

THE FORIA

Dimensions of Democracy

Modernization and Democracy

James Bohman

The Uncertain Future of Democracy

Claus Offe

1996 -03- 20

Democracy's Value and Limits

Michael Pendlebury

Dream of Purity

Zygmunt Bauman

Why do Ruling Classes Fear History?

Harvey J. Kaye

Black Socrates?

Simon Critchley

Derrida, Language Games, and Theory

Michael J.C. Echeruo

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All submissions should be sent to:

Roger Deacon
Department of Education
University of Natal
Private Bag X10
Dalbridge
4014 South Africa
(e-mail: deacon@mtb.und.ac.za)

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THEORIA

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Modernization and Impediments to Democracy: The Problems of Hyperirrationality and Hypercomplexity	<i>James Bohman</i>	1
Main Problems of Contemporary Theory of Democracy and the Uncertain Future of its Practice	<i>Claus Offe</i>	21
Concerning the Value, Scope and Limits of Democracy	<i>Michael Pendlebury</i>	35
Dream of Purity	<i>Zygmunt Bauman</i>	49
Why do Ruling Classes Fear History?	<i>Harvey J. Kaye</i>	61
Black Socrates? Questioning the Philosophical Tradition	<i>Simon Critchley</i>	79
Derrida, Language Games, and Theory	<i>Michael J. C. Echeruo</i>	99
Discussion Forum		
What is Enlightenment? A South African Postscript	<i>Shane Moran</i>	117
Reflections on the 'Unfinished Project of Enlightenment': A Response to Shane Moran	<i>Raphaël de Kadt</i>	125
Review Essay		
Vision of the Future, Critique of the Present: David Schweickart's Case Against Capitalism	<i>Martin Wittenberg</i>	131

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About *Theoria*

Based in South Africa, *Theoria* is an engaged, multidisciplinary journal of social and political theory. Its purpose is to address, through scholarly debate, the many challenges posed to intellectual life by the major social, political and economic forces that shape the contemporary world. Thus it is principally concerned with questions such as how modern systems of power, processes of globalization and capitalist economic organization bear on matters such as justice, democracy and truth. How might such systems best be explained? In what do justice and freedom consist? How might these ends best be realized under the conditions both of advanced modernity and of uneven modernization in the 'developing' world? In what, precisely, do the problems of social and political identity consist, and how might sense best be made of phenomena such as resurgent ethnic nationalisms? And what, in addressing these concerns, is the scope of philosophy, art, literature, history, social and political theory and economics? These, among many others, are the kinds of questions by which *Theoria* is driven.

Although the compass of the journal is wide and any one issue may carry contributions in a diversity of fields, the editors have decided that the contents of each issue will be largely dictated by one or more governing themes. To secure contributions in good time, these themes will be announced well ahead of publication. Besides articles the editors would like to encourage communications from readers which are intended to further debate on topics addressed in the journal. The editors would also like to encourage a review essay tradition and maintain a book review/book note section.

Note to Contributors

Contributors are requested to submit **THREE** hard copies of their articles, as well as a disk version. All submissions should be sent to Roger Deacon, Department of Education, University of Natal, Private Bag X10, Dalbridge, South Africa, 4014 (e-mail: deacon@mtb.und.ac.za). Please indicate which word-processing program has been used. The disk must be readable by IBM-compatible/MS-DOS systems. Contributors are advised to retain copies of their texts as we do not return unused copy. A short abstract of each article should be included.

Single quotation marks should be used throughout. Quotations of more than 25 words should be indented, without quotation marks. Only the least familiar foreign words need to be italicized (or

underlined). Notes should be in the form of endnotes rather than footnotes.

Contributors are also requested to submit brief biographical sketches indicating their institutional affiliation, research interests and the activities and publications they consider most important. This information should preferably be so formulated as to be reproduced in *Theoria*'s brief list of contributors at the end of each issue.

Theoria uses the Harvard style of referencing i.e. in the text of articles, bracketed references appear like this: (Williams 1972:23).

A list of References should appear at the end of each article.

Past Issues of *Theoria*

Since no. 76, *Theoria*'s themes have been as follows:

76	(October 1990)	The Meaning of 1989
77	(May 1991)	Aesthetics and Ideology
78	(October 1991)	Development and Ethics
79	(May 1992)	The State and Civil Society
80	(October 1992)	Literature and Art in South Africa
81/82	(October 1993)	Our Catastrophic Century
83/84	(October 1994)	Progress, Modernity and Marxism
85	(May 1995)	Markets, States and Justice

Future Issues of *Theoria*

***Theoria* 87.** The claims that history can be 'rationally reconstructed' and that it has some kind of 'logic' or 'direction' to it are clearly controversial. Are these claims in any way sustainable? What purpose, if any, might be served through the study of history? How might it properly be grasped and with what implications? What are the challenges that face history and historiography as we approach the end of the twentieth century? In what ways might history be abused, and what, if anything, does it mean to speak coherently of a 'philosophy of history'? These, among many others, are the issues that *Theoria* 87 will address, as it focuses on the theme: 'Reason, Theory and History'.

***Theoria* 88.** Identity, Agency and the Self.

***Theoria* 89.** Poverty, Property and Power.

***Theoria* 90.** The Scope and Limits of Public Reason.

Editorial

In *Theoria* 85 Frank Cunningham and David Held engaged directly with some of the challenges that confront democratic theory and practice in the contemporary world. This direct encounter with the problems of democracy is substantially extended in this issue of *Theoria*. James Bohman, in a rich and subtle analysis of the problems of 'hypercomplexity' and 'hyperrationality' under the conditions of modernization, revisits and reaffirms the prospects for 'genuinely democratic decision-making' in large scale, complex and cosmopolitan societies. Claus Offe, in his article – almost as if in deliberately qualified counterpoint – cautions us against too readily taking democratic regimes for granted. In a sobering and properly disturbing analysis, he alerts us to the fragility of democracies, which as he so felicitously puts it, are 'condemned to succeed'. In particular, he points to the extent to which democratic citizenship, as an essentially modern phenomenon, may be vulnerable to both 'pre-modern' and 'post-modern' dispositions. Michael Pendlebury, in his contribution, shifts our focus to the unavoidable task of conceptual clarification. He argues, controversially, that democracy as a form of governance should be seen as an extrinsic rather than an intrinsic good and that care should be taken to define, precisely, in what its scope and limits consist.

In his remarkable book *Modernity and the Holocaust* Zygmunt Bauman argued that the Holocaust could only properly be understood if apprehended as a phenomenon of modernity, with the latter's preoccupation with classification, ordering and sanitization. In his contribution to this issue of *Theoria* he carries this analysis further and shows how 'the tendency to collectivise and centralise the cleansing activities aimed at the preservation of purity tend to be in our time replaced with the strategies of de-regulation and privatisation'. The new 'impure' who are excluded from properly effective participation are the *flawed consumers* – those who are 'unable to respond to the enticements of the consumer market because they lack the required resources'. In consequence, they are substantially unfree. This aspect of unequal power – reflected in the de-regulated market system – has direct implications for the prospects for democracy. How, for example, does it bear on David Held's call to 'bring the economy into the sphere of democracy' in a world where the divisions between rich and poor are so great?

The impotence of the poor – and the fears of the rich – are provocatively examined by Harvey Kaye who, in this published

version of his Isaac Deutscher Memorial Lecture, raises the question of why ruling classes 'fear history'. To the extent that the enjoyment of privilege and the exercise of power depends upon the genesis and control of the images and understandings that a society has of itself, those who benefit from such power and privilege will wish to define the substance of such images and understandings. They will attempt, however subtly, to control the 'construction' of the past in ways that make legitimate the dispensation from which they benefit. The struggle for power is, inevitably, a struggle over the interpretation and 'appropriation' of the past, a struggle over history. The historian's enterprise is thus by its very nature potentially subversive and contested and, in being so intricately and unavoidably implicated in the constitution of power, bears on the shaping of our collective futures. Kaye's contribution thus eloquently introduces the organizing theme, 'Reason, Theory and History', of the next issue of *Theoria*.

Philosophy is itself not unaffected by the contest over its history. Simon Critchley in an arresting reflection on the Greco-European 'tradition' of philosophy as a 'tradition of detraditionalisation', makes a case for the study and practice of a 'contrapuntal philosophy'. To this end he alerts us to the inherently subversive potential of philosophy as an enterprise which enables us to deconstruct and disturb the accreted understandings that constitute tradition. For, as he puts it, 'traditions, culture and identity are irreducibly hybrid ensembles'. The point of 'contrapuntal criticism' is 'to bring us to a recognition of these ensembles'. This, clearly, has political implications. The cultural-political task of the left, he suggests, thus lies in *hegemonizing hybridity*. Following Said, he suggests the need for an international politics that would hegemonize oppositional movements. However, in his postscript he asks whether and how, in the context of contemporary capitalism, intellectual resistance to consensus and hegemonic power is possible. For he points to the fact that, in Adornian terms, 'what late capitalism lacks is a *critical* or *utopian* moment'. He asks, further, whether the 'categories of hybridity, nomadism and exile' help or hinder the articulation of such a critical or utopian moment.

The critical engagement with the political and philosophical discourses of modernity/postmodernity has been, and doubtless will remain, one of *Theoria's* central concerns. This engagement is directly extended in this issue not only by Critchley, but by Michael Echeruo who wishes to qualify postmodernist, and especially Derridean, arguments concerning the gross heterogeneity of meanings embodied in any linguistic act. Against this 'relativist' tendency, Echeruo asserts that in every language there exists a culturally

embedded 'default mode of meaning'. In making this claim he affirms Losev's point that language must be understood as purposive. The purpose of language is communication and it is hence 'structured for meaning' – a point, he claims, that Derrida has missed. He argues that we can identify a 'default mode of meaning' implicit in a language-in-use and – assuming certain, specified, conditions – that we can redeem an intended structure of meaning. This structure is, however, not universal but culturally specific.

Theoria welcomes communications from its readers. This issue carries a critique by Shane Moran of a 1989 *Theoria* article by Raphaël de Kadt, the current Editor in Chief. In his article he accuses de Kadt of collapsing 'cultural modernity into social modernity and ethics into technological modernization'. Raphaël de Kadt responds briefly to this challenge.

Finally, Martin Wittenberg, in a substantial and carefully wrought review essay, critically assesses David Schweickart's major new critique of capitalism. Through this article he extends the critical exploration of the post-1989 world economic system, which has been a feature of previous issues of *Theoria*.

THE EDITORS

Modernization and Impediments to Democracy

The Problems of Hyperrationality and Hypercomplexity

James Bohman

Radical democracy relies on an egalitarian version of the principle of popular sovereignty, that is, the principle that the only legitimate government is by the people and for the people. According to this ideal, not only is legitimacy dependent on popular consent, but the political power to shape common life must also somehow come from the 'people'. While such ideals have too often been exaggerated, they do minimally require that decision-making power be widely dispersed among citizens rather than concentrated in the hands of a few. Many social theorists now argue that even this minimalist version is no longer possible. I want to argue that radical democracy is indeed possible, so long as we understand the potential dangers and promises of modernization processes. The promise of modernization is increased democracy, made possible by widening rational and consensual control over social processes. The dangers of modernization are the results of overcomplexity, which I shall argue takes two forms: hyperrationality, or excessive rationalism; and hypercomplexity, excessive social differentiation which undermines deliberative decision making.

The normative problem with radical democracy is well known: the 'will of the people' can easily be reified. Some interpretations of participatory, or deliberative, democracy suggest that political decisions must express the substantive values and traditions of a homogeneous political community or a 'general will.'¹ Such requirements for legitimacy are too strong for contemporary pluralist democracies; well-intentioned attempts to realize them usually have been nothing short of disastrous and have discredited radical democratic ideals as leading to political excesses.² But many critics of radical democracy extend their criticisms beyond the problems of these ill-fated attempts. They suggest that the ideal of sovereignty itself has become irrelevant under contemporary conditions. They pose the following difficult questions which deliberative democracy must also face: Do modern conditions of social complexity and

cultural pluralism make popular sovereignty an impossible goal? Are the powerlessness and passivity of citizens inevitable? Such questions do not merely challenge the possibility of society-wide 'town meetings' or the ability of such assemblies to run complex and large organizations. Rather, they represent a fundamental challenge to the very idea of deliberative democracy. According to these critics, the ideal of the voluntary organization of society is no longer possible in complex and pluralist societies.

The moral conflicts typical in pluralist societies challenge democratic arrangements to provide enough unity to generate an effective political will. But the more difficult problem of 'unavoidable social complexity' speaks against the possibility of voluntaristic and self-conscious control over many modern social processes, such as market fluctuations. Claims about social complexity challenge the core idea of popular sovereignty – that legitimate laws should be authored by the citizens who are subject to them. From the circumstances of inevitable social complexity follows 'inevitable inequalities', the necessity of non-democratic sources of power and of 'indispensable' mechanisms of integration beyond public control. If most or all of these empirical claims are true, they blunt the critical force of the ideals of deliberative democracy apart from small-scale organizations.

I shall argue that such political pessimism about democracy and the consequences of modernization does not follow from the fact of social complexity. It is certainly true that face-to-face assemblies and town meetings are no longer the best ways to maximize opportunities for active citizenship. Even if political participation is institutionally mediated, it does not follow that popular sovereignty is somehow an unattainable ideal or an inappropriate critical standard. Popular sovereignty does, however, need to be rethought under such circumstances, so that it squarely faces the issue of how to make majority rule more a matter of the public deliberation of citizens. But, I want to argue, those aspects of social complexity which supposedly challenge *any* form of popular sovereignty are not unavoidable features of modern social life. Instead, such arguments fail descriptively and are themselves reifying: they ignore the *interdependencies* between social institutions and the publics that constitute them and constantly reinterpret their basis. This interrelationship continues even in complex societies with highly differentiated institutions and sub-systems. The question for deliberative theorists is how to make these social interdependencies more democratic.

Social complexity does in fact constrain current deliberative arrangements in many ways. Consider the sheer size and scale of most modern nation-states. If decisions have to be made under time

constraints, the number of actual participants in any political decision may turn out to be quite limited. As Dahl and Tufte put it, in a large society 'the number of people who can participate directly in a decision by speaking so as to be heard by all the other direct participants is extremely small.'³ The large spatial scale of modern institutions also makes it extremely difficult to coordinate deliberation in the usual back and forth manner of a debate. Such spatial and temporal limitations are indeed real limitations on deliberative possibilities in large organizations. The problem posed by complexity for democratic norms is that deliberative democracy has too often been guided by criteria that make sense only on a small scale. But the descriptive problem is to determine the actual constraints on publicity that complexity introduces, other than spatial and temporal ones which do indeed have an 'unavoidable' character. I shall argue that most appeals to 'functional' or systemic complexity, typical of most macro-sociological theories, do not pass their own rigorous criterion of unavoidability: that is, that current institutions cannot be otherwise than they are. I want to argue that what critics call 'functional complexity' is nothing more than the familiar problem of scale. Contrary to these critics, the spatial and temporal properties of large organizations and institutions in complex societies do not imply that popular sovereignty is either impossible or undesirable.

One response to such problems with radical democracy has been to separate public deliberation from actual decision-making power in complex institutions. Habermas has elaborated this solution as the central feature of the constitutional state, with his distinction between informal 'opinion-formation' in the public sphere and the formal 'will-formation' of political institutions.⁴ Similarly, Nancy Fraser distinguishes between 'strong' and 'weak' publics. The appeal of such attempts at demarcation is that they preserve at least one of the functions of popular sovereignty in critical public opinion: the public can challenge the decisions of those whose power is sanctioned by their institutional position. This view is taken even further by some recent 'civil society' theorists for whom the plurality of intermediate and informal associations serves to limit the power of an increasingly independent state and its bureaucracies.⁵ In civil society theories, deliberation belongs in the delimited informal sphere, such as 'civil society' or diffuse public opinion. Otherwise, democracy collapses into the impossible demand for society-wide deliberation; the slow and informal process of changing the climate of opinion is to replace any suggestion of an excessive, Jacobin democracy.

The critics of radical democracy and popular sovereignty have two main concerns. Not only do they see the implicit model of a face-to-face assembly still operating in participatory ideals, they also

argue that collective decisions can no longer reflect a unified general will in a diverse and complex society. But the issues of pluralism and complexity must be separated. In the nineteenth century, a participatory radical democracy such as Marx's Paris Commune had a utopian element, offering the ideal of direct self-rule without the mediation of state institutions or coercive power. Certainly, a complex society without a state is unimaginable: human suffering would increase without the efficient administration of welfare institutions, public transit and other public goods. But this argument based on efficiency can only go so far without turning into an argument against democracy *sans phrase*. Rather than correcting nineteenth century errors, such arguments repeat older, eighteenth century mistakes. With the separation of state and society demanded by these theorists, citizens are in the position of Kant's anti-democratic public sphere. Just like Kant's citizens who must accept the decisions of already constituted monarchical power, contemporary citizens can *only* be critical of complex institutions; they cannot be their authors. Without some appeals to popular sovereignty, complexity and differentiation undermine democracy itself, leading to a public sphere that must, as Kant puts it, 'criticize, but obey!'

In what follows, I closely examine this general line of argument against radical democracy. Taken as an unanalysed whole, the sheer size and complexity of modern society do appear to undermine popular sovereignty and other radical democratic ideals, if not make them obsolete. In the first section, I shall argue that the critics of radical democracy fail to distinguish properly between complexity and overcomplexity. On the one hand, social complexity is the product of the large spatial and temporal scale of social processes. On the other hand, overcomplexity involves the loss of human control over social processes. It has two forms: hypercomplexity and hyperrationality. It is hyperrationality, or an excessive political will that wants to bring everything under popular control, that is the actual target of most criticisms of radical democracy. In the second section, I shall analyse claims of this sort, which have included 'inevitable' inequalities, scarcity of resources and information, differences in competence and expertise, and the uncontrollability of non-intentional forms of integration and coordination. These anti-democratic claims about social complexity are either descriptively false or reduce to special cases of spatial and temporal limitations. Such limitations are, in turn, no basis for rejecting popular sovereignty. I suggest a general account of deliberation and participation within public institutions preserves the link between modernization and complexity, the linkage which is broken by hyperrationality and hypercomplexity.

On Social Complexity: Hyperrationality and Hypercomplexity

Social theorists often simply assume that social complexity and democratic organization are inconsistent with each other. In this section, I want to show that this assumption is unfounded. Instead, democracy is more consistent with complexity than are non-democratic alternatives, which reduce rather than preserve complexity. If properly analysed into distinct forms, complexity need not always be opposed to intentional forms of coordination. In many instances, just the opposite is true: complex organization often depends upon such mechanisms in order to be sustained. Most opposing claims try to show that democratic organizational principles are inconsistent with and hence limited by the non-intentional mechanisms responsible for macrosociological order. If such theories are themselves inadequate, then it is easy to see why complexity may not have the political and epistemological consequences that the critics of radical democracy believe it does, except for those having to do with problems of scale. The real target may be called 'excessive rationalism', or the belief that the public deliberation of citizens of good will can solve all political problems.

The chief political feature of modern social complexity is the development of ever increasing social differentiation at many levels. This tendency is realized in various ways, including the segmentation of spheres of activity and the stratification of groups. But what distinguishes modern social systems is their increasing 'functional differentiation', beginning with the differentiation of state and economy from society and culminating in increasingly differentiated subsystems.⁶ Each distinct sphere of action develops specific rules distinct from the system out of which it has been differentiated; each system also develops its own specific forms of organizational structures and 'functional codes' or languages (such as money in economics or votes in politics). Codes refer to the rules and criteria which determine the significance of actions within such a social system; the differentiation of such codes leads to a high degree of specialization and division of labour as well as to a growing impersonality and abstractness in the social system as a whole. The effects of markets and their code of money provide the clearest example of this sort of depersonalization and abstraction. One supposed consequence of extreme differentiation is that there may be no generalized means of coordination among the subsystems and thus no master code.

The difference between functional and other forms of differentiation has to do with the absence of a central coordinating mechanism or a centralized location from which power and authority can be

exercised. Functionally differentiated societies are 'polycentric', that is, they have no single centre or apex from which to exercise control over all the differentiated subsystems. Since Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, this problem of the integration of complex institutions with differentiated spheres still remains a critical question for the organization of the modern state, even as the state itself becomes increasingly functionally differentiated: how can modern society be both differentiated and unified at the same time?

This lack of a single 'centre' from which to regulate independent spheres of social action represents a basic challenge to popular sovereignty and democratic control. One source of such theories has been the failure of planned economies; their unintended consequences and the perverse effects of planned economies led many to conclude that market subsystems should remain independent and not be brought under conscious control by political institutions.⁷ Furthermore, many argue that such control also restricts individual and social freedom; it could be had only by eliminating civil society. On this point, there is an odd convergence here between system theory and those civil society theorists who argue against the application of democratic principles to all areas of social life; this insistence amounts to 'democratic fundamentalism'.⁸ Proponents of radical democracy seem trapped on the horns of a Hegelian dilemma: if the political institutions gain influence over all of society sufficient to bring about democratic integration and popular participation, then there is a corresponding loss of freedom and complexity; if freedom and complexity are preserved, then even a democratic political system must give up much of its influence and control. But the dilemma depends on the premise that democracy and complexity are opposed to one another. Is there an alternative way to conceive of this empirical relationship?

The dilemma is a false one, on my view, because it fails to distinguish two distinct problems that complexity creates for democracy. The problem which most critics of radical democracy identify is what Jon Elster calls *hyperrationality*, a pathological version of public reason that sees all problems as solvable by the *currently* available types of deliberation. It is an excessive rationalism to the extent that it ignores conditions that could undermine the satisfactory outcome of deliberation, such as problems of uncertainty and lack of information. Democracy does not solve these problems. Hyperrationality is thus an inability to recognize failures of rationality, as when deliberators ignore uncertainty and demand that there be uniquely rational decisions.⁹ But by irrationally believing in the powers of reason, including rational political deliberation, deliberators fail to acknowledge the limits of reason or to apply the self-critical

capacities of reason to public reason itself. As Elster notes, the Kantian dictum is essentially correct: 'The first task of reason is to recognize its own limitations and draw boundaries within which it can operate'.¹⁰ Typically, the critics of popular sovereignty discuss cases in which a public fails to recognize such limitations, which leads to excesses of political will. Social complexity is but one source of such limitations, and excessive rationalism is a problem for democracy independent of any special account of complexity and differentiation.

In pluralistic societies, the popular will is rarely unified and coherent. Even when it is, the effects of collective decisions cannot always be easily controlled or predicted. One reason is complexity: political decisions often have uncontrollable feedback effects in multiply interrelated social processes, as when the decision has some unintended effects on another differentiated sphere. Above all, complexity of this sort causes uncertainty which may, in turn, lead citizens who are using public reason to fail to recognize the excesses of a popular will that may meet with public approval. Complexity also limits efficiency, to the extent that any means to some public end may have many unforeseen consequences. But the failure here is due to the agents themselves, for not being aware of the conditions of success for deliberative decision making.

Such irrationality violates the self-critical basis of the public use of reason. *Hypercomplexity* is a different problem, one related to a degree of complexity which inhibits or makes impossible rational public decision making. Many critics of radical democracy do not distinguish between hypercomplexity and hyperrationality, instead simply assuming that public reason is in every case operating outside of its proper limits. But self-critical public reason cannot correct for the effects of hypercomplexity on intentional forms of social coordination. In markets, for instance, complex interdependencies are supposed to make conscious or intentional coordination unnecessary for maintaining a complex order. But this example is exceptional and therefore misleading; it leads defenders of non-intentional, market-like complexity to consider a whole range of pathological phenomena as social facts.

Consider a complex and highly interdependent technical system, such as a nuclear power plant connected to the power grid of a large metropolis. The increased complexity of such a system demands just the opposite of what markets are supposed to be like: they need constant and intentional adjustment. Such systems are characterized by what Charles Perrow calls 'tight coupling', which in turn leads to 'normal accidents'.¹¹ Tight coupling occurs when the interrelation between various sub-systems is so heightened that the need for control is increased, rather than decreased. Adjusting the money supply may

have immediate economic effects, which in turn require adjusting interest rates, and so on. The increased differentiation and independence of subsystems can often be maintained only at the price of raising uncertainty and risk. Rather than increasing freedom under these conditions, such complex systems decrease the range of freedom. This loss of freedom has nothing to do with the excessive will of political agents who seek to resolve uncertainty, but with the increased risks involved in excessive complexity. Such subsystems also tend to promote inequalities, as well as lessen the scope of public freedom.

Such tightly coupled systems must be closely connected to the social organization that monitors and maintains them. The greater the complexity of a technical system, the greater the non-linear connections between the system and its environment: the malfunctioning of a single unit, or such a unit being unpredictably influenced by an external source, can have unexpected effects.¹² This unpredictability makes it necessary to *reduce* the complexity of the system's environment, in order to maintain the system's own complexity while avoiding a catastrophic breakdown. Thus, in tightly coupled systems there is constant monitoring of the environment, with minimal flexibility regarding the time and quantity of resources needed for intervention. Maintaining such a system demands increasingly specialized expert knowledge, which in turn multiplies experts' authority over the decisions pertaining to system maintenance, and also to monitoring the system's environment.

Technological systems are not a special case in this respect. To borrow an example from Joseph Rouse, once agricultural production becomes guided by technological interventions, decisions become more and more tightly coupled. Every adaptation of the plant to the past intervention needs further corrective responses with fertilizer, insecticides, and so on. As a result, tight coupling has produced an 'artificial complexity' in agricultural production, as compared to the looser form of complex interdependence typical of ecological systems. Artificiality refers to overcomplexity, in that every response is only a response to the previous intervention. With such complexity there is indeed 'the slow decline into guardianship', to use Robert Dahl's apt phrase. But this decline is not due to any intrinsic or unavoidable complexity, or even to specialized expert knowledge, but instead to the kind of interdependence that hypercomplexity produces. Why is this form of complexity desirable or inevitable? As with arguments based on the efficiency of subsystems, it is necessary to ask: complexity for what? Tight coupling is one mechanism through which functional differentiation undermines public deliberation; it shows that certain forms of complexity are not always desirable if one wants to promote freedom.

A clearer analysis of the relationships between hyperrationality, hypercomplexity and democracy should make us question the assumptions of many criticisms of radical democracy. In the case of hypercomplexity, time constraints on decisions preclude any deliberative input if complexity is to be preserved. Overcomplex systems have anti-democratic consequences. But with regard to other forms of complexity, the opposite is often the case: democracy preserves complexity, while anti-democratic measures are often attempts to reduce complexity for the sake of goals such as security and protection from risks. The empirical relation between democracy and complexity is not as unidirectional as critics of radical democracy have claimed. The in-principle argument against deliberative democracy generalizes from one type of macrosociological complexity. It does not consider the ways in which democratic institutions actually promote and preserve complexity, at least to the extent that democracy is not excessively rational and political institutions are not overly complex. Both hyperrationality and hypercomplexity are anti-democratic: they inhibit effective deliberation and undermine democratic legitimacy. But institutions can maintain both social complexity and the conditions of public deliberation at the same time.

In cases of hypercomplexity, the complexity of a subsystem, say the technical subsystem of Perrow's example, may be preserved in only one way: by reducing the complexity of the environment. Thus, the system adapts the environment to itself and not vice versa, as might be the case in the gradual destruction of the organic content of the soil through monoculture. It is this reduction of complexity which limits the capacity of a deliberating public to hold decisions open until they have passed through public procedures sufficient to assure some form of consent. Hypercomplexity describes a whole series of problems facing contemporary democracies, including

ecological disequilibrium, nuclear disasters, demographic pressures, the problem of the food supply, the disposal of waste, the interconnection of financial systems, terrorism, and the worldwide circulation of drugs.¹³

According to theorists such as Zolo and Luhmann, these problems are too complex to be dealt with by the intentional and hence 'linear' institutional mechanisms of democracy. Democracy and the popular sovereignty of citizens are therefore 'obsolete' under such circumstances. In the face of such problems and risks, democracy 'has become the most improbable and the most fragile, and the least realistic form of government conceivable today'.¹⁴ This claim leads to the inevitable Weberian conclusion that all non-elementary, complex political systems are 'necessarily oligarchic', and that all claims for democratic consent, even those mediated through a constitutional

state or civil society, are illusory. Claims about unavoidable complexity are a steep and slippery slope, which first eliminates possibilities of participation, then deliberation, then representation, and then, finally, democracy.

This analysis of social complexity allows us to restate the basic dilemma which critics pose: democracy requires a certain degree of complexity in order for individual and public freedom to be possible; yet, at a certain threshold of complexity this same freedom disappears. Does the second half of this dilemma mean that democracy is inadequate to deal with complexity and that something like oligarchy is inevitable? The problem is that oligarchy does not, in the end, preserve complexity; it is often the case that democracy maintains complexity by preserving the contingency of individual choice and the uncoupling of civil society from the economy or the state. Anti-democratic tendencies, such as the power-inflation of modern state bureaucracies which control social risks and the effects of scarcity, also aim at reducing complexity. As Danilo Zolo puts it, 'The simplest and most effective mechanism for achieving such protection is a drastic reduction of social complexity'.¹⁵ Criticisms of democracy on these grounds do not provide an argument for limiting popular sovereignty in the constitutional state but rather for increasing political power, typically hierarchically structured political power. Conservative critics of democracy, such as Carl Schmitt, have long pointed out the inadequacy of democracy to fulfil the state functions of protecting us from evil.¹⁶ Thus, there is no inherent functional antinomy between increasing democracy and maintaining complexity. Many of the same political mechanisms that reduce complexity also restrict democracy. It all depends on the type of complexity: the overcomplexity produced by non-linear feedback loops or the complexity that results from free and hence contingent decisions.

Hyperrationality is by no means inevitable. Some solutions are institutional, as in the familiar separation of powers. This internal differentiation of the political system increases its complexity and preserves it from the overarching power of one branch over others. Instituting such internal complexity of the political system does two things at once: it restricts the capacity of each branch to intervene effectively in some social spheres, and at the same time it inhibits the escalation of political power. Such political complexity is therefore consistent with well-ordered democratic institutions. Similarly, hypercomplexity could be defined in terms of the inflation of power in one of these subsystems in order to meet the increased need for protection or reduction of risk. But this role ascribes to certain institutions anti-democratic purposes, and hence the conflict is not dependent on any level of social complexity but instead on the

inherent tensions in political systems with built-in multiple political purposes. Viewed institutionally, hypercomplexity dovetails with hyperrationality through the escalation of power necessary for carrying out political decisions.

Before turning to more specific conflicts of democracy and complexity, one further general point needs to be made. Can there be democratic complexity? This term denotes the sorts of differentiated institutions typical of existing democratic institutions. The separation of powers is not merely a *functional* requirement for government to fulfil certain independent purposes; it also exists to preserve private and public autonomy and thus to preserve the complexity of free and contingent decisions. In so doing, this form of complexity permits free and open public deliberation.

Such differentiation within deliberative institutions meets the challenges of complexity. It permits a variety of deliberative roles as well as an epistemic division of labour within deliberation and decision making. Exactly how one spells out the different deliberative roles depends on both the issue at hand and institutional constraints. Indeed, issues such as constitutional amendments may require deliberative inputs from all citizens, while others may require only casting a vote for a particular representative in some decision-making body. Institutional mechanisms which preserve complexity by permitting diverse types of public input at various levels should be a necessary part of any well-ordered society and of the structure of the constitutional state. The mechanisms which help citizens avoid hyperrationality also institutionally help to limit escalating non-democratic forms of political power. This is true to the extent that diverse public inputs keep the democratic process open and make it harder for institutions to see their policies as the univocal expression of the public will. Such institutional designs do not necessarily entail a precommitment or self-binding of the political will but instead ongoing intelligent planning that preserves the conditions which make both public deliberation and private association possible.

The separation of powers is a mechanism for preserving complexity and sovereignty rather than being merely a functional or organizational device. It enables and limits popular sovereignty within the boundaries of democratic principles in that it establishes a recursive relation between public opinion and democratic decision making in institutions. By 'recursive' or 'self-referential', I mean that such mechanisms enable the public to reshape the institutional means that they have for executing political decisions; at the same time, these institutions are necessary to organize and carry out the public will in large scale societies. Problems of scale require a dialectic between institutions and their deliberating publics: the decision-making power

of the public is channelled into institutional mechanisms; the institutional mechanisms are thus influenced and limited by the public and its sovereignty. On the one hand, such a recursive relation implies that the sovereign will of the people no longer has power to constitute the whole of society by its collective decisions; on the other hand, it limits political power in such a way that there is no sovereignty other than the will of citizens.

Sovereignty here concerns the constitution and legitimation of political power in the deliberative process. The power of citizens is itself legitimate only if it is exercised through the limiting and enabling conditions of the constitutional state, and the constitutional state is legitimate only if it makes possible the constitution of power through the will of citizens. Even the constitution is recursively open to the will of citizens, as in the amendment process. Whatever limits complexity imposes on democracy, it is not to be found in the mechanisms of the constitutional state, but in the influence of other social systems upon its institutional attempts to preserve complexity. The constitutional state preserves complexity by functionally limiting the scope of the use of hierarchical power, while also establishing mechanisms for the dispersal of democratic power.

Popular sovereignty shows the continued dependence of political institutions on intentional action and upon the belief of citizens in the legitimacy of politically generated power. Just as producers only continue to practice monoculture if they believe it to be more productive, so too the preservation of social complexity in politics depends on the intentional input of actors. 'Tightly coupled' systems require monitoring; markets require consistent optimizing behaviour and state intervention. Besides proper institutionalization such as the separation of powers, deliberation requires that actors become knowledgeable participants who are capable of taking part in deliberation in a variety of ways, with a variety of roles. This broad participation is often quite efficient with regard to information pooling, thereby reducing the information costs of the process of public deliberation as a whole.¹⁷

But many criticisms of radical democracy do not depend on the strong claims about the inverse linear relation between democracy and complexity, or about polycentric, functionally differentiated societies. Rather, they claim that there are other forms of complexity that are 'unavoidable' in modern societies. These forms of social complexity are equally anti-democratic, understood here as egalitarian face-to-face interaction among free and equal persons. By contrast, modern societies 'unavoidably' depend upon centralized and hierarchical authority, on social processes that can in no way be reconciled with democratic norms of equality, freedom and publicity.

Unavoidable complexity leads to violation of these norms as well as to the cognitive limits on the deliberative capacities of citizens. In this way, complexity makes popular sovereignty impossible and separates institutional decision-making processes from the freedom and openness of the public sphere or civil society. Given the complexities of institutional decision making and the cognitive demands of modern society, it will only be in the informal public sphere that we approximate ideals of equality and publicity. Such claims, I shall argue, conflate complexity with hypercomplexity, as well as confuse the problems of public reason with excessive rationalism.

'Unavoidable' Complexity and Democratic Ideals

In the last section, I disputed the general claim that increasing the scope of democracy decreases social complexity. In this section, I want to deal with a different sort of objection to participatory and deliberative arrangements: that 'unavoidable' social complexity inherently limits the application of basic norms of political equality and the decision-making power of the democratic public. This objection depends on establishing the need for other non-intentional, integrative mechanisms in complex societies, whose operation produces anti-egalitarian consequences and limits the effectiveness of intentional forms of political integration. The polemical purpose of these accounts is to show that socialism and radical democracy are inappropriate for modern societies.¹⁸ In *Faktizität und Geltung*, Habermas affirms this harsh lesson of some critics of radical democracy; he agrees that the communicative organization of society as a whole is impossible, for the reason that democracy can no longer regulate the social contexts in which it is embedded.¹⁹ Deviations from and even violations of democratic norms are therefore considered to be 'inevitable' in institutionally differentiated societies.

To reply to such compelling sociological objections, radical democrats must show two things. First, they must show that institutional complexity *per se*, such as the use of experts in deliberation, does not necessarily lead to the *violations* of democratic norms which critics claim they do. The epistemic division of labour as such is not inherently undemocratic. Rather, it is a question of *how* the labour of decision making may be divided and still remain public. Second, radical democrats must then show that popular sovereignty can be maintained even in institutions characterized by a high degree of social complexity. As it turns out, most of these arguments against popular sovereignty do not refer to *social* complexity at all, but instead are arguments about the excessive rationalism and political will typical of Jacobin forms of radical democracy. Some versions of

participatory democracy do indeed founder on problems of excessive political rationalism rather than social complexity, and macro-sociology is hardly needed to see why this is true.

