oversimplified character of a fable.[42]

We are, or at least should, all be rather familiar with this proposal in South Africa today. At least one function of apartheid was to hide consequences from us, including the consequences of unequal development. The Group Areas city was, for example, specifically designed to inhibit spatial interaction amongst the race groups whom,

the Verwoerdian urban designers had decided, should live separately from each other. Natural barriers to interaction, such as rivers or mountains, were proposed as the most appropriate boundaries for group areas, failing which strong artificial barriers such as railway lines or freeways were indicated as divides. In the event of neither of these options being available, open spaces of land known as 'buffer strips' were to be located between Black, Asian, Coloured and White group areas, to serve as barriers to inter-racial interaction.[43] In the rural areas similar devices of separation have been employed, so that the average person travelling between cities and metropolitan areas in South Africa today is often quite unaware, and even shocked, at the existence of deep rural poverty. Yet, economic and geographic research indicates that such poverty exists on a grand scale, with over two thirds of the black inhabitants of South Africa's rural areas now living in absolute poverty.[44]

Development is of course an enterprise broader than that which can be reflected through a single academic discipline. Indeed, it is one of those challenges that requires cross-disciplinary co-operation, since real development problems do not conveniently segregate themselves into disciplinary categories. The emphasis of the present paper has been on a geographical dimension to development, insofar as I have identified some of the methodological issues that derive from the interaction of theory and practice within the contexts of our often limited, individual time-geographic horizons. This emphasis has required that I draw, in large measure, upon personal experience in order to highlight the particular methodological challenges that lie in wait for us all in development geography in the decade ahead. Nevertheless, I believe that it is possible to draw conclusions that may be of general relevance to future practice in the cross-disciplinary field of development:

- First, to return to my starting point, it is helpful to situate our responses to the development challenge within the context of a political, economic and locational analysis of the key development priorities in this country in this period of our history. Such focus maximises returns to effort invested. In effect, this requires that we contextualise our research and project work within a framework of both material and urban reconstruction.

- Second, it is important that we recognise the contingence of potential development outcomes. It must be emphasised that local and regional development specifics are the product of different permutations and combinations of both particular 'rules of the game' and 'key uncertainties'. This kind of analysis

also allows that human actions can make a difference, and that social structures are only part of the process of social determination.

- Third, we have to make a sustained effort to overcome the routinised spatial and environmental barriers to our own experiences of development challenges. This entails becoming aware of our individual time-space routines, and adapting and/or interrupting these routines where necessary. It also requires the continued and creative use of the traditional tools of geographic analysis – for example, the topocadastral map, the air photograph, or the computer-assisted analysis of spatially distributed data so as to discover geographical realities hitherto unknown.

- Fourth, we need to conduct our research and project work on a variety of geographical scales, and we must remain open to the unexpected transfer of theoretical insight from one geographical scale to another. A focus on the urban scale may be justified given contemporary demographic trends, but there are many urban centres of different sizes, each connected into regional and international economies in different ways, each affected in their growth by developments in a rural hinterland, and each characterised by complex neighbourhood patterns. All of these scales matter to the quality of development outcomes.

- Fifth, and finally, we must recognise that both development theory and practice entail a process of engagement with processes of social change. A hypothesis of this paper has been that critical, collective problem-solving in practical development situations is a powerful analytical device in its own right. Moreover, it has been suggested that this mode of analysis both can and should operate on a variety of geographical scales. One cannot of course prescribe the nature of such engagement, but for those who shy away in principle from the alleged bias of such engagement, I can only return to my starting point and echo Habermas: 'the critique of ideology must tacitly presuppose as its own motivation just what it attacks as dogmatic, namely the convergence of reason and commitment.'[45]

NOTES

1. See for example, J. McCarthy, 'Urban Reconstruction and South Africa's Future', University Lecture, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 29 May 1991; and Urban Foundation, *Policy Overview – The Urban Challenge* (Johannesburg: Urban Foundation, 1990).
2. For a recent discussion of different meanings of the concept of development see for example I. Wallerstein, 'Societal development or development of the world system?' In M. Albrow and E. King (eds), *Globalization, Knowledge and Society* (London: Sage, 1990).
3. W.W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).
4. See for example R.J. Chorley and P. Haggett, *Models in Geography* (London: Methuen, 1967); and for subsequent critiques D. Harvey, *Explanation in Geography* (London: Arnold, 1969) and D. Amedeo and R.G. Golledge, *An Introduction to Scientific Reasoning in Geography* (London: Wiley, 1975).
5. See for example R. Abler, J.S. Adams and P. Gould, *Spatial Organisation: The Geographer's View of the World* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971) and T.J.D. Fair, *South Africa: Spatial Frameworks for Development* (Cape Town: Juta, 1983).
6. This homogenisation would be due to the diffusion of modernisation from the core areas to the peripheral areas. See J. Abler *et al*, *op cit*.
7. J. Abler *et al*, *op cit*; and P. Haggett, *Geography: A Modern Synthesis* (London: Harper and Row, 1972).
8. M. Santos, *The Shared Space: The Two Circuits of the Urban Economy in Underdeveloped Countries* (London: Methuen, 1979).
9. A brief summary of the dependency view point from a geographical perspective can be found in T.J.D. Fair, *op cit*; but for a more detailed exposition of this perspective see for example A.G. Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).
10. See for example S. Corbridge, *Capitalist World Development: A Critique of Radical Development Geography* (Basingstoke, Hants: MacMillan, 1986).
11. See D. Sayer, *Method in Social Science: A Realist Approach* (London: Hutchinson, 1984) for an exposition of realist methodology by a contemporary geographer. Concrete examples of current geographical research on development can be found *inter alia* in the journal *Applied Geography and Development*.
12. See Tongaat Hulett Properties Ltd., *The Durban Functional Region – Planning for the Twenty-First Century* (Durban: Tongaat Huletts, 1990).
13. C. Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).
14. C. Geertz, *op cit*.
15. P.E. Willis, 'The man in the iron cage – notes on method', *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, Vol.9 Spring 1976, pp.135–43.
16. O.F. Borda, 'The application of participating-action research in Latin America', in M. Albrow and E. King (eds), *Globalization, Knowledge and Society* (London: Sage, 1990).
17. A discussion of the Clairwood area and the conflict surrounding it is provided in J.E. Butler-Adam, E. Haarhoff, J.J. McCarthy and D.P. Smit, *Clairwood: Industrialization or Residential Rehabilitation* (Durban: Built Environment Support Group, University of Natal, 1983).
18. Dozens of places of worship, for example, are located in Clairwood. See J.F. Butler-Adam *et al*, *op cit*.
19. The residential viability of the area was undermined by charging rates or property taxes equivalent to that of industrial land to those poor shack-owners who received almost no residential services, in return, from the Council. (All of this was occurring prior to the formal zoning of Clairwood as an industrial area). Many property owners were thus forced to sell their land to industrial property speculators, or had their properties auctioned by Council because they had fallen substantially into arrears on their rates payments.
20. Some of the more preliminary plans of the academic – Clairwood civic association coalition are reproduced in J.F. Butler-Adam *et al*, *op cit*.
21. O.F. Borda, *op cit*, p.80.

22. A. Giddens, 'Time, space and regionalisation', in D. Gregory and J. Urry (eds), *Social Relations and Spatial Structures* (London: MacMillan, 1985, p. 286).
23. R. Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man: On the Social Psychology of Capitalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978).
24. M. Foucalt, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980).
25. See for example J. Western, *Outcast Cape Town* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981).
26. Headstart is a Section 21 (not for gain) company which is building lower-cost medium-density housing in inner areas of Cape Town, including the District Six area. The project was largely the brain-child of Professor David Dewar of the Faculty of Architecture, University of Cape Town.
27. Urban Foundation, *Population Trends* (Johannesburg: Urban Foundation, 1990).
28. D.H. Mayne (ed.), *Background Material – Strategic Initiative for Central Johannesburg* (Johannesburg: Anglo American Properties, 1991).
29. See for example L. Schlemmer and L. Stack, *Black, White and Shades of Grey* (Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies, University of the Witwatersrand, 1990).
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34. J.F. Butler-Adam *et al*, *op cit.*
35. Tongaat Hulett Properties Ltd., *op cit.*
37. J. McCarthy, 'Local diversity, national cohesion and South Africa's future', Serton Memorial Lecture, Department of Geography, University of the Witwatersrand, July, 1991.
38. For a discussion of these regions and speculation on their politico-economic significance see W. Cobbett, D. Glaser, D. Hindson and M. Swilling, 'Regionalism, federalism and the reconstruction of the South African state', *SA Labour Bulletin*, 10(5), 1985, pp. 87–116.
39. Urban Foundation (1990 and 1991), *op cit.*
40. An important start in this regard has already been made by Professor Chris Rogerson of the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, University of the Witwatersrand. See his several articles in the special issue of the *SA Geographical Journal*, 71(3), 1989.
41. E. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies – The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).
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43. See J. Western, *op cit*, chs .3–5; or J.J. McCarthy and D.P. Smit, *op cit* pp. 57–61 for expositions of group areas planning principles in relation to geographic considerations.
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The State, the City and Political Morality

Doreen Atkinson

South African historiography is ripe for change. Since the emergence of revisionism in the 1960s, South African politics has been studied using certain hitherto unquestioned assumptions. The radical paradigm has been responsible for extraordinary insights in South African political and historical analysis; however, it also needs to be transcended in important ways. It is the aim of this paper to subject these assumptions to critical scrutiny, and to develop an alternative approach to the study of political phenomena in South Africa – an approach from the perspective of 'political morality'. To some extent, I will have to overstate my case – most notably by underplaying the important dynamics of conflict and coercion. I feel this is legitimate, however, because these issues have occupied, unchallenged, the centre stage in political analysis in this country. After a review of the existing literature and some theoretical comments, I will apply the notion of 'political morality' to a specific historical context, viz. township administration in South African cities during the 1950s.

Realism, functionalism and Hobbesianism

During the 1970s, the prevailing 'liberal' or 'reformist' approach to South African political analysis was decisively dethroned by the materialist assumptions of the revisionist school. In the last two decades, the revisionists and their successors, the state-centric theorists and the ideology-critics (all of whom I gather under the term 'radical tradition'), have interpreted political reality from several key assumptions:

Realism

The revisionists were methodological realists, in the technical sense that they distinguished between several layers of reality. Causal power was attributed to underlying, usually invisible, structures and forces. Consequently, revisionists adopted a posture which has been

Theoria, October 1991, pp. 115–138

described as the 'hermeneutics of suspicion', a view that holds that actors do not have direct access to the meaning of their discourse and practices, and that our everyday meanings work to cover up a deeper kind of intelligibility.[1]

For revisionists, social analysis was used to destroy putative masks and illusions in a relentless effort at 'demystification'. The revisionists' main theoretical innovation was their portrayal of apartheid ideology as a mask for more fundamental practices, notably capitalist exploitation. For this reason, methodological realists (and especially those with a materialist bent) had very little respect for what 'ordinary people's consciousnesses have to say for themselves'.[2] To some extent, this problem has been rectified by a new approach to history-writing, spearheaded by the History Workshop organised at Wits University. A new generation of historians have begun to explore the details of social and cultural life in South Africa. From this perspective, 'all men are philosophers', and 'experience . . . arises because men and women. . . . are rational, and they think about what is happening to themselves and their world'.[3] The 'cultural forms of the "grassroots"' have been studied, for example, in Natal,[4] East London,[5] Brakpan,[6] and Germiston.[7] Yet this genre of research remains politically biased. Only certain forms of experience tend to qualify as the 'grassroots':

> Such a history should resonate with the lives of ordinary people rather than reflect the deliberations of the ruling classes or the theoretical concerns of structuralist abstractionism.[8]

Apparently members of the 'ruling classes' do not feature as 'ordinary people',[9] whose ideas are either reduced to crude self-interest,[10] or stark zealotry,[11] or simply left unexplained.[12]

Function, structure and agency

A second claim made by revisionists was that underlying economic forces were actually functional to the maintenance of racial segregation.[13] In the light of this assumption, revisionists have concluded, illogically, that segregation has served the interests of specific sectors or classes of society. This argument contains two logical fallacies: (1) the fallacy of division and (2) the fallacy of imputation. We will comment briefly on these two problems.

First, as regards the fallacy of division:[14] the claim that something is functional to a system as a whole does not mean that it is functional to a segment of the whole. Functionalism is a form of teleological inquiry: social practices are explained with reference to the systemic functions they serve. To reduce the concept of systemic function to

that of the function to serve the interests of specific social sectors is quite unwarranted.

Second, this has often led to a confusion between *interpretation* (saying what a policy or a practice means) and *imputation* (attributing a particular motive to a social actor).[15] In revisionist historiography, this illogical shift has often been made. Despite revisionists' claims, the fact that racial segregation was functional to capitalism does not imply that segregation was introduced with the conscious motive of promoting capitalism.[16] The notion of function has been allowed to lapse into the concept of individual *motive*.

From these logical errors, it was a short move to developing an understanding of human motivation based on the notion of interest-maximisation. According to revisionists, capitalists must be analysed from the perspective that they are always busily promoting their interests, making rational calculations, making alliances, worrying about their labour supplies, and generally promoting the conditions for accumulation of capital. This approach remained 'realist', since it was deemed that political phenomena were reducible to 'underlying interests'. Terms such as 'control', 'exploitation', 'needs of capital', 'mobilised capital', 'onslaughts', 'dominant and subordinate classes', 'interests', 'material needs', 'accumulation', 'domination' and 'hegemony' became an insistent litany of any respectable radical social research in South Africa. Political analysts have adopted, in Peter Sloterdijk's terms, an attitude of cynical reason, ever-intent on exposing layer upon layer of 'egoisms, class privileges, resentments, steadfastness of hegemonic powers'.[17]

The generation of 'state-centric theorists' of the 1980s asserted, in reaction to the materialistic bias of the revisionists, that the state was an actor in its own right.[18] However, the Hobbesian conception of motivation and meaning has remained, grounded firmly in the unchallenged primacy of the concept of 'interests'. Therefore, as a theoretical improvement, this innovation was limited in its significance. Only the *dramatis personae* changed; the theme and tenor of the play remained the same. Although some theorists have recently moved away from a monolithic conception of the state, and have analysed the important cleavages within it, they still attribute an unwarranted degree of pragmatism and expediency to state actors.

Historians of the History Workshop genre, such as Deborah Posel, have challenged this emphasis on economic interests,[19] and urged that variables such as ideological and political control, ethnicity, and individual leadership be taken into account. Yet even the History Workshop genre of research is often characterised by an emphasis on motive and interests, where the consciousness of 'the ruling classes' are concerned. Bozzoli, for example, has written of the dominant

classes, who, she claims, 'attempt to achieve . . . a "hegemonic situation"' by attempting to 'make alliances' with the oppressed; the various 'leading white classes' in South Africa undertook a 'class project' to overcome their divisions.[20] The Hobbesian interpretation of human motivation remains common in radical South African political analysis. We are left with a world populated by supremely self-interested, competitive, calculating individuals – a conception which has flourished in the fertile soil of unpalatable inequality and racism in South Africa.

A second major improvement on the revisionist literature has been a recent concern with questions of ideology and discourse.[21] However, the realist, functionalist and Hobbesian assumptions are retained in these analyses. In all these studies, the realm of meaning is often only deemed interesting to the extent that it purportedly justifies political or economic domination. Governmental actors' beliefs and language are treated as 'mechanisms' and 'strategies' of political power, 'schemes of legitimation . . . to achieve . . . the objectives of power;[22] and establishment intellectuals are seen as engaged in 'ideological projects' and 'tasks' which results in further ideological 'mystifications'.[23]

The discourse-theorists provide no real reasons why the beliefs of state actors should be regarded in this way, other than the pervasive assumption that it is somehow functional to the maintenance of certain power structures. Instead, discourse-theorists simply rely on an abundant use of scare quotes to warn us of the essential dubiousness of almost everything said by state actors, and to indicate that these actors' points of view do not represent reality in any meaningful sense. For Adam Ashforth, for example, the discourse of Native Commissioners is illegitimate, in whole or in part (Ashforth never makes clear), because such a discourse has either the effect, or the function, or the purpose (again, Ashforth never clarifies), of promoting state power.

Because of these difficulties, the 'discourse-theorists' implicitly subscribe to a curious understanding of politics. Their critiques of ideologies are deeply ambiguous. Why, exactly, should we peer beyond social actors' express beliefs? Why should we subject such beliefs to a 'hermeneutic of suspicion'? Exploring the latent assumptions of a theoretical paradigm is always a tricky matter, but there are important issues at stake. Hence I will briefly consider two aspects of their implicit conception of political meaning, viz. their critique of the political effects of ideology, and their epistemological critique of ideology.

First, simply showing that 'the knowledge of social realities' is somehow 'integrally connected to the formations of state power'[24] is

simply not sufficient to challenge the validity of historical beliefs and discourse. All kinds of ideas affect all kinds of power relations in all kinds of (intended or unintended) ways. The further argument that beliefs are suspect because they promote certain interests does not really help matters. Does the presence of interests discredit beliefs *per se*? Or is it the nature of the interests (i.e. 'illegitimate interests') that disqualify the validity of beliefs? And what interests are legitimate anyway? Can we seriously expect social actors, caught in a specific historical context, to have interests different from the ones they had?

Second, on the other hand, discourse theorists also tend to question the epistemological validity of social actors' truth claims.[25] Once again, this issue is often left ambiguous in their writings.[26] However, if we as theorists proclaim social actors' beliefs to be unwarranted or illogical or invalid, the onus rests on us to give reasons for our argument, and explain whether historical actors could possibly have been expected to think differently about things, given their social context and the knowledge available to them. It is this that will distinguish historical and theoretical analysis from emotional catharsis.

Ultimately, the critique offered by discourse-theorists remains ambiguous. Why are dominant ideologies offensive? Is it that these beliefs have an (intended or unintended) effect on power structures, or that actors' beliefs promote certain interests, or that their beliefs promote illegitimate interests, or that actors' have mistaken beliefs? Or is it simply that the fact that powerful (and often arrogant and unpleasant) people hold these beliefs? Thus far, theorists in the radical tradition tend to cultivate an attitude of cynical reason, a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' without taking the trouble to spell out exactly what we should be cynical about.[27]

Implicitly, the diffuse critiques of discourse-theorists (and radical theorists generally) have led to a neurotic disagreeableness about political life, based on a subterranean anger about the role of interests and and power in politics.[28] Because these theorists are unable to pinpoint exactly what the real problem with society is, these unfocussed critiques have tended to produce the mirror image of the world of political interests – a fantasy world, where politics is stripped of power (or eliminated altogether), where beliefs are freed of interests, and where discourse becomes a transparent window on truth.[29] These difficulties are not limited to discourse-theorists alone; they stem from the entire tradition of revisionist theory, which took refuge in an endless 'critique mode',[30] without ever providing a coherent standard by which political (and economic) activity could be

sensibly evaluated. Because they did not have a viable conception of political life, they ended up by blaming politics for being politics.

What is desperately necessary in South African political analysis, is a better understanding of political conduct *per se*. Such an appreciation which would recognise the quest for power and the pursuit of interests as *normal* and *legitimate* – but nevertheless *limited* – dimensions of politics conduct: a recognition which would leave significant space for the other dimensions of politics, most notably political meaning and morality.

There are indications that theorists are coming up to the limits of existing theoretical assumptions. Saul Dubow, for example, tantalisingly refers to 'the ethic and style of government, the living assumptions of administrative officials', and the moral justifications offered by segregationists,[31] but these are not explored at all. Deborah Posel makes the useful suggestion that the manipulatory dimension of discourse is properly a matter of empirical proof, not an a priori assumption. In addition, her distinction between 'languages of legitimation' (which are consciously employed by social actors to further certain interests) and 'ideologies' which genuinely shape the identity and meaning of individuals, is a fruitful one.[32] Jeremy Seekings's study of opposition movements in Duduza in the early 1980s is remarkable for its honesty in admitting an inability to explain the moral outrage of black residents at the government's lack of faith: 'Despite extensive interviewing I have been unable to reach a conclusive "explanation" of the prominence of these beliefs [concerning the state's promises]'.[33]

I am not making a realist claim in a new guise, that there is a hidden reality of meaning or consciousness of which social actors are unaware. Rather, this essay will make an argument for the ubiquity of political morality, and for the view that any meaningful discourse always constitutes social actors in a moral way. Ironically, it is only by taking political morality seriously that we can appreciate both the importance and the limitations of power and Machiavellianism in political conduct. Politics can be reduced neither to morality nor to power. I will explore the implications of these claims in the rest of the essay. It is only then, I maintain, that we can begin to make sense of the nature of community and citizenship in our cities.

The nature and importance of political morality

In political and social life, people's motives are extremely complex and diverse. People engage in politics for many different reasons, ranging from enjoyment, novelty, conformity, thrill and self-

fulfilment, to the pursuit of power or morally-defined goals. The public world cannot be reduced to private material interests.[34] Furthermore, political activity itself helps to define people's individuality, their identities, and the self– understanding of communities.[35] Political activities are forms of human sociability; hence they do not only make sense in terms of their consequences, but also as important expressions of inter-subjective meaning.

An indispensable part of human sociability is moral life.[36] All actions are intrinsically moral, not because we judge them to be virtuous (they often are not), but because they always take place within a social framework of meaning and notions of justice. (The only exceptions are the actions of psychopaths). All normal social conduct is structured by rules, and by notions of rights, obligations and appropriateness. 'All properly social relations are moral and customary'.[37]

It is necessary, therefore, to attempt to disentangle the concept of 'political morality' itself. Following Hegel, we can distinguish two dimensions of morality in society: ethical life and morality. I consider these in turn.

Ethical life

For Hegel, the term *Sittlichkeit* refers to the moral obligations which people have to an ongoing community of which they are a part. These obligations are based on established norms and uses. Common life is an ongoing affair, and our fulfilment of our obligations sustains it.[38]

'Ethical life' involves morality and custom, the diffuse patterns of social obligations and decencies, including 'absolute prohibitions, elementary decencies, the recognition of a plurality of prohibitions which do not all serve a single purpose'.[39] The rituals, good manners and social mores of a society help to define more abstract principles of political morality.[40]

An important dimension of Hegel's notion of ethical life is that persons are constituted by their recognition of one another qua persons. People cannot be abstracted from society; it is through social involvement that they become recognisably human. It involves the rejection of the fiction of the isolated and self-sufficient individual. Inter-subjective meaning and sociability is central in the constitution of ethical life. Communities are deeply permeated with shared moral preconceptions; it is in this sense, then, that we can talk of 'moral communities'.

Another way of making the same point is to contrast Kantian with Hegelian ethics. Whereas the Kantian notion of ethics postulates universalistic rules which should apply to persons in the abstract,

regardless of their social characteristics, we instead advocate a more Hegelian approach, which emphasises that morality is intrinsically social.[41] We should analyse ethical life as vested in the established norms, ideals and self-interpretations that constitute an ongoing communal life. This is an essentially hermeneutic method of understanding political morality: in the words of Paul Stern, we must start from a 'reconstruction of the shared conceptions of citizenship and of social co-operation . . .'.[42] To understand a person's choices, we need to empathise with his or her entire *Weltanschauung*. Our morality arises from dense experience as constituted members of a specific community. Hence many of our individual choices are often taken absent-mindedly, or by intuition.

Consequently, ethical life is also fundamentally shaped by social institutions, since institutions involve shared dispositions and mutual expectations.[43] The institutional constraints on political and governmental actors have consequences for their moral sensibility. The notion of institutional role is particularly useful, since occupants of roles usually find their very being defined by their roles.

This can have important consequences in political life. For example, institutions may encapsulate their members, thus shielding them from some of the consequences of their actions. Also, official roles tend to justify actions which would be impermissible from the point of view of individual morality.[44] Institutional and bureaucratic cultures produce a specific form of ethical life within themselves. This should be taken into account, especially when analysing governmental actions.

Political morality

In contrast to the ethical life of a community, morality is a question of individual conscience. We have obligations to do the right thing. Such obligations exist, not in virtue of our being part of a larger community life, but because we have individual rational wills.[45]

Political morality is centrally concerned with moral choice. Because moral choices are not self-evident, social actors have to make up their own minds, using their own information and moral sensibilities. This point is important, in order to temper our sociologistic inclinations towards social determinism and causal analysis – an inclination which may, on occasion, tempt us to excuse cases of moral abdication.[46] Moral dilemmas are a part of life, and can produce unpredictable results – ranging from extraordinary moral grandeur, on the one hand, to moral lapses and even betrayal, on the other. There are also certain standards of moral choice, and given careful

justifications, we (as observers) are entitled to judge the quality of moral choices which political actors make.

However, we should also remember that reality, as social actors experience it, often does not clearly indicate the right choice to them. The application of a moral principle to a specific practical problem is often not a simple matter. Hence social actors may experience moral problems to be quite intractable. Practical problems yield themselves to very different interpretations,[47] and must then evaluated in terms of a perplexing array of moral prescriptions. Especially in politics, actors may be torn between the moral claims entailed by political effectiveness and those which apply to private life, such as scrupulous honesty and integrity.[48]

A further issue concerning political morality can briefly be addressed. We can usefully distinguish between two broad styles of political morality, viz. moderation and extremism in political morality. Moderation and extremism are different forms of moral commitment. At stake is the relationship between means and ends in political conduct. Moderation is the acceptance of moral limits in the choice of means to achieve a political end, whereas extremism is the willingness to use exceptional means (which often are in tension with the ends being pursued, e.g. the use of war to achieve peace). Moderation involves an awareness of a plurality of possible and reasonable ends, whereas extremism tends to fasten on one overriding end.[49] The most extravagant form of extremism is utopianism, in which the ultimate Common Good is so profound that it may justify the use of extreme measures to achieve it.[50] This distinction can play a useful role in analysing the political morality of different actors in concrete contexts.

This issue entails the problem of 'dirty hands', which Machiavelli discussed at length in *The Prince*. For our purposes, we can note that his understanding of politics contains the following three claims: (1) public policy often involves greater resonsibility than private actions, because it has more far-reaching consequences; (2) the occasional use of force or other unpalatable methods is a normal part of government; and (3) in modern politics (especially a democracy) political actors are reasonably required to protect the interests of those represented, whether they be fellow party members, a social group, or fellow citizens.[51]

Machiavelli's argument is important, but limited. It is important because it recognises that it is irresonsible to apply to political action the moral standards appropriate to private life. A certain measure of ruthlessness, deceit, guile, promise-breaking and force are normal in politics – especially when it is felt that certain beneficial consequences will justify unethical means:

> [I]t is a predictable and probable hazard of public life that there will be these situations in which something morally disagreeable is clearly required. To refuse on moral grounds ever to do anything of that sort is more than likely to mean that one cannot seriously pursue even the moral ends of politics.[52]

However, Machiavelli's claims are also limited. To be truly effective in politics, Machiavellianism in politics must take moral limits into account. Politics generally involves both political seriousness (in the use of power and the pursuit of interests) and moral seriousness, decencies and sensitivities. Machiavellianism is not always ruthless calculation (although it may be, on occasion). This moral caution stems from two sources: (1) intelligent political actors are usually aware that unethical means may well have undesirable political consequences; and (2) political actors are also social beings, steeped in their society's norms of decent conduct. The recognition of the practical relevance of 'dirty hands' in public life does not imply that 'anything goes'. (It is worth noting, especially in the light of my criticisms of revisionists, that the notion of 'interests' is certainly an indispensable theoretical tool in political analysis – my only reservation is that we should know when to stop wielding it).

However, it should be noted that the more extremist forms of moral commitment tend to have a greater predilection for resorting to 'dirty hands'. The choice of means in political conduct is an important indicator of the tenor of political morality in a specific context.

A methodological digression: the question of causality

Many people nowadays will agree about the importance of ideas, consciousness and even morality in understanding South African politics. However, subjective phenomena are often still regarded as dependent, in some undefinable way, on 'material reality'. Is it necessary, they ask, for such a drastic critique to be made of revisionist and other radical analysts? Surely, in the final analysis, ideas are caused by the material context or by material interests?

I would reject such a line of argument. Causal analysis has been an important part of positivist methodology. The validity of causal explanation in social research is a complex one, and cannot be dealt with here. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that the purported causal relationship between 'material reality' and 'ideas' is based on an erroneous division of social phenomena into the 'objective' and the 'subjective'. This logically implies that, in social life, objective entities exist which can be analytically purged of their subjective content. In this regard, the cruder Marxists have claimed to derive social ideologies from the material or technological forces of

production. Similarly, revisionists in South Africa want to 'read off' people's motivations from their material interests, which in turn are claimed to derive from a bedrock of objective class positions.

Such arguments are false, since no social phenomena, whether they be classes, material production, technological development, or whatever, can be defined without simultaneously referring to subjective experience. Ideas are built into every dimension of social life. One can only make sense of the concept of a person's 'material interests' in the context of that person's conception of himself or herself as a person, as well as that person's conception of the proper relations which should exist between people. Similarly, it is not possible to make sense of the notion of 'social class' without simultaneously referring to notions of rights and obligations which structure property relations.

It is foolhardy to look for a realm of reality which exists prior to the level of meaning. Social structures would not exist unless they were intrinsically meaningful. This essay takes such argument as a given. A more interesting claim is that all social meaning involves, *inter alia*, normative assumptions about the nature of society and the nature of proper conduct. Consequently, we would argue that such normative assumptions cannot be derived from 'objective reality', but are part and parcel of that reality itself.

Ethical life and the construction of moral communities

At this point, we need to begin to look at South African politics from a new vantage point, which transcends the exclusive emphasis on the notion of interests.

A crucial dimension of the Hegelian notion of 'ethical life' is that a coherent and shared sense of identity, solidarity and social integration exists within a community. In fact, W.H. Walsh has drawn attention to the disconcerting extent to which communities can be characterised by 'closed' systems of morality. This means that certain moral virtues and expectations are postulated for one's own community, while other standards apply to conduct affecting outsiders. Any harmful effect of their actions on outsiders may be deemed regrettable, but not to the extent that their actions will be condemned.[53] Walsh warns us not to exaggerate the prevalence of genuinely universalistic or Kantian moral principles in ordinary social life.

How does this cast light on the South African experience?

In situations of rapid social change, communal solidarities tend to break down, leading to severe existential anxiety: 'When we see individuals defending an ideology it is often because they believe that

the alternative is chaos, an undoing of themselves as persons, the annihilation of their identity'.[54] In such situations, much of politics becomes concerned with maintaining or imposing an identity system. In fact, people may well become fierce advocates of double standards, in an attempt to differentiate their own community from others, and hence achieve some existential security.

In contexts of rapid social change, such as modernisation, we find that moral communities become eroded. The same traumas of modernisation have accompanied social change in South Africa as in other developing countries. In the technical-economic realm, individuals have had to adjust to being treated more-or-less as instruments to maximise profit.[55] In the political realm, people have increasingly identified with the revolutionary notion of equal rights, against the increasingly intrusive powers of the state bureaucracy. At the cultural level, traditional patterns of identification have given way, or have been combined with new forms of social solidarity.

The importance of viable moral communities, with which social actors genuinely identify, cannot be overstated. From a normative perspective, modernity involves new forms of ethical life, in which individuals are constituted by new kinds of social rights, obligations and social recognition. Modernity involves new forms of moral communities.

In Western countries, these adjustments have been radical enough. In South Africa, with its neo-colonial heritage, the existential confusion has gone much deeper, since the boundaries of the nation-state are very recent, and since cultural distinctions have never ceased to be controversial. South Africa in the 20th century has consisted of a bewildering combination of languages, cultures, classes, degrees of urbanisation, and modes of acculturation to the rising giant of capitalism.

The South African experience can be posed as a problem of deriving appropriate boundaries for moral communities. Because of the context of ambiguous moral communities in South Africa, the application of appropriate standards of moral conduct to different groups of people was a hazardous affair. Different moral communities, delineated by racial, linguistic, class and other divisions, have co-existed in uncomfortable proximity. They are often not quite insulated from one another, and certain moral outlooks have, on occasion, overlapped with one another. The result is that political actors have had to constantly navigate the boundaries between moral communities, with only the fragile signposts of their own moral preconceptions to guide them.[56] The crucial point is that, in a context of shifting boundaries between communities, the question of appropriate rights and obligations becomes highly problematic in

practice. Different conceptions of moral decency and appropriateness exist. Hence social actors not only have to make sense of the shifting fortunes of their own community in times of rapid change, but with the relatively alien cultural institutions of other communities living nearby.

Such confusions at the level of ethical life also tend to make the exercise of political morality a highly complex endeavour for individuals. In an extremely complex social and moral universe, errors of judgement, mistakes and misinterpretations become very likely. And when people's conceptions of their own identity and worth are infringed, it causes distress, hurt, and confusion – occasionally with explosive results. The prevalence of such occurrences should not be underestimated in South African politics.

Urban communities during the 1950s

So far, we have simply prepared some theoretical ground for a new approach to the understanding of the urban community in South Africa. Let us consider a practical historical example of the lack of appropriate community boundaries in South Africa. In South African cities, the notion of the 'urban community' has been a particularly problematic one. One can regard the history of the city in South Africa as the history of (generally unsuccessful) attempts by local and central government actors to resolve the ambiguities of local community membership.[57] The key question was, of course, the following: in what ways were black residents part of the 'urban community'? Should the black community be seen as internally homogenous (a moral community in its own right), or does a certain sector of black residents truly belong to the established urban community? In studying the meaning of 'the city' in the history of South Africa, we need to recognise the intrinsically normative and emotive dimensions of community feeling as distinctly public questions that cannot be reduced to private sentiments.

The experience of urban administrators in the cities clearly illustrate these confusions. The native administrators in South African cities were, during the 1950s, the state's front line in coming to terms with urban change. Unlike other whites, they were in constant close contact with black residents, and were witnesses to the social distress and moral decay prevalent in black townships. This, they believed, gave them some authority in understanding the problems of townships, for they had first-hand information of 'the aspirations of the urban Native; of his aspirations for home and family life and security;

of his frustrations in our economic framework; of his weakness due to his backwardness and his limitations'.[58]

Consequently, these officials were particularly prone to exercise their minds about the problems of black townships. Dr Language, the Manager of Non-European Affairs in Brakpan, made eloquent testimony of the

> . . . harmful effects such as the tremendous wastage of valuable time, of opportunities, of labour and of capital, not to mention the threats to personal life and safety and the ruination of family and of community life. This is a problem affecting the social, economic, administrative and religious institutions of the country as a whole, including all living creatures – not even the dumb animals in our locations escape injury and ill-treatment.[59]

The ravages of modernisation had to be dealt with. The crucial question was – how?

For the rest of this essay, we will attempt to apply this approach to a specific problem: the definition of the South African urban polity during the 1950s. Our discussion will of necessity be brief, and is intended to be an introduction to future work. It will simply focus on the way in which white officials and City Councillors perceived their moral relationship with black urban residents. The point of the exercise is simply to illustrate the practical application of the theoretical concepts developed in the first part of the essay.

Ethical life: The notion of patriarchalism

'Patriarchalism' can be defined as follows:

> The term 'patriarch' in ancient times referred to a male ruler, typically a venerated elder. A community hierarchically organized with such persons having supreme de facto authority is called 'patriarchal'. . . .[60]

Patriarchalism is not a morally irrational system. There are several possible justifications for patriarchalism. The family represents ethical life based on feeling and intimacy; the individual is assured of belonging; and there is little place for the loneliness and alienation found in more individualistic contexts. Clear, ascriptive patterns of authority may be experienced as preferable to the diffuse, competitive authority patterns which characterise individualistic societies.[61] If such characteristics are carried over to a social setting, these justifications may appear quite attractive to certain parts of people's psyches. However, on the negative side, there is little room for privacy and individualistic rights in the family (although there may be other kinds of rights).