In his *Integration moderner Gesellschaften*, Bernhard Peters nicely crystallizes this multifaceted criticism of radical democracy through a very illuminating thought experiment. I shall use it here only as a way of organizing the sociological objections to radical democracy typical of theorists as diverse as Weber, Luhmann, and Foucault. Peters' thought experiment proposes that we imagine a society that is characterized by 'a fully conscious and discursive form of self-organization'; we are asked to consider what it would be like for a society to be structured entirely through free and open communication in abstraction from any external or internal limitations. Imagine that Marx's vision of the Paris Commune flourishes for more than a few months, or that deliberating citizens actually achieve some approximation of the ideal speech situation in their political institutions.²⁰ Based on communicative forms of association alone, such an ideally democratic society is the expressive totality which neo-Marxists sought. In every aspect and dimension, social relations would reflect human capacities and needs and would be fully consensual. For Marx, the ideal society is based on 'freely associated individuals', each of whom possesses full cognitive and communicative capacities. What makes such a society an idealized version of discursive association is that all *external* limitations have been lifted by abstraction – all spatial, temporal, communicative and cognitive restrictions on citizens' capacities are removed – so that all problems of coordination can be resolved by conscious collective action. Such a society embodies egalitarianism in all its dimensions:

It is a structure which embodies the conscious, rational process of reaching understanding among equals; equality here signifies the fully reciprocal recognition of everyone, where everyone has the equal chance to participate in social life, in this case the equal opportunity to participate in the discourse of conscious will-formation.²¹

The abstraction to a 'purely communicative form of sociation' is not a mere thought experiment; it is also 'a methodological fiction', useful for understanding necessary and unavoidable deviations from the norms of equality and procedures of discursive association. This fiction is also useful for criticizing the claims of democratic theories, such as those of Joshua Cohen and Robert Dahl.²²

The first problem with this general type of criticism is that it is abstract: it is directed at an ideal of consensus and transparency that does not model anything like deliberation in democratic institutions and political discourse. It is based on the idealizing assumptions of

discourse, and not on a reconstruction of democratic deliberation. Democracy can only in part be characterized as the institutionalization of discourses governed by mutual recognition. The moral idealization of conditions of perfect equality and full mutual recognition is not meant to provide a model for actual deliberation about conflicting values, interests or principles. Indeed, the critics have a false target. They show what Kant knew already: that the 'Kingdom of Ends' is hardly the basis for a workable political order. The fiction of pure communicative association suggests that these norms could only be fulfilled in a society *without* political power or institutions (which implies that there will be no need for democracy, either).

Once complexity is introduced into communicative forms of association, the first deviation that the thought experiment supposedly identifies is a direct violation of norms of equality. It is surprisingly strong: *unavoidable inequalities emerge which would not be agreed to by everyone in deliberation*. Radical democrats will have to admit that public deliberation certainly can produce and reproduce inequalities. But the burden of proof is on the critic to show not merely that potential inequalities remain in such arrangements, but that these inequalities are both produced by deliberative arrangements themselves and cannot be corrected by them (that is, that they are indeed 'unavoidable'). Here the critic has to resort to other values, typically defending inequalities as promoting efficiency and freedom.²³ In this way, we can introduce a number of similar 'deviations' proposed by a chorus of sociological critics of democracy: 'unavoidable' scarcity, inherent difference and limitations in the cognitive and communicative capacities of citizens, inevitable social coercion and non-democratic authority, and so on. The general structure of such arguments should now be clear. In each case, the critic proposes nondemocratic solutions to such problems which, if unresolved, would threaten social integration: delegation, the division of labour, and non-intentional forms of integration such as markets.

Upon closer examination, these inevitable inequalities turn out to have little to do with social complexity. Such inequalities are generally *epistemic*, having to do with 'overburdening' intrinsic limited capacities or with 'natural' differences in people's cognitive abilities. Many critics of 'mass democracy' have questioned the competence of the 'masses', whose incompetence makes them in need of the guiding hand of authority.²⁴ Neither capacities nor acquired knowledge can be assumed to be evenly or widely distributed. Such limits give rise not only to inequalities in capacity and chances to participate but also to forms of scarcity directly related to decision making; knowledge and information are scarce resources in complex

societies. Both of these facts point to an 'overburdening' of human capacities for communication and cognition in deliberative democracy and point to the need for experts, delegates and other epistemic forms of the division of labour. Many of these mechanisms are clearly intentional (such as delegation), and do not as such violate any democratic principles.

More specific instances do seem to violate democratic norms. Expertise seems to undermine the claim of all to participate equally, and specialized knowledge also seems to give unfair deliberative advantages to some participants. Here the problem is misstated; it is not a matter of having superior knowledge but of having greater access to the relevant forum. Expertise produces potential inequalities only on the further assumption that it promotes self-interested behavior. It is certainly the case that such asymmetries of knowledge permeate many social practices on which complex societies depend, such as transportation systems, the distribution of food, architecture, medicine, and many areas of life in which specialized knowledge is built into everyday life. As Susan Shapiro puts this epistemic dependency: most ordinary citizens 'are unable to render medical diagnoses, to test the safety and purity of food and drugs before ingesting them, to conduct structural tests on skyscrapers before entering them, or to make safety checks on elevators, automobiles or airplanes before embarking on them; they must rely on the representations and assessments of experts'.²⁵ Does this dependence on others show that complex societies cannot function with strict political equality?

The problem with this argument is that it underestimates, rather than overestimates, the effects of the epistemic division of labour on public activities. Experts themselves are in the same position of trust in regard to their very own 'expert' knowledge, not just with regard to other experts.²⁶ Furthermore, social movements have successfully challenged scientific experts both in the political arena and, more importantly, on their own ground. These movements demonstrate quite well that epistemic inequalities are not an 'inevitable' result of the complex division of scientific labour, or the division of lay and expert in the public sphere. The movement Act-Up in the United States, as well as other AIDS activist organizations, has challenged the 'representations and assessments' and hence the credibility of scientific experts in the public sphere. While many areas of expertise remain unproblematic, the AIDS crisis took expert knowledge and assessments out of the uncontested domain. To resolve this crisis of trust and credibility, experts were forced to agree to take many aspects of AIDS treatment and research out of the exclusive domain of their expert authority and make them contested public issues.²⁷ This is not

some exceptional circumstance, but a political demand for access to the agenda of researchers who need both the cooperation of AIDS patients and the funding of public institutions.

Perhaps even more important is the fact that public trust is a particular sort of resource in a democratic society. It is not a scarce economic resource, which is depleted by use. Rather, it is a 'moral resource', which increases, rather than decreases, through its use.²⁸ The public testability and moral character of trust as the social basis of expertise belie the view that it violates norms of equality: expertise must be publicly convincing to be effective and it can be lost through abuse and disuse. Furthermore, expertise increases rather than decreases the aggregate of available public knowledge, so long as it is treated as a *shared* resource. The more such knowledge is publicly used to justify democratic decisions, the more likely it is that it will become more widely distributed through the process of deliberation and debate on an issue.

The phenomena of trust and the distribution of knowledge in deliberation raise another problem that leads to supposed 'unavoidable' violations of equality: the problem of inevitable *scarcity*, such as the scarcity of information. Once again, an economic account of scarcity is needed to motivate the argument against democracy. All organizations and groups have a scarcity of cognitive resources to some extent, where the main problem is simply the scarcity of time. There are organizational and distributive strategies for dealing with temporal constraints; these include setting limits on when decisions are made to meet the pressures of coordination as well as minimizing information costs in decision making. But these limits are not the result of complexity but are instead the limitations of time and information typical of ordinary intentional action. These same problems of time and information constrain planning in democratic organizations as well.²⁹ A general analysis of scarcity does not identify anything which specifically causes deviations from democratic norms. Scarcity by itself does not create inequalities, since burdens can be shared equally. Analogous counter-arguments can be made to dispute many of the critics' claims about cognitive inequalities.³⁰ Similarly, the time-saving routinizations typical of everyday decisions do not necessarily produce *inevitable coercion*. Rather, they only show that conscious deliberation is not possible for every decision and for every time some past decision is enacted or enforced. Instead of eliminating such efficiencies for the sake of consensual arrangements, in democratic arrangements there need only be opportunities for revision and review when routines become problematic and burdensome. If these practices are in place, the 'inevitability' of coercion may only be temporary.

These public processes of participation, review and revision can, however, themselves become routinized, a by-product which heightens problems of hyperrationality. Even if required, such proceedings would produce reform only if the alternative reasons are not defined automatically within the administrative system of significance. This system is developed precisely to ensure the smooth functioning of the organization, not to produce a diverse set of alternative proposals. Properly reformed, such hearings could not only become more deliberative; they are also a more efficient means for developing problem-solving strategies.

My line of argument has been to show that it is difficult to establish 'inevitable' complexities or violations of egalitarian norms by means of a macrosociological theory. The thought experiment is telling only when hyperrationality and hypercomplexity are confused; the solution to each problem requires different institutional mechanisms. In the case of hyperrationality, the excessive political will must be limited by such means as the separation of powers. In the case of hypercomplexity, new public means must be developed to change the intentional inputs into the system. Hypercomplexity must be transformed into a complexity manageable by democratic means, such as the complexities of size and scale.

The argument of this paper has been two-fold. First, I have suggested that the relationship between democracy and complexity is not unidirectional. There is no empirical evidence or in-principle argument which shows that complexity inherently limits democracy. Second, my positive argument has been to show that the relationship is bidirectional. Some institutions preserve complexity. It is democratic institutions which enhance and enable the positive features of complexity, such as the contingencies of freedom and plurality. Thus, my argument points in the direction of identifying those institutions which are capable of preserving both democracy and complexity at the same time. Popular sovereignty is possible only if institutions maintain the good features of social complexity (such as freedom and pluralism), while at the same time create mechanisms to resolve some of the problems that it poses (such as the escalation of social power and the loss of public control of large areas of social life). I have argued that a better appreciation of the avoidable, negative consequences of modernization allows us to see just how wide the scope for genuinely democratic decision making actually is, even in large-scale, complex and cosmopolitan societies.

NOTES

1. Rousseau's radical democratic account of the 'general will' is sometimes interpreted this way; it is the core of 'civic republican' and communitarian ideas of democracy. For an historical overview of republicanism and its influence, see Frank Michelman's introduction to the special issue on the 1985 Supreme Court Term, 'Forward: Traces of Self-Government', *Harvard Law Review*, 100, 1986, pp. 4-77; also his 'Political Truth and the Rule of Law', *Tel Aviv University Studies in Law*, 8, 1988, pp. 281-91. Proponents of 'strong' participatory democracy think beyond ordinary practices of voting and representation and criticize current institutions for their 'thin' standard of democratic legitimacy. Democracy is achieved only in a self-governing community, which is constituted by more than homogeneous interests. See Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, pp. 117ff.
2. Among many recent examples is the former Yugoslavia, where newly formed nations have enacted constitutions on the basis of ethnicity. Such constitutions are the constitutions of a particular ethnic (rather than political) group and citizenship depends upon possessing this ascribed property.
3. Robert Dahl and Edward Tufte, *Size and Democracy*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973, p. 70.
4. This distinction plays an important role in *Faktizität und Geltung*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1992, especially chapters 7 and 8; hereafter FG.
5. See, for example, Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992, especially chapter 1.
6. See Danilo Zolo, *Democracy and Complexity*, University Park: Penn State University Press, 1992, especially ch.3. for a clear statement of how functional differentiation is different from other forms of complexity, such as the segmentation of spheres of activity that are not functionally interdependent.
7. Jon Elster has made the 'perverse effects' of social planning one of his major themes. See the editors' introduction to J. Elster and K. Moene (eds), *Alternative to Capitalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 1-38.
8. Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, pp. 24-25.
9. Elster, *Solomonic Judgments*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 17.
10. Elster, *Solomonic Judgments*, p. 17.
11. Charles Perrow, *Normal Accidents*, New York: Basic Books, 1984, ch. 3; for an interesting discussion of the artificial world constructed by experimental science using this model, see Joseph Rouse, *Knowledge and Power*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987, p. 230.
12. Perrow, p. 78.
13. Zolo, *Democracy and Complexity*, pp. 64-5.
14. Zolo, p. 67.
15. Zolo, p. 56.
16. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983, pp. 59ff, where Schmitt argues that the Counter-reformation defined protection from 'evil' as the central political problem.
17. On the concept of information pooling, see B. Grofman and G. Owen (eds), *Information Pooling and Group Decision Making*, Westport, Conn.: JAI Press, 1983. Also see John Ferejohn and James Kuklinski (eds), *Information and Democratic Processes*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990.
18. See Bernhard Peters, *Integration Moderner Gesellschaften*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1993, chs. 5 and 6.
19. Jürgen Habermas, FG, p. 397.
20. For Marx's account of the Paris Commune, in which he applauds the 'reabsorption of the state into society', see 'The Civil War in France', in D. McLellan (ed.), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 539-8. In some early formulations, Habermas seems to invite this interpretation, as when he insists that the ideal speech situation is not a 'mere fiction'. As we shall see below, he is now much more cautious. But the important distinction is between the requirements of agreement in moral discourse and the more minimal demands of political agreement. In my view, democracy does not require unanimity even as a regulative ideal, but the willingness of citizens to continue to cooperate. Even when they are losers, citizens need only the reasonable expectation that they will be able to affect the outcome of future deliberation.

21. Peters, *Integration Moderner Gesellschaften*, p. 230.
22. For criticisms of Joshua Cohen's account of deliberation along these lines, see Habermas, FG, pp. 383ff; for a criticism of a similar set of normative conditions offered by Robert Dahl, see pp. 369ff.
23. Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato make a similar criticism of claims to extend participatory demands to 'economic democracy' in *Civil Society and Political Theory*, p. 229.
24. This is Robert Michels' 'oligarchic tendency' manifested in mass democracy; see Robert Michels, *Political Parties*, Glencoe: Free Press, 1958.
25. Peters uses Shapiro's arguments about expertise to substantiate his claims about the inevitability of the inegalitarian and contractual distinction between agent and principal in such relationships. See Susan Shapiro, 'The Social Control of Impersonal Trust', *American Journal of Sociology*, 93, 1987, pp. 623-58.
26. Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 417. As Shapin puts it: 'For scientists' practical capacity to advance knowledge, even skeptically to check over another's claim with a view to falsifying it, depends on their ability to trust almost everything else about the science in which they do skepticism and the resources which permit skeptical activities to be carried through'.
27. See Joshua Gamson, 'Silence, Death and the Invisible Enemy: AIDS Activism and Social Movement Newness', *Social Problems*, 36, 1989, pp. 351-67; also the work of Steven Epstein, including 'Activists as Experts: Dilemmas of Democratization in the AIDS Epidemic' (presentation at the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, 1994).
28. Partha Dasgupta, 'Trust as a Commodity', in D. Gambetta (ed.), *Trust*, London: Basil Blackwell, 1988, pp. 48-56.
29. Peters relies here on analyses of 'economic' organization theorists such as James March; see March, *Decisions and Organizations*, London: Basil Blackwell, 1988; Peters, pp. 237-8.
30. For a more dynamic and temporal account of intentional action, see Michael Bratman, *Intentions, Plans and Practical Reason*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988, pp. 29ff. Peters' argument depends on an account of deliberation which is entirely too punctual and disconnected, and his criticisms do not apply to a future-oriented planning model of ongoing intentional activity (such as Bratman's), which builds temporal limitations into deliberation itself. Agents make plans, precisely in order to build in constraints on our activities over time.

Main Problems of Contemporary Theory of Democracy and the Uncertain Future of its Practice

Claus Offe

Let me start my remarks with a brief reflection on the relationship between two concepts that everywhere play a paramount role when normative foundations of post-authoritarian societies and polities are being discussed. These two normative standards are those of 'justice' and 'democracy'. What is their relation? I wish to draw our attention to the fact that that relation can be read in both directions. First, one might argue that democracy – or equal political rights of participation and representation within the framework of strongly protected individual liberties and division of state powers – is derivative from justice, or an embodiment of its principles. But conversely, one might also argue that justice (of which there are many conflicting versions when it comes to the concrete assignment of rights and duties) is the outcome of processes of legislative, executive, or juridical decision making that conforms to democratic procedural rules. In this sense, we must envisage the relationship between justice and democracy in terms of a circular model, according to which either of them determines, and at the same time derives from, the other.

To this, let me add another observation that turns to the concept of democracy itself. We can think of democratic forms of government in terms of a life cycle: Democracies are 'born' at a certain point in time and under certain circumstances, and it would at least be naïve to exclude the possibility that they can 'die', as these forms of government are evidently not automatically self-enforcing and self-perpetuating. The existence of democracies within a possibility space of a non-democratic past as well as a non-democratic future is what makes them both precious and precarious. What I want to do here is to highlight an interesting asymmetry between the two limiting points of democracy within this possibility space, its beginning and its end. While it is virtually axiomatic that democracies do not come into being in democratic ways (but rather emerge from revolutions, wars, occupation regimes, *coups d'état*, etc.),¹ it is quite possible that they disintegrate as a consequence of individual and collective forms of action, the emergence of which can neither be theoretically nor

practically excluded within a democracy. If the people cease to participate in constitutionally prescribed ways, élites fail to cooperate according to constitutional rules, parliaments abdicate their powers, governments and courts fail to implement their decisions or implement them without regard for constitutional rights of citizens, there is nothing that the subjectless 'democratic form of government' by itself can do in order to defend and assert itself. If it can be defended, it must be due to the loyal, prudent, and principled action (or inaction) of citizens and élites who are aware of the dangers to which the democratic form of government may fall victim, as well as being determined to prevent or resist these dangers. As democracies are inherently vulnerable, they need to be intelligently protected. And the mode of protecting democracies cannot be regulated by democratic constitutions alone. Democracies, in a word, in order to survive depend upon being willed, supported, and defended.

Concerns about the future of democratic forms of government raise two questions. First, which are the (economic, social, cultural, political) preconditions and determinants that are conducive to – or must be seen as a minimum requirement of – the continued viability of democratic regimes where they exist, as well as the further spread of such regimes to places where they do not yet exist? And what can we anticipate with some degree of certainty about the socio-economic and cultural trajectories along which these, as it were, pre-constitutional determinants will develop in the future? Second, to the extent to which the prospects for democratic regimes can be shown to be favourable, the question must be asked which *variety* of democratic regimes is more – or less – likely to survive the challenges and turbulences to which democratic regimes are typically exposed? The first of these two questions is framed in a yes/no logic as it addresses the rise and *sustainability* of some kind of democracy, and the second in a more-or-less logic that concerns the *kind* and quality of democracy.

These two sets of questions have acquired – somewhat paradoxically, it might appear – a new sense of urgency and uncertainty by the most momentous and consequential event in recent history, the end of the Cold War and the breakdown of the Soviet system of state socialism. What appears paradoxical is that the future of liberal democracy has become the object of melancholic conjectures and it appears problematic² exactly at the point when it seems to have scored a definitive victory over its only competitor in the modern world. State socialism, as long as it was a historical reality, also provided a reference point to liberal democracies in relation to which the latter could make a strong and successful claim to be 'better' – in both economic and moral terms. Could it be that the measure of

self-assurance that liberal democracies enjoyed throughout the period after World War II was in fact parasitic upon the existence of state socialism – a system almost generally considered inferior in both its legitimacy and effectiveness? If so, the new legitimation problem of liberal democracy would be that it is no longer enough to be ‘better’; it is now required to be ‘good’, as measured by a set of universally shared normative criteria. This latter standard, of course, involves much heavier burdens of argument and proof. Also, the normative theory supporting liberal democracy would have to come to terms with the apparent puzzle that, if liberal democracy is held to be the most legitimate and effective, the most civilized and morally most attractive way to organize social and political life, why is it that not all political forces in all previously non-democratic countries appear to embrace it as the uniquely desirable institutional model, and why is it that those who do so still seem to encounter severe difficulties in implementing it?

One of the central issues in contemporary political philosophy can be summarized in the following question. Given the unavoidable and irreversible ‘pluralism’ within and between societies in the modern world, and also given the fact that contact and rivalry cannot be avoided between the plural interests and ideas that make up this world, we must face the reality of intense and irreconcilable conflict between proponents of different interests and forms of life and the very particular notions of the ‘good’ life each of them pursues. Given this intensity of conflict, on the basis of which conditions and which arguments should any of these groups develop a strong and robust commitment to rules specifying the ‘right’ procedures according to which the conflict can be solved? If the ‘right’ procedures are seen to compromise prospects for the realization of the ‘good’ life, why should anyone opt for the former – particularly if not ‘everybody else’ is trusted to do the same and/or if violation of the rules is expected to go unpunished in concrete cases? Must the democratic citizen be compartmentalized into two sub-units – one pursuing the concrete and substantive ‘good’, while the other remains faithful to the formal and abstract ‘right’ that is designed to civilize the coexistence of divergent and conflicting conceptions of the ‘good’? And, if so, how do we provide for the stability and balance of the division of each citizen’s dual self?

Without pursuing these philosophical questions any further, I try to approach them by specifying a number of context conditions for the viability of the democratic form of political organization. The first five of these context conditions relate to political and other élites, and the second five to non-élites, or the mass of ordinary citizens.

- (1) *Internal sovereignty.* If the people should somehow 'govern' in a democracy, this principle must, first of all, be read in the negative sense: *No one else but the people* (and the representatives elected by it) ought to govern. In other words, elected officials should hold a monopoly over the making of public policy decisions (Dahl 1982:11) and ultimately over the legitimate use of force. Schmitter and Karl (1991:81) read this condition as meaning that 'popularly elected officials must be able to exercise their constitutional powers without being subjected to overriding (albeit informal) opposition from unelected officials'. This amounts to the absence, as a condition of *internal sovereignty*, of internal strategic actors capable of exercising veto power in order to obstruct, preclude, or otherwise interfere with or control decisions of elected officials. (The obvious candidates for the source of such obstruction are military élites, business élites, criminal, terrorist, or ethnic collective actors, with any number of ingenious combinations and mixed cases among them coming to mind.)

This is clearly a very demanding condition. If we take it in a strict sense, the prospects for democratic regimes would appear to be threatened not only by military counter-élites (e.g. Spain in the late seventies), terrorist organizations, mafia type illegal economic organizations (Italy), drug cartels (Colombia), militant separatist movements (Spain, Northern Ireland), but also by strategic actors representing multinational corporations that are sufficiently powerful to effectively blackmail (among other things, through the threat of disinvestment) or corrupt democratically elected governments. As complexity and interdependency increase, and particularly as the means of violence, individual and mass communication, and transportation become more readily available to everyone (and hence their use becomes more difficult to control for government authorities), and as capital stocks become organizationally and financially 'mobile', the least we can say is that the opportunities for such obstruction tend to increase, as do the incentives to exploit these opportunities. As a consequence, democratic sovereignty becomes increasingly vulnerable to the 'power of obstruction' that is provided for by the virtually uncontrollable international flow of arms, drugs, and 'dirty' as well as 'clean' money that is facilitated by the use of modern means of communication and transportation and the institutional realities of largely open borders.

To be sure, it will always remain a matter of difficult judgement to what extent the democratically illegitimate (though perhaps perfectly legal) use of such means does in fact amount to

a *strategic obstruction* of constitutional democratic government (as opposed to ordinary business, or, for that matter, ordinary crime, committed for the sake of private gain). Furthermore, the mere presence or even the fictitious assumption of such dangers and opportunities may serve as an excuse for governing élites to curtail the rights of citizens in anticipatory compliance with what are regarded as the requirements of a 'favourable investment climate' and in ways which are in conflict with the proper operation of democratic institutions.

- (2) *External sovereignty.* Schmitter and Karl (1991:81) mention as a further demanding condition that 'the polity must be self-governing; it must be able to act independently of constraints imposed by some other overarching political system'. This is the condition of *external sovereignty*. Two elections that were held in the month of March 1990 may serve as an example to illustrate how difficult it is to meet this condition, given the highly porous as well as the highly stratified nature of the international system. The elections held in Nicaragua and in the post-Communist German Democratic Republic shared two features. First, they were the first fair and clean elections to be held in the respective countries in a long time. Second, every voter in these two countries was acutely aware of the fact that the government of some other country (the US and West Germany, respectively) would take an intense interest in the election's outcome and would respond to the actual outcome in terms of either strongly negative or positive sanctions that would not just affect the newly elected government, but virtually every citizen in quite direct ways. It could therefore be said that, while the government-to-be-elected was under the control of the electorate, the electorate was to a significant extent under the effective control of some foreign government that was interfering with the electoral process through threats and promises.

The interconnectedness of national policies as well as the vast disparities of political, economic and military powers among the nation states defy the notion of democratic self-determination of nations.

The very process of governance can escape the reach of the nation-state. National communities by no means exclusively make and determine decisions and policies for themselves, and governments by no means determine what is right or appropriate exclusively for their own citizens. (Held 1993:25-6)

Such inbound and outbound spillovers affect national sovereignty in negative ways, regardless of whether they are accounted

for by formal arrangements of transnational decision making (as in the European Union with its proverbial 'democratic deficit') or, *a fortiori*, if no such institutional mechanism of transnational consultation and bargaining exists (as in the case of the central bank of one country unilaterally setting the parameters for the economic recovery of others).

- (3) *Oligarchic control.* A third variety of mechanism by which democratic sovereignty is curtailed by élite action occurs when domestic representative élites exercise more control over constituencies than constituents can exercise over representatives. This is the familiar phenomenon of oligarchic control over captured (e.g. 'clientelistically bribed') constituencies. Political parties, government bureaucracies, monopolistic associations, and mass media are often able to determine the rise and configuration of 'critical' issues, the range of choice of the electorate, and the actual choices made, to an extent that makes the 'will of the people' appear a virtual artefact of strategic élite action (cf. Bobbio 1987; Zolo 1992). Such a reversal of the direction of control – and the concomitant escape of supposedly representative élites from meaningful accountability – is part of the inherent pathologies of democratic regimes. Citizens depend on strong representative actors, in particular political parties, for their meaningful political participation, but they are also threatened by the monopolistic power position that this dependency can provide to these corporate intermediaries.

In all three cases of curtailed popular sovereignty – non-political strategic counter-élites, foreign governments, unaccountable representative monopolies – the thorny analytical issue is to determine the point at which the condition of collective autonomy of a political community (i.e. its sovereignty) is actually being subverted. For on the one hand, it is of course part of the everyday business of democratic governments to cope with a domestic and international environment that is constituted in part by the presence of rigidities, hostilities, scarcities, dependencies, and threats. Again, the banal and ubiquitous fact of the presence of such political and economic constraints is certainly no sufficient reason to consider a democratic regime as being put into jeopardy. On the other hand, if such élites are in a position to strategically impose their interest upon democratically elected governments, to determine the domestic agenda, to prevent issues from being raised through the power of making 'non-decisions', some point can be reached at which merely 'constraining facts' turn into *poderes facticos* ('factual powers') capable of exer-

cising a measure of control over domestic politics that would make the idea of democratic accountability rather meaningless.

It is the tipping point between these two distinct phenomena that is so hard to define in theory (and to recognize in practice). All we can safely say is that this tipping point will be reached the more readily the more penetrable national borders become, the more asymmetrical the dependencies between national political systems are, and the more effectively national representative organizations manage to insulate themselves from popular control and accountability.

- (4) *Élite consensus*. But not only are élites – military, administrative, foreign governments, ethnic minority, or economic – the sources of potential threats to democratic regimes. Élites are also the key actors to play an indispensable role in the formation and preservation of such regimes. As democracies are not founded and do not come into being in democratic ways, which is true by definition,³ it is only the enlightened consensus of élites and their willingness to enter into binding pacts and constitutional agreements that make democracy possible and operative. Moreover, as governments of democratic regimes, for the sake of their own security, have very good reasons to prefer their neighbors also adopting or maintaining a democratic political order, a dynamic of external incentives and supports may be hypothesized to contribute to the stability and spread of democracies. As a consequence, democracy may be thought of as thriving internationally according to a pattern of virtuous contagion and international – as well as intra-national – pact-making.
- (5) *Meaningful choice*. In addition to the negative implication of the principle of democracy ('no one else but the constituted citizenship should be entitled to determine the content of public authority'), there is the *positive* implication of *meaningful choice*. If the options concerning public policy are effectively reduced to one, democracy is reduced to zero. Élite cartelization and other tactics of political closure are symptoms of the constraining of options that are to be observed in many democratic political systems. Inter-party convergence and the vanishing of opposition can be premised, as Otto Kirchheimer observed in the sixties, upon the experience of 'success stories' (cf. the convergence of Christian and Social Democrats in the context of West German post-War reconstruction and the Cold War during the fifties) or, in contrast, by policy failure, stalemate, or some crisis condition.
- More specifically, there is a strong incentive for bipartisan convergence and élite closure if challenges are perceived to be of

a non-routine order of magnitude. Severe turbulences (including conditions that are skilfully dramatized as severe turbulences) tend to bring political competition to a temporary standstill. The formation of a great coalition government in West Germany in 1966, and similar responses to the challenges of political terrorism in Germany and Italy in 1977 are cases in point.

While success-stories, however, make convergence and the smooth withering away of ideological conflict between parties and other political élite segments both likely and unproblematic, a negative kind of equilibrium will be reached if parties converge under exceptional challenges and *then fail to cope successfully*. While inter-party convergence can be due to the hegemonic force of particularly successful policy ideas, it can also be due to the manifest exhaustion of any ideas, e.g. ideas as to how to combat mass unemployment in open economies, or how to control the budget deficit, or how to end ethnic wars raging within the ruins of former states, etc. In cases of the latter sort of convergence due to inter-party helplessness, which we may also term 'crises of excessive convergence', the manifest lack of effectiveness of a governing party will not increase the political opportunities of the opposition or some alternative coalition to move into government position, as the opposition is not credited (due to its similarity with the incumbent party) with the capability for handling acute problems more successfully. If political codes such as 'left' vs. 'right', 'government' vs. 'opposition', 'conservative' vs. 'progressive' cease to be operationally meaningful in terms of policy proposals and promising in terms of policy effectiveness, such codes are superseded in the public political discourse with another, at least potentially anti-democratic code: the code of 'the political class' (with its connotations of both incompetence⁴ and corruption) vs. 'everyone else' or 'the people'. If major problems (such as high levels of unemployment, inflation, budget crisis, decline of economic performance, ethnic conflict, 'civil' insecurity due to crime and violence, military failures) are experienced to persist no matter what the colour of the incumbent government happens to be, dissatisfaction with government translates into frustration with, and hence loss of legitimacy of, the democratic regime as such. The condition of perceived regime impotency (as opposed to failure of parties and other élite segments) will then activate the search for either (authoritarian, populist, secessionist etc.) *alternatives* to or major institutional *modifications* of the liberal democratic regime.

I now wish to turn to the requirements on the level of non-élites or 'masses'. From a top down perspective, for democracies to be

viable, élites must acquire some measure of credible sovereignty and provide a meaningful choice between policy alternatives. In addition, and from a bottom up perspective, the trivial fact is that the durability of democratic regimes is contingent upon a 'mass base' of democratic citizens willing to support and defend democratic rights and institutions. The validity of democracy resides in citizens willing to validate it. While it is true that democratic institutions, once established, can have a powerful socializing effect upon citizens who gradually get 'used to' and 'take for granted' and eventually become committed to democratic practices, this is not the whole story. Democracies can fail, or fail to come into being, not only by élite subversion, but also by mass defection from (or mass rejection of) democratic principles. Five conditions are known under which such defection/rejection is likely to prevail.

- (6) *Theocracy vs. democracy.* Theocratic regimes and their religious doctrines are – and continue to be – a powerful obstacle to both the foundation and the survival of democratic regimes. Schematically speaking, such regimes *negate* one boundary that should be present in a democracy, namely the boundary between the religious and the secular (which in Christianity was established by the Reformation). If every 'secular' conflict is ultimately to be resolved according to the will of God and according to the letter of some sacred script, there is simply no legitimate space for democracy. In a theocratic society, the people feel that it is positively dangerous and sinful to let the people decide on issues the resolution of which can only be accomplished through divine wisdom and grace, and the religious élites that lay claim to both. Conversely, there is also a boundary which should *not* be present in a democracy, namely the boundary between believers and non-believers in the respective religions. In theocratic societies, the presence of this boundary precludes the granting of equal citizenship rights of political participation, which is an obvious prerequisite of democracy.
- (7) *Distributional fairness and positive-sum economic games.* Low and unequally distributed per capita incomes, such as they are typically found in agrarian and developing societies, do not favour modes of political reasoning and political aspirations that are compatible with the broadly supported adoption and effective consolidation of democracy. Instead, what prevails as a cognitive frame (and eventually as self-fulfilling prophecy) is a 'theory of the limited good', or the image of the constant-sum-game. Its underlying intuition, shared by both sides of a distributional

conflict, is that if 'we' are to gain, this can only come about if 'they' lose, while the idea of universal, if asymmetrical gains provided for by a growth dividend lacks any plausibility supported by experience. If democracy is thus staged as an expropriation game, it will probably be effectively resisted by the likely candidates of such expropriation. Even if it succeeds, the kind and scope of redistribution that follows will trigger a negative-sum-game that is soon to be abandoned due to this disappointing outcome. To overcome this deadlock, the presence of an established urban middle class and its experience of redistribution-cum-growth seems indispensable.

- (8) *National unity vs. primordial markers.* Strong racial and ethnic divisions within a society can preclude the mass recognition of the abstract notion of citizenship, particularly if there is a significant history of conflict across this 'ascriptive' divide and/or if strong distributional disparities prevail. The mass resistance to full democracy under such conditions is based on the (often well-founded) fear that as soon as equal political resources are granted to all, this will exacerbate distributional conflict or enable newly enfranchised groups to retaliate for deprivations they have suffered in the past. Again, these at least partly rationally founded fears (as opposed to 'prejudices') amount in many countries to powerful roadblocks on the way to democracy which can only be overcome in the process of élite negotiations and pacts (as in South Africa), not through a democratic process – one reason being that the people cannot decide who belongs to the 'people', i.e. the democratic constituency. As a consequence, both admission of previously excluded segments of the population of a territory into a political community and secession from a political community are a-democratic occurrences that are brought about through negotiations and, often, violence preceding these negotiations (Spain, Israel, South Africa, Northern Ireland) or following failed negotiations (Yugoslavia).
- (9) *Trust in effective governance.* Mass defection from democratic practices and the subsequent turn to authoritarian forms of government can result from widespread dissatisfaction with the regime's (as opposed to a particular government's) effectiveness in providing what states are supposed to provide for their people, namely (as a minimum condition), military, physical, and other material security. Democratic regimes, much as any other regimes, are presumed to effectively protect the most citizens' life, liberty, and property most of the time – and only their

demonstrated success in doing so can motivate citizens to grant governments the right to demand that some citizens sacrifice some of their life (in military service), property (through taxation) and liberty (through respect for the law). But always must the balance of the values protected and the values sacrificed for the sake of protection be positive. However, while authoritarian regimes do not depend for their preservation upon much support of their citizens, but can easily survive by force, regardless of what their level of effectiveness is, democracies have ultimately no such external guarantees to rely on. They are condemned to succeed, or at least to perform in ways that are perceived by critical parts of the population to be superior to any non-democratic alternative regime form. (Such widely shared perception of relative effectiveness had obviously evaporated in the final years of the Weimar Republic.)

- (10) *Trust in collective actors and representatives.* Mass defection from democratic practices can also occur if democratic collective actors (parties, associations) and procedural institutions (division of powers, parliamentary legislation) are perceived as having lost their legitimating substance, even if their effectiveness remains satisfactory. Thus the perceptions that the government is corrupt and the political parties unaccountable, that associations have turned into exploitative cartels and the civil service into a wasteful and self-serving apparatus, that the military is involved in conspiracies, and that individual elite members as well as the media in general cannot be trusted will add up to populist-authoritarian sentiments and a widespread willingness to abandon commitments to democratic rights and rules in favour of some 'clean', 'responsive' and 'honest' form of authoritarian rule. As the feeling of being betrayed by the 'political class' gives rise to cynicism, apathy, and a sense of popular inefficacy and powerlessness, these attitudes and their spread are also likely to affect the capacity of regimes to live up to some standard of effectiveness. Such loss of faith in democratic institutions can be observed both in old and presumably rather robust democratic regimes (such as Italy) and particularly in newly established ones (such as Russia and other post-Communist countries).

To summarize these latter points, the future of democracy thus appears to be contingent upon cultural requisites in two ways. First, 'pre-modern' dispositions and cognitive frames must be overcome in order for the highly demanding notion of democratic citizenship to

become viable. This implies, first of all, the slow and however partial neutralization of religious and ethnic markers that stand in the way of inclusion into a legal community of citizens. Second, and concerning established democratic regimes, the spread of 'post-modern' dispositions (the erosion of solidarities, the cult of difference, political cynicism, abstention, unfettered subjective welfarism and a general disenchantment with public causes) would also have to be checked and reversed, particularly, but by no means solely, because the spread of these 'post-modern' dispositions can make democracies defenceless and vulnerable to the return of those 'pre-modern' ones. Pessimistic assumptions concerning civic self-confidence and the role that the individual citizen can possibly play in a modern system of governance are further strengthened by the experience of cognitive incompetence. This experience is that virtually every issue that arrives on the political agenda undergoes such a rapid process of 'complexification' that it escapes the comprehension, let alone the competent judgement, of the average citizen (including many non-specialist politicians) within the first two weeks or so of its life cycle. Again, the answer to this post-modern condition of reflexive ignorance may often be sought in the retreat to pre-modern markers, myths, and prejudices – rather than to suitable ways of coping with recognized cognitive deficiencies (cf. Dahl 1992).