It is in the light of the intuitive understanding of social patriarchy that white city fathers in South African towns understood their moral relationship with black residents.

However, in the light of rapidly changing social circumstances, there was an inherent ambiguity in the application of the principles of patriarchalism to a confusing world. Many officials intuitively recognised limits to patriarchy. Blacks' status was never simply that of 'children', unlike the slave societies of the American South. There were two reasons for this. First, the remnants of erstwhile independent black polities meant that blacks were not intrinsically 'childlike'. Secondly, the existence of a well-educated, articulate Western sector in black townships created difficulties for a doctrine of patriarchalism. The result was a diffuse awareness amongst officials that (some) blacks had claim to individualistic rights and to treatment as formal equals. In the patriarchal metaphor, blacks were 'growing up'. This produced anxiety and confusion about the nature of the moral community in the cities. The assumptions of patriarchy were being challenged:

> . . . [T]he urban Bantu harboured many grievances for a variety of reasons: a feeling of desperation, of no trust in the white man and of utter frustration was evident among the educated, and in some instances the Bantu demonstrated against the European and force had to be used to quell disturbances. . . .[62]

If blacks were 'growing up', what kind of adults were they going to become? Once again, Dr Language expressed the problem succinctly: 'I must admit that a substitute for the lost community pride and discipline for which the traditional Bantu were so renowned still has to be found'.[63]

The problem with social patriarchy is that the familial metaphor does not transpose neatly to social life. What exactly constitutes a social 'family'? Amongst the confusion which characterised white officials' deliberations, at least three possibilities can be discerned – all of which made sense from the background of patriarchalism and paternalism.

The first option was the development of a 'dual patriarchy', in which blacks did not belong in the cities at all. Black people would rightfully belong to a moral community situated in the rural areas, where a legitimate black patriarchy was entrenched. On this view, the location in the town was simply a tribal enclave; it was an urban component of a fundamentally different social order. Black people were in the towns, but they were not of the towns. This was the view propounded by Verwoerdian officials.

The second option was the development of a 'dual and equal patriarchy' within the cities themselves. This involved the development of a black leadership structure within the locations themselves. This option allowed for white paternalism in the training of black members of Advisory Boards, until the Boards reached full autonomy. Ultimately, the relationship between white city fathers and black Advisory Boards would resemble the relationship between two autonomous families, who would interact with one another on an equal footing. Each might well continue to have patriarchal structures within themselves. In the words of Prof. Coetzee of Potchefstroom University,

> [W]e will have to realise . . . that we will not always be able to choose the Bantu's leaders for him; they must develop their own leaders, and it will largely depend on us whether we will be able to cooperate with them in a friendly, beneficial and responsible way.[64]

A third option was that of 'dual but unequal patriarchy'. This scenario would resemble the relationship between a patriarch and his adult son, who had established his own family. In this case, a high degree of mutual respect would exist alongside a permanent relationship of inequality. Mr Matthewson of Benoni, for example, did not consider a transfer of power to Advisory Boards to be crucial to their functioning. He maintained that Board members simply wanted some prestige and respectability. Any decent white City Council would look after black residents' interests, and take into account the Board's views on such matters. It was just a question of finding the right attitude and mechanisms to make this relationship work.[65]

The last option reflected the beginnings of an entirely new understanding of ethical life, which we may characterise as 'proto-liberalism'. According to this view, black residents were on the road to Westernisation and multi-racialism. They did not enjoy equal formal rights with white residents, but they had the intellectual and moral capacities to be recognised as equal citizens in the future.[66] Hence this view can also be described as a 'dual and temporary patriarchy'.

Paternalism as a form of political morality

Patriarchalism usually entails paternalistic intervention by 'patriarchs' in the lives of their 'children'. In patriarchal contexts, the parents have a moral duty to teach their children about ethics. This education process invariably has a harsh dimension: 'Children are punished less because they deserve punishment than in order to be made moral; they are not only taught by precept and example, they are also taught by the infliction of pain'.[67]

For the white city fathers of the 1950s, intervention in the liberties of black residents was not an occasional affair. They intuitively assumed that such intervention was right and proper, and that black residents would (or should) consent to their interventions.

In a well-functioning patriarchy, paternalistic coercion is accepted as legitimate by a child. However, patriarchalism does not necessarily imply paternalism. As Vandeveer noted,

> Such authorities control others. Whether for their own good . . . is a further question. In addition, whether patriarchs exercised control with altruistic aims . . . is an open question. There is, then, no necessary connection between 'acting in a patriarchal fashion' and 'acting paternalistically'.[68]

While both patriarchalism and paternalism have a common philosophical root, viz. a postulated relationship between father and child, I am using them in two very different senses here. 'Patriarchalism' is a form of ethical life, of conceptualising the normative bonds of society; while 'paternalism' is a form of individual morality, a principle of individual choice regarding right and wrong. The two are logically and historically distinct. In other words, paternalistic acts may take place in a non-patriarchal social structure, and a patriarchal structure may exist without altruistic or paternalistic acts on the part of the patriarch.[69]

Also, it is necessary to differentiate between moral acts and ethical bonds: a child may resent specific paternalistic acts, while consenting to the patriarchal structure in general.

Let us explore paternalism more closely. The term refers to a certain kind of moral justification for specific actions.[70] It can be defined as intervention by a paternalist (say A) in the liberty of a subject (say S), in such a way that A's motive is concern for S's welfare. A's actions may take place without the consent of S, and may involve unpalatable actions, such as the use of force, coercive threat, or manipulation.[71] It may be noted that specific altruistic and paternalistic actions are quite compatible with broader patterns of exploitation; however, it is a mistake to regard paternalism simply as a mask of exploitation.

There are, in fact, numerous valid ways in which paternalism can be justified morally: (1) It is often the case that A claims to have some expert knowledge which legitimises his or her interference; (2) A may believe (rightly or wrongly) that the desirable consequences of his or her action will outweigh the unpleasant means employed; (3) A may believe that S does not have the intellectual or psychological competence to promote her own best interest; and (4) A may claim

that S had consented in the past, or will do so retrospectively in the future.[72] In the words of an advocate of paternalism: 'If . . . the object aimed at is good, if the compulsion employed is such as to attain it, and if the good obtained overbalances the inconvenience of the compulsion itself, I do not understand how, upon utilitarian principles, the compulsion can be bad'.[73]

The concept of paternalism brings us some way to understanding the peculiar relationship between the white 'city fathers' and black residents of South African cities during the 1950s. White officials frequently introduced measures which, they believed, were to the benefit of black residents, regardless of the latter's opposition.

The paternalistic quality of certain actions reflect back to the characteristics of moral conduct outlined above. It involved choice and responsibility on the part of officials, and often entailed frustrating moral dilemmas. However, two important dimensions of paternalism as a form of political morality merit special attention.

The first is that our notions of appropriate political morality depend on a background of a coherent moral community. Our very notion of who we are is shaped by our understanding of ethical life. Hence our treatment of our fellow-men depends absolutely on some coherent sense of who they are, what their 'personhood' consists of, and what rights and obligations pertain to them. In the South African case, however, the confusions regarding patriarchy in the cities during the 1950s meant that the appropriate limits of paternalistic moral action were unclear. How extensively were the 'city fathers' entitled to intervene in the lives of black residents? What kinds of intervention were legitimate, and which were not? What procedures should be followed in the process of intervention? How important were the ideas of black residents in defining the appropriateness of paternalistic intervention? Should they be consulted, or not? And once they were consulted, should their views be taken seriously?

A second issue to note is that different forms of political morality exist on different points of a spectrum ranging from moderation to extremism. This, as we have seen, raises the important question of the relationship between means and ends, and the phenomenon of 'dirty hands'. The issue deserves much more lengthy treatment than can be provided here. We may, however, make one basic proposition: to the extent that people envisage a proper ethical life radically different from the one that exists at present, the temptation will exist to justify means by reference to ends. At an extreme, utopian doctrines may justify the use of coercion: 'The utopian is characterized as someone so enamoured of his final goal that he will employ any means to realize it, or would if he could'.[74] In South African urban history, we may claim that the Verwoerdian officials of the 1960s subscribed to a

much more utopian perspective of ethical life than did the old-style patriarchs of the 1950s; as a consequence, they were often prepared to use methods which the city fathers found unpalatable.

It is, however, not possible to make the converse claim, viz. that conservatism in ethical life produces moderate political morality. Some forms of ethical life, such as slavery, are perfectly static (or anti-utopian), and routinely employ drastic means to achieve ends. At an extreme, certain classes of people may even be utilised as things, or as means to ends. Moderation as a moral style only flourishes to the extent that individual life, happiness, liberty or dignity are accorded value in their own right. Certain brands of Christianity and socialism advocate such values. However, the doctrine which most consistently recognises individual worth in its own right is liberalism.

In our example of the cities during the 1950s, the roots of both moderation and extremism exist in the practice of paternalistic political morality. On the one hand, to the extent that city fathers' patriarchal forms of thought contained some respect for the rights or the wishes of black residents, it induced a moderation in their actions. White Councillors and officials often found it morally difficult to justify policies which, on pragmatic grounds, they would have liked to implement. Furthermore, to the extent that a proto-liberalism crept into their understanding of the moral community, with the recognition that black residents would ultimately be equal to whites, it was even more difficult to justify means by reference to ends. In such cases, a 'soft' paternalism prevailed, which had to go to great lengths to justify coercive intervention in the lives of black residents.

On the other hand, the more utopian forms of patriarchalism, viz. the Verwoerdian notion that black aspirations should be redirected to pastoral tribal utopias, tended to encourage extreme justifications for policies. The harsher forms of influx control are examples of this. Once again, the justification was made on the grounds of moral paternalism, for coercive intervention was considered to be in the (ultimate) interests of black residents themselves. However, this was a much stronger form of paternalism, in which the white city fathers claimed an extravagant degree of 'better knowledge' of the interests of blacks.

In short, therefore, different conceptions of ethical life tend to encourage different forms of political morality. However, the relationship is not a uni-directional one. Most significantly, the employment of coercive means, and the treatment of people as if they are means to ends ultimately reinforces a specific view of their status as persons (or as proto-persons, who will only blossom as full persons when the utopia is achieved). People's conception of one another is a matter of ethical life; however, their conceptions of ethical life are

sustained and reinforced in their practical experience of one another through concrete forms of moral action.

Conclusion

Paternalism is a typical example of political morality. Its prescriptions are ambiguous, and there is always room for moral choices, ranging from moderation to extremism, and involving either clean or dirty hands. Most political or governmental actors make use of this entire range, at some time or other in their careers. As in most concrete political contexts, moral questions were seldom resolved at the level of theory. Municipal administrators were usually busy and dedicated men; they were not philosophers. Paternalist actions were usually enveloped by other practical preoccupations about administration, housing, or the never-ending worry about finance. Paternalism was not an explicit doctrine; it did not even offer clear criteria of practical success or moral virtue. It was a muddled guiding sentiment, partly coercive, partly humane, often contradictory, which at least allowed its proponents some sense of moral decency while fighting a hopeless battle to improve the increasingly squalid township conditions. The crucial point is, however, that paternalism was not simply an excuse for domination or exploitation; it involved very real moral choices.

What is unusual about the paternalism of the white city fathers of the 1950s, however, was the extraordinary ambiguities about the structure of the patriarchal moral community itself. The result was that each locality developed its own understanding of white and black patriarchy, and therefore developed its own bureaucratic ethos. In this way, patriarchalism in the cities produced a patchwork of different forms of ethical life. Patriarchal norms in Cape Town differed from those in Pretoria; and those in East London from those in Durban. The ambiguities of patriarchalism lent themselves to localistic particularities. The unresolved question of the urban moral community and urban citizenship meant that local government was simply not conducive to universalist bureaucratic principles, dictated formally from a remote central government.

In the meantime, the processes of modernisation were proceeding apace. As township conditions deteriorated, the urgency of social improvements was seldom lost from the sight of paternalistic officials. Something had to be done; but the absence of a coherent ethical system produced an array of makeshift rules, regulations, prohibitions, permissions, permits and prosecutions. Frequently, as a last resort, officials had to turn to coercion and deception – often in the name of paternalistic improvements. This was not always an easy

way out. Consciences were bothered, and endless debates took place about means and ends.

Under the patriarchal system of native administration in the 1950s, the web of control in the cities was not nearly as systematic and confident as authors in the radical tradition tend to claim. At best, it was an attempt to apply a modernising disciplinary spirit to a fundamentally ambiguous situation. It is this inherent contradictoriness that differentiated patriarchal ethics from the more utopian visions and totalitarian methods introduced by the Verwoerdians – who were as yet only gathering their strength.

NOTES

1. The term is originally Paul Ricoeur's. It is discussed by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, University of Chicago Press, 1983; p. 123.
2. Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, New York: Verso Books, 1988. He provides an extended critique of different kinds of 'cynical reason', most notably Marxism and Freudianism.
3. B. Bozzoli, 'History, experience and culture', in B. Bozzoli (ed.), *Town and Countryside in the Transvaal: Capitalist Penetration and Popular Response*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983; pp. 10 and 15.
4. S. Marks, *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986.
5. A. Mager and G. Minkley, 'Reaping the whirlwind: The East London riots of 1952', History Workshop, February 1990.
6. H. Sapire, 'Popular politics and the rationalisation of "Urban Native" administration in Brakpan, 1943–1948', History Workshop, Wits University, February 1990.
7. R.E. Pretorius, 'Banishment: Germiston's answer to opposition in Natalspruit Location, 1955–1957', History Workshop, Wits University, February 1987.
8. Bozzoli, *ibid*, p. 8.
9. There are singular exceptions, such as C. van Onselen, 'The social and economic underpinnings of paternalism and violence on the maize farms of the South-Western Transvaal, 1900–1950', African Studies Institute Seminar, May 1991.
10. For example, in Mager and Minkley, *ibid.*, p. 3.
11. For example, Sapire, *ibid.*, p. 6.
12. For example, I. Edwards, 'Swing the assegai peacefully? "New Africa", Mkhumbane, the co-operative movement and attempts to transform Durban society in the later 1940s', in P. Bonner *et. al.* (eds), *Holding their Ground*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989; pp. 70–1.
13. A critique of the functionalism inherent in the revisionist paradigm is provided in D. Posel, 'Rethinking the "race-class debate" in South African historiography', in *Social Dynamics*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1983. Unfortunately her analysis improves the revisionists' account merely by adding the notion of 'dysfunction', thus leaving the theoretical constraints of the paradigm virtually intact.
14. The claim that a characteristic applicable to a whole is also applicable to individual parts of the whole. An analogy is the claim that the functional effect of AIDS on population control in a society can be translated to the interests of specific members of that society.
15. I am indebted to Dave Christianson for this distinction.
16. This point is made by John Plamenatz, *Man and Society* (Vol. 2), London: Longman, 1963; pp. 364–5, p. 367. In the South African context, see Christopher Saunders, *The Making of the South African Past*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1988; pp. 188–9. Also Saul Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919–1936*, London: Macmillan Press, 1989; p. 8.

17. Sloterdijk, *ibid.*, p. 19. It should be noted that the roots of 'interest-based' theory lie deep in Western political philosophy, since the writings of Hobbes, Locke and Nietzsche. However, a different tradition also exists, which emphasises politics as an ethical activity; a tradition which includes Plato, Rousseau, Hegel, Habermas and Arendt. South African historiography has emphasised the former tradition, and ignored the latter. One reason for this is an unacknowledged moral outrage at the complacent and cosy accommodations which elites seem to engender in the face of extreme social distress. Such an outrage is largely valid; my point is that it should not become an unexamined springboard for genuine social analysis.
18. An early example of this is Heribert Adam, *Modernizing Racial Domination*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971. Recent examples are Mark Swilling and Mark Phillips, 'The Powers of the Thunderbird: Decision-making structures and policy strategies in the South African state', in Centre for Policy Studies, *Policy Perspectives 1989: South Africa at the End of the Eighties*, Johannesburg: CPS, 1989; and Steve Friedman, 'The National Party and the South African transition', in R. Lee and L. Schlemmer (eds), *Transition to Democracy*, Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1991. The entire 'transition literature', centered on Phillippe Schmitter and Guillermo O'Donnel, is grounded in an interest-based theory of politics.
19. Posel, *ibid.*, p. 61.
20. Bozzoli, *ibid.*, pp. 18–9.
21. For example, Dubow, ibid, 1989; D. Posel, 'The language of domination, 1978–1983' in S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa*, England: Longman, 1987; and Adam Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse in Twentieth-Century South Africa*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990; and Stanley Greenberg, 'Ideological struggles within the South African state', in Marks and Trapido (eds), *ibid.*
22. See Ashforth, *ibid.*, pp. 2–3; p. 8.
23. Greenberg, *ibid.*, p. 394.
24. Ashforth, *ibid.*, p. 10.
25. Adam Ashforth's critique of segregationists' claims to expertise and rationality in problem-solving is a good example of this. He implies throughout that their expertise was not genuine, although he never tells us why (*ibid.*, p. 6).
26. For example, Deborah Posel uses the term 'ideology' in two different ways. On the one hand, the definition of ideology as 'vehicles for the constitution of subjectivity' is a value-neutral one, referring simply to a set of beliefs which have profound meaning for us (p. 438). Presumably, on this account, we all operate within 'ideologies'; if this is the case, then, there are no objective ways of choosing between different ideologies. On the other hand, her discussion of apartheid as an ideology implies that it was false, in some sense. For example, Posel claims that 'Apartheid was thus vaunted as the only moral Christian course for South African politics' (p. 433). Presumably we are not to give Apartheid ideology the benefit of the doubt, even if it constituted Afrikaners' subjectivity as much as our beliefs constitute our own.
27. The problem finds its origin in Marx's critique of ideology. It is never clear whether Marx criticises ideology on the grounds that it promotes interests, or on the grounds that it promotes illegitimate interests, or on the grounds that it is false. On the ambiguities in Marx's theory of ideology, see N. Abercrombie *et al.*, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1980; chapter 1.
28. The radical historians are not alone in this regard. Michel Foucault displays the same anger at the ubiquity of power in society. Unlike South African revisionists, however, Foucault finds it difficult to conceive of a better society.
29. Ashforth approaches this utopianism when he refers to a better world of 'political processes wherein humans of all kinds might freely speak for themselves and act conjointly in pursuit of visions of a more desirable community' (*ibid.*, p. 63).
30. I am endebted to Khehla Shubane for this term.
31. Dubow, *ibid.*, pp. 14 and 26.
32. D. Posel, 'Language, legitimation and control: The South African state after 1978', in *Social Dynamics*, Vol. 10 (1) 1984; pp. 428 and 438. Unfortunately, her discussion of technocratic discourse as a manipulatory language of legitimation does not go far enough; it fails to explore the very real moral dimension of technocratic meaning, which involves an important (and often quite heartfelt) redefinition of rights, obligations and meanings on the part of social actors.

33. J. Seekings, 'Broken promises: Discontent, protest, and the transition to confrontation in Duduza, 1978–1985', History Workshop, Wits University, February 1990; p.21.
34. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959; p.48.
35. B. Parekh, *Hannah Arendt and the Search for a New Political Philosophy*, London: Macmillan, 1981; p.54.
36. It is worth emphasising here that a discussion of the morality of social actions does not imply an approval of those actions.
37. John Plamenatz, *Man and Society* (Vol.2), London: Longman, 1963; p.283.
38. C. Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society*, Cambridge University Press, 1979; p.83.
39. Stuart Hampshire, 'Morality and Pessimism', in S. Hampshire (ed.), *Public and Private Morality*, Cambridge University Press, 1978; p.15.
40. Stuart Hampshire, 'Public and private morality', in S. Hampshire, (ed.), *ibid.*, p.26.
41. This discussion is based on Paul Stern, 'On the relation between rational autonomy and ethical community: Hegel's critique of Kantian morality', in *Praxis International*, Vol.9, no.3, 1989.
42. P. Stern, *ibid.*, p.245. For this reason, it is simply inappropriate to evaluate the political ethics of historical actors with some abstractly derived system of universalistic morality – a tendency which implicitly informs much of revisionist and post-revisionist writing in South Africa.
43. Bernard Williams, 'Politics and moral character', in S. Hampshire (ed.), *ibid.*, p.64.
44. Thomas Nagel, 'Ruthlessness in public life', in S. Hampshire (ed.), *ibid.*, p. 79.
45. C. Taylor, *ibid.*, p.83.
46. For example, when we argue that political actors' breaches of morality must be excused on account of their deprived background, intellectual isolation, etc. While it is crucial that their social circumstances be taken into account, we should also recognise that political decisions almost invariably involve moral choices.
47. W.H. Walsh, 'Open and closed morality', in B. Parekh and R.N. Berki (eds), *The Morality of Politics*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972; p.27.
48. S. Hampshire, 'Public and private morality', in S. Hampshire (ed.), *ibid.*, p.42.
49. R.N. Berki, 'The distinction between moderation and extemism', in B. Parekh and R.N. Berki (eds), *ibid.*, p.66.
50. It may be noted that neither moderation nor extremism has *a priori* superior moral worth. Any judgement concerning their merits is a complex matter which cannot be addressed here.
51. S. Hampshire, 'Public and private morality', in S. Hampshire (ed.), *Public and Private Morality*, Cambridge University Press, 1978; p.49.
52. B. Williams, 'Politics and moral character', in S. Hampshire (ed.), *Public and Private Morality*, Cambridge University Press, 1978; p.62.
53. W.H. Walsh, 'Open and closed morality', in B. Parekh and R.N. Berki (eds), *ibid.*, pp.19 and 24.
54. Du Preez, *ibid.*, p.48.
55. D. Bell, 'Modernism, postmodernism, and the decline of moral order', in J.C. Alexander and S. Seidman, *Culture and Society*, Cambridge University Press, 1990; p.320.
56. The problem of modernity and social categories is also usefully posed by Michel Foucault. The only difference between his approach and the normative one (albeit an important difference!) is that his governing concepts are those of 'power'and 'discipline', instead of 'morality'. Foucault has drawn attention to the peculiar ways in which power operates in modern society. Instead of a repressive notion of power, which emphasises concepts such as manipulation, coercion, and domination, Foucault has introduced a 'productive' understanding of power. Patterns of power structure the roles of all members of society, thereby producing crucial identities and motives through processes of 'self-formation or autocolonization'.

    In Foucault's terms, modern societies are characterised by 'disciplinary' power. This operates at the technical-economic, political and cultural levels simultaneously. Modernity involves the division of society/polity/economy into formal categories. The individual becomes separated out, and becomes subjected to minute attention. Uninterrupted surveillance which ensured proper and enthusiastic performance, whether at the workplace, the school, the military barracks or the voting booth.

Social engineering is justified by means of scientific knowledge. However, a crucial point is that discipline is not something done by one actor (or group of actors) to another. It is reciprocally exerted – 'supervisors, perpetually supervised. . . .' It is an impulse towards social order which encompasses government and governed alike.

All this presupposes the development of numerous valid social categories in which to classify members of society (including, for example, residence, age, education, citizenship, military obligations, and taxation status). The crucial point is that there are no classifications that are a priori appropriate to the imposition of discipline. The content of such classifications is a practical problem for each specific historical context. For Foucault, a successful process of modernisation involves the production of effective new social categories, in which sustained relations of mutual supervision eventually enable individuals to identify with modern roles. In Foucault's terms, the problem in South Africa has been precisely the difficulty of delineating appropriate categories, with the result that the imposition of disciplinary power has proven extremely confusing to political elites as well as ordinary people.

57. I believe it was also a matter of some debate within the black community itself. However, that would be the subject of another essay.
58. J. Matthewson, *IANA Annual Conference Proceedings*, 1953; p.47.
59. Address to Institute of Administrators of Non-European Affairs (IANA), 1954; *Conference Proceedings*, p.32.
60. This definition is drawn from Donald Vandeveer, *Paternalistic Intervention: The Moral Bounds on Benevolence*, Princeton University Press, 1986; p.22.
61. Hegel's comments on the family as ethical unit are quite insightful in this regard. See John Plamenatz, *Man and Society* (Vol.2), London: Longman, 1963; pp.231–5. In Hegel's terms, the family is the sphere of particularity, difference and locality; as opposed to the universality of rights in civil society.
62. Dr Language, *Address to IANA*, 1954; p.180.
63. Address to IANA, *Conference Proceedings*, 1957; p.32.
64. *IANA Annual Conference Proceedings*, 1957; p.113.
65. *IANA Annual Conference Proceedings*, 1953; p.39–40.
66. Mr Bourquin of Durban represented this view when he acknowledged the hurtful nature of racial discrimination (IANA, 1957; p.45). His statement only makes sense when discrimination is seen as arbitrary treatment of essentially similar people in dissimilar ways.
67. See Plamenatz's discussion of Hegel's theory of the family, *ibid.*, p.244.
68. D. Vandeveer, *ibid.*, p.23. My emphasis.
69. In fact, 'reverse paternalism' may take place in a patriarchal context; the mother or sons may, for example, conspire to intervene in the circumstances of the patriarch for his own good – usually, one would imagine, without his knowledge.
70. In this regard, I use the term differently from, say, Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, New York: Vintage Books, 1976; or Charles van Onselen, 'The social and economic underpinnings of paternalism and violence on the maize farms of the South-Western Transvaal, 1900–1950; ASI Seminar Paper, 13 May 1991. These authors use the term 'paternalism' in a more diffuse way, to refer to an 'ethos' or a 'relationship' or a 'regime'. These uses are not wrong; but I feel that my act-based definition is more useful for my purposes.
71. This definition is drawn from Donald Vandeveer, *Paternalistic Intervention: The Moral Bounds on Benevolence*, Princeton University Press, 1986; p.22.
72. D. Vandeveer, *ibid.*, p.67; Gerald Dworkin, 'Paternalism: Some second thoughts', in R. Sartorius (ed.), *Paternalism*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983; p.107.
73. J. Fitzjames Stephen, quoted in R. Sartorius, 'Introduction', in Sartorius (ed.), *ibid.*, p.xi.
74. B. Goodwin and K. Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia*, London: Hutchinson, 1982; p.103. The link between utopianism and coercion characterised the thinking of several 19th Century utopians, such as Babeuf, Blanqui, Marx, as well as many 20th Century Marxists. However, the link is not invariably made. Many utopians have chosen other means of achieving their utopia, such as the power of education, example, evolution or experimentation (Goodwin and Taylor, p.103).

Marxism-Leninism, Radical Democracy and Socialism

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Democracy, as Keith Graham recently noted, is a concept which, until the eighteenth century, was understood by all, but favoured by few. Nowadays, the position has been reversed: 'Everyone is in favour of it but no one has a clear idea any longer what it is' (Graham 1986:1). The aim of this essay is to try to examine some of the theoretical assumptions which inform two influential theories of democracy, namely the Marxist-Leninist and Laclau-Mouffeian or radical democratic approaches. Both are, I argue, inherently flawed, although the latter contains the seeds of a more fruitful and democratic form of socialist politics, which, if seen in the light of Bob Jessop's concept of Strategic Selectivity, and recent reflections on autopoieticism – neither of which are attempted in this paper – provide the seeds for a more fruitful and realistic form of socialist politics.[1]

As such, the essay stands in opposition to recent pronouncements on the 'failure of socialism' which seek to deny any relationship between socialist theory and the Eastern European experience, and which place an almost exclusive blame on the rulers of these states (Miliband 1989; Slovo 1990; Nash 1990). In contrast, we maintain that the theoretical foundations upon which the theory of socialism rests are inherently flawed, and as such are unable to provide a basis for a post-capitalist project. As a result, the argument is that the concept of socialism will have to be re-thought and that the best way to do this is by celebrating and defending the 'egalitarian imaginary' against the attempts at closure which underlie the positivist assumptions of Marxism-Leninism.

The Marxist-Leninist concept of democracy[2]

> It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat at the moment regards as its aim. It is a question of *what* the proletariat *is*, and what in accordance with this *being*, it *must* historically be compelled to do. Its aim and historical action is visibly and irrevocably foreshadowed in its own life situation.
>
> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (1975:37).

Theoria, October 1991, pp. 139–158

The Marxist conception of democracy rests on an anthropological conception of man which guarantees the realisation of the higher order of society known as communism. Nowhere is this more clearly stated than in the above quotation from the *Holy Family*, which unambiguously privileges the endogenous development of history over rational choice. (The same logic underlies Engels's famous distinction between 'Utopian' and 'Scientific' socialism.)

In this schema, the subjectivity of agents is derived from the economy. By virtue of their position in the relations of production a class-in-itself – whose interests are inherent and known in advance – can be identified. During a process of political struggle – which emerges from the *inherently* antagonistic nature of the relations of production – class location is transformed into class consciousness and we can talk of a class-for-itself. Here the influence of Hegel is clear,[3] as is the origin of a politics of substitution which is given practical expression in Lenin's *What is to be Done?*.[4] Of course classes can misconstrue their true interests, but this is the task of the revolutionary party to correct.

The endogenous conceptualisation of 'the economic' has recently been criticised by Louis Althusser (1982). Rejecting what he terms the false 'theoretical unity' of *Capital*, Althusser points to the way in which this conception of politics is reinforced by the structure of Marx's *magnum opus*. By beginning his analysis of capitalism with a presentation of the arithmetic calculability of surplus value 'in which labour power figures purely and simply as a commodity' in isolation from the chapters detailing its historical conditions of existence – chapters which 'stand outside of the *order of exposition*' – Marx endorses a purely economic theory of exploitation. This, Althusser continues, has helped reinforce false and restrictive divisions between 'economic' and 'political' forms of struggle which 'is today hindering the broadening of the forms of the whole working class and struggle of the masses' (Althusser 1979:233–4). Seen in this light, Marx's decision to start with the abstract commodity is a reinforcement of the conception of history as a process which is internal to itself. (It was Stalin, of all people, who recognised this and expunged the concept of *Aufhebung*, i.e. the 'transcendence-preserving-the-transcended-as-the-internalized-transcended' (Althusser 1982:182), from Marxist thought.)

Abstracting from the terms in which Althusser framed his discussion, the logic of the argument is clear. If historical processes, and class-interests, can be determined in isolation from their conditions of existence, and if these interests, like the secret of commodities, can only be understood through the *application* of the *science* of Marxism-Leninism, then our conception of democracy

must be one which allows for the exclusion of 'various forces from the political process, and [the] relegating [of] political *problems* to the status of conflicts between those who knew the truth and those who, out of ignorance, malice or self-interest, refused to acknowledge that truth' (Polan 1984:117).[5] In this context, it comes as no surprise to hear Marx proclaim that the question of democracy is a question of *being* and historical compulsion, not choice.[6] Flowing from the assumption that there is an essential homogeneity of interests among structurally defined classes, and Lenin's notion of the vanguard, we are forced to acknowledge the myth of 'the general will', which Claude Lefort dubs the 'People as One' hypothesis.

What remains is a limited conception of a politics which has been reduced to an expression of already determined interests. This has devastating effects for Marxism's ability to provide a framework for a democratic society. If 'class interests' derive from 'class position', then it follows that the end of the latter means the end of politics. Relations under communism will be 'transparent in their simplicity' (Marx 1976:172).[7] A practical demonstration of this conception of politics can be found in the Soviet Union's inability to 'think' gender relationships, or to concede the possibility of a form of consciousness not reducible to class. In Stalin's time the *zhenskii vopros* (women question) was declared solved. It was only in the context of potentially devastating demographic changes that Brezhnev acknowledged the possibility of such a contradiction, officially regarded as a 'non-antagonistic contradiction' (cf. Buckley 1989).

This anti-political impulse is the key to an understanding of the conceptual bankruptcy of Marxism-Leninism and its (however implicit) responsibility for the monstrosities which are beginning to crumble in Eastern Europe. Let us now turn to the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat and examine the ways in which it gives further content to the totalitarian impulse mentioned above.

The dictatorship of the proletariat

Lenin is correct when he proclaims that 'it has often been said and written that the main point in Marx's theory is the class struggle, but this is wrong. . . . Those who recognise only the class struggle are not yet Marxists; they may be found to be still within the bounds of bourgeois thinking and bourgeois politics. . . . Only he is a Marxist who extends the recognition of the class struggle to the recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat' (Lenin 1977a:261–2; Marx 1978b:220). The dictatorship of the proletariat is indeed the logical extension of the concept of class interest just discussed.

In Marxist theory, the dictatorship refers to the political transition period which corresponds with the 'revolutionary transformation' of capitalist society into communist society. In this phase, the state can 'be nothing but the *revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat*' (Marx 1978a:538) which 'itself only constitutes the transition to the *abolition of all classes and to a classless society*' (Marx 1978b:220).

Having seized state power, the goal is to use the power of the state, which was previously the exclusive preserve of the (representatives of) the minority, to further the *historically inscribed* goals of the (actively participating) majority i.e. the abolition of class society. As such, the intention is to consolidate the insurrectionary process by using the power of the state 'both to crush the resistance of the exploiters and to *lead* the enormous mass of the population – the peasants, the petty bourgeoisie, and semi-proletarians – in the work of organising a socialist economy' (Lenin 1977a:255). Because we know, *ex ante*, that this *is* the true goal of the proletariat, there can be no questioning the need to endorse, or verify support for the dictatorship,[8] or for qualms about the use of force to achieve these objectives. As such, the dictatorship of the proletariat 'is rule won and maintained by the use of violence by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie, rule that is unrestricted by any laws' (Lenin 1977b:23).

In his treatment of 'the state', Lenin refers to a body which is separate from society, and which, by its very nature, reproduces that from which it arises, i.e. class antagonisms. Here Lenin is endorsing the view that the failure of the Paris Commune demonstrated that 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and wield it for its own purposes', but must smash it (Marx 1977:217–8; 1983:98; Lenin 1977a:257, 263–66). Accordingly, the argument is that the state – as institution, not the functions performed by the state – is fundamentally oppressive, and must be smashed in order to give way to full communism: '. . . it is clear that the liberation of the oppressed class is impossible not only without a violent revolution,[9] *but also without the destruction* of the apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling class and which is the embodiment of this "alienation"' (Lenin 1977a:242).

In this phase, the state operates (initially) as an almost mirror image of the bourgeois state. The difference between the two is that its purpose is (ultimately) to destroy its own political functions, and to turn itself into 'a non-political state' where its remaining administrative functions can be directly performed by 'The People'. By transforming the state from an organ separate from society into a series of administrative functions performed by society itself, the

(non-political) state becomes subordinate to society, and not the other way round as it is under capitalism (cf. Lenin 1977a:283). The manner in which such direct management is to be performed is never clearly elaborated, but the intention is clear. To paraphrase Lenin: each will govern in turn such that ultimately no one will govern.

There is, however, a fundamental difference between the two dictatorships. The dictatorship of the bourgeoisie is subject to the constraints of parliamentary democracy, to the rule of law, and to constitutional checks and balances. The communist model of politics, by contrast, rejects the bourgeois separation of executive from legislature, and calls for the transformation of 'talking shops' into 'working bodies' (Lenin 1977a:270). The former's insistence on a separation of powers presumes a celebration of multi-interest politics and a concern to prevent the monopolisation of power. The latter treats these as non-problems. Communism is the end of multi-interest politics. The essential homogeneity of wills, and the depiction of the workings of society as 'transparent in its simplicity' means that there is no need to keep institutional checks on representatives. In the event that people shirk their responsibilities, or try to abuse their power – a possibility which neither Marx nor Lenin denied – they would simply be recalled from office.