In sum, viable democratic regimes depend upon the presence of a rather peculiar set of civic commitments and cognitive frames that are being established on the mass level. To be sure, these norms can be inculcated, and their growth cultivated, by democratic institutions, and, I might add, by some variants of democratic institutions more easily than by others. But some cultures, particularly those that do not allow for the separation of political from religious conflict or that tend to strongly emphasize racial or other primordial identities, do not seem to provide a fertile ground for democratic regimes. Moreover, established democracies can fail in that they do not cultivate the social and cultural 'capital' on which they depend; by their very mode of operation they virtually deplete (or fail to accumulate sufficient amounts of) such capital.

NOTES

1. More precisely, the will of the people (or the will of whatever part of it or of any non-popular agency) to establish a democracy is expressed and enforced in ways that are different from the ways in which the will of the people (or parts thereof) are expressed or enforced in an established democracy. This difference is conventionally referred to as that between *pouvoir constituant* and *pouvoir constitué*.
2. If there is anything that theorists (as well as many of the more thoughtful practitioners of the democratic form of government) agree upon, it is the call for an institutional renewal of democratic institutions that proceeds from the insight that 'democracy as a system cannot rest where it is' (Budge 1993:154).

3. That is to say: At the beginning of any democratic regime, agents (such as military occupation regimes, constituent assemblies, the holders of emergency powers, 'round tables', elite negotiators, or the leaders of rebellious popular forces) play decisive roles that are not themselves constituted in ways described by democratic procedures. Note, however, the asymmetry that consists in the fact that, in the absence of special provisions excluding this event, democratic procedures can well result in the abolition of democratic regimes.
4. Such lack of competence for the formation of effective policies, however, does not necessarily have to be rooted in opportunism, lack of determination, or shortsightedness of policy-makers and their 'irresistible temptation for free-riding', as Sartori (1991:445) suggests. It may as well – and less optimistically – be the case that the means at the disposal of even the most determined and principled democratic policy-makers and national governments are incapable of coping with the kind of problems that inescapably appear on their agenda.

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Concerning the Value, Scope and Limits of Democracy

Michael Pendlebury

The birth of democracy in South Africa is indeed worthy of the celebration it occasioned both locally and abroad. For democracy is one of the greatest public goods; it is frequently worth fighting for; and in our time it is an essential feature of any legitimate and morally acceptable state. It is not, however, an intrinsic good which is valuable for its own sake, but an extrinsic or instrumental good which is valuable for the sake of the benefits it yields. This is at any rate what I shall argue here – after I have spent some time clarifying the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value, nailing some colours to the mast, and suggesting a framework for talking about value. My brief defence of the view that democracy is an extrinsic good leads on to a schematic account of the conditions under which, the sorts of institutions in which, and the extent to which democracy is appropriate and defensible. These issues are both philosophically interesting and practically important – not only in relation to the state and other lesser polities such as provinces and towns, but also in relation to various other sorts of institutions concerning which the words ‘democratic’ and ‘undemocratic’ have become key terms of praise and abuse in certain influential circles in South Africa.

Value

Let me try to get clear on the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value in the course of detaching it from certain contentious philosophical views with which it is sometimes coupled. In doing this I go somewhat beyond what is needed for the topic at hand, but I don’t want my conclusions damned by association, and I would in any case like to display the intrinsic-extrinsic distinction as a useful and relatively neutral general tool for dealing with questions about value before I apply it to the case of democracy.

One view which is sometimes associated with the distinction is value-monism, according to which all good and evil depends ultimately on a single property – or, more accurately, on a one-dimensional property-spectrum involving both positive and negative quantities, the standard example being degrees of pleasure and pain. A sophisticated variation on this theme involves a commitment to the

possibility of a single consistent scale in terms of which all value (or 'utility') can ultimately be measured and compared. Value-monism contrasts with value-pluralism, which posits a plurality of ultimate values which might pull an agent in different directions. The pluralist holds that such a conflict could be rationally irresolvable not only because the alternative options may be *equivalent* in value (a situation of existential choice which is recognized by the monist), but also because the alternative options may be *incommensurable* in value (a possibility which the monist denies). Perhaps I should add that I am abstracting here from complications due to an agent's inability to work out the significance and consequences of an action, something which vastly increases the need for existential choices.

The intrinsic-extrinsic distinction is clearly necessary for the defence of value-monism. For, whatever a monist selects as the ultimate value, there will be cases in which an agent's evaluation cannot be explained in terms of the net quantity of that value which the relevant item possesses in its own right. A monism based on pleasure and pain, for example, cannot explain the possibility of an agent's making a positive evaluation of a wholly painful event by invoking the pleasure it involves, for by hypothesis there is no such pleasure. Any reasonable monistic explanation here would have to show that the event and its consequences involve, or probably involve, a positive net balance of pleasure over pain, or that it is an essential or significant part of a whole which involves a positive net balance of pleasure over pain. Thus the event's overall value will depend upon both its negative intrinsic value, which is a matter of its painfulness, and its positive extrinsic value, which is a function of the intrinsic values (in terms of pleasure and pain) of its consequences or of the relevant whole. All versions of value-monism depend in some such way on the intrinsic-extrinsic distinction.

The distinction, however, is also compatible with pluralism, and can be put to work within a pluralist framework. For it is quite possible for an agent to evaluate something positively even if all the pluralistic values which it has in its own right are negative. It may be painful, ugly, tedious and inauthentic as an expression of self (to choose one short list of possibilities), and yet still be valued by the agent as a means to desirable ends or a part of a worthwhile whole. In other words, its negative intrinsic values are in some sense outweighed by the balance of its positive over its negative extrinsic values. The pluralist will of course insist that there is no metric in terms of which this situation could be expressed as a neat algebraic inequality – or in terms of which the intrinsic values of something could always be summed and rendered as a single quantity. But this is simply to reiterate the view that values are sometimes incommensurable, and it

casts no doubt on the intrinsic-extrinsic distinction. Furthermore, an adequate defence of pluralism involves at least a tacit use of the distinction, for the fact that we experience apparently distinct values in no way supports pluralism unless we are in a position to argue that some of them are intrinsic values.

Now, I do not believe that we can completely rule out the possibility of an abstract form of monism which yields more or less accurate *predictions* of our considered judgments of value. But monism is not 'phenomenologically true', for unlike pluralism it cannot do justice to our experience of value, our motivational structures, and our moral psychology in general. It would take a paper or more to establish the superiority of pluralism in these respects, but perhaps I can say something to soften up the sceptics in the small space I have available.

I expect that most of my readers tacitly treat several different things as ultimate goods, including not only pleasure, but also, for example, self-realization, personal autonomy and friendship. The typical monist would argue that goods like these three are entirely extrinsic; that, for example, we value autonomy only because it increases our capacity to achieve our ultimate ends, and friendship only because it is apt to yield an improved balance of pleasure over pain. I don't think that this is correct. It is true that both friendship and autonomy are likely to increase our pleasure, but at least some of the pleasure they yield is, so to speak, a cherry on top – a by-product of our achieving things which we value for themselves rather than an external reason for valuing them. To borrow a phrase from Aristotle, this pleasure comes like 'the bloom of youth on those in the flower of their age.'¹

However, I accept that some of the pleasure arising from friendship and autonomy makes them more valuable, and that they are, therefore, extrinsic goods. But this in no way implies that they are not also intrinsic goods, and there is indeed evidence that we value them for their own sake. Given the chance to plug into a super 'experience machine' which yields a permanent sense of satisfaction and well-being and whatever illusions of activity and power are necessary to support this, while unbeknown to us our bodies lie strapped, cathetered, tubed and wired-up in the vaults of the Happiness Centre, we opt rather for autonomy, and are ready to pay the price of normal human pain and discontent.² And, to return from the outer reaches of logical space, there are those who would knowingly choose to comfort and affirm their love for a dying friend at immense personal cost and without any extrinsic benefits. This could not be if they did not value the friendship for its own sake.

A possible response to these arguments is that they are based on too narrow a conception of monistic value. Couldn't a monist accommodate such counter-examples by, say, opting for happiness as the

ultimate value, in the sense in which *happiness* is equivalent to the Ancient Greek term *eudaimonia*? I think not. For happiness, so understood, is something which someone possesses over an extended period of time to the extent that her life during that period is, relatively speaking, filled with positive value. We could think of someone's happiness as a higher-order good consisting of the sum of the goods on which it supervenes; but it is not itself something which has value alongside, independently of, or prior to those other goods, and it cannot, therefore, serve as the monist's ultimate value.

But perhaps, it may be suggested, we could save monism from my counter-examples by basing it on a more abstract notion of utility in terms of which the utility someone derives from comforting a dying friend might simply outweigh enormous consequential disutilities. Again, I think not, for two reasons. First, utility so understood is a theoretical construct which has no psychological reality in relation to the vast majority of people. Since they are never conscious of it, it cannot be something which they value. Second, it seems to me that the sorts of diverse intrinsic values which I have posited can be incommensurable, as the pluralist claims. For example, it is possible for conflicting demands of friendship and pleasure, or of friendship and autonomy, to create a dilemma for the agent which cannot be resolved rationally even if someone sweetens one of the options with a reward of R1 000. No one who is potentially subject to such dilemmas has the well-behaved value- or preference-system necessary to underpin a conception of utility which is adequate for value-monism.

The second doctrine from which I would like to uncouple the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value is what I shall call value-universalism, in terms of which one value or set of values applies to all human beings without exception. I think that this is false; that it is possible for values to vary between individuals, and between different stages of the same individual's life. I shall refer to this position as 'particularism' because I don't like the terms 'relativism' and 'subjectivism', which suggest that values are far too varied and arbitrary.

A crucial point to be considered when we assess universalism is that a world without sentience, consciousness, desire, or other similar manifestations of mind contains nothing of value. Likewise, if we bracket off all human subjects, we exclude from the world all the human values – whatever they may be – with which we are now concerned. Remove the inhabitants of Pompeii, and the eruption of Vesuvius is no longer an evil; remove the inhabitants of the world, and cacao is no longer a good. The value of something which is not human depends upon the relations of human beings to that thing, and never entirely on its intrinsic properties.

This does not imply that there are no intrinsic values, for the claim that something is intrinsically valuable is best understood as meaning that an appropriate *relationship* between that thing and an agent is of value to the agent in its own right, and independently of any other states of affairs. And in general it is actual and possible states of affairs involving agents – or aspects of such states of affairs – which are the logically proper subjects of value attributions.³ For example, when we say that pain is an evil for all human beings, this is best understood as shorthand for ‘Any human being’s suffering pain has negative value for him or her’, but in general I won’t test the reader’s patience by spelling things out so tediously.

It should by now be clear that I think that the intrinsic value of something depends upon its *being valued* for itself – usually tacitly – by the relevant agent. However, I hasten to add that the valuation that counts here is not valuation in anticipation, but valuation in possession, for we would not see ourselves as faring well if we got most of what we previously wanted but were usually disappointed in it. Restricting ourselves to what is or would be valued in possession for its own sake will do a great deal to limit variations between individuals, for it involves an abstraction from specific causes and effects, and from differences in individual psychology and circumstances. But it remains a brute fact that there are some differences within the human species. It may be that pleasure is a universal intrinsic good, and pain a universal intrinsic evil, but in other cases we must allow for the possibility of variations. Even if the overwhelming majority of people value friendship for its own sake, there are no doubt exceptions, including perhaps victims of extreme autism, and people brought up in a radically individualistic way in isolation from normal human communities; perhaps people raised in an inflexible way in rigidly tyrannical societies – or in selfless Buddhist communities – are psychologically incapable of valuing personal autonomy; and it is possible that the Kamikaze pilot values a form of honour which is worthless to the rest of us. Further examples of variations in intrinsic values are easy enough to discover or imagine.

But these observations raise the question of whether I have left enough room for the moral dimension and the abstract, impersonal, universal value it seems to require. I reply that such moral value is legitimate only to the extent that it can be constructed out of non-moral, psychological facts about what individuals value such as those with which I have been concerned. The challenge of such a construction is immense, but the details of how it is to be carried out are not germane to this article, providing we accept that the only non-arbitrary basis involves a presumption of equality between individuals.

This brings me to the third view from which I wish to detach the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value, namely, an extreme form of individualism, or value-atomism, in terms of which everyone's values are independent in the sense that what one person values is not directly influenced by what others value: that the values of others are taken into account only because (for entirely self-regarding reasons) their actions can interfere with or contribute to our projects. This leads to egoism and ultimately moral solipsism – treating others only as a means to one's own ends.

I want to claim, in contrast, that most ordinary human beings have some communitarian and other-regarding values; that they value such things as friendship, membership in certain communities, agreement with others, and other people's achieving what they value, for their own sakes. I have already provided evidence for this in the case of friendship, and such evidence can be generalized to other communitarian values, which are also to be expected in the light of biological considerations. It would, however, take me too far afield to pursue this.

Democracy

We turn, then, to the case of democracy, by which I shall understand any form of governance in which the ultimate power of decision belongs to and is divided equally amongst the members (or the full members) of the relevant institution. This is imprecise, but not empty. Properly understood it is broad enough to cover states and other institutions which are generally considered democratic, such as Australia, Japan, and the American Philosophical Association. But it is also narrow enough to exclude a variety of states and other institutions which almost anybody would count as non-democratic, for example, Apartheid South Africa, military dictatorships, traditional monarchies, Anglo-American Corporation, the Vatican, the New York police, the Russian Army, and the South African Broadcasting Corporation.

My definition also identifies the three crucial factors which must be considered in applying the concept of democracy, namely, *power*, *equality* and *membership*. For the purposes of this article I don't need to say much about the powers which the members of a democracy must possess and the respects in which they must be equal. In order for an institution to qualify as democratic it is obviously sufficient, but it is not necessary, for its members to have direct control over every aspect of its operations or even its main goals and policies. What is crucially important when they do not is that they should have the means to select and dismiss the government of the institution – which

could exist in the form of the legislature and executive of a state, a city council, the board of directors and top executives of a business or NGO, and so on. The equality required for democracy is obviously not an equality of influence (which is impossible), but an equal opportunity to participate in the relevant decision-making mechanisms, which usually takes the form of an equal distribution of voting rights. But real power and equality also presuppose freedom of information, association, discussion and debate; equal rights to participate in political processes; and equal rights of access to political office.

I need to say a little more about the important issue of membership. In the case of clubs, unions, professional societies, guilds, co-operative NGOs and other associations of individuals, membership is usually well defined, and it is therefore clear who must possess the relevant powers in order for the association to qualify as democratic. How to define membership – or citizenship – for states and other polities is somewhat less evident. This is the issue of what is to count as the *demos* of a democracy. For our purposes it is enough to note that the overwhelming majority of adults who reside permanently in the territory of a polity should be included; that exclusions based on foreign allegiance, serious criminality, insanity or mental retardation are perhaps acceptable; but that exclusions based on illiteracy, race, ethnicity, gender, wealth, income, or educational qualifications are definitely ruled out. Cases other than associations and polities are of varying orders of difficulty. At a stretch it is sometimes possible to treat the employees of an institution as its members when asking whether it is democratic, but certainly not always. Consider, for example, a sports club or a church, the members of which are not usually employees. The membership of an academic department in a university is often taken to include all its academic staff, but to exclude secretaries, technicians, cleaners and students. But what about a whole university? A group of companies? A charitable foundation? Or the anti-abortion movement? Sooner or later we come across cases where membership is unclear or inapplicable, and in such cases the notion of democracy is in the same boat.

This is at odds with current modes of discourse in which the term 'democratic' is applied to deliberation, consultation and negotiation procedures which involve a broad range of 'stakeholders', as well as to participatory styles of management which are responsive to the feelings, ideas and interests of employees. Such practices are valuable and effective when focused on important points of principle, policy and potential conflict, for they are apt not only to promote co-operation and cohesion, but also to increase the range of possible alternatives which are considered. However, I believe that they are

often unfortunate when extended to day-to-day management and the detailed implementation of policy,⁴ for they are likely to bog down processes, undermine the delivery of important goods, and put excessive power in the hands of bureaucrats, ideologues, party hacks and guardians of moralism. But that is by the way. My crucial point here is that it is unfortunate that the notion of democracy has been extended to cover various forms of deliberation and negotiation, participatory management, and other similar practices, however desirable they may be. The extension does yield an immediate political benefit in so far as it casts doubt on the legitimacy of alternative practices, but only at the price of conceptual unclarity, and at the risk of weakening the notion of democracy in its core application to 'government by the people', the subject with which I am concerned.

To turn to the value of democracy in the state and other polities, the first thing to notice is that even in cases in which democracy is widely recognized as desirable, there are apt to be citizens whose interests it does not serve and for whom it is not a good. Perhaps Eugene Terre Blanche belongs to this category. It is also possible for there to be citizens who, other things being equal, would prefer another form of government such as a plutocracy or racist oligarchy, but who grudgingly value democracy because they see it as the only alternative to a state of chaos which would undermine their own interests. No doubt there are South Africans to whom this applies. It is absolutely clear that for such people democracy is a highly qualified extrinsic good.

But – more to the point – how does the value of an admittedly desirable democracy stand, first, in the abstract and, second, in relation to the general run of citizens, most of whom presumably value it ungrudgingly? Although these two questions are not identical, they are ultimately inseparable. I have no intention of tinkering with the details of how their answers should be related, but it is worth distinguishing them in order to approach the key issue from two different angles, thus permitting a form of triangulation which will undermine our answers if they conflict, and produce extra confidence in them if they coincide.

From the abstract point of view I am inclined to reason, in outline, as follows. At a very general level the primary purpose of the state (which I will henceforth use as shorthand for 'state or other polity') is to serve the interests of its citizens, and it is justified and valuable only to the extent that it does this. (Actually the interests of children and unborn future inhabitants have an equal claim to consideration, but for the sake of simplicity let's duck this issue by pretending that most citizens are big enough to include these interests in their own.) Now

there is a presumption that normal adults are the best judges of their own interest; and if each is best, then they are necessarily equal in that respect. Thus the best form of state is apt to be one in which policy is determined on the basis of the citizens' judgments of their own interests, with each counting as equal to every other. Although democracy is not the only logically possible way of achieving this, an effective democracy is likely to be the most stable and practicable way. For our purposes the details and underpinnings of this key line of argument are not important. What is important is that the argument justifies democracies only in so far as they serve the interests of their citizens. And this in turn implies that the value of democracy is, as I claim, extrinsic.

Reflection on the value of democracy from the perspective of the general run of citizens reinforces this view. Although it is logically possible for someone to value living in a democracy entirely for its own sake, I would guess that most ordinary human beings who think that democracy – or their democracy – is a good do so for external reasons. They value it because it serves their interests, which are not themselves defined in terms of democracy. The ways in which it does this could vary. A citizen's interests might overlap or coincide with those of a critical mass of people whose interests the democracy is likely to advance; or she might belong to a group whose interests are apt to be protected because their skills and resources are needed to advance the interests of the critical mass. If democracy does not serve her self-regarding interests, it might still be a significant good for her because of strong other-regarding or communitarian values. To change tack somewhat, the trouble taken by some extremely old black South Africans in order to vote in the general election of April 1994, and the extent to which they were moved by the mere act of voting, suggests that public recognition of a citizen's formal equality with all others – including those with power and authority – can be of immense significance for her self-esteem.⁵ And if she values personal autonomy highly for its own sake, she will also value democracy in so far as it increases the domain of her power of decision and limits outside interference in her life.⁶ Several of the above possibilities could of course apply to one person, but in terms of all of them democracy remains an extrinsic good.

I would like to reply briefly to three arguments in support of the opposing view that democracy is intrinsically valuable.

First, it might be suggested that there is a 'constitutive' conceptual link between autonomy and democracy such that the latter inherits the intrinsic value of the former. I reply that what is analogous to personal autonomy in the state is not democracy, but self-government and independence; and that if there is a *conceptual* tie between personal

autonomy and a form of government, it is between autonomy and *anarchism*,⁷ which essentially involves an absence of state restraints on the individual. The conceptual argument is therefore unsatisfactory.⁸

Second, it is sometimes suggested that there are people who would prefer to live in a democracy even if this involved such a great sacrifice of economic and other goods that we would be forced to acknowledge that they place high intrinsic value on democracy itself. I reply that I am not concerned to rule this out as a logical possibility, but the thought that it is widespread seems to me incredible on psychological grounds, for in general people are willing to give reasons for their valuing democracy by specifying other values which it serves. I therefore suggest that the extent to which democracy might be valued for its own sake is so small as to be of negligible significance in explaining its overall value.

The third argument I want to consider can be expressed as follows:

The outcomes of democratic decision-making processes are legitimated by those processes, and this holds even for outcomes which are not especially good. Thus the value of the processes cannot derive from their consequences, and must therefore be intrinsic to them.⁹

Perhaps there is a sense of 'intrinsically good' in terms of which this argument is sound. But from our perspective the proper reply is simply that democratic processes legitimate particular outcomes only if they are in general apt to produce better outcomes than alternative possible legitimators. We have no reason, therefore, to doubt that their value is extrinsic.

Up to this point I have restricted myself largely to unspecified circumstances in which democracy is admittedly a good. What we should do next is appeal to the sorts of extrinsic factors on which we have found its value to depend in those circumstances in order to clarify the circumstances themselves. I will barely scratch the surface here, but perhaps this will help to provoke further thought. On the face of it, it seems that the basic conditions of democracy obtain when the main purpose of the institution in question is to serve certain interests of its members, providing that they have an equal claim to consideration and may be presumed the best judges – and therefore equal judges – of the relevant interests. In addition, institutionalisation should serve those interests better than anarchism, but I won't dwell on the point.

This first pass account of the conditions of democracy seems to work well for polities and various associations of individuals. It

implies, for example, that democracy is a good in the case of modern states and cities, unions, staff associations and adult recreational sports clubs, but perhaps not in the case of a sports club for young children or a church. Notice that it is the 'best judge' condition, i.e., the requirement that the members may be presumed to be the best judges of the relevant interests, which is doing the key work here. Most sports clubs for young children and churches no doubt have the purpose of serving certain interests of their members equally, but we may have reason to question the relevant judgmental competence of the children; and it is often part of church dogma that ordinary members have no claim to authority with respect to their spiritual interests. As an aside I note that although outsiders may be inclined to dispute this, they have no cause to protest against non-democratic governance in a church if membership is voluntary.

At this point we may begin to wonder whether the best judge condition is ever substantially satisfied. This is a matter of serious concern, for we would not want to base a defence of democracy on a purely formal presumption. Yet on the face of it we are not always the best judges of our own interests: we frequently defer to doctors, lawyers, financial advisors and other councillors, and even to popular magazines; we sometimes see particular individuals as being uncommonly wise in respect of other people's interests; most of us recognize that our judgement is fallible, and we often mess up for that reason; and there are even people who seem to mess up almost all the time. No matter. It is *we* who judge that we need assistance or advice and who decide whether to accept it when offered; it is *we* who recognize that we have messed up and that our judgement is fallible. And in a disinterested frame of mind none of us would want to claim a superior capacity to judge someone else's interest than that person himself possesses. This is not only because of his self-knowledge and privileged access to his intrinsic values, but also because we recognize that the basic skills, common sense, information and independence which people exercise in judging their own interest are not so difficult to come by.¹⁰ Furthermore, in the case of those who value autonomy highly for its own sake, being the best judge of their own interests is in effect constitutive of the value system on which those interests depend.

We should not, however, rule out the possibility of communities in which democracy would not be a good because their ordinary adult members are not characteristically the best judges of their own interests. This may seem shocking from the perspective of the late twentieth century, but it is easy enough to imagine a primitive community which, because of extreme poverty, ignorance and deprivation, usually produces adults who are permanently and

irremediably saddled with the foresight, self-knowledge and judgement of 8-year olds. We are perhaps justified in thinking that there is much wrong with such a society, and even in intervening with a view to improving it for the benefit of future generations; but my key point here is simply that democracy is inappropriate in it because its members are incompetent judges of their own interests – and this is something which any interventionist tacitly accepts.

But now, having stressed the *best judge* condition, I want to propose that the other clauses in our first pass specification of the conditions of democracy are in need of revision. A democracy could be of value even when it is not the purpose of the institution to serve the interests of its members – providing that its members are the best judges of whatever interests it is supposed to serve, that they are equal in that respect, and, just as importantly, that they have a commitment to serving those interests. This is something which is virtually guaranteed if those interests are their own, but it is also possible in other cases.

The members of an academic department in a university, for example, might be highly motivated to pursue relevant interests of their students and their discipline because of the possible adverse effects on their careers if they do not do so. If this is the case, a democratic system of department governance would, I claim, be worthwhile providing the members of the department were of roughly equal competence as judges of the extent to which the department is serving its purposes (and that might mean that there is no reasonable way of differentiating between them). An ideal academic department is like this, but many fall far short of the ideal, especially in South African universities, where many departments are dominated by inexperienced and poorly qualified junior members. I believe that a non-democratic form of governance is better in such cases, but stress that this does not mean that those in charge should not be highly responsive to the views of the others, or that junior members (or students for that matter) should have no power at all.

A second example of worthwhile and appropriate democracy in the case of an institution which is not meant to serve the interests of its members might be that of a co-operative NGO with a very specific purpose such as the promotion of rugby or business in the townships. Given that the members of the NGO are all skilled and knowledgeable with respect to the domain in question, it is better for control to rest with them than, for example, with the community which the NGO is supposed to serve (although the views of that community should obviously be given a great deal of weight). In the sort of case I am imagining the members of the NGO will of course have a *legal right* to insist that it be run democratically by themselves, but what is in

question is not their rights, but whether their exercising those rights would be a *good*.

An example of democracy which would not be a good in terms of my account is provided by the State's Department of Finances. In fact democracy is not well defined for state departments, as it is not clear what is to count as membership in them. But let us set this problem aside by assuming that their members are their employees and officials, including the relevant government ministers and deputy ministers. It then becomes obvious that it would be disastrous if all the members of the Department of Finance were to have an equal say in and ultimate control of its governance and decision-making. For the purpose of the Department is to serve the financial needs of the State and the economic needs of the country as a whole, and most members of the Department (as defined above) are not especially good judges with respect to these needs. Furthermore, it is unlikely that their commitment to them would outweigh incompatible personal interests.

It seems to me that my account of the conditions of democracy is well supported by such consequences, which are generally in line with our considered judgements of when democracy (as I have defined it) is appropriate and valuable. In the absence of a clear counter-example there is accordingly good reason to accept the conditions as rough but useful principles which are subject to further refinement.

Assuming that this is correct, let me end with some brief observations concerning the question of university democracy. The first thing to notice is that the concept of university membership is extremely muddy. No doubt the academic staff of a university (including the Vice-Chancellor and other academic leaders) have a claim to membership, but the case becomes progressively less obvious when we consider semi-academic support staff (such as librarians, laboratory technicians and computer experts), students, senior non-academic administrators, lower level administrators, and maintenance and cleaning staff. If we counted individuals in all these categories as members I would unequivocally oppose giving them an equal say in the governance of a university, not only because they are unequal in judgement with respect to its main purposes, but also because their commitment to those purposes is unequal and in many cases extremely weak. Another crucially important point is that the university system as a whole is meant to serve the tertiary education and research needs of the country as a whole, and it is no easy matter to determine the best contribution for any given institution to make towards those needs. Obviously government, the academic staff, other staff, students and a broad range of stakeholders should be represented on a university Council and have a say in deliberations concerning important matters of principle. But their influence should be variable, so that, for example, academics have much more power

than others with respect to the curriculum, while the power of cleaners (as cleaners) should not extend much beyond the domain of standard labour issues. But whatever the best possible arrangements for university governance may be, it seems to me simply befuddling to describe those arrangements as democratic.¹¹

NOTES

1. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1174b (Ross translation, revised by Ackrill and Urmson), Oxford University Press, 1980.
2. See, for example, Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, Oxford University Press, 1974, pp. 42–45, and Robert Young, *Personal Autonomy: Beyond Negative and Positive Liberty*, London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986, ch. 3.
3. See Mark Pastin, 'The Reconstruction of Value', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 5, 1975, pp. 375–93, for some benefits of this approach.
4. Zwelakhe Sisulu, Chief Executive of the South African Broadcasting Corporation seems to be endorsing this sort of point when he says, 'I don't believe you can run an organization by democratic vote. The buck stops here.' (Rex Gibson, 'Meet the SABC's Mr Change', *The Star*, October 31, 1994, p. 13.) See also, for example, Reggie Naidoo, 'Building a Financial Services NGO from the Grassroots', *Development and Democracy*, 7, (April 1994) (*NGOs After Apartheid: A Luta Continua?*), pp. 21–4.
5. Nelson Mandela mentions 'old women who had waited half a century to cast their first vote saying that they felt like human beings for the first time in their lives': (*Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, Randburg: Macdonald Purnell, 1994, pp. 610–11).
6. This should not be understood as favouring minimal government which fits a libertarian mould, for the protection of personal autonomy undoubtedly requires state restrictions on the activities of businesses and other institutions which have a great deal of power to manipulate people and interfere with their lives. It is also worth noting that the development and promotion of autonomy among citizens and future citizens (which I take to be a high priority goal of government policy) legitimates yet other interventions which no libertarian could stomach. Unfortunately it would take me too far from my main theme to enter into further discussion of the most desirable forms of democracy, but it should be stressed that the claim that democracy is valuable does not imply that any possible form of democracy – including institutionalized mass hysteria – is a good.
7. Cf. Robert Paul Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism*, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1976, pp. 18–19. Note, however, that the conceptual tie between autonomy and anarchism does not imply that the development and protection of autonomy is best served by anarchism. See note 6.
8. I am not clear whether this very schematic reply is applicable to the most sophisticated versions of the conceptual argument, for example, that in Susan Hurley, *Natural Reasons: Personality and Polity*, Oxford University Press, 1989, with which it is extremely difficult to come to grips.
9. Cf. Thomas Christiano, 'Democratic Equality and the Problem of Persistent Minorities', *Philosophical Papers*, 23, 1994, pp. 169–90.
10. This is related to Descartes' point when he says at the beginning of the *Discourse on Method* that 'Good sense is of all things in the world the most equally distributed, for everyone thinks himself so abundantly provided with it, that even those most difficult to please in all other matters do not commonly desire more of it than they already possess'. *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, translated by Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross, Cambridge University Press, 1911, vol. 1, p. 81.
11. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Annual Congress of the Philosophical Society of Southern Africa, Durban, July 1994, a Hoernlé Research Seminar in Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand in October 1994, and a Philosophy Department Research Seminar at the Rand Afrikaans University in November 1994. I am grateful to my audiences for useful questions and comments, and owe special thanks to Raphael de Kadt, Mervyn Frost, Graeme McLean and Mary Tjiattas.

Dream of Purity

Zygmunt Bauman

Great crimes often start from great ideas. Few great ideas prove completely innocent when their inspired followers try to make the word flesh – but some can hardly ever be embraced without the teeth being bared and daggers sharpened. Among the latter ideas, the pride of place belongs to the vision of purity.

'The German Final Solution', observed American writer Cynthia Ozick, 'was an aesthetic solution; it was a job of editing, it was the artist's finger removing a smudge; it simply annihilated what was considered not harmonious'.¹ German psychologist Klaus Dörner calls his readers 'die Nazis auch als Bürger zu sehen, die genauso wie die Bürger vor und nach, ihre Antwort auf die Soziale Frage gesucht haben'² – the 'social question' to which the answer they sought being the question of 'pollution', of the stubborn presence of people who 'did not fit', who were 'out of place', who 'spoiled the picture' – and otherwise offended the aesthetically gratifying and morally reassuring sense of harmony. In the early years of the modern era, as Michel Foucault reminded us, madmen were rounded up by the city authorities, loaded into *Narrenschiffen* and sent to the sea; madmen stood for 'a dark disorder, a moving chaos . . . which opposes the mind's luminous and adult stability'; and the sea stood for water, which 'carries off, but does more: it purifies'.³

Purity is an ideal; a vision of the condition which needs yet to be created, or such as needs to be diligently protected against genuine or imagined odds. Without such a vision, the concept of purity does not make sense, nor can the distinction between purity and impurity be sensibly drawn. A forest, a mountain range, a meadow, an ocean ('nature' in general, as distinguished from culture, the human product) are neither pure nor impure – that is, until spattered with leftovers of a Sunday picnic or infused with the waste of chemical factories. Human intervention does not just soil nature and make it filthy; it introduces into nature the very distinction between purity and filth, it creates the very possibility of a given part of the natural world being 'clean' or 'dirty'.

Purity is a vision of things put in places *different* from those they would occupy if not prompted to move elsewhere, pushed, pulled or goaded; and it is a vision of *order*, that is of a situation in which each thing is in its rightful place and nowhere else. There is no way of

thinking about purity without having an image of 'order', without assigning to things their 'rightful', 'proper' places – which happen to be such places as they would not fill 'naturally', on their own accord. The opposite of 'purity' – the dirt, the filth, 'polluting agents' – are things 'out of place'. It is not the intrinsic quality of things which makes them into 'dirt', but solely their location; more precisely, their location in the order of things envisaged by the purity seekers. Things which are 'dirt' in one context may turn pure just by being put in another place – and vice versa. Beautifully polished, shining shoes become dirt when put on the dining table; returned to the shoe-stack, they recover their pristine purity. An omelette, a mouth-watering work of culinary art when on the dinner plate, becomes a nasty stain when dropped on the pillow.

There are, however, things for which the 'right place' has not been reserved in any fragment of man-made order. They are 'out of place' everywhere; that is, in all places for which the model of purity has been designed. The world of the purity-seekers is simply too small to accommodate them. It won't be enough to move them to another place; one needs to get rid of them once for all – to burn them out, poison, shatter in pieces, put to the sword. More often than not these are mobile things, things that would not stick to the assigned place, that change places on their own accord. The trouble with such things is that they will cross boundaries whether invited or not. They control their own location, and thus deride the purity-seekers' efforts to 'put things in their place', and in the end lay bare the incurable fragility and shakiness of all placements. Cockroaches, flies, spiders or mice, who at any time may decide to share home with their legal (human) residents without asking the owners' permission, are for that reason always, potentially, uninvited guests, and so cannot be incorporated into any imaginable scheme of purity. The situation becomes yet more threatening and calls for yet more vigilance in the case of things which do not just move of their own accord, but moreover do it without drawing attention; they defy not just the model of purity, but the very effort of its protection, since without being aware of the invasion one does not know that the time of action has arrived and can be easily lulled into the illusion of security. Carpet mites, bacteria and viruses belong to that category of things from which nothing is safe, including the pursuit of safety itself. The writers of the advertisements for washing powders and detergent products sense the difference very well – promising future customers to smother and destroy 'the dirt you see and the germs you don't'.

We may gather from what has been said thus far that the interest in purity, and the associated interest in 'hygiene' (that is, keeping the dirt away) has more than an accidental relation to the fragility of order; to

a situation in which we feel that we cannot rely on the order taking care of itself, that we cannot expect the order to survive our laxity, our doing nothing about it, by its own momentum. 'Order' means a regular, stable environment for our action; a world in which probabilities of events are not distributed at random, but arranged in a strict hierarchy – so that certain events are highly likely to occur, others are less probable, and others virtually impossible. Only such an environment we *understand* – only in such surroundings (according to Wittgenstein's definition of 'understanding') we 'know how to go on'. Only here we can select our actions properly – that is, with a reasonable hope that the results we have in mind will indeed be achieved. Only here can we rely on the habits and expectations we have acquired in the course of our being-in-the-world. We humans are endowed with memory and capacity for learning, and for this reason we have vested interests in an 'orderliness' of the world. Learned abilities to act are powerful assets in a stable and predictable world; they would turn downright suicidal, though, were the events suddenly to break out of the causal sequences and thus defy all prediction and take us by surprise.

No one perhaps explained better what all this fuss about purity and fighting dirt is about, than the great British anthropologist Mary Douglas, in her eye-opening book *Purity and Danger* (first published in 1966). Dirt, Douglas suggested,

is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt; it exists in the eye of the beholder . . . Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment . . .

In chasing dirt, in papering, decorating, tidying, we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea. There is nothing fearful or unreasoning in our dirt-avoidance: it is a creative movement, an attempt to relate form to function, to make unity of experience . . .

To conclude, if uncleanness is matter out of place, we must approach it through order. Uncleanness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained.⁴

From Mary Douglas' analysis, the interest in purity and the obsession with the struggle against dirt emerge as universal characteristics of human beings: the models of purity, the patterns to be preserved change from one time to another, from one culture to another – but each time and each culture has certain models of purity and certain ideal patterns to be kept intact and unscathed against odds. Also, all concerns with purity and cleaning emerge from that analysis as essentially alike. Sweeping the floor and stigmatizing the traitors or banishing the strangers appear to stem from the same motive of the

preservation of order, of making or keeping the environment understandable and hospitable to sensible action. This may well be so; but the explanation in such universal, extra-temporal and species-wide terms does not go far towards evaluating various forms of purity-pursuits from the point of view of their social and political significance and the gravity of their consequences for human co-habitation.

If we focus our attention on the latter, we will immediately note that among the numerous incarnations of the pattern-sapping 'dirt' one case, sociologically speaking, is of a very special, indeed unique, importance: namely, a case when it is *other human beings* who are conceived to be an obstacle to the proper 'organization of environment' – when, in other words, it is other people, or more specifically a certain category of other people, who become 'dirt' and are treated as such.