At this point, it will be useful to examine the philosophical assumptions on which the concept of the dictatorship rests. We have already referred to Lenin's reliance on an instrumentalist view of the state as 'a product of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms', which is 'a power standing *above* society and "*alienating* itself *more and more* from it"' (Lenin 1977a:242). This conception of the state has been increasingly regarded as inadequate, and the criticisms thereof are too well known to bear rehearsing.

A more interesting critique relates to the way in which this conception of the state allowed Lenin to equate the rule of the bourgeoisie with a dictatorship based on force. This only holds water if we, like Marx in *On The Jewish Question*, dismiss the individual freedoms and rights which the parliamentary *form* makes possible as little more than an attempt to provide legitimation for the capitalist state. This is, however, an untenable assumption. The nature of 'the bourgeois revolution', the constitutional state and the defence of individual rights, is a complex one which will be discussed at a later stage. For the moment it is sufficient to point to the way in which the absence of constitutional mechanisms for a change in government has often allowed otherwise corrupt and unpopular leaders like Mobutu Sese Seko and Fidel Castro to remain in power.

However this is to attack Marxism-Leninism at its weakest point. There is no inherent reason – there are plenty of probable reasons[10] –

why such constitutional arrangements could not be used in communist societies. To understand the depth of the gulf between Marxist-Leninist and multi-interest democracy, we need to examine the critique of the parliamentary *form*.

Parliamentary democracy, which Lenin equates with bourgeois democracy, is inherently limited and stifling, and must be dispensed with. Instead of a form of democracy which allows citizens the chance to make simple candidate-based choices every five or six years, a form of Soviet or Council style 'direct' democracy is defended. Although Lenin calls for a combination of representation and direct rule, this is very different to the kind of *institutionalized* arrangements to which people like Poulantzas refer (Poulantzas 1980:261). Rather it involves 'the transformation of public functions from political into simple functions of administration' (Lenin 1977a:283), which is ultimately a continuation of the theme of de-politicization.

Here we see the importance of the conflation of communist politics with administration. For essentially practical reasons, representative organs will continue to be necessary, but they will not be removed from society and will not involve specialist or permanent representatives. These representatives will be ordinary men and women, who are paid 'workmen's' wages. (In opposition to the conflation of politics with administration, and to the belief that multi-interest politics will 'wither away' under communism, Weber believed that 'while the political sphere acts as a restraint on the administration, the administration is also necessary to defuse the dangerous tendencies of the politicians (a term which may mean the *whole* of the citizenry)' (Polan 1984:109).)

Perhaps the most important critique relates to Lenin's belief in the progressive simplifications of tasks under capitalism, and the notion of an homogeneity of wills as an essential foundation for the communist project. Although it could be argued that the simplification thesis is a retreat from the more grandiose claims of all-round development contained in *The German Ideology* – claims that would be equally impossible to sustain in contemporary society (Elster 1985: 521–28) – this seems to be the issue upon which the continued relevance of Marxism-Leninism, as a philosophy for the management of a post-capitalist society, will stand or fall.

According to the simplification thesis,

> Capitalist culture has *created* large-scale production, factories, railways, the postal service, telephones, etc., and *on this basis* the great majority of the functions of the old 'state power' have become so simplified and can be reduced to such exceedingly simple operations of registration, filing and checking that they can easily be performed by every literate person, can

> quite easily be performed for ordinary 'workmen's wages', and these functions can (and must) be stripped of every shadow of privilege, of every semblance of 'official grandeur' (Lenin 1977a:269).

Because these tasks are so simple, they can be performed by almost anyone, and do not require a specialised administrative-governmental apparatus for their completion. At the same time, and in order not to overstate our case, it must be acknowledged that Lenin was no fool, and that he recognised the need for bourgeois specialists to assist in the construction of the new order. This was, however, to be a temporary feature only, and one which would be under the direct control of the armed workers.

Once again we see the importance of Marx's belief that communist relations would be 'transparent in their simplicity' (Marx 1976:172), which made possible a system of comprehensive nation-wide planning with no contradiction between general and particular interests, or problems related to technical coordination and calculability (Selucký 1979; Nove 1983). These are not viable assumptions on which to base a political project. The idea of the capitalist state simplifying itself, and of the progressive dispensability of the bureaucratic stratum, is a misreading of the nature of the state form, and of the nature of bureaucracy. Modern states have become progressively more complex, whilst their tasks become more specialised. Lenin's theory ultimately rests on the idea that 'the particular *form* of the state is immaterial, epiphenomenal and insignificant, and what counts is a supposed essence' (Polan 1984:91). There were good reasons for criticising the state form in Imperial Russia, Polan continues, but the argument that the *essence* of the Tsarist state was the same as all others in Europe is mistaken. By making this assumption the introduction of those very features which determined the specificity of the bourgeoisie state, as opposed to the direct rule by one class over another – eg. the separation of state from civil society, freedom of the press, the right to form political parties, separation of powers etc. – is downplayed, allowing us 'to elide the differences between liberal democracies and other authoritarian and repulsive regimes of a fascist or totalitarian nature' (Polan 1984:91–2).

The implications of such a critique are both devastating and depressing. If tasks are not simplified the need for a (political) state remains. Even with the best will in the world, the conceptual weaknesses of this argument mean that we have no sound principles on which to govern, and we are once again forced to take refuge in the world of class interests and the *scientific* status of Marxism-Leninism in order to maintain any semblance of ideological coherence. We have thus returned to the original point of my exposition, the logic of

substitution, to use Trotsky's phrase, and the need for a vanguard party to interpret the 'general will'.

At this point it is necessary to distance ourselves from the argument that the concept of the one party state cannot be found in the original Marxist texts (cf. Slovo 1990:19). It is not denied that the Marxist-Leninist call is for class rule, not rule by a single party. However if we acknowledge that the conceptual basis on which such claims rest are false, then we have little choice but to admit the close relationship between the two. Given the assumption of an essential homogeneity of interests amongst the working class, it is difficult to see a continued need for different political parties. As a result of the emphasis which is placed on the need to conscientize workers, to make them aware of their class interests and historical destiny, the existence of different parties could easily be dismissed as an attempt to confuse the workers and to prevent the *realisation* of *their* interests (Polan 1984:117; Hirst 1990).

In short, the argument is that it is this essentialization of the social that is used to give theoretical justification to the centralisation of authority and power. As Terry Eagleton notes, the practical consequences of the (false) assumption of the universality of the working class's 'objective interests' is that for as long as it is an emergent social class it is unlikely to consolidate any sectional interests, and will try to win as wide a support base as possible. Once they have seized power, however, the falseness of their claim to universalism will soon manifest itself and selfish interests will cause it to concentrate on particular interests. More importantly, this lapse will increase the need for an ideological justification of the proletariat's right to rule (Eagleton 1991:56–7). In his characteristically succinct manner, Claude Lefort sums up the effects of this process as follows:

> It does not matter that, for a while, the people is confused with the proletariat: the latter is then conceived mythically as the universal class into which all elements working for the construction of socialism are absorbed; it is no longer, strictly speaking, a class within a stratified society, it has become the people in its essence and notably includes the bureaucracy. This image is combined with that of the Power-as-One, power concentrated within the limits of the ruling apparatus and, ultimately, in an individual who embodies the unity and will of the people. These are two versions of the same phantasy. For the People-as-One can be both represented and affirmed only by the great Other; in the initial period it can be so only by that great individual whom Solzhenitsyn has so aptly called the *Egocrat* (Lefort 1986:287).

To conclude, the argument is that in the Marxist-Leninist conception of consciousness 'the outcome of the decision procedure is

smuggled in with the hypothesis of the nature of the deciding agent' (Hirst 1990:167). This is a flawed, and ultimately authoritarian, form of democracy. It grants no legitimacy to personal, 'racial', ethnic, national, or gender based forms of political conflict – none of which can be said to exist autonomously, each overdetermining the identity of the other – and provides no institutional arrangements for the expression of such interests. By equating politics with the administration of an essentially conflict free society, 'society turns out to be an amorphous matter to be organised, something which is organizable and which lends itself to the constant intervention of the engineer, the builder of communism' (Lefort 1986:287; Arendt 1960).

Let us now turn our attention to the second form of democracy under discussion.

Radical democracy

> There is no *unique* privileged position from which a uniform continuity of effects will follow, concluding with the transformation of society as a whole. All struggles, whether those of workers or other political subjects, left to themselves, have a partial character, and can be articulated to very different discourses. It is this articulation that gives them their character, not the place from which they come . . . This means that any politics with hegemonic aspirations can never consider itself as *repetition*, as taking place in a sphere delimiting a pure internality, but must always mobilise itself on a plurality of planes.
>
> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985:169).

The concept of radical democracy rests on a very different conception of social relations to that embraced in the Marxist-Leninist tradition. It is explicitly anti-humanist, and is not content to assert that the inherently rational character of communism will enable us to reduce the question of communist politics to a matter of administration. Instead, radical democracy rests on a defence of the 'egalitarian imaginary', and is an attempt to extend the democratic logic into the text of a socialist project.

In this regard, the philosophy of radical democracy arises out of two related concerns. The first is the desire to reject any attempt to depict 'society' as unified along an essential class axis. Traditional socialist theory is criticised for being reductionist and essentialist. Radical democracy, by contrast, rejects the idea of an *a priori* determinant of history, or the identification of a fixed axis along which social conflict takes place. There are a number of contingent axes of antagonism, and potential antagonisms, any combination of which may dominate.

The second involves the positive affirmation of this contingency. If society is not organised along essential class lines, and is not determined by the laws of motion of an endogenous 'economic level', then it is possible to develop a form of politics which celebrates and defends such openness. (It is in this context that the 'egalitarian imaginary' which lies at the heart of 'liberal democracy' needs to be discussed.) History provides us with a number of attempts to privilege a particular organizational principle, be it God, class, or gender. The task of radical democracy is to reject such attempts at closure, and to seek to articulate alternate social pacts, or 'chains of equivalence', in order to contest 'the social' in a way which is simultaneously liberatory and democratic.

As radical democracy, at least in its Laclau-Mouffeian form, is not simply an extension of traditional democratic theory, but rests on a very different philosophical conception of (the regulation of) 'the social', it is essential to examine each aspect in turn.

Critique of Marxist reductionism

Laclau and Mouffe, by far the most important representatives of the school, begin by tracing the 'crisis in Marxism' and identify the key-necessary role played by economism (as epiphenomenalism *and* class reductionism) in Marxist theory. Here they explicitly reject the notion that subjects are able automatically to translate a (non-discursive) experience in the relations of production into a class subjectivity, and argue that the process of subjectivization is far more complex than Marxist theory originally envisaged. Drawing on the work of post-Saussurean discourse theory,[11] they argue that the identity of agents, like language, is never 'fixed', and that for this reason identity is permanently open to change.

By radicalizing Gramsci's concept of hegemony, Laclau and Mouffe argue that subjectivization is not the result of one's position in the relations of production *alone*. The social has no unifying logic, rather it is always open, and consists of a number of competing discursive formations. In Gramsci, position in a 'hegemonic bloc', that is to say a contingent discursive formation organised along non-class grounds, is seen as a determinant of political identity only in so far as it articulates *already constituted class subjects* towards one or other *class pole*. Laclau and Mouffe reject this, arguing that such articulation is not limited to times of crisis, and that there is no *a priori* reason why it should take place along class lines. Such dual determination is ultimately little more than a sophisticated attempt to defend class reductionism.[12] Instead, the identity of subjects is

established through their position in these (competing) discursive formations. (This is what Ernesto Laclau means by the 'constitutive character of difference' (Laclau 1983:39).) Hegemonic struggle will thus modify the identity of both (or all) discursive formations involved. As such, their belief in the centrality of discourse in the constitution of identity stands in opposition to the empiricist assumptions underlying Marx and Engels's references to 'real active men' in *The German Ideology*; and to the theory of commodity fetishism articulated in Capital – which argues that our perception of reality is inherent in reality itself, and thus ignores the different ways in which human beings discursively construct and interpret their beliefs and interests (Eagleton 1991:88).

As regards the question of the economic organisation of society, Laclau and Mouffe insist that they are not simply asserting the primacy of the idea. Instead, they affirm the centrality of the need to reproduce material life, only rejecting any *a priori* social division stemming from such activity (Laclau and Mouffe 1982:93; 1985: 75–85).[13] Unlike Marx and Lenin, they acknowledge that economic activity is itself a political activity, and that its conditions of existence are not incidental to its form. For this reason, 'the economic' cannot be treated as an endogenous self regulating 'level'. At the same time, Laclau and Mouffe insist that they are not retreating into an absolutely relativist framework, and argue that existing discursive processes act as *point de capiton*, or the locus of an overdetermination of effects, as their identity rests on the ability to suppress the constitution of other identities. As such, existing discursive processes – for example a discourse of Islamic Fundamentalism – partially limit the field of signification. However such centrality is the result of historical struggle and is never predetermined (Laclau 1983:40).[14]

There is thus no privileged political practice. Because we have rejected the idea of a basic human nature that responds to experiences in an essentialist fashion, it must be acknowledged that the signifier 'worker' can just as easily be articulated into a capitalist discourse which defines it as someone with limited market value, as could it be articulated to an anti-capitalist discourse which defines it as the producer of unpaid surplus value (the example is taken from Hudson 1987).[15] Whilst it is possible to identify contingently defined limits to the field of signification, it must be acknowledged that there is no *a priori* guarantor of Truth, or possibility of 'false consciousness' – in the sense of an illusory phenomenon which is unable to produce material effects: we do not deny that ideology may involve falsity, distortion and mystification (Eagleton 1991:26).

To summarise, the point is that all aspects of the social should be seen as discursively articulated, not the product of an endogenous

process of causation. As a result, the field of politics is incomparably broadened. By rejecting the idea that class can be identified as the (*a priori*) central political antagonism, and thus the need for the (representatives of the) working class to express their 'objective interest' by seizing power and, via their dictatorship, articulate other classes to their position, more democratic forms of political practice become possible.

Let us return to the second point of my definition, the celebration of liberal political discourse.

Liberal political discourse and the egalitarian imaginary

Growing out of the belief in the essential indeterminacy of social relations, radical democrats stress that 'liberal democracy' is a specific political form of society. As such, they are concerned to examine the ways in which liberal discourse is constituted, and the possibility of articulating its various 'elements' into a socialist project (Mouffe 1990).

At the outset it should be stressed that this *is not* an unambiguous celebration of liberalism, or liberal democratic 'societies', *per se*. A central theme running throughout the work of Laclau and Mouffe, Norberto Bobbio (1987, 1988, 1990), who should be seen as the original advocate of radical democracy, and Bowles and Gintis (1986), is that an ongoing critique of liberal democracy in capitalist societies should seek to expose its limitations, and demonstrate that its complete realisation is impossible outside of a socialist framework. Unlike liberals, radical democrats are not willing to limit their attention to the allegedly separate and autonomous worlds of 'the political', 'civil society' and 'the state'. Instead, they vehemently deny any sharp distinction between these 'areas', and insist on the need to democratise all aspects of 'the social'. It is through this broad definition of democratization that radical democrats re-establish contact with the socialist tradition, or at least the left-Eurocommunist variant thereof (cf. Poulantzas 1980:259–65), although they are insistent on the fact that socialism is only one, albeit important, aspect of the struggle for human liberation.

Although there are significant differences between the various authors who either consciously place themselves within the radical democratic tradition, or who are (perhaps problematically) appropriated by it, a central feature of their overall analysis is the belief that 'liberal discourse' cannot be treated as a political practice which necessarily includes a number of essential elements, all of whom are linked to the capitalist economy. The philosophy of liberalism

consists of many different discourses which do not necessarily form a single doctrine. In contemporary capitalist society, as Chantal Mouffe observes, the dominant discourse tends to be individualism, but this need not be the case. Because of the contingent nature of all discursive formations it is possible to talk of, and to struggle for, different forms of liberalism: 'to value the institutions which embody political liberalism's principles does not require us to endorse either economic liberalism or individualism' (Mouffe 1990:58). As such, it is important to try to disarticulate the link between the egalitarian impulse contained in the philosophy of liberalism, discussed below, from the many different forms of private property, and to seek to re-articulate this impulse in a system where the different forms of ownership have been, to varying extents, socialised. This should not, however, be taken as an endorsement of the revolution first, democracy later, position which we discussed in an earlier section. Instead, the argument is that the logic of egalitarianism is constrained under a system of private property, and that a struggle for an expansion of democracy can (potentially) involve us in a challenge to these limits. It is not, *pace* Marx and Engels, an attempt to replace one form of democracy with another *in toto*.

In a similar vein, Zillah Eisenstein (1981, 1984) argues that the egalitarian impulse contained in the discourse of liberal feminism is (potentially) subversive to both capitalism and patriarchy in so far as it is able to demonstrate the disparities between the claims of liberalism and the experience of women in America. (We should, however, be careful not to make any cavalier distinctions between a (discursive) world of ideology and a (non-discursive) world of experience.)

To return to the question of the egalitarian imaginary, the important aspect of 'liberal discourse' which radical democrats wish to appropriate lies in what Claude Lefort calls 'the *dissolution of the markers of certainty*'; or its challenge to the phenomenon which Pierre Bourdieu calls *doxa*. The egalitarian imaginary should be contrasted with any closed system of beliefs, for example the discourse of a God ordained hierarchy in a feudal order. This challenge to the idea of a sutured universe, Lefort argues,

> inaugurates a history in which people experience a fundamental indeterminacy as to the basis of power, law, and knowledge, and as to the basis of relations between *self* and *other*, at every level of social life (at every level where division, and especially the division between those who held power and those who were subject to them, could once be articulated as a result of a belief in the nature of things or in a supernatural principle) (Lefort 1986:19).

It is this (ongoing) process of dissolution of the 'markers of certainty' that underlies the concept of pluralism in 'liberal democracy'. Without a positive endorsement of difference, our attempt to abandon the idea of a privileged form of political practice would be meaningless. As Mouffe argues, pluralism is a complete rejection of the 'dangerous dream of a perfect consensus, of a harmonious collective will' (Mouffe 1990:58–9). It is because of this challenge to the idea of a 'People-as-One' – which we have already argued takes us down a one way street into a philosophy of substitution – that radical democrats maintain that the goals of the *socialist* project cannot be achieved outside of the liberal democratic framework. As such, radical democracy prioritises liberal democracy over socialism. Not because of the niceties of electoral politics, but because it is the ability of liberalism to challenge the fixity of a closed discourse which makes democracy, and socialism, possible.

Radical and plural democracy thus involves the recognition of the centrality of conflict in modern societies, and the plurality of political antagonisms in all areas of life, on the one hand, and the attempt to extend democratic principles to these areas on the other, for example struggles around 'racial' and sexual oppression and the discrimination against minorities. Most importantly, it is an affirmation of the constitutive character of these struggles.

In particular, liberal political values, for example representative multi-party democracy, the right to work and freedom of the press should be upheld, and shown to be fully realisable only under a socialist system. (Knee-jerk attempts to equate them with the liberal economic defence of private property and class rule rest on the idea that these are, *ab initio*, fixed class values which cannot be re-articulated along alternative discursive lines (cf. Engels 1978:23).) Instead of treating *institutional arrangements* in an essentialist and ahistorical fashion, we have to recognise their essential indeterminacy, and the many different ways in which they can be articulated into a variety of political projects.

At this point, it will be useful briefly to refer to five important critiques that can be levelled against the radical democratic project in general, and against Laclau and Mouffe in particular. Whilst not wishing to underplay their significance, or the extent to which they have exposed important obstacles which any radical democratic theorist would have to cross, we will make no attempt to provide answers to such critiques. This is, we hope, justifiable on the grounds that the purpose of the essay is to identify the philosophical starting points of both traditions, and not to engage in a discussion of the intricacies thereof.

The most common critique of Laclau and Mouffe concerns their belief that all identities are relational, and that they resist a final closure. If identity is continually open to (re)negotiation, and if the transition from 'element' to 'moment' is never complete, how is it possible for stable systems of communication to exist, and how do we account for institutional durability? We can, as already noted, refer to the existence of temporary nodal points which 'quilt' the process of signification (cf. Žižek 1989), but the details of this process are obscure. For radical democracy – at least in its Laclau-Mouffeian form – to have any political (and electorial) attractiveness, this problem will have to receive serious attention.

Of equal importance, is the need to recognise the existence of societalization processes, that is to say the 'complex social processes in and through which specific institutional orders and their broader social preconditions are secured' (Jessop 1990:5). Without a notion of 'society effects' it becomes impossible to theorise the kinds of institutional mechanisms needed to give rise to a radical democratic society. Laclau and Mouffe are correct to point to the contingent nature of different institutional arrangements, and to the way in which their character is overdetermined by other discursive formations, but they cannot deny that once in place these arrangements will produce effects which cannot be ignored – hence my earlier remarks on the importance of recent reflections on autopoieticism. As it stands, Laclau and Mouffe's dismissal of any notion of 'society' is without substance.

A more serious critique has been made by Paul Hirst, who points out that the work of radical democrats is, in many senses, 'an attempt to revitalise the concepts of common citizenship, civic virtue, and active participation by individual citizens in the public sphere' (Hirst 1990:161–2). Drawing on his analysis of the French revolution, Hirst argues that attempts to create a 'new republicanism' soon failed, and gave way to representative governments and mass electorates. In this regard, both Hirst and Bobbio argue that we cannot presuppose an electorate which is willing to contest all aspects of 'the social', and believe that calls for active political participation have continually proven to have little electoral appeal. Although Hirst's critique is stilted and ignores many of the more radical aspects of Laclau and Mouffe's work, there is much merit in his claim that proposals for electoral reform and for legally guaranteed civil rights become 'isolated panaceas' in the absence of 'a doctrine of government that addresses the problems of modern representative democracy and proposes a solution to them' (Hirst 1990:161). This scepticism is shared by Hannah Arendt, who believes that 'extraordinary adaptability and absence of continuity are no doubt [the] outstanding

characteristics' of the totalitarian personality, whilst the success of the totalitarian movements in Europe demonstrated that 'politically neutral and indifferent masses could easily be the majority in a democratically ruled country' (Arendt 1960:306, 312).

This is not an endorsement of the view that democracy should be curtailed in any way, or to suggest that there is a relationship between the project of radical democracy and the totalitarian project. Indeed, as we have seen, Laclau and Mouffe's emphasis on the need to make the 'friend-enemy distinction' central to our understanding of politics, and to articulate political alliances or 'chains of equivalence', rests on a very different objective to that of the totalitarian project which 'depended less on the structurelessness of a mass society than on the specific conditions of an atomised and individualised mass' (Arendt 1960:318). It does, however, serve as a warning of the dangers inherent in the combination of an insistence on perpetual challenge and change and a (potentially) indifferent electorate.

The argument is thus that a more feasible form of socialist politics must not take the existence of an active electorate for granted, and would not be undermined if there were a low level of active participation. This point is related to the observation that we need to take societalization processes and 'society effects' seriously, and leads us directly onto the question of legitimacy.

The fourth, and perhaps most important critique that we want to advance, relates to the effects of this conception of a (potentially) foundationless society. Whilst the rejection of the concept of an *a priori* referent has indeed made politics possible, it has also made it difficult to conceptualise the question of political legitimacy and stability. Once again it is useful to refer to the work of Claude Lefort, and to his cautionary warning that, taken to its extreme,

> There is always a possibility that the logic of democracy will be disrupted in a society in which the foundations of the political order and the social order vanish, in which that which has been established never bears the seal of full legitimacy, in which differences of rank no longer go unchallenged, in which right proves to depend upon the discourse which articulates it, and in which the exercise of power depends upon conflict (Lefort 1986:19).

By abandoning all foundations, but holding onto the 'new republicanism' ideal, we may well discover that our conception of politics is as meaningless as that contained in the Marxist – Leninist problematic. Nowhere do Laclau and Mouffe adequately explain the origins of the antagonisms that are seen to be characteristic of late capitalism. (Indeed, their argument is, in many senses, a simple inversion of that developed by the Frankfurt School.) Legitimacy need not rely on any

ahistorical assumptions about class interests, or on normative principles. Perhaps the best definition lies in a procedural approach? Once again, if radical democracy is to gain widespread support as a political project, it will have to provide us with some tools with which to 'think' the question of legitimacy.

The final problem connected to the idea of a radically democratic society in which all relationships are open to continual re-negotiation, is the question of whether the human psyche will be able to tolerate the effects of such indeterminacy.[16] In his recent onslaught against the 'carnivalesque delirium' inherent in the work of many discourse theorists, Terry Eagleton has made much of 'the extent to which a certain provisional stability of identity is not only essential for psychical well-being but for revolutionary political agency': their work, at worst, 'slides into an irresponsible hymning of the virtues of schizophrenia' (Eagleton 1991:197–8). This relates to the need for post-Marxists to provide a more robust account of the processes which give rise to, albeit temporary, stability.

Conclusion

Although not unproblematic, radical democracy can thus be seen to provide us with a useful set of philosophical assumptions with which to begin our re-thinking of socialist democracy. Unlike the traditional Marxist-Leninist argument, it is not dependent on an anthropological conception of man, and does not rely on the notion of 'class interests' or an essentialist depiction of institutional arrangements. However, for the reasons outlined above, it is not without its problems.

Few, if any, attempts, have been made to think through the institutional arrangements needed to create the foundations for the radical democratic project. Such a project is of immediate political importance if democratic socialism is to gain any popularity. As democrats and as socialists we have to respond to the challenges which lie ahead, and reject both the fundamentalist left and the 'New Right' in order to make possible a world which is simultaneously both liberal and egalitarian, and in which distribution is in accordance with the needs of the populace as opposed to the desires of the few.

NOTES

1. Many of the ideas contained in the essay stem from a course which I jointly teach with Mr P.A. Hudson, entitled 'The Crises of Socialism'. I acknowledge his influence gratefully.
2. It is necessary from the outset to stress that there is an essential continuity between the works of Marx and Lenin. Some recent evaluations of Marxist theory have attempted to separate the two traditions in order to lessen Marx's responsibility for the conceptual bankruptcies of communism. (See, for example, Ralph Miliband 1989:30). It should be admitted, however, that there is in Lenin an attempt to turn the doctrine of a man – who, when faced with the attempts of his followers to codify his work, proudly proclaimed: *Moi, je ne suis pas marxiste* – into a series of shock-slogans. The basis for Lenin's work can be clearly traced to texts like *The Holy Family*; the *1872 Preface* to the German edition of *The Communist Manifesto; The Civil War in France* and *Capital*. The *Paris Manuscripts* are equally revealing, but were only published after Lenin's death.
3. Although, to be fair to Hegel, the subject of his teleology was the process itself, not man (cf. Althusser 1982:183).
4. This text is often erroneously cited as proof of a rejection of the essentialism in Marx's work, and as a defence of the importance of 'Politics' in the construction of identity. This is false for, as Lenin tells us, the trade union politics to which workers are otherwise condemned, is *bourgeois consciousness*. As such, the essentialist structure remains the same, all we have is a degree of movement therein.
5. On the same page, Polan points to the similarities between this approach and the words of the American Declaration of Independence: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident.'
6. An equally clear endorsement of the endogenous development of history can be found in the works of the 'late Marx': 'My standpoint, from which the development of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he remains, socially speaking, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them' (Marx 1976:92).
7. Although we will not discuss the claim here, it can be argued that once we reject the conception of ideology contained in *The German Ideology* i.e. as a false reflection of 'reality', and acknowledge the crucial role which ideology plays in the *interpellation* of human subjects, then the claim that ideology will wither away with the superstructure becomes equally untenable (Eagleton 1991:81, 148–52; Althusser 1984).
8. Here the practical expression of the concept of class interest is clear and unambiguous. As Lenin puts it: 'The overthrow of bourgeois rule can be accomplished only by the proletariat, the particular class whose economic conditions of existence prepare it for this task and provide it with the possibility and the power to perform it. . . . Only the proletariat – by virtue of the economic role it plays in large-scale production – is capable of being the leader of *all* the working and exploited people, whom the bourgeoisie exploit, oppress and crush . . . but who are incapable of waging an independent struggle for their emancipation' (Lenin 1977: 255).
9. Here Lenin contradicts Marx's view that 'we do not deny that .there are countries – such as America, England, and . . . perhaps Holland – where the workers can attain their goal by peaceful means' (Marx 1978c:523). However the 'institutions, mores, and traditions' which *may* make this possible, are never outlined, or discussed at any length.
10. A useful discussion of this point can be found in Jon Elster (1988). The main thrust of Elster's argument is that the conception that 'one may rationally count on being able to achieve full democracy by the temporary abolition of democracy' is essentially untrue. This is interesting, as the theoretical assumption on which Elster bases his argument is that 'it is impossible to predict with certainty or even qualified probability the consequences of a major constitutional change'. Whilst Elster limits his discussion to an assessment of the unpredictability of constitutional – or any institutional – arrangements, this fits in nicely with the comments which we will make later on concerning a) the way in which the assumption of rationality in Marx's conception of communism provides a justification for undemocratic practices; and

b) the essential indeterminacy of institutional relationships. An interesting special argument used by Elster is that 'democracy is an especially unlikely outcome of a process that begins by abolishing democracy' (Elster 1988:303–4). We will not consider this here.

11. By discourse is meant the result of any articulatory practice. As such, we are not simply talking about language. Institutions and social practices like 'the sex-gender system' are all discursive practices. For a critique of this definition, see Jessop (1990:288, 297–301) and Eagleton (1991:215–19).
12. As Laclau argues, 'in the Gramscian discourse the politics of the signifier and the play of difference do not enter the process of constitution of the identity of the subjects of hegemony. Social classes appear in the Gramscian discourse as *natural* subjects of hegemony and, as a result, the necessity of *one* hegemonic centre can reproduce, under different forms, a discourse of *the* society' (Laclau 1983: 42–3).
13. It is this acknowledgement, more than anything else, that separates Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxism from the more 'idealistic' post-Structuralist tradition. For an important discussion of the differences between Lacan and the post-Structuralists, see Žižek (1989:156).
14. This formulation is developed – by way of a commentary on Lacan's notion of the 'Ideological Quilt' – in Žižek (1989). For a discussion of the 'Derridean trace' in their work see Jessop (1990:296).
15. Here Laclau is correct to argue that capitalist relations should not be treated as *intrinsically* antagonistic, as it 'is only if the worker *resists* such an extraction [of surplus value] that the relationship becomes antagonistic; and there is nothing in the category of "seller of labour power" to suggest that such resistance is a *logical* conclusion' (Laclau 1990:9). In the absence of the sorts of assumptions underlying the Marxist-Leninist theory of consciousness, such a conclusion would not only rely on an extreme act of faith, but would fly in the face of the reality of post-war worker political allegiances. Jon Elster, working from a completely different perspective, is also concerned to comment on the ability of subjects to interpret their class situation in non-class ways, eg. as 'bad luck', rather than as systematic exploitation (Elster 1985:18–22).
16. I am grateful to Mr P. A. Hudson for this point.

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Post-Marxism with Apologies?*

Jennifer Robinson

Post-Marxism may have become something of a new orthodoxy in Western countries, but the arguments of its proponents remain relatively unexplored, if not somewhat unfashionable, in the South African context (although see, for example, Ashforth, 1990; Cloete and Muller, 1991; Deacon, 1991). In this regard, then, Mouzelis's latest offering, *Post-Marxist Alternatives: The Construction of Social Orders*, should be of interest to South African readers. But there are a number of other reasons why the contribution from Mouzelis reviewed here is useful. Firstly because he is engaging with the problem of economic reductionism in Marxism – a problem which has occupied a number of local writers for some time (such as Helliker, 1988; Wolpe, 1988; Dubow, 1989). Secondly, because he tries to hold on to Marxism's better qualities while at the same time trying to move beyond its more severe failings – something which some academics here may find politically appealing. And thirdly because he elaborates his arguments with examples from nineteenth-century Greece, a 'developing' country which has more than a passing comparability with aspects of South African history. Of more general interest is his overall aim which is to provide a political analysis which is independent of concepts derived from the economic sphere.

Nevertheless, there are some aspects of Mouzelis's discussion with which I would like to take issue, and which arise directly from his desire to 'hold on' to Marxism in the face of the many criticisms which have contributed to its 'theoretical crisis' (p. 18). I especially find his use of economically based analogies to understand the political sphere problematic: at best unnecessary and, at worst, perpetuating of a materialism which has been the subject of extended criticism. The first section below will outline Mouzelis's contribution

* Review essay: *Post-Marxist Alternatives: The Construction of Social Orders* by N. Mouzelis. London: Macmillan, 1990. ISBN 0–333–53156–6, 210 pp. £40.00.

Theoria, October 1991, pp. 159–171

ERRATUM

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to an analysis of the political sphere, while the second will explore the possibilities which his approach offers in thinking about the South African situation. The final section draws out some of the problems with his schema and points towards a more thoroughly post-Marxist

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position both in general and in terms of understanding South African politics.

Post-Marxist alternatives

In defence of Marxism

The kernel of Mouzelis's argument is that while Marxism can be criticised for its economic reductionism, it should not be rejected altogether, as many contemporary critics are wont to do. But instead of responding defensively to the widespread dismissal of Marxism, he suggests that we acknowledge its extensive problems while holding on to what he sees as its strengths. Chief amongst these, he argues, are Marxism's conception of the dialectic between structure and agency and its holistic approach to analysing society.

In terms of the structure-agency relationship, Mouzelis suggests that Marxism manages to avoid the opposing evils of determinism and voluntarism in a way which other contemporary social theories/theorists fail to do. He defends this claim in his generally easily accessible and 'chatty' style when he argues, for example, that 'it requires no mental acrobatics to move from an analysis of how the technical and social division of labour allocates agents into different locations/positions within the sphere of production, to an investigation of the type of practices and struggles to which such structural positions lead or fail to lead' (p. 25). It does seem strange, though, that Mouzelis can claim the structure-agency relation as a theoretical *strength* of Marxism, when it is perhaps one of the most hotly contested arenas within Marxism as well as the source of much criticism from non-Marxist theorists.

The basis of Giddens's (1981) critique of historical materialism and his elaboration of structuration theory is, for example, an effort to engage with the inadequacies of Marxist conceptualisations of the interactions between structures and agents. And, as Perry Anderson (1983) – in his masterful review of historical materialism – suggests, the relationship between structure and subject in human history and society 'was not a marginal or local area of uncertainty in Marxist theory. Indeed, it has always constituted one of the most central and fundamental problems of historical materialism as an account of the development of human civilization' (p. 34). In the absence, then, of a coherent Marxist account of structure-agency relations, Giddens has advanced his notions of the recursive interaction between structures and agents, suggesting that structures both reproduce and are reproduced by human agency.

Thus Mouzelis's claim that Marxism contains a sensitivity to both structure and agency is probably true of the entire (complex) corpus of

Marxist theory – and Mouzelis offers us little guidance as to which Marxism(s) hold out this conceptual usefulness. But even so, this is true only in the most trivial and unhelpful of senses. That agents and structures are both important shapers of history is generally agreed, but the nature of interactions between the two is unspecified and their juxtaposition in the simplistic way which Mouzelis suggests raises many more questions than it puts to rest.[1] In addition, the complex debates surrounding the meaning of both these terms are not sufficiently acknowledged: what is an agent? what is the ontological significance of structures? Indeed, his theory seems to rest upon the idea of an individual agent, banding, additively, into collectivities. Mouzelis dismisses the 'dialogic' character of intersubjective action (as in Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Habermas, 1984) as unsuitable because of its inability to entertain a substantive analysis of institutional dynamics.[2] 'Ideology' offers the only possible rubric within which to capture these socially mediated meanings and interpretations – a rubric which is fundamentally problematic.