The founder of phenomenological sociology, Alfred Schütz,⁵ made us aware of a characteristic of human life which seems obvious the moment it is pointed out: that if we humans may 'find our bearings within our natural and socio-cultural environment and come to terms with it', it is thanks to the fact that this environment has been 'pre-selected and pre-interpreted' 'by a series of common-sense constructs of the reality of daily life'. Each of us, in our daily activities, and without much thinking about it, uses tremendous amounts of products of that pre-selection and pre-interpretation, which combine into what Schütz calls the 'stock of knowledge at hand'. Without such knowledge, living in the world would be inconceivable. None of us is able to build the world of significations and meanings from scratch; each of us enters a 'pre-fabricated' world, in which certain things are important and others are not; in which the established relevances bring certain things into focus and leave others in the shadow; and above all, we enter a world in which many aspects are obvious to the point of not being consciously noticed any more and needing no active effort, not even spelling them out, to be invisibly, yet tangibly present in everything we do – thereby endowing our actions, and the things we act upon, with the solidity of 'reality'.

Among the tacit, yet indispensable ingredients of the 'stock of knowledge at hand', that commonsensical wisdom which all of us receive, to use Schützian terms, as a gift from the 'intersubjective world of culture', from that 'treasure house of ready-made pre-constituted types' – pride of place belongs to the assumption of 'reciprocal perspectives'. What we believe without thinking (and above all as long as we do not think about it), is that our experiences are *typical* – that is, whoever looks at the object 'out there' sees 'the same' as we do, and whoever acts, follows 'the same' motives which

we know from introspection. We also believe in the 'interchangeability of the standpoints'; to wit, if we put ourselves in another person's place, we would see and feel exactly 'the same' as he or she sees and feels in their present position – and we believe that this feat of empathy may be reciprocated.

This assumption seems pretty straightforward and innocuous; perhaps even deeply moral in its consequences, since it postulates the essential similarity of human beings and assigns to the others the qualities of the subjects just like our own subjectivity. And yet to hold fast this assumption of 'reciprocal perspectives' must rest on a presupposition deeper still: that it is not just me who assumes reciprocity of perspective and behaves accordingly – that this assumption of reciprocity is itself reciprocated. If a suspicion arises that the latter is not the case, then the rock-solid construction of daily security falls to pieces. 'I am able to understand other people's acts', says Schütz, 'only if I can imagine that I myself would perform analogous acts if I were in the same situation, directed by the same "because" motives, or oriented by the same "in-order-to" motives – all these terms understood in the same restricted sense of the "typical" analogy, the "typical" sameness . . .'⁶ The undetachable corollary of this ability to imagine myself in the situation of the other is, of course, the ability to imagine the other in my own position: the expectation that if cast in my situation the other would think and behave just like I do . . . In other words, the idea of the essential unity between me and the other, which the assumption of the reciprocity of standpoints ostensibly promotes, precedes rather than follows this assumption. I must first be able to accept unproblematically our mutual similarity, the readiness of the other to think and behave along lines identical with my own, for the assumption of our reciprocity of standpoints to hold.

The recipes attached to routine situations I am likely to encounter in the course of daily life combine in what Max Scheler called the *relativ-natürliche Weltanschauung*. Armed with these recipes, I feel secure. For most things I do, and all things I do routinely, they offer reliable and sufficient guidance. They have all 'the appearance of a sufficient coherence, clarity, and consistency to give anybody a reasonable chance of understanding and of being understood'. But they boast this salutary and wondrous quality only because they are 'evident', accepted 'matter of factly', without much reflection – and this happy-go-lucky situation may exist only as long as no one around begins to question them, ask about their grounds and reasons, point out the discrepancies, lay bare their arbitrariness. This is why the arrival of a Stranger has the impact of an earthquake . . . The Stranger shatters the rock on which the security of daily life rests. He comes

from afar; he does not share the local assumptions – and so ‘becomes essentially the man who has to place in question nearly everything that seems to be unquestionable to the members of the approached group’.⁷ He ‘has to’ commit this damaging and deplorable act because he has no status within the approached group which would make the pattern of that group look ‘natural’ to him, and because even if he tried his best, and successfully, to behave outwardly in the fashion that pattern requires, he would not be accorded by the group the credit of reciprocating the group’s standpoint.

If ‘dirt’ is an element which defies the purpose of the ordering efforts, and the self-acting, self-moving and self-directing dirt is an element which defies the very possibility of effective efforts, then the Stranger is the very epitome of the latter. No wonder the locals of all times and places, in their frenzied efforts to separate, confine, exile or destroy the strangers compared the objects of their exertions to vermin and bacteria. No wonder also, that the meaning of their own actions they compared to hygienic routines; they fought the ‘strangers’, convinced that they were defending health against the carriers of disease.

This is what ‘the locals’ (who, to be sure, could think of themselves as ‘locals’ and constitute themselves as ‘locals’ only in as far as they opposed themselves to the ‘strangers’ – that is, to some other people who were not ‘locals’) did, let me repeat, at all times and places. But in certain situations the preoccupation with Strangers assumed a particularly important role among many activities involved in the daily care of purity, the daily reproduction of inhabitable, orderly worlds. This happened once the work of purifying, of ‘order making’, had become a conscious/purposeful activity, when it had been conceived as a *task*; when the objective of cleaning, instead of keeping intact the way in which things were, became *changing the way* in which things used to exist yesterday, *creating* a new order that challenged the present one; when, in other words, the care of order meant the introduction of a new and by the same token *artificial* order: making, so to speak, a *new beginning*. This momentous change in the status of order coincided with the advent of the *modern era*. Indeed, we can define modernity as the time, or the way of life, in which order-making consists in the dismantling of the ‘traditional’, inherited and received order; in which ‘being’ means a perpetual new beginning.

Each order has its own disorders; each model of purity has its own dirt that needs to be swept away. But in a durable, lasting order which preempts the future and involves also, among other prerequisites, the prohibition of change, even the cleaning and sweeping pursuits are parts of order. They belong to the daily routine, and like everything

routine they tend to be repeated monotonously, in a thoroughly habitualized fashion that renders reflection redundant. It is not so much the dirt-eliminating routine, as the prevention of an occasional, unusual *interruption* of the routine, that reaches the level of consciousness and arouses attention. The care for purity focuses not so much on fighting the 'primary dirt', as on the fight against the 'meta-dirt' – against the slackening, or altogether neglecting the effort to keep things as they are . . . The situation changes drastically, though, when ordering means the dismantling of the extant order and replacing it with a new model of purity. Now, keeping purity cannot be reduced to the maintenance of daily routine; worse still, the routine itself has the awesome tendency of turning into 'dirt' which needs to be stamped out in the name of the new purity. All in all, the state of 'perpetual beginning' generates ever new, 'improved' targets of purity, and each new target cuts out new categories of 'dirt' – an unheard of dirt and an unprecedented dirt. A new condition appears, in which even pretty ordinary, boringly familiar things may turn into dirt at short notice or without notice. With models of purity changing too fast for the purifying skills to catch on, nothing seems secure any more; uncertainty and suspicion rule the day.

We may go a step further and say that the 'order-making' becomes now indistinguishable from announcing ever new 'abnormalities', drawing ever new dividing lines, identifying and setting apart ever new 'strangers'. Doing something about the strangers moves into the very centre of ordering concerns. Strangers are no more routine, and thus the routine ways of keeping things pure do not suffice. In a world constantly on the move the anxiety condensed into the fear of strangers saturates the totality of daily life – fills every nook and cranny of the human condition.

In the modern world, notoriously unstable and constant solely in its hostility to everything constant, the temptation of arresting the movement, of bringing the perpetual change to a halt, of installing an order secure against all further challenges, becomes overwhelming and very difficult to resist. Almost all modern fantasies of 'good world' were deep down anti-modern, in that they visualised the end to history understood as a process of change. Walter Benjamin said of modernity that it was born under the sign of suicide; Sigmund Freud suggested that it was driven by Thanatos – the instinct of death. Modern utopias differed in many of their detailed prescriptions, but they all agreed that the 'perfect world' will be one remaining forever identical with itself, a world in which the wisdom learnt today will remain wise tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, and in which the life skills acquired will retain their usefulness forever. The world depicted in the utopias was also, expectedly, a transparent world –

one in which nothing dark or impenetrable stood in the way of the eye; a world with nothing spoiling the harmony; nothing 'out of place'; a world without 'dirt'; a world without strangers.

No wonder that throughout the modern era there was a strict correlation between the scale and radicality of 'new and final order' imagined, dreamt of and tried in practice, and the passion with which the 'problem of strangers' was approached, as well as the severity of treatment reserved for the strangers. What was 'totalitarian' about totalitarian political programmes, themselves thoroughly modern phenomena, was more than anything else the comprehensiveness of the order they promised, the determination to leave nothing to chance, the simplicity of the cleaning prescriptions, and the thoroughness with which they approached the task of removing anything that collided with the postulate of purity. Totalitarian ideologies were remarkable for their proclivity to condense the diffuse, pinpoint the elusive, make the uncontrollable into a target within reach and, so to speak, within the bullet range; the dispersed and ubiquitous anxiety exhaled by equally dispersed and ubiquitous threats to comprehension and to the sense of order were thereby squeezed and compressed so that they could be 'handled', and dealt with wholesale in a single, straightforward procedure. Nazism and communism excelled in pushing the totalitarian tendency to its radical extreme – the first by condensing the complexity of the 'purity' problem in its modern form into that of the purity of race, the second into that of class purity. Yet totalitarian cravings and leanings have made their presence visible, albeit in slightly less radical form, also in the tendency of the modern nation-state as such to underpin and reinforce the uniformity of state citizenship with the universality and comprehensiveness of national membership.

For reasons which I analysed elsewhere⁸ and which are too complex and numerous to be spelled out in our present context, the tendency to collectivise and centralize the 'cleansing' activities aimed at the preservation of purity tend to be in our time replaced with the strategies of de-regulation and privatisation. On the one hand, we note a growing indifference of the state to its past task of promoting a singular as well as comprehensive model of order, and the unprecedented equanimity with which the co-presence of a variety of such models is contemplated by the powers that be. On the other hand, one can discern the waning of the 'forward push' so crucial to the modern spirit, a relaxation of the modern war of attrition waged against received tradition, lack of enthusiasm (even resentment) for all-embracing schemes of decreed order that promise to put and fix everything in its place – and, indeed, the appearance of *sui generis* vested interest in the continuing diversification, under-determination,

'messiness' of the world. Ever growing numbers of postmodern men and women, while by no means immune to the fear of being lost and ever so often carried away by the recurring waves of 'homesickness', find the open-endedness of their situation attractive enough to outweigh the anguish of uncertainty. They revel in the chase of new and untested experience, are willingly seduced by the offers of adventure, and on the whole prefer keeping options open to all fixity of commitment. In this change of mood they are aided and abetted by the market organized entirely around consumer demand and vitally interested in keeping the demand permanently unsatisfied and thus preventing the ossification of any acquired habits and whipping up the consumers' appetite for ever more intense sensations and ever new experience.

The consequence of that sea-change, most relevant to our topic, has been well captured by Georges Balandier:

Aujourd'hui, tout se brouille, les frontières se déplacent, les catégories deviennent confuses. Les différences perdent leur encadrement; elles se démultiplient, elles se trouvent presque à l'état libre, disponibles pour la composition de nouvelles configurations, mouvantes, combinables et manipulables.⁹

Differences pile up one upon the other, distinctions previously not considered relevant to the overall scheme of things and therefore invisible now force themselves upon the canvas of the *Lebenswelt*, differences once accepted as non-negotiable are thrown unexpectedly into the melting pot or become objects of contention, competitive charts overlap or clash, barring all chance of an 'official' and universally binding ordinance map. Yet since each scheme of purity generates its own dirt and each order generates its own strangers, making up the stranger in its own likeness and measure – the stranger is now as resistant to fixation as the social space itself: 'L'Autre se révèle *multiple*, localisable partout, changeant selon les circonstances'.

Does this augur the end of the Stranger's victimization and martyrdom in the service of purity? Not necessarily, contrary to many enthusiastic eulogies of the new postmodern tolerance, or even its assumed love of difference. In the postmodern world of freely competing styles and life patterns there is still one stern test of purity which whoever applies for admission is required to pass: one needs to be capable of being seduced by the infinite possibility and constant renewal promoted by the consumer market, of rejoicing in the chance of putting on and taking off identities, of spending one's life in the never ending chase of ever more intense sensations and even more

exhilarating experience. Not everybody can pass that test. Those who do not, are the 'dirt' of postmodern purity.

Since the criterion of purity is the ability to partake of the consumerist game, then left outside as a 'problem', as the 'dirt' which needs to be 'disposed of', are *flawed consumers* – people unable to respond to the enticements of the consumer market because they lack the required resources, people unable to be 'free individuals' according to the sense of 'freedom' as defined in terms of consumer choice. They are the new 'impure', who do not fit in the new scheme of purity. Looked upon from the now dominant perspective of the consumer market, they are redundant – truly the 'objects out of place'.

The job of separating and eliminating that waste of consumerism is, like everything else in the postmodern world, de-regulated and privatised. The shopping malls and supermarkets, the temples of the new consumerist creed and the stadiums where the game of consumerism is played, bar the entry to the flawed consumers at their own expense, surrounding themselves with surveilling cameras, electronic alarms and heavily armed guards; so do the neighbourhoods where lucky and happy consumers live and enjoy their new freedoms; so do the individual consumers, viewing their homes and their cars as ramparts of permanently besieged fortresses.

These de-regulated, privatised, diffuse concerns with guarding the purity of consumerist life come together in two contradictory, yet mutually reinforcing political demands directed towards the state. One is the demand to further enhance consumer freedoms of free consumers: to further privatise the use of resources by 'rolling back' all collective intervention in private affairs, dismantling the politically imposed constraints, cutting the taxes and public expenditure. Another demand is to deal more energetically with the consequences of the first demand: surfacing in the public discourse under the name of 'law and order', this second demand is about the prevention of the equally de-regulated and privatised protest of the victims of de-regulation and privatisation. Those whom the expansion of consumer freedom deprived of consumer skills and powers need to be checked and kept at bay; being a drain on public funds, and therefore indirectly on the 'taxpayer money' and the freedom of free consumers, they need to be checked and kept at bay at the least possible cost. If waste-disposal proves to be less costly than waste-recycling, it should be given priority; if it is cheaper to exclude and incarcerate the flawed consumers to keep them from mischief, this is preferable to the restoration of their consumer status through thoughtful employment policy coupled with ramified welfare provisions. And even the ways of exclusion and incarceration need to be 'rationalized', preferably

subjected to the severe discipline of market competition: let the cheapest offer win . . .

In his eye-opening study of the ways in which the 'defense of law and order' is today carried on in the affluent countries, Nils Christie draws the following nightmarish picture of where the present tendency, if unchecked, is likely to lead:

There are no natural limits. The industry is there. The capacity is there. Two thirds of the population will have a standard of living vastly above any found – for so large a proportion of a nation – anywhere else in the world. Mass media flourish on reports on the dangers of the crimes committed by the remaining one third of the population. Rulers are elected on promises to keep the dangerous third behind bars. Why should this come to stop? There are no natural limits for rational minds . . .

The worst nightmare will never materialise. The dangerous population will not be exterminated, except for those killed by capital punishment. But the risks are great that those seen as core members of the dangerous population may be confined, warehoused, stored away, and forced to live their most active years as consumers of control. It can be done democratically, and under the strict control of the legal institutions.

'And the theoreticians in criminology and law', Christie observes gloomily, 'are there with a helping hand. Nobody believes in treatment any more, but incapacitation has been a favourite . . .'¹⁰ The present-day concern with the purity of postmodern enjoyment expresses itself in the ever more pronounced tendency to criminalize its socially produced problems.

That every order tends to criminalize resistance to itself and outlaw its assumed or genuine enemies, is evident to the point of triviality. What is less obvious, yet seems to emerge from our brief survey of the forms which the pursuit of purity has taken in modern and postmodern times, is that the object of particularly zealous and intense outlawing flurry are the radical consequences of the order's own constitutive principles. Modernity lived in a state of permanent war against tradition, legitimized by the urge to collectivise human destiny on a new and higher level, to substitute a new, better order for the old, jaded and outlived. It had therefore to purify itself of those who threatened to turn its inherent irreverence against its own principles. One of the most vexing 'impurities' in the modern version of purity were the *revolutionaries*, which the modern spirit could not but generate: revolutionaries were, after all, nothing but zealots of modernity, the most faithful among the believers in modern revelation, eager to draw the most radical lessons from the message, and push the order-making effort beyond the boundary of what the order-making mechanism was able to sustain. Postmodernity, on the other hand, lives in a state of permanent pressure towards dismantling

of all collective interference into individual fate, towards de-regulation and privatisation. It tends to fortify itself therefore against those who – following its inherent tendency to disengagement, indifference and free for all – threaten to expose the suicidal potential of the strategy by pushing its implementation to logical extremes. The most obnoxious ‘impurity’ of the postmodern version of purity is not the revolutionaries, but those who either disregard the law or take the law into their own hands – muggers, robbers, car-thieves and shoplifters, as well as their *alter egos* – the vigilantes and the terrorists. Again, they are but the zealots of postmodernity, avid learners and pious believers in the postmodern revelation, keen to bring the life-recipes which the lesson suggests to their radical conclusion.

Pursuit of modern purity expressed itself daily in the punitive action against dangerous classes; pursuit of postmodern purity expresses itself daily in the punitive action against the residents of mean streets and the no-go urban areas, vagabonds and layabouts. In both cases, the ‘impurity’ in the focus of the punitive action is the extremity of the form promoted as pure; the stretching to the limits of what should, but could not be kept in bounds; the waste-product that is but a disqualified mutation of the product passed as meeting the standards.

NOTES

1. Cynthia Ozick, *Art and Ardour*, New York: Dutton, 1984, p. 165.
2. Klaus Dörmer, *Tödliches Mitleid: Zur Frage der Unerträglichkeit des Lebens, Gütersloh*, Verlag Jakob van Hoddis, 1993, p. 13.
3. Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la Folie*, Paris: Plon, 1961. Here quoted after the English translation by Richard Howard, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, London: Tavistock, 1967, pp. 11, 13.
4. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970, pp. 13, 53.
5. Comp. in particular Alfred Schütz's ‘Common-sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action’, in *Collected Papers*, vol. 1, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967.
6. Alfred Schütz, ‘The Social World and the Theory of Social Action’, in *Studies in Social Theory*, vol. 2, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967, p. 13.
7. Comp. Alfred Schütz, ‘The Stranger: An Essay in Social Psychology’, in *Studies in Social Theory*, vol. 2, pp. 95ff.
8. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.
9. Georges Balandier, *Le dédale: Pour en finir avec XX siècle*, Paris: Fayard, 1994, p. 20.
10. Nils Christie, *Crime Control as Industry: Towards Gulags, Western Style?*, London: Routledge, 1993, pp. 166–7, 171, 172.

Why do Ruling Classes Fear History?

Harvey J. Kaye

1989 was the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution, and – contrary to the schemes of governing classes, West and East – developments of that year seemed to provide dramatic living proof that the grand ideals of 1789 were not just remembered but still inspiring and informing action.

Across Eurasia and beyond, struggles for liberty, equality and democracy asserted themselves. Rebellions claimed control of public spaces and toppled rulers and regimes. There were triumphs like the tearing down of the Berlin Wall, and there were tragedies like the Tiananmen Square massacre. But, together, these events reminded people globally of the popular desire for freedom and the demand for ‘power to the people!’ There was reason to celebrate and to believe more was yet to come.

And yet, within just a few years the hope and sense of possibility engendered by those events and the end of the Cold War have been overtaken by other, darker developments and the spiritual order of the day has become one of despair and cynicism. Emulating the most brutal traditions of our century, the politics of the new world order are apparently dominated by greed, hatred, and mass murder – sadly, I need merely mention Somalia, Bosnia and Rwanda. European life itself is marked by resurgent nationalisms, xenophobia and, most bizarrely, in view of the tragic success of the Nazis to rid the continent of Jews, anti-semitism.

At the same time – and surely contributing in massive proportion to the reinvigoration of the former – the market now rules globally, North and South, subsuming everything and everyone to the command of capital, intensifying already gross inequalities as the rich grow richer and working people poorer, and ever threatening to completely destroy the Western labour movement and its finest twentieth-century achievement, social-democratic government.

It becomes more and more difficult to gain a hearing for the ‘public good’ or ‘commonweal’. Public discourse and private thoughts across the political spectrum seem to accept – as the American neoconservative, Francis Fukuyama, put it – that we are at ‘the end of history’. With the global triumph of capitalism we are believed to have arrived at the terminus of world-historical development, the culmination of universal history, entailing not only the collapse of the Soviet Union

but the consignment of all varieties of socialism to the graveyard of history. Fundamentalisms and particularisms may arise to challenge liberal capitalism, but there is no universal alternative to it now or in the future. In fact, Edward Lutwak's recent survey of the world makes Fukuyama's own thesis seem downright optimistic for, in place of liberalism, Lutwak sees 'Fascism as the Wave of the Future'.¹ In any case, radical-democratic possibilities are finished; the further progress and development of liberty and equality is foreclosed, forever. To think otherwise is declared, and widely perceived to be, not just utopian but dangerous.

I do not accept that assumption, and I will not defer to it. Our requirements and satisfactions are not simply material. History and its progressive political possibilities are not resolved.

Still, I take the 'end of history' most seriously. I do so not merely because the appearance of Fukuyama's brash work was a smartly-timed literary and commercial coup, orchestrated with the financial support of a corporately-endowed New Right foundation, but because – however illusory a notion it really is – it has articulated anew the perennial ambitions and dreams of the powers that be to make their regimes and social orders not just omnipotent and universal, but immortal. And, at least for now, it does seem to capture in a single phrase the dominant historical vision.

To those of us who still aspire to advance the critical and democratic ideals of the Enlightenment and Age of Revolution, the old question – *What is to be done?* continues to present itself. And yet, there would seem to be an even prior and more urgent question: From where can we draw sustenance, hope, and a sense of possibility when, admittedly, there are substantial reasons to be pessimistic?

Most immediately, I can do no better than to quote Deutscher himself: 'Awareness of historical perspective seems to me', he wrote, 'to provide the best antidote to extravagant pessimism as well as extravagant optimism over the great problems of our time'.

Beyond that, what I have in mind may strike you as rather perverse. I want us to stare fully and deeply into the eyes of the ruling and governing classes. I want us to appreciate what they see. Victor Kiernan, the phenomenal British historian of empires, nation-states and so many other subjects, has never ceased to remind me that our rulers have been able to secure their rule over and over again because they are 'more united, more class conscious and, politically, more intelligent'. They are regularly in the driver's seat, we are not; thus, however eager to deceive themselves they may be – and it is imperative that they try to do so – they are also better positioned to spy the road ahead and behind.

It is my contention that however imposing their power, and

however acquiescent may seem the people over whom they exercise it, the eyes of the ruling classes reflect not surety and confidence, but apprehension and anxiety. *What* is it that they see? *What* is it that they recognize? *What* is it that they know? The American radical historian, Howard Zinn, points us toward an answer:

When we become depressed at the thought of the enormous power that governments, multinational corporations, armies and police have to control minds, crush dissents, and destroy rebellions, we should consider a phenomenon that I have always found interesting: Those who possess enormous power are surprisingly nervous about their ability to hold on to their power. They react almost hysterically to what seem to be puny and unthreatening signs of opposition . . . Is it possible that the people in authority know something that we don't know?²

In the looks and actions of the powerful, we may discover what exercises them so and, at the same time, be reminded of what we appear to be on the verge of forgetting. Ultimately, we will have to ask: *Why do ruling classes fear history?*

I have a story to tell, one which I have been carrying around with me for several years. It is not long, nor grand, nor epic in its proportions. And, to be sure, there are many other, more powerful ones. Nevertheless, I think it can serve as a place to begin.

Early in the fall of 1986, one of my colleagues, Craig Lockard, deposited on my desk an article from the *Far Eastern Economic Review* relating the trials and tribulations of a young dissident, Yu Si Min, before the power and authority of the South Korean state. Craig correctly figured that my students and I would find it intriguing for it made reference to a text we had been reading and discussing in class.³

The story begins in 1978 with Yu setting out for the capital from his southern provincial city, having been accepted to study economics at the most prestigious of the country's academic institutions, Seoul National University.

This was a tremendous moment for him and his family. The fifth of six children, Yu's parents had scrimped and saved for many years to make sure that he could further his education. As he told it, on leaving his family's home he could actually feel his 'mother's proud gaze falling on [his] shoulders'; and, en route, he swore that he would pursue a lucrative career in order to reimburse his parents for everything they had gone through.

However, life in Seoul was not as he had expected. Yu was shocked by the low wages and terrible labouring conditions suffered by workers, especially by women and teenage girls, and before the end of his first year at college he had become involved in running

night-school classes in a factory district, an activity which quickly brought him to the attention of the authorities.

Eventually, the police picked him up. They interrogated him for three days, trying to find out if he was encouraging strikes and union organizing, both of which were banned by the government.

When martial law was declared in May 1980, Yu was one of thousands of demonstrators hauled in for demanding the restoration of democratic rights such as freedom of the press and assembly and independent labour unions.

His first prison term lasted three months, during which he was beaten regularly. Then, on his release, he was immediately drafted into the army. As a known student protester Yu was guaranteed harsh treatment and, like others in his straits, he was posted to a unit patrolling the demilitarized zone separating the two Koreas. This practice was intended supposedly to heighten one's awareness of the North's threat to the South's security because, along with the sub-zero temperatures and frequent harassment, there is the constant 'danger of sudden firefights'.

Released from service in the spring of 1983, Yu was re-admitted to university. However, within weeks of his return he was joining in demonstrations and was soon under arrest once again, this time charged with assault when he and other students detained several police agents 'discovered spying at the university'.

Sentenced to a year in gaol, Yu was placed in 'solitary confinement . . . cut off from the rest of the world'. His cell was

1.8 meters long and 1.2 wide, with nine coin-sized ventilation holes. The walls and floor were covered with plastic foam to prevent any noise filtering in and a double door blocked any view of the corridor beyond. 'The first thing that occurred to me', he said, 'was that I had better learn to get along with the silence'.

Yu kept himself occupied with needlework. But – ever the student – he laid out for himself a rigorous syllabus and worked his way through 150 volumes of world literature, including 'everything by Dostoevsky and Tolstoy'. There were, however, two works which were forbidden to him because they were considered 'subversive', Nehru's *Glimpses of World History* and E.H. Carr's *What is History?*⁴

My own students wondered why these two books in particular were considered 'subversive'. What made them 'special'? Most immediately, they figured it was because Nehru had been a triumphant rebel against empire and a prominent leader of the non-aligned movement, and Carr had also been the author of a monumental, and not unsympathetic, *History of the Soviet Union*. But some of them went

on to examine their respective chapters, assuming that censors actually read the works they keep from others. In doing so, they discovered that *Glimpses of World History* had originated in the 1930s as letters written by Nehru from British colonial gaols to his young daughter, Indira. Informed by universalism, humanism and marxism, and acknowledging social forces high and low, the letters narrate a global history of empire and independence, reaction and revolution, destruction and creative innovation.

Next, in the book they were all supposed to be reading, *What is History?*, they heard Carr arguing forcefully against the prevailing pessimism of his peers. Even with its disasters, modern history is still progressive, he contends, for we continue to see the mutual expansion and deepening of reason and freedom. And, in those terms, Carr calls upon his fellow historians to acknowledge their intellectual and political responsibilities and 'present fundamental challenges in the name of reason to the current way of doing things . . .'

Viewed from the perspective of the powerful, that is, from the office of the prison censors, my students agreed that these books were unquestionably 'subversive'. *But*, they then asked – and I loved them when they did – wouldn't that be true, at least to some extent, of critical history in all regimes of unequal power and wealth?⁵

I have told Yu Si Min's story because I believe it renders in microcosm the universal compulsion of ruling classes to control not only polity and economy, but also culture and thought, most especially historical memory, consciousness and imagination. There, in his gaol cell, his self-made reading room, physically isolated and alone, Yu was completely under the command of the State. Seemingly with confidence, his warders allowed him access to a great many literary works; but, in truth, they were ever anxious and ever watchful, and driven to prevent him from reading the two requested books, the works specifically addressing history.⁶

Yu's prison experience summons up a long, long record of ruling-class suppressions, occultations, mystifications, corruptions, and falsifications of history. Standing before us is the arch-antidemocrat Plato, dialogically laying out in his *Republic* a blueprint for a class-ordered society – one in which poets and protohistorians are to be carefully regulated, and consensus is to be founded upon a grand historical fabrication:

'Now', I said, 'can we devise one of those lies – the kind which crop up as occasion demands . . . – so that with a single noble lie we can indoctrinate

the rulers themselves preferably, but, at the least, the rest of the community?’

‘What sort of lie?’ he asked.

‘Nothing too outlandish,’ I replied, ‘just a tall story about something which happened all over the place in times past . . . , but which hasn’t happened in our lifetimes and I’m not sure it could and people would need a great deal of convincing about.’

(Strangely enough, Plato’s *Republic* might well have been one of the ‘great works’ on Yu’s prison syllabus.)

Clearly distinguishing between ‘the past’ as ideological construct and ‘history’ as critical knowledge, in *The Death of the Past* J.H. Plumb succinctly summarizes the parade of ruling class elaborations and uses of the former from ancient to recent times: ‘The past was constantly involved in the present, and all that enshrined the past – monuments, inscriptions, records – were essential weapons in government, in securing the authority, not only of the king, but also of those whose power he symbolized and sanctified . . .’

Plumb may have underestimated the persistence of the past today, and the continuing efforts of élites to compose and direct it, but he appreciated its essential significance: ‘Myths and legends, king-lists and genealogies . . . Whig-interpretations and Manifest Destinies . . . All rulers needed an interpretation of the past to justify the authority of their government . . . The past has always been the handmaid of authority.’⁷

Our own century is hardly free of such practices. Subscribing to the Party’s slogan in Orwell’s *1984* – ‘Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past’ – totalitarian and authoritarian regimes have ceaselessly sought to dominate and manipulate public and private memory. It was true of Nazism and Fascism, it has been true of Communism, and it has been true of a great host of pettier, though not necessarily meeker, dictatorships.

Compared to the devastations of *blitzkrieg* and conquest and the organized murder of six million Jews, book burnings and perversions of the past seem minor crimes, but they should never be discounted for the Nazis’ criminal treatment of history served to rationalize and justify to the German people their later crimes against humanity. Those who deny that the Holocaust ever happened may be exercising their right of free speech (and demonstrating that ruling classes do not have an absolute monopoly on trying to suppress the past), but they are also committing atrocities against memory and history. The presence in Europe’s streets of neo-nazis, along with the reascendance of fascist politicians, is chilling.⁸

Censorship in the Soviet Union began under Lenin as a ‘temporary measure’. However, as David Remnick writes in *Lenin’s Tomb*: ‘The

Kremlin took history so seriously that it created a massive bureaucracy to control it, to fabricate its language and content, so that murderous and arbitrary purges became a “triumph over enemies and spies”, and the reigning tyrant, a “Friend to All Children”.⁹

Isaac Deutscher gives accounts of how early on in Stalin's campaigns against his rivals he ‘started the prodigious falsification of history which was to descend like an avalanche upon Russia's intellectual horizons’ and of how, by the onset of the '30s, he was requiring falsehoods and cover-ups ever more massive. Show-trials, purges, famines, deportations, prison camps, murders in the millions . . . Stalin and the Party imposed a grand ‘conspiracy of silence’.

After more than a quarter century, the horrors and the lies, and the suppression of any reference to them, were bound together so tightly that Stalin's successors could not afford to loosen the controls too much. How could they when they had all been his ‘accomplices’?¹⁰ Khrushchev himself fully appreciated the powers of the past and, ironically, offered one of the finest – though hardly universally deserved – tributes to the profession that I have ever come upon: ‘Historians are dangerous people, capable of turning everything topsy-turvy. They have to be watched.’

While the darkest days did not return, history remained under close supervision and regulation – with occasional ‘thaws’, followed regularly by ‘purges’ – until *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the mid-1980s. Yet, Gorbachev was no fool. Even he would have preferred, at least at the outset, not to extend opening and restructuring to questions of the past. Indeed, it was not until Gorbachev imagined that allowing public re-examination and revision of the historical record would help to undermine his opposition that he called for the filling in of the all-too-many ‘blank spots’.¹¹

Having been so well supervised, professional scholars were themselves at first hesitant about undertaking the now licensed re-examination of Soviet experience. But others were not, and very quickly the historical past was asserting itself everywhere. I distinctly remember the Soviet government's announcement in May 1988 that, in view of the great changes underway, school history examinations were being cancelled. In time, more was to be cancelled than that . . .

Gorbachev's miscalculations – assuming he never actually intended the break-up of the Soviet Union – also invited the renewal and redemption of politics and history in Eastern Europe. In 1988, on the 20th anniversary of Prague Spring and the crushing of the Czechoslovak experiment in socialist democracy, the dissident group Charter 77 issued a statement which concluded with the following:

We call only for truth. The truth about the past and the truth about the present are indivisible. Without accepting the truth about what happened it is impossible to address correctly what is happening now; without the truth about what is happening now it is impossible to substantially improve the existing state of affairs.

In the Baltic Republics, too, political insurgency was accompanied by calls for the complete disclosure of the 'secret protocols' of the 1939 Hitler-Stalin Pact which had sealed their fates. Similarly, changes underway in Poland – so long striven for by the workers and intellectuals of Solidarity – generated a series of historical 'revelations' regarding Soviet actions before, during and after the War. And in Hungary, along with popular demands for political reform, a 'Committee for Historical Justice' was organized to pursue the recovery of the buried past of the Revolution of 1956.¹²

Submerged since 1945, extreme-nationalist and reactionary forces reasserted themselves in each of these instances, threatening in their respective fashions to replace the Communist suppression of memory and history with nationalist repressions. Nevertheless, the importance of history to the liberation movements of 1989 authenticated the words of the Czech novelist, Kundera, that 'The struggle of man against power, is the struggle of man against forgetting'.¹³

Further east, the Communist Chinese leadership, in spite of all their revolutionary designs, actually renewed their imperial forerunners' management of the past and those who studied it. In fact, Mao and his cadres, in the words of Jonathan Unger, were:

Even more determined to control the messages imparted in works of history – to bend those messages in ways favourable to official policy lines and to extirpate any manifestation of dissent or opposition that might be hidden in historical allegory . . . In short, historians were to serve as hand-maidens to the Party propagandists.¹⁴

The degree of control exercised since 1949 has varied – though obviously not as much as the historiographical directions dictated by the government's changing political and economic policies. For their part, Chinese historians and other producers of 'the past' have themselves occasionally, though unsuccessfully, spoken up for the 'right to remember' – as in 1989, when, in a petition supporting the students and workers mobilizing in Tiananmen Square, a group of writers in Shanghai called for 'free historical enquiry'. However, following the terrible events of the night of June 4th there came the predictable ideological backlash, commencing with the government's propaganda machine describing the army's violent suppression of the democracy movement as actions taken against 'counter-revolutionaries'.

It is difficult to treat the governing classes of the contemporary liberal states in the same pages as those relating the experiences of Fascism and Communism. But our ruling élites are not innocents and we must make every effort not to forget that the institutions, laws and customs which constrain them are the results of long and continuing struggles from below.

Before the Second World War, Japanese education was a blatant instrument of indoctrination, intended to cultivate in children the belief that the nation's overseas expansion was a sacred campaign to bring the 'whole world under one roof' *and*, to guarantee that they promoted 'loyalty to the emperor and love of country', all school-books were subject to review and certification by the Ministry of Education. However, with Japan's defeat and the ensuing American Occupation, educational practices were reformed and, within certain guidelines, teachers were permitted to choose their own texts. But this did not last long . . .

By the 1950s, the conservative, Liberal-Democratic Party government had succeeded in reinstating state controls over education and the authorization of textbooks – against the opposition of the Teachers Union. Most problematically, this meant that, in spite of the growing scholarly historiography, the Government was able to have removed from the books specific references to the atrocities committed by the Imperial Japanese military during the Second World War – most infamously, the 1937 'Rape of Nanking'. Recently – due to persistent legal campaigns by liberals and leftists *and*, maybe even more significantly, diplomatic wrangles with the governments of those countries which had suffered Japanese depredations – prohibitions have been reduced or withdrawn. However, state control and censorship of textbooks continues.¹⁵

To varying degrees, the distortion and occlusion of the historical past by governing élites has characterized public history and historical education in all of the former Axis countries – regularly with the acquiescence, if not the encouragement, of their former opponents eagerly pursuing Cold-War and anti-Left ends. Consider the politics of amnesia surrounding Austrians' adherence to an image of themselves as having been merely 'the victims' of German expansionism; or the 'historical' initiatives of German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, ranging from the Bitburg ceremonies in 1985, to his recent plans to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the plot to assassinate Hitler which deliberately excluded representatives of the socialist and communist resistance movements. We might also register here the half-century worth of political prevarications and equivocations in France engendered by the nation's 'Vichy Syndrome'.¹⁶

Whereas the archives have been opened in Berlin and Moscow, American and other Western secrets about state and corporate crimes committed under license of the Cold War are only beginning to seep out . . . Secret deals with Nazis and fascists, domestic spying and red-baiting, atomic-radiation tests on military personnel and civilians, assassinations and the overthrow of governments, plans for a first-strike nuclear attack – I will stop before I start sounding like Oliver Stone, producer of the film *JFK*.

And yet, there remains the comment by a former US official that ‘possibly, one-third of American history is classified’. (I won’t even begin to guess at all the Official Secrets squirrelled away somewhere here in Britain.)

Moreover, perhaps no less so than in Japan did US history textbooks in the postwar decades exclude or limit reference to the darker events and persistent social struggles which had shaped American history and continued to do so. In favour of a Cold-War consensus and the pursuit of anti-communism at home and abroad, high school history books unanimously represented America’s westward expansion and overseas interventions in terms of Manifest Destiny, the defence of the Hemisphere and/or support of anti-colonial struggles.¹⁷ Naturally, democracy was a central theme of their narrative of progress; however, ignoring the persistent limitations, exclusions, and oppressions, these texts articulated – well before Fukuyama was old enough to think about it – a vision of postwar America as the culmination of Western and world history.

Not only the schoolbooks, the most official of public histories, but all of American mass culture from Madison Avenue to Hollywood projected that assumption. As the 1950s gave way to the 1960s, liberals and conservatives alike seemed to share in the historical belief that in America we were witness to the ‘end of ideology’.¹⁸ Those who resisted were effectively marginalized and without credibility. Or so it seemed for a brief while.

Fomented in part by the very contradiction between the history portrayed and the history lived, American radicalism was renewed in the sixties . . . And the struggles for the civil rights of racial and ethnic minorities, the social rights of the poor, the equal rights of women, and the cessation of imperial wars – along with the much less-celebrated but no less remarkable working-class insurgency for industrial rights and democracy – together instigated serious reforms of the American polity and economy.

As well, these struggles inspired dramatic revisions in historical study and thought, including the socialization and democratization of the past – that is, the recovery and incorporation into the historical record of previously ignored class, racial and gender experiences and agencies.

Unfortunately, though predictably, these democratic campaigns and accomplishments also provoked profound reactions on the part of the 'power élite' who grew increasingly worried that the several struggles of the day were on the verge of coalescing into a broad radical-democratic movement, promising reforms on an even grander scale. In public statements and manifestos such as the Trilateral Commission's 1975 report, *The Crisis of Democracy*, the voices of the corporate class declaimed that the Western polities were facing 'governmental overload', more specifically, a 'crisis' in which the problems of 'governance' stemmed from – *and I quote* – 'an excess of democracy'. The threat was clearly acknowledged as coming from below – from minorities, women, public-interest groups, *and* labour unions – but the real culprits were made out to be university and other 'value-oriented intellectuals' (for which, read historians and their kin).¹⁹

Thus, for the past twenty years we have been subjected, both in the United States and, for very much the same reasons, here in Britain, to what Ralph Miliband identified as 'class war from above' against the achievements of liberalism and social democracy and the progressive changes wrought by the diverse struggles of the sixties. And a pronounced feature of these 'revolutions from above' has been vigorous and concerted campaigns to reshape historical memory, consciousness and imagination – the climax of which was to be the pronouncement that we had actually arrived at the 'end of history'.²⁰

Strongly encouraged and lucratively bankrolled by the business élites, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher along with their Republican and Conservative minions brilliantly articulated mythical renditions of their respective nation's history. Gross distortions and omissions of the past were incessant but, in particular, we might recall Reagan's harking back to a supposedly happier, safer and more economically robust America, existing some time – depending on the occasion – before the upheavals and Great Society programs of the 1960s *or* the New Deal of the 1930s. For Thatcher the good old days were those when 'Victorian Values' were supposed to have prevailed and the British people had somehow been both more self-reliant and kinder *and* more entrepreneurial and philanthropic (the former or latter combination determined presumably by one's class circumstances).

Reagan and Thatcher spoke of the past as a time of 'shared values' and insisted on the necessity of reinstating them. These were not flashes of nostalgia, but weapons directed against liberals, trade unionists, socialists, feminists, the poor, and racial and ethnic minorities. Each offered a rhetoric of consensus actually intended to

bolster a politics of social division and a political economy of capital accumulation and class inequality.

Furthermore, the New Right leaders' ambitions for 'the past' were not merely rhetorical. In neo-McCarthyite language, they declared their hostility to the scholarly and pedagogical labours of the new historians, and proceeded to initiate 'culture wars' by translating the media-touted 'crises of historical education' into major civic, if not defence, issues. Then, under the guise of responding to student ignorance and spreading historical amnesia, Republican and Tory Secretaries of Education, respectively, introduced unprecedented schemes for 'national standards' and 'national curricula' in which History was to be a central subject. And they made every effort to determine that the narratives rendered in those syllabuses and curricula would contribute to the development of their aspired-to conservative orders.

In this age of spectacle and entertainment, New Right efforts to subordinate historical education have been enhanced, if not overshadowed (at least in America), by corporate reconstructions of the past. Thinking specifically of Madison Avenue's renderings of the 1960s, an older colleague warned me some years ago that 'You can spit at the capitalist system in protest. Some company will harvest it, refine it, and package it. And your mother will buy it for you for Christmas'. In film, television, and advertising, past and present are sanitised and commodified; and now we have the proposal by the Disney Corporation to develop a new theme park to be called 'Disney's America', in which they promise – and here the mind boggles, not knowing whether to laugh or to cry – to create 'realistic renderings of the nation's past', including slavery and the Civil War. In a truly Orwellian fashion, we are to be provided History for the 'End of History' . . .

Consider again the varied, but universal and unremitting drive of ruling and governing classes to subordinate not only the present but the past. Surely, you don't have to be a Marxist to recognize the hegemonic ambitions entailed when a hired-hand of the powers that be proclaims that the present order of things is eternal. Comprehended politically and historically, the handsomely-subsidized intellectuals of the New Right with their end-of-history project stand in the very same queue as the schemers in Plato's *Republic* with their 'tall story' – all of them intent upon deterring democracy, not enhancing it.

Just what is it about history which so distresses the ruling and governing classes that they are driven to control and command it? Inverting Orwell, Kundera writes:

The past is full of life, eager to irritate us, provoke and insult us, tempt us to destroy or repaint it. The only reason people want to be masters of the future is to change the past. They are fighting for access to the laboratories where photographs are retouched and biographies and histories rewritten.

It is not confidence which authorizes such actions, but trepidation; it is not conviction about the course of history which leads them to declare it finished, but anxiety induced by what they see there.

I began by proposing that we look directly into the eyes of the powerful, to discover what they see, what they recognize, what they know. I should have asked: What do they see, but try to obscure? What do they recognize, but attempt to deny? What do they know, but endeavour to conceal? Boris Kagarlitsky refers us to Marx's own assessment of censorship: 'The law against a frame of mind is not a law of the state promulgated for its citizens, but the law of *one party against another party* . . . Laws against frame of mind are the involuntary cry of a bad conscience'. Absolutely. But it is not only guilt which obliges proscriptions. Knowing this, Kagarlitsky adds the following, with the effect, intended or not, of directing our thinking well beyond the experiences of fascism and communism: 'Censorship is introduced by those who fear public opinion, the very existence of censorship is a sign that oppositional thought is alive and cannot be eradicated – that alongside the ruling bureaucratic 'party' there is also a *de facto* democratic party.'²¹

Why do ruling classes fear history? Because, beyond their crimes, and beyond the tragedies and ironies which are so demanding of hope and spirit, *they see and they know* – as did their forerunners – that history has been, and remains, a process of struggle for freedom and for justice – and, increasingly, at least since the late eighteenth century, it has been, as the late Raymond Williams once put it, a *Long Revolution*,²² at the political heart of which is the fight for liberty, equality and democracy.

Moreover, they realize that however many times history has entailed the 'experience of defeat', for the peoples and classes who have sought to make it otherwise, the Long Revolution has also afforded great victories. In search of reason to hope, Ronald Aronson ventures this:

The real historical advances in human social morality have occurred through such struggles. Slavery has been abolished, democratic rights have been won, certain elements of dignity and equality promised and achieved, wars ended, other wars forestalled – only because we have acted. Projected, now desperately, now with confidence, in collective visions by movement after movement, sacrificed for, agitated for, partially achieved, then legitimized by law and custom, social progress has been *made true* every step of the way.²³

Indeed – whether in resistance, rebellion or revolution – it is not only the victories which weigh in; the defeats, as well, have contributed to the making of democracy. The Levellers and Diggers of seventeenth-century Albion and later generations of Radical, Luddite and Chartist artisans and proletarians; the Parisian *sans-culottes* and Parisian communards; the rebellious black slaves of the Americas; the radical mechanics, Populist farmers, Socialist workers and Wobbly labourers, native and immigrant, of my own country; the revolutionary campesinos, vaqueros and obreros of Mexico; the workers defending Republican Spain and their comrades in the International Brigades; the partisans of Occupied Europe and Jewish fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto; the anti-apartheid demonstrators at Sharpeville in South Africa; and the Chinese students and workers of 1919 and 1989, have all, in their respective ways, endowed the struggle.

My Russian-Jewish grandfather, who came to America after the 1905 Revolution and campaigned as a socialist youth on New York's Lower East Side, passed onto me while I was still a boy his copies of the writings of Tom Paine. Among them was the revolutionary pamphlet, *Common Sense*, wherein Paine boldly wrote: 'We have it in our power to begin the world over again.' 1776, 1789, 1810, 1848, 1871, 1910, 1917, 1945, 1949, 1959, 1968, 1989, 1993 and so many other radical-democratic moments large and small have renewed that possibility.

Whatever they say, the powerful have not forgotten . . . Nor have they forgotten the defiance expressed in the lines of Rosa Luxemburg, still evading that arrest by the proto-Nazi *Freikorps* which would lead to her murder: "'Order reigns in Berlin.'" You stupid lackeys! Your "order" is built on sand. Tomorrow the revolution will rear ahead once more and announce to your horror amid the brass of trumpets: "I was, I am, I always will be!"

The democratic narrative has long haunted their imaginations, and it must do so all the more today because it is the very foundation upon which contemporary political legitimacy stands. However insincere, hypocritical or blasphemous their words, for much of this century, and for far longer in America, rulers and governors have been obliged to speak within, and to, a discourse of democracy – often, a discourse rooted in a revolutionary moment. However limited, debased or eviscerated the institutions, the idea of 'rule by the people' has become the ideological cornerstone of modern government. As John Dunn observes: 'Nothing else in the history of the world . . . enjoys the same untrammelled authority for human beings today, and does so virtually across the globe'.²⁴

Ironically, the very content of the hegemonic ideology serves to remind us of our democratic ideals and holds out to us the possibility

of further realizing them. Sometimes it is brutally obvious; but, again, sometimes – especially, in our liberal end-of-history politics – you have to listen closely, very closely, to appreciate the apprehensiveness of the governing élites.

Consider the ascension two years ago of the Democrat, William Jefferson Clinton, to the Presidency of the United States after a dozen years of conservative Republican government. In his Inaugural Address, the new President urged Americans ‘to be bold, embrace change and share the sacrifices needed for the nation to progress’.

It is necessary to recall that Clinton sought to connect his own pretended ‘political vision’ to that of the revolutionary author of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson. Following his pilgrimage to Jefferson’s home at Monticello and, then, a journey to the District of Columbia along the route travelled by the third president in 1801, Clinton’s inaugural speech was laden with Jeffersonian references. I have in mind one remark in particular: His statement that, quote, ‘Thomas Jefferson believed that to preserve the very foundations of our nation, we would need dramatic change from time to time’.

But, of course, as every child of the sixties such as Clinton knows, that is not exactly what the Founding Father said. The words Jefferson himself proffered were: ‘I hold that a little *rebellion* now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical’.

How should we read Clinton’s ‘revision’ of the radical Jefferson? As an innocent act? As an act in favour of reconciliation? Or, as I did (though hoping to be proven wrong): As an act in favour of the existing order by yet another representative of the governing class, who – having campaigned in the name of ‘change’ – had no intention of actually rousing American historical memory and imagination for fear the people might really pursue it?

From the Fascist prison cell which was supposed to break him and, physically, eventually did, Antonio Gramsci penned these words to his young son, reminding us, from the bottom up, of where we might draw sustenance, hope and a sense of possibility:

My Darling Delio, I am feeling tired and cannot write a lot. But write to me always and tell me about everything that interests you in school. I think you must like history, as I did when I was your age, because it deals with men, as many men as possible, all the men in the world in so far as they unite together in society, and work and struggle and make a bid for a better life. All that can’t fail to please you more than anything else. Isn’t that right?

In the same spirit, Howard Zinn modestly explains his own 'Failure to Quit':

I can understand pessimism, but I don't believe in it. It's not simply a matter of faith, but of historical evidence. Not overwhelming evidence, just enough to give hope, because for hope we don't need certainty, only possibility. Despite all those confident statements that 'history shows . . .' and 'history proves . . .', hope is all the past can offer us . . . When I hear so often that there is little hope for change in the '90s, I think back to the despair that accompanied the onset of the '60s.²⁵

Tormented by what they see in and know about the past and the making of the present, the powerful recognize, as Khrushchev did, that, to the extent that they pursue their scholarly and pedagogical labours critically, historians can be 'dangerous people'. We are not only capable of wielding the powers of the past against the powerful themselves, but – by offering *historical* challenges to despair and cynicism – of making radical contributions to popular memory, consciousness and imagination.

What is to be done? Deutscher himself once wrote that the role of intellectuals 'is to remain eternal protestors'. I like that. However, in acknowledgement and appreciation of the very fears of the powers that be, I would take it further – in a way I am sure he would have approved.

Poaching a term from my mentor, Victor Kiernan, I would argue that our responsibility and task is to secure, bear witness to, and critically advance the *prophetic memory* of the struggle for democracy.²⁶ Thus, for Marxist and other radical historians the fundamental project remains: The recovery of the past, the education of desire, and the cultivation, as Gramsci himself urged, of

an historical, dialectical conception of the world . . . one which understands movement and change . . . which appreciates the sum of effort and sacrifice which the present has cost the past and which the future is costing the present . . . and which conceives the contemporary world as a synthesis of the past, of all past generations, which projects itself into the future.²⁷

Why do ruling classes fear history? Because they know that however ancient the democratic idea, the modern democratic narrative has really only just begun. As Joel Kovel reflects in his recent study of McCarthyism: 'Yes, the dead-end variant of socialism that went under the name of Soviet Communism ultimately failed badly. But the capitalist order, with all its brilliant achievements, has not succeeded; it has only won'.²⁸

It would make things easier if it could be otherwise, but the future growth and development of capitalism and of democracy cannot be

mutual; extending the reaches of the former necessarily requires that democracy be constrained or even further constricted. The ongoing globalisation of capitalist relations of exploitation and oppression means, as it has before, that previously-secured democratic victories will be severely challenged and fresh democratic aspirations will continue to be harshly confronted. But, as Deutscher said in *The Unfinished Revolution*, '[failing nuclear annihilation] nowhere will history come to a close'.

The point is that working-class and other struggles from below will continue to assert themselves. Indeed, in ways we have yet to make out, global capital also makes possible its dialectical opposition on a global scale. On the good possibility that our own agencies do matter, we must work hard to make sure, whether they are national or international, that these struggles too are informed by the prophetic memory of liberty, equality and democracy.

We cannot know what will transpire; but be assured that our governors fully expect the historic and perennial demand for power to the people to be renewed. It's reflected in their eyes.

NOTES

1. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York, 1992; for a discussion of such notions see Lutz Niethammer, *Posthistoire: Has History Come to an End?*, translated by Patrick Camiller, London, 1992. Edward Lutwak's remarks were in 'Fascism as the Wave of the Future', *London Review of Books*, April 7, 1994.
2. Howard Zinn, *Declarations of Independence: Cross-Examining American Ideology*, New York, 1990, p. 294.
3. Shim Jae Hoon, 'A Rebel with a Cause Pays the Price for Dissent', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 10, 1986.
4. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, Oxford, 1989 Centenary Edition; and E. H. Carr, *What is History?*, New York, 1962.
5. I should add here that the closing paragraphs of the magazine article indicate that while in prison Yu was expelled from the university once again and on his release he turned to translating and proofreading to make a living. He also became active in an organization for the families of political prisoners.
6. I must state clearly that in telling this particular story, I mean no disrespect to writers of fiction. The banning of their works and the attacks and imprisonments suffered by so many of their calling offer more than ample testimony to their ability to incite fear in the hearts of the powerful.
7. J.H. Plumb, *The Death of the Past*, New York, 1969.
8. Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*, New York, 1993; and Paul Hockenos, *Free to Hate: The Rise of the Right in Post-Communist Eastern Europe*, New York, 1993.
9. David Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb*, New York, 1993, p.4.
10. Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed*, pp.155-60; and *The Prophet Outcast*, pp. 168-71, 377ff; and *The Unfinished Revolution*, pp.102-15.
11. See Remnick, *Lenin's Tomb*; R.W. Davies, *Soviet History in the Gorbachev Revolution*, London, 1989.
12. On these developments see the double issue of *Across Frontiers*, nos.4/5 Winter-Spring, 1989.
13. Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, New York, 1978.

14. Jonathan Unger, Introduction to Unger (ed.), *Using the Past to Serve the Present: Historiography and Politics in Contemporary China*, New York, 1993, pp. 2–3.
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Black Socrates?

Questioning the Philosophical Tradition

Simon Critchley

Inconsiderateness in the face of tradition is reverence for the past.

Martin Heidegger, *Sophistes*

Funk not only moves, it can remove.

George Clinton. *P. Funk (Wants to Get Funked Up)*

Philosophy tells itself stories.¹ One might go further and claim that the life of philosophy, the memory that ensures its identity and its continued existence as something to be inherited, lived and passed on, consists in the novel repetition of certain basic narratives. And there is one story in particular that philosophy likes to tell, which allows philosophers to reanimate, theatrically and sometimes in front of their students, the passion that founds their profession and which, it seems, must be retold in order for philosophy to be capable of inheritance. It concerns, of course, Greece – or rather, as General de Gaulle might have said, a certain idea of Greece – and the passion of a dying Socrates.

Philosophy as De-traditionalization

Socrates, the philosopher, dies. The significance of this story is that, with it, we can see how philosophy constitutes itself as a tradition, affects itself with narrative, memory and the chance of a future, by repeating a scene of radical *de-traditionalization*. For Hegel and Nietzsche, to choose two examples of philosophers who affect themselves with a tradition – although from seemingly opposed perspectives – the historical emergence of philosophy, the emergence of philosophy into history, that is to say, the decisive break with mythic, religious or aesthetic world-views, occurs with Socrates' death.²

Who is Socrates? So the story goes, he is an individual who claims that the source of moral integrity cannot be said to reside in the traditional customs, practices and forms of life of the community, what Hegel calls *Sittlichkeit*; nor, for Nietzsche, in the aesthetico-religious practices that legitimate the pre-philosophical Greek *polis*, that is to say, *attic* tragedy. Rather, Socrates is an individual who

demands that the source of moral legitimacy must lie in the appeal to universality. It must have a universal form: what is justice? The philosopher does not ask ‘What is justice for the Athenians?’ or ‘What is justice for the Spartans?’, but rather focuses on justice in general, seeking its *eidōs*. Socrates announces the vocation of the philosopher and establishes the lines of transmission that lead from individuality to universality, from the intellect to the forms – a route which bypasses the particular, the communal, the traditional, as well as conventional views of ethical and political life.

The vocation of the philosopher is *critique*, that is, an individual interrogation and questioning of the evidence of tradition through an appeal to a universal form. For Hegel and Nietzsche, Socrates’ life announces the death of tragedy, and the death of the allegedly *sittlich* (ethical) community legitimated through the pre-philosophical aesthetico-religious practices. In Hegel’s words, Socrates’ death marks the moment when tragedy comes off the stage and enters real life, becoming the tragedy of Greece.³ Socrates’ tragic death announces both the beginning of philosophy and the beginning of the irreversible Greek decline that will, for Hegel and Nietzsche, take us all the way from the legalism of the Roman Republic to the eviscerated *Moralität* (abstract morality) of post-Kantian Germany. Of course, one’s evaluation of Socrates’ death will vary, depending on whether one is Hegel or Nietzsche. For the former (not without some elegaic regret for the lost Sophoclean *polis*) it is the first intimation of the principle of subjectivity; for the latter, Socrates’ death ignites the motor that drives (Platonic-Christian) nihilism. But, despite these differences of evaluation, the narrative structure is common to Hegel and Nietzsche; the story remains the same even if the moral is different: Socrates’ death marks the end of tragic Greece and the tragic end of Greece.

It is a beautiful story, and as I recount it I am once again seduced by its founding passion: the historical emergence of philosophy out of the dying Socrates is the condition of possibility for de-traditionalization. It announces the imperative that continues to drive philosophy, *critique*, which consists in the refusal to recognize the legitimacy of tradition without that tradition having first submitted itself to critical interrogation, to dialogue *viva voce*.

Philosophy as Tradition

However, if on my view philosophy is de-traditionalization, that which calls into question the evidence of tradition, then what is philosophy’s relation to its own tradition? What is the relation of philosophy to the stories it tells about itself?

With the admittedly limited examples given above, one might say that the philosophical tradition is a tradition of de-traditionalization, of stories where the authority of tradition is refused. As Descartes famously writes, 'I will devote myself sincerely and without reservations to the general demolition of my opinions'.⁴ As we will see presently with reference to Husserl and Heidegger, the philosopher's appeal to tradition is not traditional; it is, in Derrida's words, 'an appeal to tradition which is in no way traditional'.⁵ It is a call for a novel repetition or retrieval of the past for the purposes of a critique of the present, often – for example, in Husserl – with a view to the construction of an alternative ethical teleology. But, slightly getting ahead of myself, should we believe the stories that philosophy tells to itself? Should these stories themselves be exempt from philosophical critique? More particularly, what about the story of the dying Socrates? What more can I say about this story apart from feeling its beauty and pathos despite (or perhaps because of) its being so often recounted?

To ventriloquize a little: 'One might point out that the story of Socrates' death is a *Greek* story, a narrative that recounts and reinforces the Greek beginning of philosophy. Indeed, it is a story that can be employed to assert the exclusivity of the Greek beginning of philosophy. Philosophy speaks Greek and only Greek, which is to say that philosophy does not speak Egyptian or Babylonian, Indian or Chinese and therefore is not Asian or African. Philosophy can only have one beginning and that beginning has to be the Greek beginning. Why? *Because we are who we are.* We are Europeans and Europe has a beginning, a birthplace, that is both geographical and spiritual, and the name of that birthplace is Greece. What takes place in Greece, the event that gives birth to our theoretical-scientific culture, is *philosophy*. By listening to the story that philosophy tells to itself, we can retrieve our beginning, our Greek beginning, the Greek beginning of the European Spiritual adventure. Furthermore, by appropriating this beginning as our own we will be able to come into our own as authentic Europeans, to confront the crisis of Europe, its spiritual sickness, a malaise which consists in the fact that we have forgotten who we are, we have forgotten our origins and immersed ourselves unquestioningly in tradition. We must de-traditionalize the tradition that ails us and allows us to forget the crisis – be it the crisis of objectivism (Husserl), rationalization (Weber), commodification (Marx), nihilism (Nietzsche) or forgetfulness of Being (Heidegger). We must project another tradition that is truly our own. The only therapy is to face the crisis as a crisis, which means that we must tell ourselves the story of philosophy's Greek beginning, of philosophy's exclusively Greek beginning – again and again. If philosophy is not

exclusively Greek, we risk losing ourselves as Europeans, since to philosophize is to learn how to live in the memory of Socrates' death.'

This troubling ventriloquy is very loosely based on Husserl's 1935 Vienna Lecture, 'Philosophy and the Crisis of European Humanity',⁶ which in many ways perfectly exemplifies the concerns of this article and the position I am seeking to question. We could also quote examples from Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Arendt, Gadamer, and an entire German and English romantic tradition. What such remarks testify to, I believe, is the importation of a certain model of ancient history, centred on the exclusivity of Greece, into philosophy as the foundation stone of its legitimating discourse. I would briefly like to explore and question the historical basis for this belief.

Philosophy as Invented Tradition

One of the most challenging consequences of reading Martin Bernal's *Black Athena*⁷ – regardless of its many alleged scholarly infelicities, which I am simply not in a position to judge – is the way in which he traces the genealogy of the invented historical paradigm upon which Husserl bases his remarks; the 'Aryan Model' of ancient history, which (astonishingly) only dates from the early decades of the nineteenth century and was developed in England and Germany. Prior to this period, and indeed for most of Western history, what Bernal calls 'The Ancient Model' of classical civilization had been dominant. The latter model believed, amongst other things, that the Egyptians invented philosophy, that philosophy was essentially imported into Greece from Egypt, and that Egypt – and remember Plato visited there around 390 BCE – was the fount of all philosophical wisdom. In addition to the Egyptian influence on Greek civilization, it was also widely assumed that Greece was subject to colonization and extensive cultural influence from Phoenician traders and mariners, and that, therefore, Greek civilization and the philosophy expressed by that civilization was largely a consequence of the influence of near-eastern cultures on the African and Asian continents. That is to say, Greek culture – like all culture – was a *hybrid ensemble*, a radically impure and mongrel assemblage, that was a result of a series of invasions, waves of immigration, cultural magpieism and ethnic and racial mixing and crossing.

Contesting this picture of the African and Asiatic roots of classical civilization given in the Ancient Model, a picture that Bernal wants to revise and defend, the Aryan Model claims that Greek civilization was purely Indo-European and a consequence of either the autonomous

genius of the pre-Hellenes – resulting in what is sometimes called ‘The Greek Miracle’, the transition from *mythos* to *logos* – or of alleged invasions from the north by shadowy Indo-European peoples. Bernal’s polemical thesis is that the displacement of the Ancient Model by the Aryan Model was not so much driven by a concern for truth as by a desire for cultural and national purity which, for chauvinistic, imperialist and ultimately racist reasons, wanted to deny the influence of African or Semitic culture upon classical Greece, and by implication upon nineteenth century northern Europe.

The influence of this Aryan Model in philosophy can be seen in the way the canon of the history of philosophy was transformed at the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁸ Up until the end of the eighteenth century, the history of philosophy was habitually traced back to multiple so-called ‘wisdom traditions’ in Egyptian, Hebraic, Babylonian, Mesopotamian and Sumerian cultures. However, from the early 1800s, these traditions were generally excluded from the canonical definition of ‘philosophy’ either because of their allegedly mythical or pre-rational status or because they were largely anonymous, whereas the Greeks, like Thales, had names. The individual thinker rather than a body of thought becomes the criterion for philosophy. The consequence of this transformation of the canon is the belief that philosophy begins exclusively amongst the Greeks; which is also to say that philosophy is indigenous to the territory of Europe and is a result of Europe’s unique spiritual geography – setting aside the unfortunate geographical location of certain pre-Socratics on the Ionian coast, which is usually explained away by calling them Greek colonies, an explanation that conceals a slightly anachronistic projection of the modern meaning of colonialism back into the ancient world.

The hegemony of the Aryan model can also be seen in the development of the discipline of Classics in England in the nineteenth century based on the German model of *Altertumswissenschaft*. Both are premised upon a vision of the Greeks as quasi-divine, pure and authentic. What Bernal shows is the way in which this vision was complicit with certain northern European nationalisms and imperialisms (particularly in England and Germany), where contemplation of the Greeks was felt to be beneficial to the education of the future administrators of empire. It is on this point of a possible link between culture and imperialism that one can perhaps link Bernal’s analysis to the wider problematic of the invention of tradition in the nineteenth century, as diagnosed by Eric Hobsbawm and others.⁹ Hobsbawm shows that traditions were invented with extraordinary rapidity in this period by various states (notably Britain, France, Germany and the

USA) in order to reinforce political authority and to ensure the smooth expansion of electoral democracy – for males at least.

More specifically, the traditions invented in this period, which in Britain were as grand as the fabrication of a modern monarchy complete with its jubilees and public processions, or as small as the invention of the postage stamp complete with image of the monarch as symbol of the nation; or, more widely, the proliferation of public statuary in France and Germany, with the ubiquitous image of Marianne in the former and Bismarck or Kaiser Wilhelm in the latter, or the spread of national anthems and national flags – culminate, claims Hobsbawm, in the emergence of *nationalism*. It was nationalism that became the quasi-Rousseauesque civic religion of the nineteenth century, and which, crucially, ensured social cohesion and patterns of national identification for the newly hegemonic middle classes, providing a model which could then be extended to the working classes, as and when they were allowed to enter the political process. The power of invented tradition consists in its ability to inculcate certain values and norms by sheer ritualization and imposed repetition, and to encourage the belief that those traditions are rooted in remotest antiquity, in the case of English nationalism in the sentimental myth of ‘a thousand years of unbroken history’.

My concern, as someone who teaches philosophy, is the extent to which the version of tradition that is operative and goes largely unquestioned in much philosophical pedagogy and post-prandial parley (the belief in the exclusivity of the Greek beginning of philosophy and the centrality and linear continuity of the European philosophical tradition) remains tributary to an invented historical paradigm, barely two centuries old, in which we have come to believe by sheer force of inculcation and repetition. Is the vision of philosophy offered by those, like myself, working on the geographical and spiritual edges of the Continental tradition, tributary to the Aryan model of ancient history and thereby complicit with a Hellenomania that buttresses an implicit European chauvinism? Indeed – although this is not my direct concern here – might one not be suspicious of the nationalist motives that led to the retrieval within an Anglo-American tradition suspicious of the high metaphysics of ‘Continentalists’ of a specifically ‘British’ empiricist tradition in the 1950s to justify either an Anglicized logical positivism or Oxford ordinary language philosophy?¹⁰ Or the selfconscious retrieval of pragmatism or transcendentalism as distinctively and independently *American* traditions in the work of thinkers as diverse as Stanley Cavell, Richard Rorty and Cornel West?¹¹

All of which brings me to some critical questions: must the Greco-European story of the philosophical tradition – from ancient

Greece to modern northern Europe, from Platonism to its inversion in Nietzsche – be accepted as a legitimating narrative by philosophers, even by those who call themselves philosophers only in remembrance? Must philosophy be haunted by a compulsion to repeat its Greek origin? And if so, what about the possibility of other traditions in philosophy, other beginnings, other spiritual adventures? Could philosophy, at least in its European moment, ever be in the position to repeat another origin, announce another beginning, invent another tradition, or tell another story?

More gravely, and with reference to Bernal and also to David Theo Goldberg's *Racist Culture*,¹² is there perhaps a racist logic intrinsic to European philosophy which is founded on a central *paradox*, hinted at above in the coincidence of the geographical and the spiritual or the particular and the universal in Husserl? That is, philosophy tells itself a story which affirms the link between individuality and universality by embodying that link either in the person of Socrates or by defining the (European) philosopher as 'the functionary of humanity',¹³ but where at the same time universality is delimited or confined within one particular tradition, namely the Greco-European adventure? Philosophy demands universal validity, or is defined by this demand for universal validity, yet it can only begin here, in Europe. We are who we are, and our supra-national cultural identity as Europeans is founded in the universality of our claims and the particularity of our tradition; a tradition that, for Husserl, includes 'the English dominions', i.e. the USA, but does not extend to the gypsies, 'who constantly wander across Europe',¹⁴ like some living memory trace of Egypt. No other culture could be like us, because we have exclusive rights to philosophy, to the scientific-theoretical attitude.

In the light of Edward Said's work, such philosophical sentiments do not seem far from the core belief of imperialism: namely, that it is the responsibility or *burden* of the metropolitan powers to bring our universal values to bear on native peoples, that is, to colonize and transform other cultures according to our own world-view and to conceal oppression under the cloak of a mission. As Said puts it, why are most professional humanists unable or unwilling to make the connection between, on the one hand, the prolonged cruelty of practices such as slavery, colonialism, imperial subjection and racial oppression, and, on the other hand, the poetry, fiction and philosophy of the societies that engage in such practices?¹⁵

However, if we provisionally admit that there is a racist or imperialist logic in philosophy – and this is as much an accusation against myself as against Husserl – then could it ever be otherwise? That is, would it be conceivable for philosophy, or at least for 'we European philosophers', to be in a position to repeat another origin?

Wouldn't this be precisely the fantasy of believing oneself to speak from the standpoint of the excluded without being excluded, of wishing to speak from the margins whilst standing at the centre, that is to say, the fantasy of a romantic anti-Hellenism or Rousseauesque anti-ethnocentrism? If so, where does this leave us? How do we proceed? As a way of sharing my perplexity, rather than resolving it, I shall try to illuminate these questions by taking a slightly different tack.

Sedimentation, Reactivation, Deconstruction

Tradition can be said to have two senses: (1) as something inherited or handed down without questioning or critical interrogation; (2) as something made or produced through a critical engagement with the first sense of tradition, as a de-traditionalization of tradition or an appeal to tradition that is in no way traditional. Of course, this distinction is artificial insofar as it could be claimed that the consciousness of tradition *as such* only occurs in the process of its destruction, that is to say, with the emergence of a *modernity* as that which places in question the evidence of tradition.

However, it is this second sense of tradition, the philosophical sense, that is shared – not without some substantial differences – by Husserl and Heidegger. For the Husserl of the *Crisis of the European Sciences*, the two senses of tradition correspond to the distinction between a *sedimented* and a *reactivated* sense of tradition. Sedimentation, which in one passage of the *Crisis* Husserl compares to 'traditionalization',¹⁶ and which it is helpful to think of in geological terms as a process of settling or consolidation, would consist in the forgetfulness of the origin of a state of affairs. If we take Husserl's celebrated example of geometry, a forgetfulness of the origin of geometry leads to the forgetfulness of the historicity of such a discipline, of the genesis of the theoretical attitude expressed by geometry, and the way in which the theoretical attitude belongs to a determinate *Lebenswelt*. What is required to counter the sedimentation of tradition is the *reactivation* of the origin in what Husserl calls 'a teleological-historical reflection upon the origins of our critical scientific and philosophical situation'.¹⁷ Thus, philosophy in the proper sense of the word, i.e. transcendental phenomenology, would be the product of critical-historical reflection upon the origin of tradition and the (re)active making of a new sense of tradition against the pernicious naïvetés of objectivism and naturalism.

Matters are not so different with the early Heidegger's conception of *Destruktion*, the deconstruction of the history of ontology, which is precisely not a way of burying the past in nullity, but rather of seeking

the positive tendencies of the tradition. *Destruktion* is the production of a tradition as something made and fashioned through a process of repetition or retrieval, what Heidegger calls *Wiederholung*. The latter is the assumption of the tradition as a genuine repetition, where the original meaning of a state of affairs (the temporal determination of the meaning of Being, to pick an example at random) is retrieved through a critical-historical reflection. In the period of *Being and Time*, Heidegger articulates the difference between a received and destroyed tradition in terms of the distinction between tradition (*Tradition*) and heritage (*Überlieferung*), where the possibilities of authentic existing are delivered over and disclosed.¹⁸

It is important to point out that the target of Husserl's and Heidegger's reflections on tradition – and this is equally true of Hegel's reflection on the history of Spirit and Nietzsche's conception of nihilism – is not the past as such, but the *present*, and precisely the *crisis* of the present. The true crisis of the European sciences (Husserl) or distress of the west (Heidegger) is felt in the absence of distress: 'crisis, what crisis?' At the present moment, when the Western techno-scientific-philosophical adventure is in the process of globalizing itself and reducing humanity to the status of happy consumers wearing Ronald McDonald Happy Hats, we are called upon to reactivate the origin of the tradition from which that adventure sprang, and to do this precisely in order to awaken a sense of crisis and distress. Thus, a reactivated sense of the tradition permits us a critical, perhaps even *tragic* consciousness of the present. As Gerald Brunos points out in an essay on tradition,

On this line of thinking a good example of the encounter with tradition would be the story of Oedipus and his discovery of the truth of what has been said about him by seers, drunks, and oracles, not to mention what his own awakened memory can tell him. I mean that from a hermeneutical standpoint the encounter with tradition is more likely to resemble satire than allegory, unmasking the present rather than translation of the past. Or, as I've tried to suggest, the hermeneutical experience of what comes down to us from the past is structurally *tragic* rather than comic. It is an event that exposes us to our own blindness or the limits of our historicity and extracts from us *an acknowledgement of our belongingness to something different*, reversing what we had thought. It's just the sort of event that might drive us to put out our eyes.¹⁹

The Husserlian-Heideggerian sense of reactivated tradition which destroys the past in order to enable us to confront the present achieves this by consigning us, as Derrida puts it,²⁰ to the security of the Greek element with a knowledge and confidence which are not comfortable, but which permit us to experience crisis, distress and tragedy.