The other pole of Mouzelis's defence of Marxism concerns its 'holism', that is, its ability to 'investigate how contradictions and struggles within the economy are systematically related to changes in the political and cultural spheres' (p.93). Thus while Mouzelis supports a strong (see Helliker, 1988) interpretation of the autonomy of the political, and of the state, he considers that it is most important to retain a sense of the mutual determination between the economic and the political spheres – a position, incidentally, which need not necessarily derive from Marxism. Indeed, placing this holistic requirement within the Marxist camp only serves to raise endless thorny questions about ultimate determination, which Mouzelis is at pains to avoid throughout this book.

In the context of debates around the nature of state autonomy, this is a useful statement of the current state of the assessment of state-society (or economy) relations. Here I find it useful to distinguish between autonomy and independence: the state can arguably be said to be an autonomous institution, with interests, dynamics and outcomes which are derived from within its own sphere of activity. However, it is also clear that, as with all social agents and institutions, the state does not exist in a vacuum. In this regard, it is clearly dependent, in a variety of different ways, upon other agents, institutions and social processes, including economic agents, institutions and processes. But the nature of these dependencies have not been specified in any systematic way within the framework of a state-centric analysis. It is quite likely, then, that many of the earlier, reductionist insights of Marxist state theory could be usefully mobilised within this new theory of state autonomy.

Michael Mann (1986), however, disapproves of the focus upon mutually interacting 'spheres' of social life. As he comments, 'in this sense both Marxian and neo-Weberian orthodoxies are false. Social life does not consist of a number of realms – each composed of a bundle of organisations and functions, ends and means – whose relations with one another are those of external objects' (Mann, 1986: 18). Indeed, Mann is challenging the fundamental ontologies of much of Western sociology, arguing instead for a new reading of society which focuses upon the more immediately observable aggregations (institutions) rather than upon the imagined divisions of economics, politics, ideology. While Mouzelis is certainly concerned with the importance of institutions within the political sphere, he retains this 'levels' analysis which Mann (1986) has attempted to redefine as an interaction between various sources and networks of power. Mouzelis might have found this framework useful in attempting to elaborate upon his concept of the 'forces of domination', or the technologies of political power – which we will consider in the following section.

Mouzelis's reasons for defending Marxism are, he claims, essentially pragmatic, to do with the 'heuristic utility' of the theory, rather than with its political role or one's personal commitment to its value in the 'salvation or damnation of the modern world' (pp. 2–3). But the remainder of the book explains why a retention of Marxism is essential for the account of political relations which Mouzelis has developed.

New concepts for the political sphere

Many of Mouzelis's points in defence of Marxism are made in two previously published essays, appearing here as Chapters 1 and 2, which reflect upon Gregor MacLennan's *Marxism and the Methodologies of History* and Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (misspelt as 'social strategy'), and are thus very partial in their coverage of the debates (as was indicated above). More original and also more interesting in my view is the second part of the book entitled 'The Economic and the Political: Towards a Non-Reductive Framework'. Here Mouzelis advances his non-reductionist account of the political domain.

The author's concern is with institutional transformation and the dynamic processes which shape the political sphere. In opposition to Marxist accounts which either present an unashamedly economically reductionist interpretation of the political or, from an understanding of the relative autonomy of the political sphere, interpret political processes through economic categories such as classes, he argues that we need to 'create new concepts for the analysis of the political and

cultural spheres' (p. 1). But he insists that we should do this without abandoning the holistic approach of Marxism which guards 'against the study of economic, political and cultural phenomena in a compartmentalised, contextless or ad hoc manner'(p. 38).

However, Mouzelis's 'new concepts' for analysing the political turn on some very familiar Marxist concepts derived from the economic sphere and import into the political sphere many of the unresolved questions which have dogged previous Marxist analyses.[3] He argues that we can adopt a 'material' analysis of the political, identifying political technologies and forces and relations of domination, as well as political ideologies which represent these material conditions (p. 47). He suggests that we conceptualise the totality of all these political aspects of a particular social order as a Mode of Domination. Obviously these terms, and their empirical referents, mirror the traditional Marxist terms dealing with the economy – namely, forces and relations of production, and modes of production.

On the one hand, this is a most exciting conceptual manouevre. As Mouzelis suggests, it enables us to analyse the political sphere without reference to economic categories such as class, and to understand political change as autonomous of economic transformations. Presumably a mode of domination might change according to a completely different rhythm from that governing the economy (although their interdependencies would need to be explored in an empirically open fashion).

He offers some caveats to his scheme, including the comment that 'the aim is not a complete isomorphism between the economic and the political spheres' (p. 73) and a disclaimer regarding the potential materialism involved in the identification of forces, relations and ideologies within the mode of domination:

> As I reject both the substantive and the methodological [but not the conceptual] implications of historical materialism, I consider attempts at establishing the primacy of one of the three dimensions on the level of politics as useless and sterile as are similar attempts at establishing in universalistic manner the primacy of the forces or relations of production within a mode of production or within a social formation as a whole (p. 74).

Mouzelis follows Foucault and Weber in their discussions of disciplinary surveillance and forces of domination respectively in his formulation of the notion of political technologies (or forces of domination). Here the micro-powers of Foucault's work, the means of administration and government (including taxation, accounting) discussed at length by Weber, and Mouzelis's concern with more

contemporary political 'techniques' such as populistic and clientelistic forms of political incorporation make up this dimension of the political sphere (pp. 50–1). In the context of his extended discussion of Greek history, Mouzelis considers how the bureaucratisation and rationalisation of the state apparatus during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century undermined the oligarchic rule of notables which had hitherto characterised the political arena. The Revolution of 1909, then, far from being a 'bourgeois' revolution as characterised by Marxist historians, was a political revolution which took place within a very undeveloped economy dominated by merchant rather than industrial capital.

However, Mouzelis directs by far the most attention to the second dimension of politics, the 'relations of domination'. Mouzelis postulates that there is a structural relationship between 'subjects differentially situated vis-a-vis the control of technologies' (p. 67). The struggle between opposing (dominating and dominated) political groups is, according to Mouzelis, over 'the amount of political consent or compliance that the holders of the means of domination can extract from the non-holders' (p. 67). It is far from apparent, though, how the technologies of domination determine, or even shape, the relations of domination (or more broadly, politics) since much the same technologies of domination are available over a wide temporal and spatial spread of states and polities with varied political relations and political forms. Both authoritarian states and Western democracies, for example, rely upon bureaucracies and use many of the same disciplinary mechanisms in their maintenance of domination and order. Mouzelis sidesteps this problem by focussing upon the practices of political agents in addition to their structural position with respect to the means of domination. But this only leaves vast swathes of political process and outcomes to be explained through open-ended, empirical research. His account of the political sphere might therefore seem somewhat minimalist and insufficiently systematic. Perhaps more seriously, though, he does not take account of the wide variety of 'relations of domination' which occur within any given society.

Mirroring the economic class analysis too closely, the two-group dynamic between holders and non-holders of the means of domination is inadequate as a characterisation of the power relations which emerge from the multitude of technologies of power in the modern world. And here Mann (1986) is potentially more useful in understanding the complex and overlapping power networks which shape societies – considerably 'messier' than Mouzelis's notion of a mode of domination. Many different actors and strategies abound within any given 'mode of domination'. In addition, many power relations, if

we take Foucault seriously, do not entail an orchestrateD attempt to dominate another group. Indeed, on Foucault's account, it is the modern day reformers and liberators who have elaborated the most subtle and extensive forms of power, not the politicians determined to hold on to state power (Foucault, 1977; 1980). And even when powers and technologies are appropriated by the state for its own purposes, other agents remain important in shaping and implementing modalities of domination.

Modes of domination in South Africa

Why do I imagine, then, that Mouzelis's post-Marxist alternative might be of interest to the student of South African affairs? My reasons are based upon a reading of Mouzelis which is at once both critical and favourable. First, despite my reservations on the matter, I would suggest that changing technologies of power might have more to do with the contemporary transformation of South African society than we have imagined to date. And second, that the focus on domination which Mouzelis advocates, if suitably disconnected from the restricting notion of a 'mode of domination', could offer a suitable framework within which to locate recent debates around the nature of the state and the autonomy of politics.

Unfortunately, the challenge which this text brings to South African studies is watered down by his claims regarding the continued value of Marxist analysis – unfortunate because South African writers and scholars themselves remain tied to the terminology and concepts of Marxism, and have generally been unresponsive to the post-Marxist critiques which have taken root elsewhere in the academic world. Before expanding on this point (in the next section) I would like to suggest that Mouzelis does speak directly to a number of recent efforts to explore the political dynamics of South African society.

Of late, the old 'liberal-radical' 'race-class' debate – still casting a long shadow over interpretations of South African history – has been translated into a more contemporary concern with the question of the autonomy of the state and with the independent dynamics of the political sphere (Posel, 1986; Dubow, 1986; 1989; Wolpe, 1988; Greenberg, 1987). An interesting engagement with the influential role of bureaucrats, state managers and political conflict has resulted in a much less mechanistic interpretation of the rise and decline of segregation and apartheid, at both the central and local state levels, and in a political and a physical (geographical) sense. Even within the realm of the economy, political actors and imperatives have been

identified as crucial in shaping outcomes (Duncan, 1990). These more state-centred analyses have not been confined to historical studies; the contemporary period (whose lessons may have played no small role in confirming the value of *political* analyses in general) has witnessed significant proactivity on the part of state managers in attempting to shape and cope with the upheavals of transition (Swilling and Phillips, 1991).

Even so, some authors have been reluctant to abandon some final, if long term, determination of political events by economic imperatives. Dubow (1986) and Posel (1987) both end off their respective dissertations with a quotation from Jon Elster's *Making Sense of Marx* to the effect that in the long term the state will always adjust to the needs of Capitalism. Mouzelis offers a clear counter to this claim, taking what Helliker (1988) has called a 'strong' view of state autonomy. He writes: 'Marxists do not take very seriously the obviously negative, obstructionist role (*vis-à-vis* the expanded reproduction of capitalism) that the State is playing in many Third-World countries' (p. 95). In this regard Mouzelis's scheme links in well to the notion that 'Apartheid' has at times been 'functional' to capital, and at time dysfunctional (Wolpe, 1988; Nattrass, 1990) – and the dimensions of this dysfunctionality require further elaboration from within a state-centred analysis.[4]

However, none of the writers on South African history have taken the infrastructure (or the technologies) of political power seriously. Doing so entails a critical attitude to accounts of an excessively unified state since, as I remarked in my observations on Mouzelis's notion of the mode of domination, the multiple technologies of political[5] power involve many different agents in dominative power relations, and potentially in non-instrumental and non-authored power relations. Although there is no reason why different technologies of power need coalesce into a coherent mode of domination, there may well be cases where this does occur. One could hypothesise that the Apartheid mode of domination was such a case; but here again we need to be cautioned by the complexities of history. As Posel (1986) and others (e.g. Lazar, 1987; Mabin, 1990) have pointed out, Grand Apartheid was not a self-evident plan implemented with ease once the Nationalists came into power. Instead, the conceptual framework of Apartheid was only slowly put together, and implemented with difficulty and many modifications during the 1950s and 1960s. Contradictions and practical problems plagued many aspects of the Apartheid order (see Greenberg, 1987) and its demise was evidenced in the turn to exceptional violence – arguably the weakest form of power – in the 1980s.

But if we abandon the notion of a society-wide 'mode of

domination' *a la* Mouzelis, then we may find more specific and limited technologies of power which are important in maintaining aspects of certain political orders. One such technology I have identified is a particularly geographical strategy (appropriate for an order whose popular title is profoundly geographical in implication) which I have labelled the 'Location strategy'. Dating back to the first half of the nineteenth century, and deployed in both rural and urban areas, this fundamental territorial strategy has underlain several government efforts to maintain control over African people. The state was concerned with control in an overt political sense in terms of sustaining the domination of African people and their exclusion from citizenship rights and also in the more subtle sense of building infrastructural capacity in order to be able simply to govern this vast population with limited resources and meagre infrastructural capacity. Thus the territorial strategy was implemented in an effort to facilitate the physical surveillance of African people. Alongside the racist ideology or political philosophy of segregation (Cell, 1982) we can identify a *practice* of physical segregation and administration in Locations which was intrinsically concerned with building state capacity – without which racial domination would have been impossible (Robinson, 1990). Indeed, without some measure of infrastructural capacity – not necessarily of the geographically segregated and racially differentiated type – the new South African government will be equally unable to implement decisions taken by state managers.

While I have argued above that one cannot read relations of domination easily from the forces of domination, as Mouzelis would seem to suggest (albeit with a number of caveats), I feel that analysis of contemporary South Africa, as much as historical analysis, could benefit from greater attention to the forces (or infrastructure) of domination. In a suggestive article Pickles (1990) argues that one of the important factors underlying several state reforms of the mid-1980s was the technological innovations and enhanced administrative capacity available to the South African state. Insofar as the Location and Influx Control regulations (requiring African people to carry pass documents) functioned to facilitate physical, personal surveillance of the African population in the absence of conventional Western state practices (eg efficient enumeration and record keeping at a non-territorialized centralised level, not dependent upon the presence of the state agent – see Giddens, 1985), the increase in the effectiveness of the state in this regard with improved access to computing facilities and bureaucratic capacity[6] was partially responsible for enabling the state to revoke previous discriminatory legislation without necessarily losing its capacity to govern and maintain adequate surveillance

of African people (evident, for example in the nation-wide, non-racial issue of identity documents). However, and at the same time, ongoing political conflicts at the local state level have left state structures on the ground relatively disabled. The forces of domination have been found wanting. In this context, motivations for reform or transformation could also be read as efforts by agents within the state to regain the institutional capacity necessary to govern either the people or the economy.

Towards a post-Marxism without apologies?

While the consequences of Mouzelis's 'apologies' for Marxism may seem harmless enough to the reader who has followed this review to the present point – amounting to a dependence upon Marxian economic categories to make sense of the autonomous political sphere – his unexamined sympathies do have some important implications for interpretations of political strategy. For example, he comments that 'it is not difficult to see that the working class movement, however fragmented or disorganised, has greater transformative capacities and therefore better chances of playing a leading role in a hegemonic contest than, say, the sexual liberation movement. The reason for this has to do less with political initiatives and articulatory practices and more with the central structural role of the working class in capitalist society' (p.30). Within South African society, however, we have become used to questioning just such an assumption in the context of the race-class debate, two-stage theories of transition and so on. Why should gender relations, for example, not be considered a 'central structural' feature of contemporary Western society? It is only a particular interpretation or reading of the contemporary moment – a reading from a male gendered subject position – which insists that transformation depends upon the working class and the elimination of private ownership of capital. Indeed, we now have very good examples in ex-socialist countries as to why this is clearly insufficient for human social liberation – not to mention simple welfare or survival. It is perhaps more pertinently post-Marxist, to read transformation as involving a more multiple set of resisting agents and institutional contexts, and as proceeding in a more halting, perhaps even *ad hoc* and long term fashion than visionary revolutionary ideas of a nationally or internationally unified working class overthrowing the capitalist state (a conflation Mouzelis is elsewhere at pains to criticize) would suppose. And this progressivist vision in itself could be more thoroughly questioned. One of the thrusts of post-Marxist thinking has been a suspicion of even mildly teleological accounts of history (Lyotard, 1984). Thus, our conceptions of

transformation and our visions of socialism can at best be partial and open always to revision.

It is particularly a concern with recasting the political identities and subject positions generated through decades of divisive naming procedures on the part of the Apartheid state and society which could most fruitfully concern political agents in the current period. Instead of relying on previously outdated accounts of social relations or of liberatory social groupings, we could encourage and imagine new subject positions which undermine the previous categorisations handed down to us: in Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) terminologies, we could explore the subversive effects of the 'constitutive outside' on past and present discourses of political identity. But Mouzelis's analysis is, in the end, a fundamentally materialist analysis – albeit a materialism which recognizes the 'institutional materiality' (Poulantzas, 1978) of the state and the political sphere.

Mouzelis, then, has prepared a schema with much to commend it. A definite statement regarding the autonomy of the political – a long-standing bugbear of Marxist theory – and an interesting politics-centred account of aspects of Greek history (which I have not had space to review here). However, Mouzelis remains more wedded to the Marxism he wants to move beyond than seems proper for a post-Marxist and he fails to tackle the serious flaws of Marxism in the rigorous manner his approach would seem to warrant. But there is some important food for thought here for South Africans concerned to engage with elements of the post-Marxist debate; although those who are less empirically minded may do better to go back to Mouzelis's arch foes – Laclau and Mouffe (1985) – and consider the potential they offer for a much more startling analysis of contemporary South Africa, and of political processes more generally.

NOTES

1. As Laclau (1990) comments on Mouzelis's 'resolution' of the structure-agency problem: 'I am fully prepared to admit that both approaches coexist and that is precisely why I speak of dualism in Marxism – including Marx. In order to demonstrate that there is no dualism, something very different from showing the coexistence side by side of the two approaches is needed: it would have to be shown that both are logically articulated in a coherent whole' (p. 222).
2. Although, as Laclau (1990) counters, 'It is completely untrue that we have ever stated that social practices occur in an institutional vacuum' (p. 223). Rather, 'what we wish to say by asserting the contingent nature of the social is that there is no institutional structure which is not ultimately vulnerable; and not, as Mouzelis has understood, that everything in the field of the social is in a state of permanent flux' (p. 224).
3. And as McLennan (1990) comments, 'it is in the nature of analogies and metaphors to mislead as well as illuminate, by suppressing crucial differences between the processes being compared' (p. 262).

4. Both Wolpe (1988) and Nattrass (1990) remain society and economy centred. This is understandable in the case of Nattrass (1990) since she is specifically concerned with economic relations rather than with the state.
5. And we need a broader understanding of politics than Mouzelis's focus upon the state allows (see Leftwich, 1983).
6. Not to mention the collapse of the previous system under the weight of pressures for urbanisation and market related labour distribution – see *inter alia* Greenberg, 1987.

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Book Reviews

Adjusting to Reality: Beyond 'State and Market' in Economic Development by Robert Klitgaard. San Francisco & Panama: ICS Press, 1991, International Center for Economic Growth Publication, ISBN 1–55815–147–8, 318 pp, pb $11.95.