But we must proceed carefully here: on the one hand, it seems that

the Husserlian-Heideggerian demand for the reactivation of a sedimented tradition is a necessary and unavoidable move, it is the step into philosophy and critique, that is, into the realization of tradition as something made or fashioned (re)actively as a way of confronting the tragedy of the present. However, on the other hand, the problem here is that the tradition that is retrieved is uniquely and univocally Greek; it is only a Greek tragedy that will permit us to confront the distress of the present. The way in which globalized techno-scientific ideology is to be confronted is by learning to speak Greek. My problem with this conception of tradition, as pointed out above, is that it might be said to presuppose implicitly an imperialist, chauvinist or racist logic. One recalls the remark that Heidegger was reported to have made to Karl Löwith in 1936, when he asserted that his concept of historicity was at the basis of his political engagement with National Socialism.²¹

It is with this problem in mind that I want to make an excursion into Derrida's 1964 essay, 'Violence and Metaphysics', which deals with the thought of Emmanuel Levinas in so far as that work might be said to offer an ethical challenge to the Heideggerian and Husserlian conceptions of tradition. I think it is justified to claim that Derrida's thinking of tradition, at least in the early work, is dominated by the problem of closure, that play of belonging and non-belonging to the Greco-European tradition, which asserts both the necessity and impossibility of such a tradition. Broadly stated, the problem of closure describes the duplicitous or ambiguous historical moment – *now* – when our language, institutions, conceptuality and philosophy itself show themselves both to belong to a metaphysical (or logocentric) tradition that is theoretically exhausted, while at the same time searching for the breakthrough from that tradition.²² The problem of closure describes the liminal situation of late modernity out of which the deconstructive problematic arises, and which, I believe, Derrida inherits from Heidegger. Closure is the double refusal of both remaining within the limits of the tradition and of transgressing that limit. Closure is the hinge that articulates the double movement between the philosophical tradition and its other(s).

In 'Violence and Metaphysics', Derrida's general claim is that Levinas's project cannot succeed except by posing the question of closure, and that because this problem is not posed by Levinas in *Totality and Infinity*,²³ his dream of an ethical relation to the Other which is linguistic but which exceeds the totalizing language of the tradition, remains just that, a *dream*. Derrida calls it the dream of pure empiricism that evaporates when language awakens. Levinas's discourse – and Derrida repeats this strategy with regard to all discourses that claim to exceed the tradition, those of Foucault,

Artaud, Bataille or whoever – is caught, unbeknownst to itself, in an economy of betrayal, in so far as it tries to speak philosophically about that which cannot be spoken of philosophically.

Now, one conservative way of understanding the problem of closure is to argue that Derrida demonstrates the irresistibility of the claims of the Greco-German tradition and the impossibility of claiming any coherent position outside of this tradition – ‘Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger are always right!’ Although this interpretation is to some extent justified, it is by no means the whole story. The logic of closure works within a double bind, that is, if there is no outside to the philosophical tradition from which one can speak in order to criticize its inside, then, by the same token, there is no inside to the philosophical tradition from which one can speak without contamination by an outside. This is why closure describes the *liminal* situation of late modernity, and why it is a *double* refusal of both remaining within the limits of the tradition and of transgressing those limits. Thus, there is no pure Greek inside to the European tradition that can be claimed as an uncontaminated origin in confronting the crisis. This, I believe, explains Derrida’s strategy when confronted with a unified conception of tradition, when he works to show how any such conception is premised upon certain exclusions which cannot be excluded. One thinks, for example, of his unpicking of Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche or of Foucault’s reading of Descartes, or again in *Glas*, where the focus is on that which refuses the dialectical-historical logic of *Aufhebung*, and in *La carte postale*, where Heideggerian unity of the Greek sending of Being (*envoi de l’être*) is undermined and multiplied into a plurality of sendings (*envois*).

Tradition as a Changing Same

Turning from the philosophical tradition to tradition as such, the deconstructive thinking of tradition leaves one in the situation of the double bind discussed by Derrida in relation to European cultural identity:

It is necessary to make ourselves the guardians of an idea of Europe, of a difference of Europe, *but* of a Europe that consists precisely in not closing off in its own identity and in advancing itself in an exemplary way toward what it is not, toward the other heading or heading of the other, indeed – and this is perhaps something else altogether – toward the other of the heading, which would be the beyond of this modern tradition, another border structure, another shore.²⁴

Although such statements are problematic, not least because Derrida tends to assume too much unity to the ‘European culture’ that is being deconstructed, it is clear that, for him, being European means obeying

the irreducibility of a double duty (and why only a double duty? Why not a triple, quadruple or multiple duty?): to retrieve what Europe is or was, whilst at the same time opening Europe to the non-European, welcoming the foreigners in their alterity.

On a deconstructive account, then, any attempt to interpret tradition and culture in terms of a desire for unity, univocity and purity must be rigorously undermined in order to show how this desire is always already contaminated by that which it attempts to resist and exclude. If deconstruction has a sociology, then it is a sociology of impurity, of contamination. Culture and tradition are hybrid ensembles, they are the products of radically impure mixing and mongrelism. For example, being British today means recognizing the way in which the dominant English culture has been challenged and interpellated by previously dominated cultures, be they Scottish, Welsh, Irish, Afro-Caribbean or Asian. As Edward Said persuasively suggests, the consequence (and inverted triumph) of imperialism is the radical hybridity of culture, where histories and geographies are intertwined and overlapping, troubling any appeal to cultural and national exclusivity. Cultural identity (or perhaps one should say, cultural self-differentiation) is relationally negotiated from amongst competing claims that make conflicting and perhaps awkward demands upon us.

Of course, one response to this conflict is racism, or the essentialist identification of race, culture and nation that is shared by white supremacism, Tebbit-esque British nationalism and oppositional Black nationalism. Needless to say, I do not think the latter are the most felicitous responses to the hybridity of culture and tradition; but the cultural-political task facing the Left, as I see it, lies in *hegemonizing hybridity*. As Said intimates, this can only entail an internationalist politics, which would try to hegemonize those oppositional movements – Said speaks of the *intifada*, the women's movement, and various ecological and cultural movements – that resist the global political cynicism of 'hurrah capitalism'. The vocation of the intellectual (whatever that much-maligned word means at this point and whoever it includes and excludes) consists in trying to focus and exacerbate these internationalist energies by being the exilic consciousness of the present through the practice of what Said calls *contrapuntal criticism*. The latter would be a form of critical-historical, genealogical or deconstructive reflection that would bring us to the recognition of the hybridity of tradition, culture and identity. Contrapuntal criticism, the comparative analysis of the overlapping geographies and intertwined histories of present cultural assemblages, would reveal hybrid ensembles *as* hybrid ensembles and not as unities or essences.

A recent and stunning example of such a contrapuntal criticism is Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*.²⁵ The basic polemical point of this book is to oppose any easy (and fatal) identification of race or culture with nation, where notions of racial purity function as legitimating discourses for nationalistic politics, for example within Black nationalism. In opposition to the latter, the black Atlantic is a transnational and intercultural framework that exceeds the borders of existing or Utopian nation states; it is a 'rhizomorphic, fractal structure' that opposes 'the ethnic absolutism that currently dominates black political culture'.²⁶ What is most impressive about Gilroy's book is the way in which the frequently reified and reifying discourse on race and roots is transposed onto a discourse of routes: a historical tableau of traversals and criss-crossings signifying upon a vast oceanic surface; a diaspora, that Gilroy courageously compares to Jewish experience, but where the potentially Mosaic discourse of roots and the promised land is maintained as a mosaic of routes. Gilroy engages in what we might call a spatialization of history, where the potential essentialism of historical narrative is problematized through a recourse to geography.

But it is Gilroy's conception of tradition that, for me at least, forms the centre of the book and which speaks directly to the concerns of this article. Gilroy's basic historical thesis is that it is not possible to view slavery as an epiphenomenon within modernity, or as some residue of pre-modern barbarism carried over into modernity. Rather, using Zygmunt Bauman's terminology, slavery and black Atlantic experience as a whole constitute a distinct *counter-culture* within modernity that complicates and disrupts certain versions of modernity's emancipatory project. The question here is whether there is room for a memory of slavery within modernity; that is to say, for Gilroy, is there room for a personalized, sublime and perhaps pre-discursive moment of liberatory creativity within modern experience? This emphasis upon creativity and aesthetic experience takes us to Gilroy's main contention, which is that black expressive culture, particularly music, is the means for articulating this counter-culture and for activating this memory. For Gilroy, black music is 'a cipher for the ineffable, sublime, pre-discursive and anti-discursive elements in black expressive culture'.²⁷ Black music is, in Gilroy's words, a *changing same*. Taking the examples of dubbing, scratching, sampling, mixing, borrowing and alluding that one can find in Hip Hop, Rap, Reggae and more recent musical hybrids, Gilroy argues against the notion of an authentic racial art and the conception of black music as a fixed dialogue between a thinking racial self and a stable racial community. In this sense, black musical expression exemplifies the relation between identity and difference that is constitutive of cultural

traditions and tradition as such. Thus, cultural traditions, like music, cannot be reduced to 'the transmission of a fixed essence through time', but is rather a series of 'breaks and interruptions'. In this sense tradition itself 'may be a distinct though covert response to the destabilizing flux of the post-contemporary world'.²⁸

Tradition is a changing same – that is, by insisting on the place of the memory of slavery within modernity, Gilroy disputes the supposed opposition between tradition and modernity, where, for example, black nationalists might claim the purity and authenticity of an African tradition in order to oppose the oppression of European and American modernity. This can be seen vividly in George G.M. James's attempt to show how the Greco-European tradition that culminates in modernity and racism is, in fact, a stolen legacy from a prior Egyptian and African civilization.²⁹ In contradistinction to such attempts, Gilroy fascinatingly proposes a *black modernism*, that is to say, a self-consciously modernist relation to tradition, where the specificity of the modern lies precisely in the consciousness of the problematic relation between the past and the present, between tradition and the individual talent. For the modernist, and the resonances with Derrida's notion of closure here become apparent, tradition is that to which we simultaneously belong and do not belong, what Gilroy suggestively calls '*a non-traditional tradition, an irreducibly modern, ex-centric, unstable and asymmetrical cultural ensemble that cannot be apprehended through the manichean logic of binary coding*'.³⁰ Tradition is that duplicitous experience of continuity and rupture or of belonging and non-belonging that we have tried to discuss already in relation to Derrida. In response to this conception of tradition, what is required, according to Gilroy, is a Du Boisian experience of double consciousness, or simultaneous attraction and repulsion, where one recognizes the doubleness of one's identity as being shaped by modernity without feeling fully part of it.³¹ *An experience of modernity as something which one is both unable to believe and unable to leave.* In Toni Morrison's words, tradition, like the supple and evasive rhythms of funk, 'slaps and it embraces, it slaps and it embraces'.³² Tradition is the story of overlapping geographies and intertwined histories, perhaps an ultimately non-narratable narrative that thwarts the desire for cultural, racial or philosophical purity.

Contrapuntal Philosophy?

Drawing together the threads of this discussion into a conclusion, in addition to the two senses of tradition we introduced above, we are now in a position to add a third.

- (1) *Sedimented tradition*: where tradition is inherited as forgetfulness of origins, as pre-critical inheritance or pre-philosophical *doxa*, as the moral world-view that is inculcated into us by family, schooling, etc.
- (2) *Reactivated tradition*: the Socratic moment of a critical, philosophical engagement with the first sense and the retrieval of an 'authentic' Greco-European tradition (histories and genealogies of Spirit, of nihilism, of Being's oblivion, of the forgetfulness of origin). This is the *philosophical* articulation of sedimented tradition, which one might conceive as a defining characteristic of *modernity*.
- (3) *Deconstructed tradition*: where the unity, univocity and linearity of the reactivated traditions would be critically questioned, and where the founding presuppositions of such traditions would be shown to be premised upon certain exclusions that are non-excludable, leaving us in the double bind of closure, and encouraging us to face up to the doubleness (or more than doubleness) or hybridity of tradition, culture and identity. This would be the contrapuntal or double consciousness of tradition as a changing same.

So, deconstruction provides a third sense to the concept of tradition, where the reactivated philosophical-critical sense of tradition – a perpetual modernity – is not rejected or set aside, but rather where its power for getting us to face the crisis of the present is both incorporated and – crucially – *contested*, where the philosophical tradition is forced to acknowledge the limits of its jurisdiction and the failure of its demand for exclusivity.

As I see it, the position I have argued for has three important consequences for those concerned with philosophy and its history: (1) The acceptance of the necessity of the Greco-European tradition as the linguistic and conceptual resource with which what 'we Europeans' (leaving the limits of this 'we' deliberately vague) call thinking takes place. (2) The necessary failure of any attempt to constitute an uncontaminated Greco-European tradition, a pure inside that would presuppose the European exclusivity of philosophy and the privileging of the European over the non-European. The identity of the European tradition is always impurely traced and contaminated by the non-European other that it tries unsuccessfully to exclude. (3) The acceptance of the impossibility of a pure outside to the European tradition for 'we Europeans', the irretrievability of an other origin, the fantasy of a European anti-Eurocentrism, of anti-ethnocentrism, of romantic anti-Hellenism, of all post-Rousseauesque versions of what Derrida calls *nost-Algérie*.

Tradition, culture and identity are irreducibly hybrid ensembles. The purpose of critical-historical, genealogical or deconstructive reflection – contrapuntal criticism – is to bring us to a recognition of these ensembles *as ensembles*. On analogy with the latter, I wonder – and this is the tentative expression of a (Utopian) hope rather than the statement of a programme – whether it would be possible to study and practise philosophy contrapuntally. That is, to philosophize out of an experience of the utter contingency of historical being (and being as such in so far as the latter is constituted historically) and with reference to the intertwining and overlapping of those histories and geographies that make up something like a philosophical canon or tradition. As I see it, this would mean studying the history of philosophy not as a unified, universal, linear, narratable and geographically delimitable (i.e. European) procession stretching from the Athens of Socrates to Western late modernity, but rather as a series of constructed, contingent, invented and possible non-narratable contrapuntal ensembles that would disrupt the authority of the hegemonic tradition. Can one conceive of the philosophical tradition as a series of contrapuntal ensembles? I have two closing suggestions in this regard: firstly, might it be possible to conceive of the history of philosophy in terms of what Derrida calls with reference to Levinas *sériature*, that is, an interrupted series, or series of interruptions that would constitute less a teleologically destined succession of epochs or figures of spirit and more a multiplicity of sendings in the manner performed in *La carte postale*?³¹ Secondly, might the history of philosophy be approached *geographically*: as a series of plateaux in the manner of Deleuze and Guattari, that is, as a multiplicity of dated, stratified assemblages?³² Might not such a contrapuntal consciousness of the philosophical tradition have the potential to transform philosophy into a practice of radical reflection rooted in the acceptance and affirmation of hybridity as the condition of possibility for philosophy's historical emergence and its future flourishing?

NOTES

1. These thoughts were first assembled for a conference on the theme of de-traditionalization held at Lancaster University in July 1993. They were extensively reworked for a conference on the work of Edward Said held at Warwick University in March 1994. But their real source lies in conversations with Robert Bernasconi over the past few years and, more recently, with Homi Bhabha. I am particularly grateful for the careful comments of Jonathan Rée and Peter Osborne, although I don't think I have fully responded to either of their criticisms.
2. See Hegel, 'Tragedy and the Impiety of Socrates', in A. and H. Paolucci (eds), *Hegel on Tragedy*, New York: Harper and Row, 1975, pp. 345–66; and Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (transl. by W. Kaufmann), New York: Vintage, 1967; and 'The Problem of Socrates', in *Twilight of the Idols* (transl. by R.J. Hollingdale), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968, pp. 29–34.

3. 'Tragedy and the Impiety of Socrates', p. 364.
4. 'Meditations on First Philosophy, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. II (transl. by J. Cottingham, et al.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 12.
5. 'Violence and Metaphysics', in *Writing and Difference* (transl. by A. Bass), London and New York: Routledge, 1978, p. 81.
6. In *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (transl. by D. Carr), Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970, pp. 269–99.
7. Martin Bernal, *Black Athena. The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, vol. 1, 'The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785–1985', London: Vintage, 1991 [1987].
8. I rely here on Robert Bernasconi's paper, 'Heidegger and the Invention of the Western Philosophical Tradition', *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, forthcoming.
9. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983; see esp. pp. 1–14 and 263–307.
10. See Jonathan Rée, 'English Philosophy in the Fifties', *Radical Philosophy*, 65, p. 15.
11. In this regard, see especially Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, London: Macmillan, 1989.
12. David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture, Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, p. 6. Also see in this regard Harry M. Bracken's 'Philosophy and Racism', *Philosophia*, vol. 8, 1978, pp. 241–60. In an innovative and provocative discussion of racism and empiricism, it is argued that Lockean (and, to a lesser extent, Humean) empiricism facilitate 'the expression of racist ideology and that Locke was actively involved in formulating politics (compatible with those theories) and encouraging practices (e.g. the African slave trade and perpetual racial slavery) which were racist in character' (p. 255). In contrast to empiricism, and by way of a covert defence of the Cartesianism of Chomsky's linguistic theory, Bracken argues that Cartesianism contains 'a modest conceptual barrier to racism' (p. 254).
13. *Crisis of the European Sciences*, p. 17.
14. *Crisis of the European Sciences*, p. 273.
15. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1993, p. xiv.
16. *Crisis of the European Sciences*, p. 52.
17. *Crisis of the European Sciences*, p. 3.
18. *Being and Time* (transl. by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson), Oxford: Blackwell, 1962; German pagination, p. 395; English pagination, p. 447.
19. Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992, p. 204 (my emphasis).
20. 'Violence and Metaphysics', p. 82.
21. Karl Löwith, 'My Last Meeting with Heidegger in Rome, 1936', in R. Wolin (ed.), *The Heidegger Controversy*, Cambridge, Mass. & London: MIT, 1993, p. 142.
22. For a detailed discussion of the problem of closure in Derrida, see my *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992, pp. 59–106. For an illuminating discussion of tradition in Derrida in comparison with Walter Benjamin, see Alexander Garcia Düttmann's 'Tradition and Destruction', in A. Benjamin and P. Osborne (eds), *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy*, London & New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 33–58.
23. I argue that matters become much more complicated in Levinas's later work, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*; in this regard, see my 'Eine Vertiefung der ethischen Sprache und Methode', *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, vol. 42, no. 4, 1994, pp. 643–51.
24. Derrida, *The Other Heading*, (transl. by P-A. Brault and M. Naas), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992, p. 29.
25. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London: Verso, 1993.
26. *The Black Atlantic*, pp. 4–5.
27. *The Black Atlantic*, p. 120.
28. *The Black Atlantic*, p. 101.
29. George G. M. James, *Stolen Legacy. Greek Philosophy is Stolen Egyptian Philosophy*, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1992 [1954].

30. *The Black Atlantic*, p. 198 (my emphasis).
31. Incidentally, this is also how Cornel West defines the situation of the prophetic critic, in *Keeping Faith. Philosophy and Race in America*, London & New York: Routledge, 1993, p. xxi.
32. *Keeping Faith*, p. 78.
33. See Derrida, 'At This Very Moment in This Work Here I am' (transl. by R. Berezdivin), in R. Bernasconi and S. Critchley (eds), *Re-Reading Levinas*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991; and *The Post Card* (transl. by A. Bass), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
34. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (transl. by B. Massumi), London: Athlone, 1988. Although, with regard to Deleuze and Guattari, it should be noted that they also insist upon the exclusivity of the Greek beginning to philosophy: 'If we really want to say that philosophy originates with the Greeks, it is because the city, unlike the empire or state, invents the agon as the rule of society of 'friends', of the community of free men as rivals (citizens).' (*What is Philosophy?* (transl. by G. Burchell and H. Tomlinson), London, Verso, 1994, p. 9; and cf. pp. 43–4 and Chapter 3, 'Geophilosophy', pp. 85–113). Although Deleuze and Guattari insist upon the contingency of the historical origin of philosophy in Greece, and emphasize the crucial role that migrants and foreigners played in the formation and articulation of Greek culture, their representation of philosophy and the ancient world is pervaded by the power of invented tradition as presented in this article. For example, their representation of the space of the *polis* as the pre-philosophical plane of immanence and the condition of possibility for philosophical concept creation would seem, in a manner that is absolutely traditional, to link the historical emergence of philosophy to the political form of democracy in opposition to the alleged hierarchy and transcendence of all forms of imperial or theological space. But this is precisely to forget that the space of the Greek *polis* was, at once, powerfully imperial and theological. In this context, I would merely like to signal my intention here of continuing the work begun in this article in a critical discussion of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'geophilosophy'.

Postscript (July 1995)

The intention behind the previous article is the following: to see whether the concept of hybridity, so pervasive as an explanatory category in recent cultural theory, can be productively extended into a reflection on philosophy and the philosophical tradition. This intention has a two-way motivation, as I see it:

- (1) To confront an under-interrogated philosophy of history – a eurocentrism, an imperialism, a racism even – that is still hegemonic in much philosophical discussion and pedagogy.
- (2) To try and lend some philosophical gravity to debates in recent cultural theory which often seem to proceed with an unbearable lightness when it comes to the philosophical articulation and interrogation of their basic categories.

And yet, re-reading my article a year or so after writing it, a sceptical doubt troubles me. It concerns the alleged relation or equation between the category of hybridity and intellectual resistance. Throughout my paper, I faithfully follow Said's understanding of the intellectual as a nomadic or exilic figure and implicitly assume that nomadism and exile can be interpreted as figures of cultural and

political resistance to the contemporary world, to that bewildering network of what we all too readily and easily call 'late capitalism'. For Said, the critical intellectual has the obligation to speak the truth to power, to disrupt any and every consensus, to be the dissensual, oppositional moment in relation to whatever passes for common sense, to refuse academic specialization and professionalization by claiming the position of amateur and generalist, a position that Said assimilates to the nomadic experience of exile, an exile at once actual or metaphorical, even metaphysical.¹ But is such a view of the intellectual plausible? Is the intellectual described with the figures of nomad, exile or agent of hybridity a source of resistance to late capitalism or do not these figures rather suggest a troubling complicity with that which the intellectual intends to oppose? That is to say, might not hybridity, exile and nomadism better describe the deterritorializing force and the speculative flows of late capitalism and the theories of its management gurus and marketing consultants rather than constituting any resistance to it?² International capitalism, specifically the near-neurotic behaviour of the financial markets – testified to in the recent collapse of the Baring Bank at the hands of the nomadic Nick Leeson – is, in the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari, a nomadic war machine, working largely and increasingly independently of the state apparatus, where the activity of business is the ever-transient reconfiguration of skills, knowledges and products in response to rapidly changing, hybridizing markets. My question is: who is the nomad in these contemporary circumstances? Is it the entrepreneurial capitalist or is it the secular intellectual? Is it Edward Said or is it rather Nick Leeson? But if this is at least a question (and that is all I am claiming), then might this not lead one to be a little suspicious of notions of nomadism, exile and hybridity as categories in terms of which one can articulate intellectual resistance?

But, to follow this thought speculatively a little further, how is intellectual resistance possible? Is it even desirable? Is resistance itself the most felicitous response to late capitalism? Is it not too *reactive* in the Nietzschean sense? Should we not, rather than opposing late capitalism reactively, seek to think through some kind of *active affirmation* of its enormously creative and destructive energy? Should we not, as travelling theorists and jet-set professors, try to ride the surf of late capitalism in some sort of parasitic low-wage parody of the deterritorializing displacements of late capitalism, whose agents I sit next to on the aeroplane (he reads *Business Week*, I read Guy Debord), hoping that the enormously creative and destructive energy of late capitalism turns over into cyber-revolution, hoping that the multiple and relative deterritorializations of late capitalism might turn over into an absolute deterritorialization? Exciting as it

sounds – and mania is, as Freud noted, one possible response to the trauma of mourning – I have my doubts about this apocalyptic version of Deleuze and Guattari (there are less apocalyptic versions of their thought) and its concomitant economic teleology and atheodicy. But that still leaves open the question as to whether and how intellectual resistance is possible and what categories might be employed to articulate it.

What is so troubling about capitalism to many on the Left is precisely its extraordinary hybridizing energy, its ability to assume new forms, to hegemonize itself, to recuperate what was originally intended as opposition and sell it as a commodity (situationist graffiti crops up on CD packaging and T-shirts, the new South African flag flashes across the television screen between the beer commercial of the programme sponsor and live action from the Rugby World Cup). What is more disturbing is capitalism's ability to renew and propagate itself, not out of any reactive gestures, but rather out of a cheerfully superficial affirmativeness. The problem with the 'bad Nietzscheanism' of late capitalism is that it refuses to place in question the very social, economic and political premises of its own system and the gross iniquities, inequalities and wastefulness that it leaves in its wake. And it is perhaps here that we might be able to specify the difference between the nomadic entrepreneur and the nomadic intellectual, between Nick Leeson and Edward Said, because whereas the former does not place late capitalism in question, but accepts its language of forces and markets as a quasi-metaphysical reality, the latter precisely places that reality in question, engaging in a genealogical ideology critique that would trace the conditions of possibility for the emergence of late capitalism. In Adornian terms, which are interestingly echoed both by Said³ and Deleuze and Guattari,⁴ what late capitalism lacks is a *critical* or a *utopian* moment. My question is: are the categories of hybridity, nomadism and exile adequate to the articulation of such a critical and utopian moment and the production of an effective basis for intellectual resistance or do they, on the contrary, block the possibility of such resistance?

1. See Said's 1993 Reith Lectures, *Representations of the Intellectual*, London: Vintage, 1994; esp. Chapter 3, 'Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals', pp. 35–47.
2. I here follow an interesting line of argument developed by James Williams in 'Nomads and the Management of Liberation' (unpublished typescript).
3. *Representations of the Intellectual*, pp. 40–4.
4. See *What is Philosophy?*, London: Verso, 1994, p. 99.

Derrida, Language Games, and Theory

Michael J. C. Echeruo

Foucault says (in *The Order of Things*) that the cardinal error of European Classical thought was its brazen search for verbal order: the desire to 'ascribe a name to things and in that name to name their being'. The Eighteenth century was wiser. Under it, language no longer consisted 'only of representations and of sounds that in turn represent the representations'. Language was understood as consisting also 'of formal elements, grouped into a system, which impose upon the sounds, syllables, and roots an organization that is not that of representations' (Foucault 1970:235). But even that step was not enough. Saussure's discovery of 'structural linguistics' radicalized the concept of the 'formal' in the sense that the relation between the signifier and the signified came to be seen as absolutely and inherently 'arbitrary'. In Saussure's linguistic system, there are only 'differences'. Meaning is not immanent in the signifier; it is the product of a *différance* between one signifier and all other signifiers.

If that were all, we would simply proceed, following Frederic Jameson, with the 'rethinking of everything through once again in terms of linguistics' (1972:vii). But that is no longer possible. Postmodernists have compounded the language issue by rejecting the (in their view) extremely simplistic view of the relationship between sign and referent. In speaking and writing, they tell us, we do not simply generate more than one meaning, nor even a multiplicity of meanings, but a gross heterogeneity of meanings, a signification which 'could be neither univocal nor stable'. Every text, every word, was a collage of collages, every utterance a large mouthful of all-sense and non-sense. In David Harvey's words, 'Whatever we write conveys meanings we do not or could not possibly intend, and our words cannot say what we mean' (1989:49). Derrida's associate, Jean-Luc Nancy, put it this way: *différance* is

nothing other than the infinite repetition of meaning, which does not consist in its duplication or in any way of always distancing itself to infinity, but which is rather the grounding of meaning, which is to say the absence of a ground, which destines it to be that which it *is*: its own *différance*. (1992:39)

A sense of history makes me suspect that there may be more than an accidental relationship between Foucault's new archaeology,

Derrida's desedimentation and that ill-favored classical *episteme* which post-modernism so thoroughly derides. For if Heidegger, why not Derrida?

The Russian Formalist, Aleksei Losev, began a 1970 essay on language theory with the disarming question: 'To whom and for what reason do we need to explain the simple truth that we communicate with one another by means of language and that language which is not an instrument of communication is not language at all?' (1984:85). The question arises (he says) because bourgeois linguists had 'suddenly [begun] to view language . . . as some kind of aggregate of mathematical signs'. Losev can understand

that those who recognize that language is an instrument of communication would think up various kinds of signs to signify that communication, just as mathematicians also aid in human communication through their mathematical signs and have no intention whatsoever of abolishing such communication.

Losev suggests, as a practical matter, that 'linguists and mathematicians should simply shake hands with each other in this case and, having divided up their territory in terms of types of human communication, leave the communication itself alone and recognize its whole range of possibilities' (1984:86).

Underneath Losev's position is an assumption which many modern Western scholars and philosophers no longer make, namely, that there is a world out there to be reflected in language. 'What could be simpler,' Losev asks, 'than that an objective world exists around us, that it affects our consciousness, and that our representation of it is simply the result of its reflection on our consciousness?' (1984:86). Indeed, as Losev goes on to explain, the last half century has seen 'an immense multitude of philosophers who forbid including the concept of the world or being in philosophy'. These philosophers, especially Husserl and the Neopositivists, consider any philosophy which addresses problems of objective being or even of world view to be bad philosophy. 'It turns out,' Losev concludes, that, for these errant thinkers, 'genuine scientific philosophy only begins when we simply exclude all problems of world view from it' (1984:87). Losev's dire concern really is that it is an impossible assignment to seek by any rational means to correct this aeration. 'In antiquity it used to be said that one fool can throw a little stone so far into the sea that a thousand intelligent and educated people cannot find it'. Quite so!

I have some sympathy for Losev. I can see why the prospect of using words even in a de-constructed critique to seek to understand or characterize the world of experience can become a frustrating and pointless undertaking. And elegance has become a virtue very much

in short supply. So has clarity. Yet, for all that sympathy, it should have been clear to Losev as to the bourgeois Neopositivists he criticizes, that the movement in our thinking about language since Locke may not have been as revolutionary as we might suppose, and that humans, if you include non-Westerners, have a shrewder sense of the nature of this medium than Foucault and Derrida allow. Whether simple, clear or elegant, I understand what I write as my attempt to position myself and my 'message' ideally (as only I can) to reflect an angle of vision proper to myself and for my readers. What I do is to decide to use a language as a medium, and so enter into a contract with it. On the basis of that contract, I invoke an aesthetic principle, the principle of style, to insinuate my meaning. This is calculated mediation. It is calculated on my part; it is mediated by the contract of language. My meaning or message may not be patent, and cannot be transparent, but there is a presumption of purposiveness (a feature which can, indeed, include deviousness) in the very undertaking. What we do with language, is communicate. Language, and specific languages, create the condition for this communication, and prescribe its limits – each language in its own way.

My proposition is this: languages are best understood as systems subject to three laws: the law of their nature as language (entities) including the character of their lexicon; the law of their grammar as structures, and the law of their condition in and over time through adaptation.

Firstly, it is obvious enough that human languages are not all alike, however much they may be related. Indeed, to speak of a family of languages, or of the languages of man, is to acknowledge that languages may even be species-specific. The biological analogy is more than a manner of speaking, although when invoking it, one must be careful to also specify that organisms are not themselves always self-determining.

Furthermore, and secondly, Grammar, especially Universal Grammar, is more calculus than geometry; it calculates (even as it describes) a relationship, and generates a codex (in the Chomskian model at least) by which individual grammars can be spoken of at the highest level of generalization.¹ The task, as it were, of painstakingly identifying the syntactical structures underlying language in order, apparently, to determine all the sets of rules which generate meaningful (and exclude non-meaningful) utterances in language – this task could only produce a formula, not solve the equation. It is easy enough to see that language had to have both surface and deep levels of structuring. It is quite another matter to conclude that the logic of those foundations is the same for all languages. Whence, for example, our ability to speak of the plural morpheme and its different

realizations in various languages. Such a generalization cannot explain the phenomenon of the *dual plural* in Greek or the realization of that morpheme as zero in many African languages. Nothing more can be meant by that generative rule, therefore, than that fictitious symbols can be used to represent functions which are enacted in very different phonological and contextual situations. It is so also with Transformational Universalism. For although, possibly, underlying representations where they can be established will be more uniform than surface representations, this cannot be used to counter the fact that the lexicon shows no such universal uniformity (Schlesinger 1991:31).

In any event, and thirdly, we do recognize that the realization of the plural morpheme in English as [z] is only a survival or fossil from earlier centuries of active adaptation. Neither the presence of archaic plural forms, nor their absence, is the unmediated work of any individual speakers, or even generations of them. The capacity to entertain or accommodate these changes must be assumed to be inherent in particular languages in the first place, or to be (at least) not incompatible with the *nature* of those languages. The real point of Chomsky's famous quip about 'colorless green ideas sleeping furiously' is its re-iteration of the necessary dissociation between the lexicon and the dictionary, and between both and syntax. Languages exist which remind us of that dissociation, not with a travesty of lexis, but with a symphony of tonal melodies. What Kluckhohn and Leighton once said of Navaho Indian language comes to mind: 'a chemical language', 'the most delicate language we know with regard to its phonetic dynamics' (quoted in Rossi-Landi 1973:25). Languages borrow words from other languages, but in their own manner, and in complete consistency with their own inherent phonology. This resilience and adaptability of language argues for my position that languages are part of our socialization and yet are (in principle) greater than and beyond it; that languages are both a means and a condition for communication and consciousness; and especially, that languages express us. And *us* are a variety of peoples, not objects; certainly not all Indo-European. And this proposition is not just another variation on Whorf, who, if pressed, would probably have agreed with Humboldt that the Indo-European family of languages was the 'most propitious for thought' (Schlesinger 1991:14).

In this context, Losev's view of language is not as reprehensible as its association with Lenin might otherwise make it. Losev believed that 'a more or less complete and clear resolution' of the language problem is possible only 'as a result of a complete and clear analysis of the Leninist theory of reflection'. The Leninist theoretical context authorizes a view of language not as an abstract system but as 'that

active contemplation which, with the aid of abstract thought, is transformed into creative practical action of the human individuals who are communicating with one another' (Losev 1984:89). And what Losev means makes sense in practice. Language is 'neither an inanimate thing, nor an animate activity. There exist, physiologically and psychologically, thousands of acts that have nothing to do with language'. What is specific to language is that

it above all reproduces something in consciousness and thought, that is, that it is the aggregate of certain representative acts. . . . The further complication of the act of representation is the semantic act, which does not simply reproduce objects but also constructs a particular comprehension of them. (Losev 1984:95)

Naming does not create the object, nor does it replace or reproduce that object. Instead, the verbal designation 'displays enormous semantic activity, restructuring a broad concept in a certain direction and forcing us to approach the objectively existing object from only one, very specific and very differentiated aspect' (Losev 1984:92).

This is a pre-condition for the language games Derrida is wont to play, and which he is wont to make central to his theory of language and translation. The presumption that lexis and syntax are structured for meaning argues that utterances within language can, therefore, *play* on our expectations from those structures: 'I am who am' is a joke, a riddle, and a plain statement all at the same time. It is all three (and more) because of English. And the 'more' of my previous sentence is not without limit; or, more exactly, that there is no knowing how much more there is does not mean that there are no constraints to what 'more' can amount to. Derrida misses this point entirely in 'Des Tours de Babel'. Babel is not about difficult syntax, nor about incomprehensible neologisms. *Finnegans Wake* is, after all, an English text. Nor is Babel about the transformation of God into Confusion, of mortar into brick: Derrida himself, like the author of *Genesis* (but not Voltaire) had no way of punning on HIS name. What Babel signifies is the absurdity of an all-comers language; of utterance not determined and made manifest by its own registers: as would a text of Urdu and Gaelic and Igbo that is not accommodated to Urdu or Gaelic or Igbo. Or, as Derrida phrases it, innocently, '. . . in Hebrew "lip" designates what we call, in another metonymy, "tongue". One will have to say multiplicity of lips and not of tongues to name the Babelian confusion' (1991:246). What Babel, therefore, re-affirms is the integrity of languages as systems which can nevertheless accommodate any *legitimate* games their speakers care to play within their corners.²

We cannot, therefore, use, abuse, or refuse words either as words or

as concepts if the precise conditions of their possibility did not exist *in advance* in the language of use. And yet, that determination, or the impossibility of it, supposes that there is a field, or range, or manner in which those terms, when invoked, can specifically possess meaning. The creation of that condition is the privilege of language, and specific languages determine those conditions variously, both syntactically (as we all know), and semantically.

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida says:

The 'rationality' [which governs a writing] inaugurates the destruction, not the demolition but the de-sedimentation, the deconstruction of all the significations that have their source in that of the logos. Particularly the signification of truth. (1974:10)

In practice, what Derrida proposes, since he too uses language, and particular languages at that, is a bracketing off of elements of language, specifically the helpless *words* of language. What he inaugurates is a regime of displacement. What I would call the 'default' – the 'pre-play' – modes-of-meaning in language are displaced by a 'derived', 'metaphysically constituted' (but in itself extremely valid) other mode-of-meaning. By the 'default mode' I mean that mode of meaning, assuming a total absence of other agency, which an instance of language would have, even if (or even though) it never does (or could). A default sense safeguards that absolute notion of a 'relationship' in view of which Saussurian distribution and significance would operate. All sense, therefore, must become variants, or perhaps allotropes, of that default or virtual meaning. It does not make sense to say (as, for example, Derrida does say, speaking of 'giving' and 'gift' and 'Being' in Heidegger's *Zeit und Sein*) that 'there is no such thing [then] as a Being or an essence of the woman or the sexual difference, there is also no such thing as an essence' (1979:121). Every word of that statement is hypothesized by an implicit and total bracketing (underscoring/italicizing) which serves to distinguish each word as not capable of operating in the default mode. If there is no default, there can be no underscoring; or rather, the bracketing or underscoring which Derrida invokes would be without effect; and in that case, also, there would be no possibility of that play on *coup* (*blow, gift, price, and poison*) – in Nietzsche – which reinforces Derrida's oppositions in his own text. It is a matter which John Llewelyn has raised when he asks if Derrida's usages should not properly be placed in 'inverted commas' and 'scare quotes'. Moreover, he points out, all it would take to turn the gibberish of Derrida's 'Fox and and and and and Goose' is a couple of 'inverted commas' which would straighten out the sense (Llewelyn 1992:73–74).

A different question altogether arises regarding the uses to which such language games can be put – different, that is, from the question whether there is a possibility of meaning to particular uses of language. In other words, to say that what Derrida says does not make sense is not to say that it makes no sense to me. It is to affirm, at least, that what he does say – his text – is language-in-use; and is, by reason of that fact, liable to a play against default meanings. The larger questions which Derrida raises regarding metaphysical questions are themselves also viable only in that context of language-in-use. Languages, I argue, prescribe the kinds of games that can be played within their scope. Metaphysical games are, in that sense, actually (if not pre-eminently) games which particular languages *permit*. Says Derrida, in a passage which only language makes possible:

That which will not be pinned down by truth is, in truth – *feminine*. This should not, however, be hastily mistaken for a woman's femininity, for female sexuality, or for any other of those essentializing fetishes which might still tantalize the dogmatic philosopher, the impotent artists or the inexperienced seducer who has not yet escaped his foolish hopes of capture. (1979:55)

The prose is Ciceronian, which is also to say that it is Latin. To allow that is also to wonder at the lavish fecundity which often makes Ciceronian prose, in spite of its posturing, immensely attractive and feminine. But Tacitus would not have tolerated 'essentializing fetishes', 'dogmatic philosophers', 'impotent artists', 'inexperienced seducers' and 'foolish hopes'. The judgement would be one of style, with all the possibilities of parody and/or sentimentality. What Derrida means, in translation, at least, is implicated in the very nature of the language of its original French and subsequent English rendering, including especially those other resonances (immanent resonances) which, in the first instance, encouraged a translation into latinate English. The truth Derrida speaks is his meaning; but only language, a particular language (or a related family of languages) can carry its peculiar burden. Derrida's meaning is not 'true', however, precisely because Derrida *pre-effaces* the default meaning of the language he uses. Worse still, he does not allow for the fact that what he uses is a language. This is not to say, either, that what he says has no meaning, for precisely because it is within a language, what we have can be nothing like the 'rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers' of which Lacan speaks in connection with schizophrenia (see Harvey 1989:53).

I suggest, then, that my 'default mode of meaning' is perhaps what Derrida should have been looking for in that fragment of Nietzsche's about a forgotten umbrella discussed at some length in *Spurs*. No dint

of diligence or good fortune, Derrida reminds us, can reconstruct the internal and external context of that fragment. The concept of a fragment itself, since it is an appeal to 'some totalizing complement', would not even suffice. The meaning and the signature that appropriates it remain in principle inaccessible, not because it is a hidden secret, nor merely a result of inconsistency or of perversity on Nietzsche's part. All this Derrida asserts, and he is right. He is right, too, to re-narrate the elements of the old-style grammar of that fragment: the verb 'to have' in auxiliary formation, the possessive adjective, etc. All this cannot be gainsaid. We should remember, though, that Derrida also refers to that 'stratum of readability' which could 'eventually be translated with no loss into any language' (1979:121–124). Between that stratum and the rarified meta- (or pseudo) language of Derrida's own analysis, I would want to place the stability of a default mode. 'I have forgotten my umbrella' can always be read; but can only be read under the conditions of the three laws of nature, grammar and adaptation. Otherwise, reading must become a scrambling over bracketed and unreal fragments. And about those we can always argue for ever, with neither clarity nor elegance.

But 'proper', in the etymologically quaint sense of *proprius*, can have real meaning, because the permanent displacement of the *proper* with the *derived* (without a full erasure of the *proper*) denies to language the possibility of ambivalence (or more exactly, *multi-valence*), and instead institutes a regime of radical ambiguity. That is to say, whereas the restoration of a 'putative' (my 'default') propriety of meaning allows for the possibility, and (better still), the certainty of reflection and play through wordplay, Derrida's bracketing of words results in the creation of valid but idiosyncratic languages, themselves actually impoverished by their lack of access to that creative resonance which comes from a stable *proprietas* of meaning.

By a stable *proprietas* of meaning, I do not mean a fixed, joyless lexicon of sacred apportionments of meanings. I mean, rather, the *ur*-base (or hypothetical base) of meaning affirmed by all acts of writing and of inscribing, as well as by the logic of the differentiations which, fortunately, Saussurian linguistics has made explicit. I only add this qualification, that complementary distribution, while providing the condition for differentiation, cannot itself explain particular 'meanings'. In other words, though the bilabial plosive which begins *bad* differentiates that sequence from another that begins with a dental (as in *dad*), yet nothing in that calculus of relationships explains the semantic point of deviation of the adjectival *BAD* from the parental *DAD*. Nor does complementary distribution explain that feature of languages such as Igbo (a Nigerian language) in which whole phonetic clusters are denied any semantic relevance: in other words,

in languages which nurture consistency within the arbitrariness of the relation between signs and meanings. In that sense, at least, words are objects, created in language, and sustained by a linguistic and cultural logic that separates *bad* from *dad*, both grammatically and actually, not by simple *difference* (such as Saussure defines) nor by *différance*, the 'producer', as Derrida says, 'of those differences' (1981:17) but by a healthy and lively recovery of *proprietas*. Apparently, therefore, we do not so much de-sediment when we use language as fabricate. Language is a continuous process of re-construction which, in hindsight, *looks* (must look) like deconstruction.

I am suggesting, in fact, that while words are not name-tags, and have no unilateral relationship to single objects or even ideas, there would seem to be not so much a structure as an organization to them that is not entirely social. Words are socially-constructed events, but they are not, in the context of human language, a-natural. I suggest that there is a momentum, if not a life, in language which, in play with socialization, constructs how, when and why languages ever come to mean. Although this play is part of that momentum and life, it is not free-play, nor is it Derrida's 'endless play of signifiers'. Which also means that the limits of free-play define not only, as Jonathan Culler and the structuralists would say, the moment of competence, but also, in my view, the inevitability of indigenous, self-governing rules.

I should hazard my other proposition at this juncture. Languages differ from one another not only in their grammar, but, specifically, in their ecology. That, at least, is one explanation I can adduce for the kind of variation in culture which we often try to explain in terms of language use. Roland Barthes's point, in *S/Z*, is well taken. Languages, too, are like myths: they do not and cannot pre-date their own inventors. We must not, therefore, appear here to be privileging language (and myth) by ascribing to them the virtues of primary insight. But, having said that, I must quickly underscore the point that Barthes seems to deny natural life to language and myth, thereby reducing them to mere artifacts, mere monuments to our own industry. We may *fashion* myths and languages to consolidate our hegemonies, and use them as if we made them. But we do not ourselves create myths or languages. Nor is our power over language such that we are able to erase language, and make a sentence no longer capable of meaning. What offers a better prospect, perhaps, is the understanding of the hermeneutical dynamics which permits languages to extort particular meanings from us, the dynamics (within languages) which allow for unique kinds of textual interplay; for example, word-formation in German, euphony in French, or monosyllabism in English. What would it matter that a language did not have the convenience which both Cicero and Derrida exploit, of

those magical affixes which can create new entities of thought with a mere *-itas*? What philosophical consequences are made possible by the unavailability of subjunctives in particular languages?

I suggest that the re-construction of linguistic discourse (to coin a phrase) has to be carried out archetypally within the stable boundaries of a culturo-linguistic empire. It is not the case – it cannot be – to use an example recovered from Freud's review of Carl Abel's *Linguistic Essays*, that the Egyptians did not distinguish (in life) between *light* and *darkness*; nor could it be supposed that *light* and *darkness* were for them archaic forms of an unrecoverable trace (or arche-trace). It was improbable, Freud suspected, that this feature was evidence of 'the low state of Egyptian mental development' (1962:63). Carl Abel himself (in *Linguistic Essays*) had indeed stated that Egypt was anything but a house of nonsense. On the contrary,

it was one of the earliest seats of the development of human wisdom . . . A people which lighted the torch of rectitude and culture in such dark ages can certainly not have been positively stupid in everyday speech and thought. (1882b:45–46)

Nor can those words/concepts be thought of as fossils of a violated difference which now haunt the Egyptian psyche. Nor are the Egyptians out to have a good time with Derridesque 'free parodying play'. I suspect not. I offer, as a better explanation, that we consider re-instating to our view of language the very concept of signatures, inherent (genetic) markers within (and alongside) whose regimen the other (including socially manufactured) protocols operate. Thus re-marked, meanings come to life at the stable intersection of the linguistic and the cultural, both features themselves implicated in biology. Or better still, ambivalence (in this case) is present at precisely those intersections and remain there as a stable core. The play of light and darkness in the Egyptian language is not, thus, quite like Derrida's. It is un-eventful, as such. More exactly, it is not THE event. Play lies elsewhere, outside.

There may well be a related problem here, namely that of the unpreparedness of European thought to accept (or respect) difference *within* identity. A turn of mind, nurtured by an obsession with the celebration of its own privilege, may see difference as opposition or conflict rather than as complement. Languages and cultures that accept *duality* need never raise difference to the status of the OTHER, the opposite. The difference between the logic of Indo-European and Egyptian thought becomes symptomatic of an Egyptian inferiority; just as the 'way of India' was for Nietzsche. Is it the case, then, that morphemic difference translates into semantic inferiority; or at least to a manner of difference almost sufficient to justify species-like

distinction between Indo-European and Egyptian languages? Or, should we, like Spinoza and others like him, propose a polygenetic theory of language to account for this difference, with the non-European languages being pre-Adamic? It makes eminent sense, in my view, to assume a near-simultaneous existence of both, some equivalent to the Big Bang idea. What this tells us, though, is that (in the spirit of the preceding analogy), the forms of life that successfully emerge are precisely those that *can* emerge.

Without a doubt, Derrida makes a cogent point in *Writing and Difference* when he denies any user of language the comfort of insurance against caprice. There can, therefore, be no question but that the possibility which language creates for this kind of meaning is not automatically and permanently accessible to users. My point, however, is that there would seem to be good reason to argue that African languages (extending my argument somewhat) present *signatures* which (if that were the only issue) would be said to contest the concepts of Selfhood and Otherness as elaborated in Western discourse. In these languages, instead, we have an accommodating, rather than a discriminating, form of duality. And it would be an important issue for theory to consider in what ways languages pre-dispose human cultures precisely to such and similar discriminations. I use 'pre-dispose' rather than 'prescribe' because, as I argued earlier, languages do also adapt themselves, in and over time, to new (including other linguistic) circumstances.

And this brings me to my last point. Does contemporary literary theory, in its formulation of general laws, take the nature of such languages into serious account? Hegel's stand on the language question is not in doubt. Echoing Rousseau, Hegel argues that there are really only three varieties of languages, and these correspond

almost exactly to three different stages according to which one can consider men gathered into a nation. The depicting of objects is appropriate to a savage people; signs of words and of propositions to a barbaric people; and the alphabet to civilized people.

This may be so. Rousseau's (and Hegel's) formulas would thus create three discrete and exclusive zones of communication, each with its own medium. What is not so clear is whether *intention*, in any sense, remains the same at every stage, or whether (as is more likely to be their point), *intention* expands (becomes more civilized) as we move from objects through signs to the alphabet. The question should be important because if the *voulier-dire* is unchanged, we would only be dealing with a sophistication of medium, rather than of message. Still, even were the *expansion* of intention not at issue, the question would seem to arise regarding the capacity of languages operating in the oral

mode to realize the possibilities of language systems as would those operating in the script mode. Indeed, it is in this area that recent theory seems to find its new moment.

Contemporary language theory, in its celebration of *différance*, has quite ignored much nineteenth-century common-sense work on language and some of the scepticism with which the more strictly mathematical work of (say) Chomsky has been received in several quarters in this century. Carl Abel devoted much of his effort to the consideration of such otherwise mundane questions as the future of the Serbian language in the context of Slav nationalism and the adoption of an appropriate orthography from the slate of Russian (Cyrillian), Latin and German. Abel's preference for the Cyrillian script is based on real, not general theoretical grounds. The question he asks is this: 'Is the affinity between the Slavonic idioms sufficiently near for a people brought up to the use of one of them to be able to learn another as a book language, and gradually to adopt it themselves in their intercourse with the educated?' Abel had a clear notion of the difference between the vernacular and the literate, although, within the European scene, he placed them in a hierarchy not of civilization and savagery, but of high and folk culture. Rather, as he says in the same essay, the

popular tongue would supply the greater portion of roots and forms, while the literary standard would furnish developments and application; the relation being similar to that existing between the Swabian, or the Saxon-Lowland dialects, and the High German speech of cultured society. (1882c:188-189)

To understand the force of Abel's options, we should remember his attitude to national consciousness as expressed in language. Abel states quite categorically: 'The difference between what different nations think, do, and therefore speak, is still more clearly seen in other verbal particulars' (1882a:9). The differences between Germans and Englishmen can be sensed, at a glance, in the difference between the English words *fair* and *equitable* and German *billig* (which unites both ideas.) Although we can see or suspect some race-bound elements even in this small comparison (perfidious Albion!), we should recognize the essential impulse behind his examples. It is that

to some nations, some thoughts do not occur sufficiently often, or are not vivid or incontrovertible enough to seem to make special words necessary for them while to others they appear more important and are considered worth embodying in particular vocables. (1882a:16)

We do not have to accept Abel's list of determinants ('natural disposition, surroundings, and history') to see the basic plausibility of his position.

Chomskian linguistics has avoided dealing with these issues by seeking only to transform rather than etymologize meanings, by virtually ignoring the fact of diachronism.³ We come face to face with the problem only in those sociologists who have concerned themselves with non-European peoples. I am thinking specifically here of Jack Goody's reformulation of the Hegelian idea: the 'relationship between modes of thought and the modes for the production and reproduction of thought', Goody says, '[lies] at the heart of the unexplained but not inexplicable differences that so many writers have noted' between oral/primitive and literate/civilized cultures (1977:43). The argument, couched in the phrases of modern sociology, is that

oral cultures tend to define concepts through situational, operational frames of reference that are minimally abstract. Ideas are comprehended either through their concrete manifestations or through their context, but rarely in terms of other abstract ideas.

But the problem, not properly addressed by Derrida, concerns the legitimacy of language as an instrument of mediation between the binaries (not the dualities) which Western *episteme* had set up between science and magic, abstract and concrete, savage and civilized. For it hardly needs remarking that, in this regard, the underlying notions are more than forms of free frolic. Goody's solution is acted out in a language game. In his scheme, obviously, the language of literacy is considered to be of a higher order than that of orality. Written language is thought to provide more sophisticated analytic tools for the treatment of history (otherwise 'a dense past') than could oral language. Such tools, in turn, encourage 'greater reflexivity [*sic*] and self-scrutiny' (JanMohamed 1984:23; Goody 1977).

The question really is this: What is it that makes scripted languages better tools than orated ones? One answer would seem to be that literacy – the scripting of language, the invention of the alphabet – is always signal to the presence of special forms of consciousness. Societies whose languages do not have an alphabet remain conservative and homeostatic. Such societies valorize collectivity rather than individuality, and are dominated by a totalizing imperative. My own response would, in a sense, tend in the same direction as Goody's. I, too, would argue that languages shape the patterning of thought within cultures in very profound ways. Jack Goody does make it clear that 'oral cultures are unable to develop these characteristics not because of some genetic racial or cultural inferiority but simply because they lack the proper tool, namely literacy'. I would not have needed to say that myself. Literacy (the concurrent presence of script) creates a historical pre-condition for those specific adaptations anticipated in

my third law. Literacy imposes an added layer of abstraction to the language set.

That layer, like Derrida's italicizings, creates a *virtual* sub-set of language within the shell of the original language. The alphabet allows for infractions and heresies to be accommodated within language in ways that would have been impossible (physically, and mechanically) in a phono-dependent language system. In a way what the alphabet does is to accentuate those features of language which, because oral language is almost entirely dependent on phonic elements, could never have been substantially altered otherwise. It is the alphabet that makes it possible for Derrida to make his most important moves. In the passage from *Spurs* quoted earlier, Derrida is able to distinguish his *feminine* from language's *feminine*. The alphabet allows him to italicize the *-ty* in both *femininity* and *sexuality*, in ways that would not have been possible using only the phonic features of the language. Goody's halfway house is untenable.

The objection may be raised, in this case, that *italics* do indeed mimic in script the spoken *tone*, and that such tone would make Derrida's distinctions just as well, perhaps even more easily. The difference is that whereas such tonal changes are part of the supra-segmental repertoire of particular languages, and to that extent, are rule-bound, scribal conventions (triple-brackets, for example) are dictated not by pre-grammar but are only accommodated by grammar. Hence, we may state that the peoples and languages of Africa and their thought processes are not tied to an irremediable bind of indigenous mediocrity, arising from the necessarily un-evolved and primitive nature of their (unscripted) language systems. Every text, thus, embodies both linguistic and extra-linguistic phenomena and elements. The reader has to deal with what the theorists have called intra- and extra-cultural 'lacunae', the baggage of significances which betray the divergences in the circumstances of coding and decoding. I think it is a mistaken kind of theory which suggests that efforts to provide the 'missing' elements in the lacunae of texts are *ipso facto* misdirected and misleading, or that a simple matrix based on the grammar of European languages is applicable, without revision, to African language texts.

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida remarked that Saussurian linguistics, for all its good intentions, was itself still knee-deep in 'the old grid to which is given the task of outlining the domain of a science', and hence, of re-inscribing contrasts between the external and the internal, image and reality, and between representation and presence (1974:33). My own contention is that the contrasts may well have been pre-defined for both Derrida and Saussure by the languages they have used, as it would not be if they were Egyptians. What literacy and

writing (read civilization) have done is to conflate languages and systems, to make possible this absorption of one's meaning-making capacity into the language structures of Universal civilization.

To conclude. I announce my rejection of the *dualism*, and the obsession with the dichotomies of subject and object, of the corporeal and the psychic, for example, which have governed much of contemporary European philosophical discourse. Post-structuralism and post-modernism, as Madison phrases it, are indeed also characterized by their rejection of such distinctions and divisions: between spirit and body, between reason and emotion, between the rational and the irrational (1988:52). I announce a return to *duality*. I do not reject dualism on the same implicitly logical conditions as do the post-structuralists. I do not, for example, posit a larger, and more immeasurable neo-Nietzschean opposition between civilization and barbarism, so-called; in a word, a dualism in the persons of Apollo and Dionysus. For me, Duality goes with ambivalence; dualism with ambiguity. Apollo supposes Dionysus. Apollo and Dionysus are not a tension, but an existence. If (or, since) there is Apollo, then there must be (not just, *is*) Dionysus. Mine is not the either/or of dualism, but the both/and of duality. In theory, then, duality asserts, where dualism derives.

Pascal was right: '[Man] cannot conceive what a body is, and still less what mind is, and least of all how a body can be joined to a mind. This is [Man's] supreme difficulty, and yet it is his very being' (1966:94). Pascal was paraphrasing St Augustine, whose sense of dualism was more descriptive than analytical. That is to say, to allow for body and soul is not, therefore, in St Augustine, to set up two separate regimes of the self, but rather to better describe the mystery of Man himself, as observer and recipient of Providential grace. But even so, *person* becomes a derived entity; derived, that is, from the logic of a dualism in which self-hood is a mathematical 'product' rather than an object. In lay terms, language and culture propose a body opposed to soul, though both co-habit the person. The model of the Self thus remains Cartesian. Difference and undecidability, as well as method and truth, arise necessarily and appropriately from the adoption of this model. Hegelian idealism may have come to an end with Kierkegaard, as Husserl said, but not the habit, etched into Derrida and the grammar of European usage, of seeking to provide a penetration of reality through *one* family of languages.⁴ We must find the means to do better than that.

NOTES

1. But see Rudolf Carnap (1992:72–84)
2. I have argued elsewhere that Roger Caillouis's play on *travesty*, *camouflage*, and *intimidation* depends almost entirely on his use of particular languages. *Games and play* are words constructed by the general fabric of specific language systems (Echeruo 1994:150).
3. I am not arguing the same case as some linguistic relativists and anthropological primitivists who posit a 'fixed' correlation between language, thought, and culture; or who suppose that some languages (Latin, for example) were more 'primitive' than others (e.g. English) because of the differentiation and specialization in their morphology and syntax. For a discussion of which, see Hallpike 1979: chs 2 and 3).
4. According to Derrida, 'Metaphysics' and 'Western thought' are virtually synonymous. Irene E. Harvey says of Derrida's work that it is a response to the tradition of [Continental] Western philosophy 'from Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche, through Husserl, Heidegger, and Levinas' (1986:xi) On Husserl, see Madison (1988:ch. 4).

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Discussion Forum

What is Enlightenment?

A South African Postscript

Shane Moran

The future of enlightenment – what might it consist of?

(Habermas 1989:204)

Recently a South African academic has sought to answer the above question. Claiming affiliation with the Enlightenment heritage, and with the espousal of that heritage by Habermas, Raphaël de Kadt defends an 'ethical vision of modernity [that] stands in tension with the social, political and economic arrangements of modern society' (De Kadt 1989:50). He admits that this 'claim that modernity and the forces of modernization stand in a relation of tension with one another' (46) is as old as the Enlightenment itself. He initially gives a positive valuation to the promise of modernity over technological modernization, and ultimately he attempts to merge modernity and modernization. What de Kadt sees as resolving this tension is of great interest.

According to Jürgen Habermas an 'affirmative stance toward social modernity and devaluation of cultural modernity are typical for the evaluative schema in all neoconservative diagnoses of the contemporary situation' (Habermas 1989:28). In so far as he affirms an ethical view of modernity and a negative view of modernization as social and political organization, de Kadt would seem to escape Habermas's criteria for neoconservatism which entail an affirmative stance toward *social* modernity and the devaluation of *cultural* modernity. But, as I shall show, this does not mean that de Kadt's argument is not essentially conservative in a way that unsettles Habermas's criteria.

De Kadt employs Habermas's phrases 'rational will-formation' and 'discursive rationality', and he is concerned to stress the future fulfilment of the enlightenment promise. He adds his voice to the task of preparing ourselves for freedom, but beneath the rhetoric moves a distinctly naïve and conservative set of presuppositions:

The democratic and emancipatory promise of modernity remains largely unredeemed on account of the anti-democratic and constraining nature of modern systems of power [. . .] I see the promise of the Enlightenment to be as yet unfulfilled, its project incomplete. (De Kadt 1989:50)

The debilitating and alienating effects of modernization are seen to 'inhere in all modern systems of production and social and political organization', and to manifest themselves in 'phenomena identified by such terms as technocracy, knowledge élite, bureaucracy and the surveillance state; they betoken unaccountability, inaccessibility, and the potential for great irresponsibility in the exercise of power' (52).

However, despite this criticism of modernity or modernization, De Kadt also gives a positive valuation to social modernity and 'the processes of modernization, with scientific, technological and economic development' (57). He is concerned with how 'the promise of the enlightenment might be redeemed' (55), and proposes a 'dialectic of modernity':

a dynamic or creative tension between the forces of modernization, governed as they are by the imperatives of technical reason – of profit and the extension of administrative control – and the moral legacy of the Enlightenment defined as it is by an ethic of autonomy and responsibility. (De Kadt 1989:54)¹

However, this is a dialectical relation that amounts to an integrative compatibility of supposedly opposed elements, an antithesis destined for the equanimity of synthesis; 'modernization needs to be integrated with the values of modernity' (57). Modernity needs to be uplifted by the ethics of modernity into a renovated unity, a sublime reconciliation. The optimism of this resolution of the conflict between modernity and modernization (i.e., for de Kadt, between ethics and technology) can be read in the following:

Capitalism, I suspect – and here I think Marx was correct – will not be the last form in which material production will be organized and I suspect that an *ethically higher form of production* will follow it. However, the manner of its coming will, I think be neither the work of an insurrectionary party nor through a working class seizure of parliamentary power. Rather it will be through *the long, complex and highly dis-articulated set of processes* through which the many individual irrationalities of contemporary systems of power will be challenged and transcended. (De Kadt 1989:56; emphasis added)

The utopian faith in 'an ethically higher form of production', and the endorsement of the homogenization of 'the many individual rationalities of contemporary systems' speak for themselves. I only note here the tone of complacency regarding a benignly developmental capitalism inevitably tending towards an evolutionary self-overcoming; while this quietistic invocation accords with aspects of Marx's insistence on the *necessity* of capitalism, it fails to take account of the *condemnation* of capitalism.² Why must an 'ethically higher form of production' follow capitalism?³ There is more hope in such a prognostication than there is suspicion. I refer the reader to Hosea

Jaffe's uncompromising argument that capitalism is the common factor between European and American genocide, and what he calls the 'Fascist' racial policies of apartheid South Africa.⁴

Since the time of writing, 1989, de Kadt has been proved wrong in at least one of his sententious utopian 'predictions': that 'the nation state as the principal object of mass loyalty [. . .] will probably be eroded' (56). I have attempted elsewhere to show the persistent ability of nationalism to reappropriate universalist gestures, and this makes de Kadt's simple opposition (taken from Habermas) between the Enlightenment universality of modernity, and 'reactionary, anti-modernist forces such as those associated with various religious fundamentalisms and nationalisms that stress particularist as opposed to universalist identities' (57), somewhat complacent. By, in Habermas's words, 'morally neutralizing other pasts that would produce only criticism and rejection', de Kadt fulfils one of the negative requirements of neoconservatism. Not only does he neutralize other pasts, such as the various pasts covered by the term 'colonialism' or racialised capitalism, he also erases other presents too in the image of 'the long, complex and highly disarticulated set of processes'. What of the people who produce and are produced by such 'processes', the interests served by such 'processes', etc.?

Thus despite what he calls 'the disasters of our own century', and I would add those of previous centuries, de Kadt affirms an ideologically motivated continuation of the Enlightenment project that confers upon late capitalism the prospect of an 'ethical' form of production that will neutralize anti-modernist forces: 'For in my view these reactionary, antimodernist forces are, in the long run functionally incompatible with the processes of modernization, with scientific, technological and economic development' (57). Giving a positive valuation to modernization, de Kadt's argument essentially amounts to a deeply conservative plea. Espousing the ethical legacy of the Enlightenment as carried by cultural modernity, de Kadt collapses cultural modernity into social modernity, and ethics into technological modernization. He legitimates capitalism as the means to a 'more ethical form of production', effectively embracing the spread of a utopian, 'liberating' capitalism.

De Kadt fulfils the criteria of a 'postmodernist' according to the criteria that Jameson puts forth in *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*: postmodernists are simply the lackeys of late capitalism with all their talk about free-play (for which read 'free market'). Inasmuch as he merges or even reduces modernism to the imperatives of technological-capitalist rationalization, this tacit and programmatic dismissal of modernity in favour of the progress of modernization qualifies de Kadt as what Habermas describes as a

'Young Conservative' postmodernist (Habermas 1989:40 & 45). De Kadt, in the name of the Enlightenment promise, makes just that naïve identification with late capitalism that Jameson accuses the postmodernists of making. He fails to heed the spirit of Habermas's warning (made during a discussion of Foucault's treatment of Kant's 'What is Enlightenment?'): Habermas warns 'against the pious attitude of those who are intent only on preserving the remains of the Enlightenment' (1989:77).

The fact that de Kadt can work from an affirmative stance toward cultural modernity and an initial devaluation of social modernization, and still reach a conservative or quietistic conclusion, suggests a considerable complication of Habermas's criteria for neoconservatism. De Kadt manages to pass through the valuation of ethical promise of modernity over technological modernization to the affirmation of the process of modernization as the fulfilment of modernity – which is at least half of the neoconservative schema as Habermas plots it. In a broader perspective, the problem for Habermas is that this privileging of modernism, of self-consciously continuing the project of modernity, is the place (contra neoconservatism) where Habermas himself situates his analysis; Habermas's affirmation of cultural modernity in the face of neoconservative attacks is not itself, at least on the evidence of de Kadt, immune to conservative reappropriation.

From opposition to capitalism, the Enlightenment comes to be essentially identified by de Kadt with the progress of capitalism which, I suggest, effectively cancels out the ethical force of enlightenment. This turn-around is not surprising in view of the complicities Habermas traces in the American culture debate; many of the leading American neoconservatives, the ideological clientele of Reagan, were one time leftists and liberals who had become disillusioned (Habermas 1989:22). De Kadt moves explicitly from the gesture of criticizing modernization's 'systems of production and social and political organization' to investing the potentialities of modernization with the task of realizing modernity's ethical completion of the Enlightenment project. By this resolution not only does de Kadt surrender the 'ethical vision of modernity' to economic and technological-administrative imperatives in a way that Habermas could never sanction, he also invests late capitalism with responsibility for ethical and technological progress in a way that affirms America's economic imperium.⁵

Writing of the negative valuation of modernity ('Weber to Ortega, Eliot to Tate, Leavis to Marcuse') and the positive valuation of modernity ('Marinetti to Le Corbusier, Buckminster Fuller to Marshall McLuhan'), Perry Anderson notes the following: 'What

each side has in common here is a simple identification of modernity with technology itself – radically excluding the people who produce and are produced by it'. De Kadt, like the American neoconservatives, erases the exploitation of capitalism. Anderson sums up this world-view:

In the advanced capitalist world today, it is the seeming absence of any such prospect as a proximate or even distant horizon – the lack, apparently, of any conjecturable alternative to the imperial status quo of a consumer capitalism – that blocks the likelihood of any profound cultural renovation comparable to the great Age of Aesthetic Discoveries in the first third of the twentieth century: Gramsci's words still hold: 'The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born: in this interregnum a great variety of moribund symbols appear' (*Selections From the Prison Notebooks*).⁶

Modernity is reduced to technology and class is erased, and with it subject formation, interest, and exploitation – I would say that in this manoeuvre ethics is effectively erased. The formation of class is artificial and economic, and so to erase class is to erase the subject constituting power of economics: to erase society. De Kadt mentions class only in the context of what he calls a now discredited 'working class seizure of power'. In 'classical' Marxism (Lenin, Trotsky, Lucàks), the proletariat are the bearers of universality, the essence of the ethical vision of the Enlightenment. The merits of this sentimental claim are unimportant; what matters is that the same romanticism persists in a displaced, and far from innocent, form today. De Kadt does not in fact reject class or at least the attribute of ethical agency indissociable from class; rather he shifts the function of the class who speak for all and escape ideology from the proletariat to the contemporary intellectual as adjunct to the technocrat. This group claims to be the bearer of universality and erases its own ideologically complicit ties to economic power. Legitimation motivates ideology as the dissimulation of interests, and de Kadt swallows the dissimulation of modernization (i.e., the subjection of labour to technology) as progress which he has restated recently: 'Built into the organizational logic of modernizing societies is a presumption in favour of equality' (1994:53).⁷ This submission to, and hence promulgation of, ideological dissimulation ultimately endorses the *status quo*. It fails to transcend and challenge our current historical context. If de Kadt on the face of things appears laudable in his espousal of Enlightenment values in the context of 1989 South Africa, his affirmation of capitalistic modernization effectively endorses the present state of capitalism as the means to an ethically higher form of production. Just as such a thesis does not essentially challenge capitalism, I wonder

just how much of a challenge it poses to that form of capitalism called 'racial capitalism' integral to apartheid.

Most importantly, I suggest, de Kadt is blind to the uncomfortable fact, analysed by Spivak, that 'Western intellectual production is, in many ways, complicit with Western international economic interests'.⁸ De Kadt draws upon Habermas without acknowledging Habermas's context and positionality. Intellectuals play the role of what Gramsci in *The Prison Notebooks* calls 'experts in legitimation' and this applies as much to European intellectuals as to South African intellectuals. The ideology of technological progress towards 'a more ethical form of production' is still an ideology in the sense of a distortion of thought and reality by interests (economic, academic, institutional, élitist, etc.). De Kadt embraces the capitalism that reduces Jameson to despair, via naïve confidence in a benign evolutionism.

Belief in the necessary, progressive equity of wage labour in the service of an ever specializing technological production should be tested against the reality of that nation often touted as the most technologically advanced nation in the world – America. Consider the faith in an 'ethically higher form of production' in the context of the reliance of late capitalist technocracy upon cheap, often illegal labour, the exploitation of minorities, the denial of basic enlightenment rights of autonomy and respect – all in the interests of the always prevalent desire of even technologically 'sophisticated' producers to reduce labour costs still further according to the demands of the market. And of course the gleaming modules of California's 'Silicon Valley' do not exist on another planet separate from the more recognizable exploitations identified with 'developing' countries, but are related and contiguous elements of the global market; there is no linear teleology ensuring that the 'less developed' will progress to occupy the place of the 'first-world' economy (by which time the 'first' will have moved on and so vacated its spot, but not of course its pre-eminence). The existence of more brutal and less 'ethical' forms of production *make possible* those 'more ethical' forms of production, and one is not merely the nascent, embryonic form of the other.

Another last prediction from de Kadt, nearer the mark this time even if it omits mention of the means of economic production and circulation of capital that structures the acknowledged problems:

Once apartheid has been abolished, as surely it will be, South Africans will have to address, along with the problems of urbanization, poverty and economic growth, precisely the kinds of issues I have raised. (De Kadt 1989:57–58)

From the perspective of post-April 1994, in a South Africa navigating between appeals for national unity and a constitution inspired by the great Enlightenment declarations of universal human rights, I would like to add one more item to the above list, namely the Enlightenment itself. As Habermas wisely remarks:

Thus is the very nature of the Enlightenment to enlighten itself about itself, and about the harm it does. (Habermas 1989:201)

This circumspect self-reflexiveness is what de Kadt lacks. It is not enough to simply identify the Enlightenment promise with claims to universality that supposedly transcend national contexts, since claims to universality, then as now, are necessarily made within a linguistic-cultural context that include ideological imperatives and claims to pre-eminence. Such claims and declarations are not transcendental with regard to the historical contexts in which they are enunciated.

Regarding the question of historical context, am I not being too hard on de Kadt who after all wrote before Mandela's release and before the elections; is not his confidence harmless enough as an expression of hope? Possibly, but his uncritical use of the Enlightenment has consequences beyond any sentimental appeal for hope. In tacitly identifying the fulfilment of modernity with late (more ethical) capitalism de Kadt presages the dominant rhetoric of today's South Africa where America and European capital underwrite change to open up another potentially exploitable market and stabilize a regional superpower. De Kadt's pious liberalism plays into this affirmation of American cultural and economic hegemony.

Enlightenment and modernity are paradoxical – both have their positive and negative aspects, each positive being shadowed by its contradictory negation.⁹ Finally, of course, the Enlightenment was shadowed by the birth of the nation state and nationalism, both constitutional and particularistic, and by the adventure of colonialism. So it seems that, in the words of Stephen Slemon, the writer in the new nation must 'be committed to [a] cognitive unsettling of those hegemonic and universalist modes of recognition that modes of colonial representation underwrite' (Slemon 1987:13). The Enlightenment *is* (the present tense here is deliberate) complicit with the historical context of colonialism and post-colonialism, and so should not be uncritically swallowed as the antidote to these ills. As one author has recently written:

The standards of Reason in modernity emerged against the backdrop of European domination and subjugation of nature, and especially of human nature. (Goldberg 1993:119)

The enlightenment legacy of universal human rights and constitutional democracy should not be abstracted from the historical context of its emergence, and neither should this legacy be too hastily condemned by a totalizing critique of reason or hastily inserted into a quietistic parable of ideological containment. The telos of emancipation cannot be abandoned or left to itself. If to judge well is the critical goal of enlightenment, then this twisting integument of our present context still calls for a judgement *now* as part of the continuing critical preparation for freedom.