Robert Klitgaard, an American economist currently visiting at the University of Natal at Pietermaritzburg, has to his credit half a dozen books and a long, impressive and varied experience as an expert in the development field. He has worked, amongst other countries, in Ghana, Equatorial Guinea, Pakistan, Bolivia and Indonesia. This experience has tempered Klitgaard and made him into a thoughtful, clear and humble practitioner well aware of the limited academic and practical successes of the development school.

Klitgaard can best be characterised as a pragmatic liberal. He is not interested either in holistic critiques of capitalism nor in exploring the power relationships within given societies in any depth. However, he has come to believe in the inadequacies of the cruder practitioners of the anti-statist free market school which has achieved such pre-eminence in the past decade. The excellent first pages of the book show Victor Paz Estenssoro, the architect of the Bolivian Revolution of 1952, one of the great twentieth century Latin American revolutions, engineering in his old age the reversal of some of the very processes he had himself helped to engender thirty-five years earlier. Klitgaard supports the privatisation of the Bolivian economy that Paz Estenssoro pursued in the 1980s and the steps the Bolivian state took to 'get prices right' but he points out that the underlying problems of growth and poverty have nonetheless remained unresolved. Structural adjustment has beaten inflation in Bolivia but it has led to declines in production and living standards. What do we do about this reality?

Klitgaard feels that the state-market debate in development circles has become sterile. He turns to new approaches and in so doing unearths long unfashionable economic theories from such writers as Joseph Schumpeter. In particular, he stresses the importance of knowledge acquisition in order to participate effectively in the otherwise imperfect market and the need for regulatory measures to promote quality and honesty in production and marketing. Klitgaard

emphasizes that, far from withering away, the state must continue to play a vital role in promoting equity, organising infrastructure, regulating various aspects of the market and promoting (and policing) productive and administrative quality.

For a South African audience, Klitgaard may give comfort to neither of the dominant ends of the spectrum on the so-called Great Debate about the economy. He sees both market and state as 'imperfect instrumentalities'. He rejects the naïve faith in the free market so prevalent in South African business milieux and amongst those involved in their defense. He also criticises simple-minded belief in the virtues of decentralisation; central and local government both are crucial and need their operations qualitatively maximised.

Yet for the Left he offers no formulae for radical change. A very interesting section on the problem of ethnic and racial inequality (the most directly relevant part of the book for local audiences) both demonstrates Klitgaard's wide historical and sociological grasp and the extent to which, shorn of the peculiarities of apartheid, South Africa has much in common with many so-called Third World countries. However his suggestions aimed at solution are modest and pragmatic. I wonder how many in the ANC would tolerate a quantitative index based on a 'trade-off between efficiency and representation' as a means of regulating how much affirmative action should be applied in filling jobs or appreciate his low-key expectations in this area?

Klitgaard's style of writing owes a lot to American textbooks, with examples set into side boxes along the main text. Introduction and conclusion reiterate at too much length the arguments made in the substantive chapters. The line of argument veers between very high levels of generality and very specific 'case studies'. Where he provides background on a larger problem or particular national economy, his is always reliable and interesting but it is background: he eschews the middle-level explanatory formulations of political economy and likes to avoid 'ideology' when possible. Klitgaard stresses the crucial causative role of historic and institutional factors but he tends to aceept them as givens. His message is directed towards the practical practitioner trying to cope with problems of bureaucratic indifference and corruption, not to the critical intellectual explicating the power structures in which they are, as he admits himself, clearly and deeply embedded.

The result is a book which has very considerable merits. Klitgaard's particular observations and suggestions are eminently thoughtful and valuable. It is fascinating to use him as a window to viewing how frustrated development economists are currently trying to find a route forward out of the dead-end free market fashion of the 1980s. His

insistence on the importance of promoting an honest, effective, well-run state (as opposed to abandoning the state) seems well-taken. However, the limited willingness of the author to challenge structures and the modest formulation of his own approaches will prevent it from being recognised as a breakthrough. Klitgaard is correct that 'underdevelopment is bound up with ignorance and uncertainty', a major insight, but he does not stress that this is finally as much or more effect than cause.

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The Postmodern Political Condition by Agnes Heller & Ferenc Féher. Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press, 1988, ISBN 0–7456–0625–3, hb, 167 pp. £25.00

This study is an impressive attempt to redeem the possibility of a common core of ethical beliefs – and thereby common principles for political and civil conduct – in the context of the increasing plurality of cultures and discourses typical of postmodernism, and the moral and political relativism often assumed of the postmodern political condition.

Clearly and succinctly written, this book succeeds in tackling fairly complex and diverse issues in a compelling and competent manner. Beginning with a brief characterisation of the postmodern political condition, and its implications for the traditional explanations offered by the 'grand narratives', Heller and Féher argue that the plurality of world-views need not imply a moral relativism. This argument is buttressed by appeals both to the socio-philosophical arguments of Habermas, and to commonalities in the moral condition of differing cultures. These assertions are used as the basis of the development of a system of political principles, civic virtues, and an account of justice which are, Heller and Féher hold, central to the project of human self-development, political tolerance and possibly even world peace.

If convincing, this account effectively redeems modernity as an age, with postmodernity as the 'settling-in' time after the 'permanent revolution' of the nineteenth century. The recognition of limits to knowledge, to progress, to social control does not mean a surrender to chaos, but instead, makes possible agreement on core ethical

principles and mature political co-operation previously excluded by competing messianic accounts of redemptive politics.

Heller and Féher's argument can be captured in four categories.

The postmodern political condition

Postmodernity, Heller and Féher argue, is neither a new historical nor cultural period, but rather a new consciousness about the way we perceive the world – primarily a sense of living in the present while at the same time 'being after' both spatially and temporally. The emergence of this perspective is linked directly to the breakdown of the 'grand narrative' (explanatory models based on universalist principles of sorts). In its place has emerged the postmodernist perspective of modernity as a plurality of heterogeneous 'spaces and temporalities'. In this context, they note, the sense of 'being after' reflects a continuous critical distance from the present – a realisation that necessary practices and daily actions, although required, can never be entered into with the ethical conviction or absolute certainty previously assumed.

Politically, Heller and Féher argue, postmodernism has been felt in several ways: post-structuralism has pointed to the growing political significance of the 'functional' over the 'structural', more specifically, the gradual disappearance of a politics based solely on class interests and the emergence of single issue movements such as environmentalism and feminism. Luhmann has argued that modern societies are becoming increasingly 'decentred' – no longer organised around a single power centre (such as the state). Modern societies are intersected by a range of systems which do not necessarily interact optimally. For example, a world system (economy), a politico-military system (NATO) and a particular state might all intersect (in often contradictory ways) through a particular society.

This differentiation of power means that the modern state is no longer all-powerful – nor even accurately understood in structuralist terms of class conflict. Hence not only do the political formations of civil society enjoy increasing prominence at the expense of political parties, but interest-based politics of class and party are being replaced by a 'politics of irrationality'. Examples include the rise of virulent nationalism, the prominence of ethnicity, and the increasing intervention of fundamentalist religion into political life.

In this context, Heller and Féher conclude, the claims of 'redemptive' politics such as Marxism-Leninism appear (at best) simple-minded. It is not surprising, they add, that popular politics is moving away from perspectives which embrace the task of rearranging the

entirety of modernity, to those which aim at a given network of functions. 'Postmodernism' or 'being after' in this context effectively means being after class scenarios.

Although there is much consensus about the nature of the postmodern political condition, and in that respect many of the observations of Heller and Féher stand as (relatively) uncontroversial, the assertion about the postmodern condition as more an attitude than an age is more contested. A point in their favour is that this is a view supported by Hans Blumenberg in his *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*. The challenge that this assertion places on Heller and Féher is to show how the postmodern condition is, in important ways, a continuation of the project of modernity with all its commitments to progress and reason, and not simply its negation. Immediately then, the problem of 'universals' becomes a challenge.

The possibility of a common ethics

Given that the postmodern political condition is premised on the acceptance of a plurality of cultures and discourses, moral relativism seems a logical step away. However, Heller and Féher counter, the assumption that social plurality necessarily implies moral relativism is mistaken.

In a succinct yet brilliant summary, Heller and Féher trace Diderot's, Kant's, and Hegel's engagement with the moral relativist challenge, ending with Derrida's deconstruction of a seemingly insignificant paper by Kant written in 1796 (*Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosopie*). In brief, Kant mounts an attack against mystical Platonists, in particular against Schlosser who is accused by Kant of 'castrating' philosophy and almost finishing off the enterprise. Yet at the end of the piece Kant makes the surprising move of recommending that he and his contemptible philosophical enemies should work together for the same purpose – the service of the moral law.

This conclusion, Heller and Féher argue, is more than an exercise in liberal tolerance of theoretical pluralism; it amounts to a new philosophical insight: in conceding that the cause of moral reason, the moral law, can be furthered by completely different philosophers, Kant effectively resigns the tenet that the work of practical reason can be grounded in a fully rational way. Hence, Heller and Féher conclude, the relativisation of world-views does not necessarily imply the relativisation of morals. Perhaps, they continue, the opposite is the case; through the absolutising of their own world-views philosophers contribute more to the relativisation of morals, even to boosting nihilism, than by the acceptance of the relativisation of their philosophies.

This perspective owes a lot to Habermas's conception of communicative action. Premised on the Wittgensteinian arguments about the rule-governed nature of human behaviour, and the social basis of such rules, Habermas argues that the dissolution of traditional notions of universality such as 'human nature' or the 'human condition' does not mean that ongoing social construction and engagement about rules need be an 'irrational' or arbitrary process. What is important, he argues, is that social rules can be constructed according to a procedure which is rational – namely a process of argumentation whereby claims to knowledge or legitimacy are grounded in a manner which relies solely on the force of good argument (in terms of a range of criteria including factual, moral, social and personal authenticity) and not by brute force. Such a process he terms communicative action.

In a context where the proliferation of discourses or cultures has been the result of a global process (implicitly Weber's universal-historical process of rationalisation), agents not only are required to deal with each other ethically and politically (thus prompting the Habermasian-type engagement), but also experience common ethical ties that cross these discourses/cultures. This common ethical condition, Heller and Féher note, is particularly reflected in the 'dissatisfied' nature of modern societies.

'Dissatisfaction' here refers to the failure of certain needs to be filled. Such needs, Heller and Féher note, include both material 'wants' and social needs for self-determination. The primary nature of dissatisfaction in modern society is a conjunctural one in the sense that it relies on the concept of contingency. Whereas in pre-modern times the accident of birth would cast a person into the world where their fate was predetermined (eg caste, feudal class, gender role), the emergence of modernity has seen the end of pre-determined life-paths and the increasing contingency of existence. In fact, not only is one's destiny now contingent, but so is the initial context at birth – this too is open to change.

Dissatisfaction arises when the expectations created by our awareness of the contingency of life are frustrated by the realities of existence. The important point to appreciate, Heller and Féher argue, is that satisfaction cannot be realised by fulfilling concrete wants, as it is the satisfaction of needs for self-determination that allows for the transformation of contingency into destiny. Clearly the satisfaction of concrete wants carries the promise of increased self-determination, however at most it creates the possibility of need satisfaction, but cannot fulfill this on its own.

What this means is that being satisfied in a dissatisfied society involves changing our context, intervening in society in a way that increases self-determination.

This general line of reasoning by Heller and Féher is important, not only as an empirical assertion about the nature of modernity, but also in terms of offering a common experiential basis (and therefore substantive universal moment) for the establishment of a pragmatics of political and ethical behaviour. Such a line of argument can escape many of the pitfalls that, for instance, orthodox Marxism experiences in attempting to universalise the concept of labour, or conservative theories encounter in hypostatizing 'human nature', by keeping the concept of 'needs' empty of any substantive content. Such content thus becomes culture- or discourse-specific.

A possible problem does arise if one interprets Heller and Féher as implying that the concept of 'need' plays a foundational role in the explanation of social behaviour universally. This problem can be sidestepped if one assumes that the neo-Weberian rationalisation process arguably implied allows for the emergence of different developmental logics at different times. When Heller and Féher characterise modernity as embodying the three developmental logics of capitalism, industrialism and democracy (any two of which can subsume the third) they effectively avoid this challenge.

The greatest problems Heller and Féher face here are firstly, their unsubstantiated assertion about the three developmental logics of modernity (is industrialisation actually a logic of the same order as the other two?), and secondly, their failure to deal with the concept of rationalisation at all.

Nevertheless, by finding a common footing for ethical principles through a general experience of the problem of need-satisfaction, Heller and Féher appear to have overcome objections of moral relativists.

Political principles, civic virtues and justice

The characterisation of human needs as both concrete wants and needs for self-determination, Heller and Féher argue, can be correspondingly translated into two ethical principles of the 'right to life' and the 'right to freedom'.

In the context of the postmodern political condition these ethical principles are translated into the political principles of freedom, justice, equality, fairness and equity, and are derivative of the basic law of democratic politics: 'Act in a way that allows all free and rational human beings to assent to the political principles of your action.' This, Heller and Féher argue, does not mean that all political decisions will have to be resolved by consensus, but rather that political decisions will be guided by principles on which there is consensus.

The derivation of these principles is to a large extent dependent on Heller and Féher's characterisation of the postmodern political condition. In the context of a society where power is 'decentred' it is clear, they argue, that traditional Marxist or even more recent attempts at 'democratic' socialism appear as simple-minded. Further, given the three developmental logics of modernity and the variable relation between them, emancipatory actions become more diffuse, aimed at different issues in different systems. This also implies that it is no longer effective for one grouping to attempt all these actions, or for all agents to unite in one perspective as different people will experience different needs.

This also implies that the most advantageous course for the realisation of self-development is the encouragement of the developmental logic of democracy. Hence, Heller and Féher argue, principles based on the traditions of liberal-democracy and democratic-minded socialism are the most appropriate to guiding emancipatory actions. Drawing from these traditions, Heller and Féher derive five principles which, although only proposals, could, they argue, effectively serve to enhance the self-realisation of individuals with differing needs, differing world views.

Corresponding to these political principles, Heller and Féher argue for 'citizen ethics' – that is, ethics that apply to those who participate actively in the political sphere. These ethics, they continue, like the principles of political action, are informed by both the norms of the social sub-system of political action and the 'meta-norms' of the loose ethos of society. As Heller and Féher argue, this loose ethos is primarily informed by the problematic of need satisfaction, principally the need for self-realisation. These civic virtues include radical tolerance, civic courage, solidarity, justice and the intellectual virtues of phronesis (political experience/shrewdness) and communicative rationality.

As far as the laws that guide institutions are concerned, Heller and Féher argue that the possibility of self-realisation is best offered by the institutionalisation of the principle of freedom rather than the principle of life. To a large extent this argument draws on Hannah Arendt's political philosophy.

Arendt argues that human self-realisation can only be properly realised though the institutionalisation of the universal value of freedom, and that so-called democracies which have based their institutions on the principle of life effectively end up seriously compromising political and individual freedom.

While accepting this emphasis, Heller and Féher argue that a focus on the principle of freedom as primarily constitutive of the laws of the republic does not necessarily involve a rejection of the principle of life

for three reasons: it is a scandal for liberty to tolerate misery; the perpetuation of misery leads to the suicide of liberty; and the rejection of the right to life involves a false 'spiritualisation' of liberty.

This argument is bolstered by a sharp critique of what Heller and Féher terms 'the metaphysics of the social question'. Essentially this argument holds that the 'social question' (poverty, hunger, physical suffering etc) was effectively a creation of the French Revolution in that suddenly human misery became socially conditioned, and – especially for socialism – terminable with a single act of revolution. This view, they hold, effectively reduces the inherent heterogeneity of social issues to the homogeneous (materially rooted) 'social question'. Concomitantly, this abstract homogenisation suggests that a single solution (revolution) is possible – which is clearly not the case. Further, they note, such an account mistakenly pins the solution of all social ills on the rearrangement of institutional laws. Yet the nature of modern societies is such that no single system is responsible for all ills, and no single power can change everything.

Lastly, they conclude, the socialist vision of a society free from the grip of the social problem does not invoke so much an alteration of institutional norms and laws (such a programme is never theoretically well laid out and certainly hasn't worked in practice) but the transcendence of modernity. In this respect, then, 'scientific' socialism is at heart utopian.

Heller and Féher's line of thought here results in various proposals for political principles, civic ethical behaviour, the appropriate basis of, and limitations of, institutional norms and rules. As proposals these make no claim to being the exclusive principles/norms possible, and appropriately respect the process of communicative action required for the success of principles of democratic conduct. That acknowledged, it is difficult to see how there will be fundamental disagreement on the political principles and citizen ethics outlined.

The more controversial and possibly more instructive aspect of Heller and Féher's argument is on the ongoing problem of the institutionalisation of democracy and the possibilities and limitations of social change. As a spur to a popular discussion on democratisation which surpasses the traditional liberal-democratic/socialist paradigm it is a welcome relief.

Prospects for politics and postmodernity

The last forty years, Heller and Féher conclude, have witnessed a social revolution of enormous proportions. The tremendous pluralisation of the cultural universe, (captured in a fascinating account of the shifts in western inter-generational relations since World War Two)

has resulted in a shift in political and social consciousness, but it nevertheless represents the maturation of a historical process, rather than a disjunctured break with history.

The postmodern political condition, Heller and Féher continue, is thus a continuation of the trends of modernity as much as a reversal of signs. The important point to realise is that postmodernism has allowed for the recognition of limits – limits to absolute knowledge, limits to the final resolution of social and political conflict. Progress, understood as the increasing maximization of freedom, remains as urgent a task as ever; we must simply recognise more accurately the nature of the undertaking.

After all, Heller and Féher conclude, the revolutionary eruption of the nineteenth century has left us with a fraudulent sense of temporality – 'if modernity is the drama of the permanent revolution, postmodernity may be characterised as the epic of settling in. And it is more than a simple comfortable arrangement. The Augean stables need to be cleaned.'

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