NOTES

1. This repeats Marshall Berman's intention to reveal 'the dialectics of modernization and modernism' in his *All that Is Solid Melts into Air*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983, p.16. See the discussion of Berman by Perry Anderson, 'Modernity and Revolution', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Greenberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1988, pp.317-33.
2. See Duncan Greaves, 'Marx, Justice and History', *Theoria*, 83/84, October 1994, pp.13-35.
3. For an alternative valuation of modernization, see Brian Winston's critique of the claims of 'technological revolution' to enhance freedom and democracy of expression: *Misunderstanding Media*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986. De Kadt would also need to answer Spivak's tendentious point that 'a totalitarian state [is] often entailed by development and modernization in the periphery': 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Greenberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1988.
4. Hosea Jaffe, *European Colonial Despotism: A History of Oppression and Resistance in South Africa*, London: Kamak House, 1994.
5. Writing with approval of the Marxist rejection of a benign capitalism in the late fifties and early sixties, Habermas notes the following: 'The enforced control over broad social domains has produced, in the West, organizational forms for securing social positions and the more equal adjustment of social compensation, thus a kind of permanent institutional reform, so that a self-regulation of capitalism by the force of 'self-discipline' appears to be possible; the catchword for this development has been coined in the United States: the "new capitalism"', *Theory and Practice* (transl. by John Viertel), London: Heinemann, 1974, p.197.
6. 'Modernity and Revolution', pp.318, 332.
7. Writing of 'the essential self become [...] thin, the site and source of perpetually re-examined choice and rational agency', de Kadt concedes the following: 'Of course, this description fits some categories of people better than others - specifically the rich, the powerful and the highly skilled'. However, faith in the destiny of modernization remains unshaken: 'But this is the telos of individual identity formation under conditions of advanced modernization' (De Kadt 1994:52). That is: individual identity formation = economic autonomy. Modernization is taken to mediate this autonomy and rational agency through a sort of trickle-down economic effect of freedom.
8. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', p.271. For more on the question of institutional context and the institutionalization of the role of the intellectual, see Peter Uwe Hohendahl, *The Institution of Criticism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982. See also Edward W. Said, 'Travelling Theory', in *The World, the Text, the Critic* on the universalizing, imperialistic pretensions of theory.
9. See Geoffrey H. Harpham, 'So... What Is Enlightenment? An Inquisition into Modernity', *Critical Inquiry*, 1994. Harpham's appreciation of the aporetic and complicit nature of modernism seems an advance upon Neil Lazarus's attempt to salvage - via Habermas - the project of modernism in the context of South Africa: see 'Modernism and Modernity: T.W. Adorno and Contemporary White South African Literature', *Cultural Critique*, 1986-7.

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Reflections on the 'Unfinished Project of Enlightenment'

A Response to Shane Moran

Raphaël de Kadt

I find Shane Moran's critique of my 1989 article, 'Modernity and the Future of Democracy' somewhat puzzling. It refers to an article of six years' vintage as 'recent' and seems somewhat to misrepresent my views. It is perhaps a pity that it is not based on a more substantial engagement with my subsequent reflections on the issues it addresses. It might have been more useful to engage with a tightly argued critique of my more recent 'Modernization and Moral Progress' – which the author refers to only in passing. This is especially the case because, although some of Moran's worries are dealt with in that 1994 article, some difficulties with my accounts of modernity and modernization to which he quite correctly points – and which I shall briefly address below – emerge more clearly in that article. Finally – and I might well be mistaken here – Moran does not seem fully to grasp the significance of the occasion for which 'Modernity and the Future of Democracy' was written. So, before I deal with two broad and substantial issues raised by Moran which I think demand a response, let me say something about the background to that article.

'Modernity and the Future of Democracy' was first presented as a 'Richard Turner Memorial Lecture'. This fact is made clear in the October 1989 edition of *Theoria* in which it appeared. This Lecture is an annual occasion on which respects are paid to the memory of Richard Turner, who had taught at the University of Natal, Durban before being banned in early 1973 by the South African government.

Turner was, without doubt, the most brilliant and original South African philosopher of the post second World War period. Forbidden by the Minister of Justice, Mr Jimmy Kruger, to leave South Africa to continue his philosophical work in Germany as a recipient of an Alexander von Humboldt scholarship, Turner was assassinated on the 8th January 1978.

I mention these details because Turner's politico-philosophical project was that of a radical critic not only of Apartheid in South Africa, but of capitalist society too. His critique of both systems was articulated in a register that had its origins in a sustained and substantial engagement with the writings of Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and Marx. It was a register that, under the strained circumstances of his banning order, he expanded and finessed – right up until the very moment of his tragic death – in a close and critical engagement with the writings of many major contemporary thinkers including Jean-Paul Sartre, Jürgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann, to mention only a few.

It is thus not inappropriate that such a lecture – designed to pay tribute to such a brave and remarkable man – should express its own moment of hope, its own belief in the long-term possibility of achieving a rational and emancipated society. It is also not entirely inappropriate that it should endorse, in its own way, the 'promise of the Enlightenment' – a promise so central to Turner's own endeavours.

Of course, the occasion notwithstanding, the lecture must stand and be judged on its own merits. It expressed my own interpretation of the Enlightenment project and how I, on the eve of the collapse of both state socialism in eastern Europe and Apartheid in South Africa, thought the circumstances for its realization might properly be assessed. If I have made more of this background than is necessary to deal with the substantive issues raised, it is to clarify *why* that lecture was cadenced in the way it was.

I find Moran's piece rather difficult to respond to – at least within the compass of a short reply. This is mainly because he raises in such short order so many large and important issues, each of which would require a considerable number of pages – if not an article in its own right – to deal with. There is the question of what, exactly, my views on nationalism and the nation state are. Then there is the big and complex question of how I might view the relationship of capitalism to Fascism, racial politics and genocide. There is the question of how I might see the relationship between 'standards of Reason' and the 'backdrop of European domination'. There is the issue of the relationship between intellectual activity and complicity with American cultural and economic hegemony. There is the very important

question of how I understand the Enlightenment and whether I 'use it' uncritically. There is, too, the question of how I see the relationship between 'ethical modernity' and 'technological progress'.

Let me say straight away that I do not wish to deal directly with all the issues that I have listed. As much as I would find it intellectually challenging, and as crucial as some of these issues are, to do so in the space available to me would most likely produce bad arguments leading to confusion and unclarity.

Let me rather take two issues and deal with them in a brief and, I hope, clarifying way. The first is the matter of whether I would wish to 'surrender the "ethical vision of modernity" to economic and technological-administrative imperatives'. The answer to this is a clear 'no'. This raises, of course, the question of what this 'ethical vision' might be. It also raises the question of the proper scope of moral agency. This is not the place for me to spell out in detail what I think such an ethical vision might consist in or to give a full account of my view of the scope of moral agency. Suffice it, however, to say that such an ethical vision should contain at least the following elements: (1) a plausible account of what it means for people to be effectively free or 'autonomous'; (2) an account of how the dignity of persons might be defined and guaranteed. This would require, among other things, defining the proper discourses, currencies and means for the recognition of the rights and worth of individuals and perhaps categories of individuals; (3) an account, by extension, of both distributive and retributive justice which takes due cognisance of both universality and difference and of partiality and equality.

The starting point for the articulation of such a vision would, necessarily, be a sustained engagement with the work of the many thinkers who, over the years, have staked out the territory. These (on my list) would include John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas, Agnes Heller and Iris Young – to name only a few. I would also not wish to suggest that such a vision could be in any way 'definitive'; it would at most be 'provisional' and open to discursive re-definition in the context of informed public debate and dialogue. It would have to be 'negotiated' – though there are some provisions that I think are, in some form, *necessary*: such as a commitment to improving the circumstances of the worst off, a 'strong' conception of individual rights and a workable account of basic needs the satisfaction of which should 'trump' other claims.

However, I do not think – nor have I ever thought – that technological progress can, in itself, guarantee the realization of such a vision. Such a vision cannot be 'deduced' or simply 'read off' from the imperatives of economic or technological organization. However, to realize such a vision cognisance must be taken of the fact that

economic, technological and administrative systems constitute the 'institutional spaces' within which moral agency occurs. They are the framework within which choices – including choices about the very validity of the framework itself – have to be made. Such a framework is, itself, a set of relationships between people and thus the product of their actions and interactions over time. As such, it is a system or network of rules or norms. Actions can either reinforce or change such rules or norms. Which actions might change what rules in which ways can only be established through a detailed analysis of the relevant framework. What rules or norms are *desirable* can only be established through moral argument engaged in under procedurally fair arrangements. In this regard it is important to specify and, as far as is possible, extend the scope for the exercise of public reason. Thus I would like to insist that there is, indeed, a specific role for moral argument in shaping institutional arrangements. Furthermore, the effectiveness of any resultant agency will, in my view, depend crucially on the adequacy of the description and analysis of that which is to be changed.

The second issue that I should like briefly to deal with is that of contemporary capitalism – for I have been accused of 'erasing the exploitation of capitalism'. Of course, in a particular sense of the term 'erase', I wish that were the case! The fact, however, is that capitalism is the particular form of economy that is globally hegemonic. It is also the case that the world economy is grossly *inegalitarian* and unjust in the way it distributes life chances, recognition, powers and wealth. Among the questions that I believe can and, indeed, ought to be asked, are: how might this system best be acted upon so as either to eliminate or significantly reduce the harm or injury that, in working in or through it, some people do to others? That is, how, if at all, can the system be acted upon and changed so as to eliminate or reduce inequality, poverty, unemployment and environmental degradation? How can those who are the most powerful actors in the system be got to temper the exercise of their power, be more accountable for their actions and be more responsive to the needs of the worst off categories of people? How can these worst off categories of people, in turn, become more powerful and better able to protect their interests, challenge the powerful, and realize their human potentials? To pose these questions is to accept that ethical progress requires informed agency for its realization.

These are the questions that, in my view, are the most urgent ones for responsible social scientists, philosophers and ordinary citizens to ask at the end of the twentieth century. To even begin to answer these questions requires a sustained, subtle and rigorous analysis of the way in which modern institutions such as states and markets work. It

means identifying, precisely, the mechanisms through which wealth and power are distributed. For only in this way can such mechanisms be got to work differently and people learn how better to take charge of their own lives. If the system cannot be made to work more fairly and less exploitatively, with what other system or systems might it be replaced? And how and at what cost to whom? These are all difficult questions to which I do not pretend to have all the answers. They are the kinds of questions which, among others, this journal is concerned to address.

Let me say in conclusion that I do not think that a system such as contemporary capitalism will 'automatically' evolve in the direction of a 'transparent' system open to the broadly equal economic, political and cultural participation of all of humankind without the satisfaction of two conditions. The first is that the values which help maintain the system in its presently unacceptable forms need to be subjected to a thoroughgoing critique. Systems only survive in particular forms for as long as the values which justify and legitimate these forms remain essentially uncontested. This is where moral argument, social criticism and the articulation of an appropriate ethical vision come into play. People need to be persuaded, or better, come to agree that there is something morally wrong with their world. They also need to believe that their world could, on some plausible account, be both different and better. The second condition that has to be met is that people have both to want to change their world and to find out ways of doing so. The task of those concerned to 'change the world' in the direction of democracy and equality is thus, in part at least, 'to understand it' better. They also need to challenge the dominant moral consciousness of the age, the 'illusion of the epoch'. At the same time they will need to realize that, as often as not, they will have to work as much with institutions as against them in order precisely to change them – even to change them radically. For institutions can be both enabling and disabling. This applies to states, markets and the myriad other institutional arenas of contemporary societies. The task of social critics is to help articulate a dimension of 'reflexivity', to better enable us, in Anthony Giddens's words, to 'harness the juggernaut' of modernity (Giddens 1990:151). To this end the imperatives of technological and administrative modernization are open both to intelligent use as well as abuse.

The great socialist revolutionaries of the early twentieth century – such as Lenin, Trotsky and Luxemburg – attempted to fundamentally change the world in the light of their interpretations of it. We now know what has been the long term fate of those heroic attempts made in what Leszek Kolakowski has called 'The Golden Age' of Marxism. The hopes of those who, in the late twentieth century, wish to change

the world into a more humane and decent place must be more modest. Their task is to better understand the world so that they might more effectively help achieve at least some of the changes they know to be morally desirable.

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Vision of the Future, Critique of the Present

David Schweickart's Case Against Capitalism

A Review Essay

Martin Wittenberg

Writing a book attacking the moral and efficiency claims made for capitalism seems an unfashionable, if not downright foolhardy enterprise in the 1990s. Nevertheless David Schweickart's book *Against Capitalism* is a timely challenge to social democrats to re-examine their vision of the future and to refocus their critique of the social, economic and political power imbalances of the present order. The need for re-examination and debate is only heightened by the fact that not all social democrats will agree whole-heartedly with the vision expressed in Schweickart's book.

In the process of re-examining the case for socialism three interrelated issues need to be addressed:

- (1) The nature of capitalism has to be defined;
- (2) A case has to be made that capitalism (so defined) is morally 'wrong'; and
- (3) It has to be argued that an alternative to capitalism is not only possible, but provides a morally superior form of social organization.

The chief virtue of Schweickart's book is that it tries to confront particularly the last issue head-on. Too many socialist critiques of capitalism have left their core moral commitments unstated. Furthermore it is all too easy to attack soft targets – the failings of 'actually existing capitalism' – and to contrast these with the supposed virtues of an idealized 'socialism'. Given the recent collapse of 'actually existing socialism' this strategy is more evidently fraudulent and hence less available to the theorist. This, however, raises another two questions that need to be addressed:

- (4) How does the vision of socialism that is offered relate to the traditional socialist project, in particular its Marxist variants, and how does it propose to prevent the degeneration of socialism witnessed in the Eastern bloc?

- (5) If the 'classic' Marxian vision of revolution has faded, how is the socialist alternative to be brought into existence?

The Nature of Schweickart's Project

Before assessing how Schweickart deals with the questions listed above, it is important to understand something about the nature of his project, because it influences the way in which he presents his arguments and develops his case. The core of the book is a systematic examination of various arguments which have been put forward to provide a moral justification for capitalism. In the first chapter he considers various 'noncomparative justifications'. These all try to explain why interest or capitalist profits are actually quite deserved and therefore the inequalities arising from capitalism do not raise any particular moral difficulties.

Schweickart dispenses with these arguments (quite effectively on the whole) and then turns to comparative justifications. These are the kinds of arguments which state that while capitalism may be a flawed system it is the 'least bad' way of organizing the economy that there is. For purposes of comparison he contrasts '*Laissez-Faire*' capitalism with what he terms 'Economic Democracy', a model of a market socialist economy. He then considers three arguments which have been advanced in favour of capitalism: that capitalism is the most efficient economic system, that it is the most effective in promoting growth (and therefore the general level of welfare) and that it is more compatible with values such as liberty, equality, democracy and autonomy than its competitors.

The conclusion that he comes to is that Economic Democracy would be at least as efficient as capitalism in allocating resources (because it makes use of a market mechanism), it would be more effective in getting workers to be productive (since they would own a stake in the company) and that it would be less likely to waste resources in the form of unemployment and the 'irrational' sales and marketing effort characterizing modern capitalism. On the subject of growth, Economic Democracy would probably have a less expansionist dynamic than capitalism, but on the other hand this means that the nature of the growth might be more compatible with human needs – there would be less of the negative externalities (pollution) and 'creative destruction' characterizing contemporary capitalism. On the other hand, Schweickart argues that there is no reason to suppose that Economic Democracy could not be as innovative as capitalism, particularly in finding labour-saving products and processes. As far as liberty, equality, democracy and autonomy are concerned, Schweickart claims that Economic Democracy would, in

fact, promote these values more than capitalism does – mainly because inequalities would be less pronounced (there would not be a class of super-rich) and hence the scope for manipulating democratic institutions would be reduced as well.

Schweickart goes on to argue that even a reformed ‘welfare-statist’ form of capitalism would be morally inferior to Economic Democracy. The core features of capitalist interest and capitalist profits would still be in place, hence leading to the kinds of inequalities and pressures for the ‘wrong’ kinds of growth which plague contemporary capitalism.

In summary, the logic of Schweickart’s case is to examine the best case for capitalism and then to show that ‘Economic Democracy’ would outperform this best case version. In choosing to approach the subject matter from this angle, however, certain other approaches are foreclosed – for example, the book does not attempt to provide a systematic account of the dynamics of a capitalist economy. Arguments about the tendency of capitalism to lead to the concentration and centralization of capital, for example, feature tangentially, if at all. This is not because Schweickart is oblivious to such matters; indeed he acknowledges:

It is clear theoretically and empirically that a capitalist economy tends toward unequal concentrations of market power. Big firms tend to swallow up little firms or drive them out of business. It is highly unrealistic to assume that a capitalist economy with minimal government interference will be tightly price-competitive. (pp. 170–1)

Nevertheless because he wants to allow capitalism to put forward its best *theoretical* case, he is willing to consider (for large sections of the book) the case of the perfectly competitive economy of neoclassical theory.

In short, Schweickart is intent on providing an engagement between capitalism and Economic Democracy around *particular* issues and moral values (e.g. efficiency, growth) rather than on presenting a systematic *analysis* and critique of the nature and tendencies of capitalism. In this approach it distinguishes itself from many other socialist works (e.g. Marx’s *Capital*) which focus on the analysis and often leave the engagement over moral commitments and issues like growth implicit. This is not to suggest that Schweickart does not present an analysis and critique of capitalism, rather that this emerges around the particular engagements with the various arguments for capitalism. What this mode of presentation means, however, is that the emphasis that is placed on these sections is somewhat different than it would be if Schweickart had chosen to develop the case differently.

What is Wrong with Capitalism?

To begin the analysis, it is, of course, necessary to have a conception of what capitalism is. Schweickart defines it as follows:

Let us understand capitalism to be a socioeconomic system characterized by three features. First, the means of production are, for the most part, privately owned, either by individuals directly or through the mediation of corporations. Second, the bulk of economic activity is directed toward the production of goods and services for sale on a free market – ‘free market’ meaning that prices are determined largely by supply and demand, without government interference. Third, labor power is a commodity. That is, a large percentage of the work force sells its capacity to labor to those who can provide it with tools, raw materials, and a place to work. (p.4)

Given that this is the nature of capitalism, why is it wrong? Perhaps the central criticism that Schweickart levies is that there will be a class of agents (owners of capital) that will receive income for doing nothing productive. Since this is a somewhat contentious claim, Schweickart spends some time analysing various arguments that purport to show that capitalist interest is deserved. He argues that risk-taking, entrepreneurialism and innovation are not in themselves a justification for capitalist interest, because it is possible to deposit money in a bank, buy a unit-trust or a share in a blue-chip company and this will involve negligible amounts of risk, innovation or entrepreneurial skill but will still yield interest. Similarly, the neoclassical argument that the profit of the capitalist is the ‘return’ on the use of the capital equipment is specious, because allowing workers to make use of already existing equipment is not in itself a productive activity. The payment to the capitalist is really an acknowledgement of the capitalist’s position of power – her ability to withhold the equipment – rather than a reward for productive activity.

There are other problems raised by Schweickart that arise from the functioning of a capitalist economy: (1) unemployment tends to be a chronic condition; (2) enormous efforts are made to manipulate consumers into buying products that they may not really want; (3) because of the presence of externalities the private calculus of profit need not correspond to the social desirability of particular investment projects, hence leading to the ‘wrong’ kind of growth; (4) because capitalists are biased towards accumulation, the tradeoff between increased consumption (i.e. growth) and increased leisure is likely to be tilted towards the former, consequently the rate of growth might be higher than is socially optimal; (5) economic instability (boom and slump) is an integral feature of the capitalist growth process; (6) individual liberties are potentially undermined through two processes – the subordination of workers to management within the country and

the support of repressive, though capital-friendly regimes abroad; (7) the accumulation of wealth through unearned property income leads to excessive inequalities; (8) the concentration of wealth provides the means to some individuals to manipulate the democratic process; and (9) there are few incentives to ensure that work is a meaningful experience for most of the population.

What is the Alternative?

Given this indictment of capitalism, what is the nature of the alternative that Schweickart provides? His version of socialism, 'Economic Democracy', has the following three features:

- (1) Each productive enterprise is managed democratically by its workers.
- (2) The day-to-day economy is a market economy: Raw materials and consumer goods are bought and sold at prices determined by the forces of supply and demand.
- (3) New investment is socially controlled: The investment fund is generated by taxation and is dispensed according to democratic, market-conforming plans (p. 68).

The first two features are fairly self-explanatory, save for the important point that the workers *manage* the enterprise, they do not *own* it. This means, for example, that the workers are not allowed to liquidate the assets of the firm. Ownership of the enterprise vests in the community as a whole (through the mediation of community banks) and workers, as it were, lease the equipment from the community. One of the requirements of this arrangement is that depreciation of the capital stock must be covered by the proceeds from production. If an enterprise is not able to do so, it must be declared bankrupt.

Besides replenishing the capital stock, the enterprise will also be required to pay a tax on its stock. This tax can be thought of as interest payments on the capital, except that the principal is never paid off. The taxes that are collected in this way are then channelled back for investment purposes through a chain going from national government through regional and local government and ending up in a network of community banks. At each stage a decision is made as to how much of the total revenue should be devoted to public expenditures and how much should be allocated to 'private' investments (and to what kind of productive investments). The funds remaining for distribution to enterprises are vested in community banks which decide on what projects seem profitable while also meeting other criteria, e.g. creating additional employment. Besides channelling investment

finance, community banks would also have a role in monitoring the performance of companies on their books, suggesting ways of improving production, providing information about what is happening in the market, and so on.

The 'socialist' nature of this model is based on three characteristics according to which it can be distinguished from capitalism:

- (1) There is no private ownership of the means of production;
- (2) Labour power is no longer a commodity to be bought and sold;
- (3) The investment process is socialized.

Of course Schweickart does not merely have to construct a vision of an alternative, he has to argue that this vision embodies superior moral values and that it can be actualised. As far as the moral values are concerned, Schweickart argues that on each of the nine points listed above 'Economic Democracy' would outperform capitalism: (1) Unemployment would be less of a problem, because workers would not have an incentive to lay themselves off during economic downturns and because employment creation would feature more strongly as a criterion in the assessment of investment projects; (2) Although there would be some sales manipulation, this would be less severe than under capitalism; (3) Because the investment process is socialized, it is more likely that externalities and the true social cost of an investment project would be taken into consideration; (4) Society would be able to determine the desired growth rate through the rate at which capital is taxed and through the volume of investment finance made available; (5) Economic instability would be less of a problem, because Economic Democracy could more easily coexist with a low (or even zero) growth rate than capitalism; (6) Individual liberties would be enhanced because workers would not be subject to the whims of management to the same extent and because there would be no section of society that would have an interest in supporting repressive regimes abroad; (7) Democracy would be enhanced because people would have a greater opportunity to practise it and because inequalities would be reduced; (8) There would be less inequality because there would be no unearned income; (9) Because workers would have a bigger say in matters affecting them, work could become more meaningful.

How Would Economic Democracy Work in Practice?

The key question, of course, is not whether the vision that Schweickart presents has desirable moral characteristics or not, but whether such a society could actually work. Schweickart provides three examples to make the case that Economic Democracy is, indeed,

a feasible form of social organization. The first example, unlikely as it may seem, is that of Japan. Schweickart argues that some of the features of Japanese capitalism – the central role of banks in ensuring the well-being of firms associated with them and the practice of practically guaranteed life-time employment – would be similar to some of the features of Economic Democracy. An example closer to the model he espouses is that of Yugoslavia, which posted some impressive growth performances in the period when central party interference in productive enterprises was relatively smallest. The example which he makes most of is the Mondragon group of co-operatives in Spain. Many of the features he promotes – worker control of enterprises, the central role of the community investment bank – are visible in this case.

The reported success of this co-operative raises the fundamental question of why, if co-operative forms of production are superior to capitalist forms we see so many failures of producer co-operatives? Schweickart's answer to this follows that provided by Levine and Tyson (1990), who argue that the success of a particular mode of enterprise organization depends significantly on the firm's external environment. A democratically organized firm would find a capitalist environment rather hostile, while a capitalist firm might equally find itself less successful in an environment such as that of Economic Democracy. In the language of evolutionary game theory, two outcomes would be 'evolutionarily stable' – that in which most firms adopt democratic forms of organization and that in which they adopt capitalist forms.

This 'systemic' characteristic of individual success is reminiscent of Brenner's argument (1986) about rationality in feudalism and capitalism. Brenner argues that the systemic logic of feudalism was such as to encourage individual peasants to become as self-sufficient as possible and to cling on to their productive base at (almost) any cost. Lords, by contrast, found it in their interest to keep their peasants on their land and to develop their military power to extract a surplus by extra-economic means. The Smithian logic, characteristic of capitalism, that advantage is to be gained by specializing in one particular productive capacity and then to rely on market exchange with other such equally specialized agents has no grip in a feudalist economy.

Similarly, it may be argued that the logic governing production in Economic Democracy is such that it leads firms to behave in ways which are much more compatible with that social structure. This form of argumentation, however, raises two immediate problems. Firstly, if the logic of Economic Democracy is quite distinct from that characterizing capitalism this raises the question of transition – how

is the new logic to be established if the logic of capitalism dominates the present? Secondly, how is one to get a sense of how the new system will function as a *system* if it does, indeed, embody quite different principles of operation?

The latter issue is really about the 'emergent' properties of such a system – the new forms of behaviour that might be encouraged by the different environment, the 'rules' of economic interaction and the *dynamics* of the society. The question whether Economic Democracy would work is therefore not only about short term survival – after all centrally planned economies 'worked' for several decades – but about how the system would evolve. If the 'rules of the game' are sufficiently different in Economic Democracy, speculation about how such a society might *actually* function would be quite hazardous. Nevertheless tentative and provisional as it might be, some inferences might be made about the dynamics of the system.

Risk, Innovation and Expansion

In the first place, it is likely that enterprises in Economic Democracy would be more risk-averse than in capitalism. The reason for this is quite straightforward: capitalists tend to be more diversified than workers. If a capitalist enterprise goes under, the capitalist loses that particular investment but if a worker-owned firm goes under, the workers stand to lose all that they own. Schweickart argues that this would not be a significant problem under Economic Democracy, because the community as a whole would own the enterprise. The workers would therefore not lose their own money, but the community's. He also argues that because society as a whole is much more diversified than any particular capitalist is, it would stand to reason that it would be willing to take more risks than any capitalist might.

Schweickart's arguments seem to be wrong for two quite instructive reasons: firstly, he assumes that the main reason why a worker-owned enterprise would be risk-averse is that it would lose the capital. It seems more likely, however, that the major costs of bankruptcy are unemployment. Would this be a cost in Economic Democracy? Schweickart suggests that the government would be the employer of last resort in Economic Democracy (p. 111). There would therefore not be any 'proper' unemployment. This in turn raises the question of labour discipline under Economic Democracy. Schweickart suggests that shirkers could still be fired (p. 111). This, however, would be a threat only if the wage that is realized in the government employment programme is significantly lower than the package of benefits (share of profits plus basic wage) achievable within a particular enterprise.

Indeed, Bowles and Gintis (1993) suggest that the costs associated with unemployment would, almost inevitably, be quite substantial. The reason for this is that the employment relation is, in their terminology, an example of 'contested exchange':

Consider agent A, who purchases a good or service from agent B. We call the exchange *contested* when B's offering possesses an attribute that is valuable to A, is costly for B to provide, yet is not adequately specified in an exogenously enforceable contract . . .

An employment relationship is established when, in return for a wage, the worker agrees to submit to the authority of the employer. The worker's promise to bestow an adequate level of effort and care upon the tasks assigned, even if offered, is for the most part legally unenforceable. At the level of effort expected by management, work is subjectively costly for the worker to provide, valuable to the employer, and difficult to measure. (pp. 79, 80)

The strategy adopted by the employer to get an adequate level of work performance is to make renewal of the job (or termination of the contract) contingent on performance. This means, that in general, the actual wage paid must significantly exceed the reservation wage, i.e. the point at which the worker would just consider coming into the job market. This means, however, that the cost of job loss is also significant.

Would firms in Economic Democracy find mechanisms for achieving adequate job performance other than making job loss costly? If all firms are small one might imagine a situation in which mutual surveillance and social opprobrium might work. Nevertheless this does not seem very likely, given the nature of current technologies. Even if one were to subdivide large integrated production processes (such as a vehicle manufacturing plant) into smaller sized business units and teams, the question would arise in another form, as to how to enforce adequate job performance from such a unit. If bankrupting an inefficient enterprise does not impose costs on the members of the unit, there would not seem to be an incentive to perform. If these costs are severe, however, the argument about the risk-averseness of a worker-managed enterprise would seem to hold.

What about the second part of Schweickart's argument, that in effect risk is even more diversified in Economic Democracy than in capitalism? What this argument overlooks is that both modern venture capitalists and community banks are not the people who will actually manage the enterprise. This introduces a principal-agent problem (see Bowles and Gintis 1993). The capitalist (as principal) would like the firm to take certain risks. The agent (manager of the firm) is, however, more risk-averse than the capitalist, because failure of the firm will

impose real costs on her. In order to persuade the agent to take more risks, the principal adopts various strategies, including that of rewarding the agent by paying out some of the gains made on risky investments in the form of bonuses. Another strategy is to punish overly risk-averse behaviour by making the cost of job loss particularly high – through paying inflated salaries.

The point is that a community bank would find it more difficult to overcome this principal-agent problem. If a risky venture was available, how would they encourage a worker-managed enterprise to seize the opportunity? The lure of profits would be there, since profits would be distributed to all members of the enterprise, but this incentive would diminish proportionately to the size of the workforce. This problem could be overcome if management was paid special incentives, but this would introduce new inequalities which might, in time, harden into class divisions. No punishment for excessively cautious behaviour would be available.

If there are grounds for believing that enterprises would be more risk-averse than those in capitalism, there are also questions about how innovations would spread. In capitalism this works as follows: the developer of a new technology tries to secure a patent and then tries to interest a venture capitalist to advance the money to start production. If the product is successful (as indicated by high levels of demand) the profits are ploughed back to increase the size of the plant and increase the output. In most cases, the ability to increase production rapidly is also based on leveraging more money from the stock market – as a firm demonstrates high profitability, more loans can be secured and more stock floated so that expansion can occur not only with internally generated funds. If the initial company chooses to, it can also licence the technology to other firms, so helping the innovation to spread.

How might this process work under Economic Democracy? Schweickart does not really discuss this issue. In particular there is no sense of whether Economic Democracy would operate a patent system or not. The traditional economic arguments for patents is that they are just reward for innovations and that in the absence of patent protection, companies would not engage in the expense of developing new products if all other firms would stand to benefit equally. In the context of Economic Democracy, however, patents would introduce problems. Particularly, they might allow the generation of severe inequalities. Firms possessing the patent would be able to extract payments from licence holders essentially just because they could withhold the technology. For the same reasons that providing capital equipment is not a productive activity, providing a blueprint for the use of capital equipment, *once this blueprint is already in existence is*

not a productive activity. As Schweickart argues, there is no inherent justification for rewarding the developer of an innovation perpetually (pp. 13ff).

In the absence of patent protection, however, there would be nothing to stop predatory companies from reverse engineering the products of their innovative rivals and then undercutting them in the market, because they do not have to recoup the costs of developing the product. How could companies protect themselves against this? In some cases it may be possible to keep key aspects of the production process secret. The possessor of the technology would therefore not find it in its interest to make such knowledge public. This could stunt other technological developments. It may also create an informal market for the bearers of that technological knowledge – the engineers and research scientists engaged in its development.

Would there be any way of overcoming this problem? One possible solution might be for the government to levy an ‘innovation tax’ on all productive enterprises. If a particular innovator were to show that the results of her work had been embodied in a new process, she could be rewarded with a once-off payment. How such a system would work in practice is difficult to foretell.

Given that an innovation has been brought to market, how quickly would it spread? Since enterprises in Economic Democracy are worker-controlled, the question is how prone they would be to reinvest the profit and expand production or how prone they would be to consume. If expansion of the firm means hiring more workers and hence sharing the increased profit with proportionately more workers, the expansion of the firm would be a lower priority than it might be for a capitalist (p. 96). Would other firms take up the slack? Given that it has been argued above that enterprises would tend to be more risk-averse in Economic Democracy it is not that likely that new start-up firms would immediately jump into the market.

Of course in the face of sustained demand, the enterprise would sooner or later find it desirable to expand. In this situation the question would arise as to how the expansion would be financed. If the expansion is entirely financed from retained earnings, this would obviously take longer than if additional external finance is procured.

The availability of external finance raises an interesting issue. In capitalism this would involve a straightforward decision by the owners of capital about whether or not the project was likely to be profitable. In Economic Democracy there might, however, be a geographic constraint – the community bank which financed the original venture may not be allocated the kind of investment finance to allow the venture to expand beyond a certain size. Schweickart is

quite clear that investment finance would be allocated to localities strictly according to the population residing there. Within a particular locality the local council would then allocate money to its banks according to their performance.

Now a firm in community A which wanted to expand but was stretching the capacity of its particular bank could still apply for finance elsewhere (p. 75). The question, however, is whether a bank situated in community B would be prone to lend to it. The first question that such a bank might consider is whether such a loan might lead to job loss in its own area. Since it could attach conditions to the provision of finance, it might want to pressure the enterprise to create part of its expanded production facility in area B.

The process of securing development finance is therefore likely to lead to a slower process of expansion and possibly a geographically more even one. Might it, however, lead to other developments? One possible consequence is that expansion projects, to the extent to which they are undertaken, use largely internally generated finance. This, however, raises an interesting question for Economic Democracy. If the capital stock of a particular firm is *increased* through retained earnings, would the firm be taxed on this new capital stock or only on the pre-existing one – the one financed from the community bank loan?

If the state decided to tax *all* capital this would, of course, be a major disincentive to reinvest profits. If, on the other hand, only community-financed investment was taxed, this could lead to a major mismatch between the flow of investment funds and the capital base of the economy. Over time, the 'tax base' as a proportion of the overall capital base might shrink. This process could even be fuelled by government decisions – if, for example, the state wanted to meet a strong demand for consumer goods by raising the tax rate and thus the flow of investment funds, this might *decrease* the attractiveness of using those funds and *increase* the attractiveness of using retained profits. If, however, the mismatch between the actual capital base and the assessed capital base becomes too large and if too much investment is financed by reinvesting profits, it is open to question how much real social control there would be over the investment process.

In addition, given the geographically structured nature of investment flows in the Economic Democracy model, the question arises as to whether this might not undercut some of the strong agglomeration economies evident in capitalist growth paths. Would a Silicon Valley be possible in this model? Certainly in the initial stages the community bank model might foster the emergence of production facilities which exhibited strong synergies. Again, however, the

growth of a new locally based production complex would be constrained by the size of the investment funds available to the community bank. If the area has a small population (although perhaps made up of highly skilled individuals) the investment ceiling might be quite quickly reached. If investment finance has to be procured from other communities, this might again lead to pressure for the dispersal of production facilities. While this might prevent the emergence of the sharp regional inequalities characterizing capitalism, it may also prevent the emergence of the critical mass of skill and production facilities in one place which allows a new branch of industry to really take off.

Of course one possible solution to these kinds of problems might be the emergence of an informal lending market – a community bank in location B might advance loans to a company in location A in return for some payments – either cheaper products in location B, guaranteed sub-contracted work to firms in B or even support for a community facility in B. While technically not interest payments, they would function in quite similar ways – they would be payments for the fact that community bank B has capital which enterprise A would like to make use of to boost output and hence profits to its members. As long as the investment was still profitable for the enterprise it would be difficult to see why it would not want to enter into such an arrangement.

The 'interest' payments would arise because of an asymmetry of power – bank B has resources which enterprise A wants and is therefore capable of extracting a payment for it. To prevent interest payments from arising it would be necessary to ensure that there is no shortage of capital in *any* location. Given the nature of agglomeration economies and the spatially uneven distribution of skills, it is difficult to envisage that profitable opportunities would always correspond to the geographical distribution of the population. There might be ways of amending Schweickart's model to ensure that there are no geographical shortages of capital – maybe there could be national and regional development banks besides the community ones. How the relationship between such supra-local bodies and community banks would work out would, of course, be a matter of speculation.

Economic Democracy in One Country?

The arguments above suggest that enterprises in Economic Democracy would be more risk-averse, that the speed with which innovations are adopted might be lower, that enterprises would be less likely to expand and that growth would be more diffuse than in capitalism. Schweickart would argue that even if this is true, this has no moral

purchase. Indeed, a lot of the costs of capitalist development arise from excessive risk-taking, the 'creative destruction' accompanying new innovations, the wholesale destruction of industries in certain geographical areas as new production complexes come into being. The economic feasibility of Economic Democracy is not called into question by the fact that it might be slower to expand.

Nevertheless there is one respect in which the rate of expansion is crucial, and that is in questions of transition. Schweickart argues that Economic Democracy in one country would work (p.274). If the economy in this country was not as expansionist and dynamic as that of its competitors, what effect would this have on the success of Economic Democracy? One possible development is that the country falls further and further behind in technology. This might have two implications: firstly, the country might become militarily more vulnerable. Secondly, the citizens of the Economic Democracy might become tempted by the lure of capitalist consumer goods and gadgets. Indeed, it might be suggested that one of the reasons for the failure of the Eastern bloc is precisely the contrast between the level of domestic consumption and that abroad. The fact that there might be many unemployed or people objectively worse off in capitalism might not outweigh the consideration that many might also be more prosperous.

If the Economic Democracy attempts to utilize technology and products imported from capitalist societies, another problem might arise. The imports from abroad will have to be paid for in terms of exports. Schweickart suggests that this would not create any problems:

Even if worker-managed firms should turn out to be less competitive in the world market than capitalist firms, there is no cause for concern. Exchange rates will adjust to ensure that whatever the real differences in productivity, enough of the country's goods will be price-competitive abroad to offset imported foreign goods that are cheaper than those domestically produced. (p. 274)

While this argument is technically correct it is also seriously misleading. If the imports are produced by firms which are innovating at a more rapid rate than the exporting firms, then the terms of trade are likely to deteriorate. The Economic Democracy would be caught in a typical situation of unequal (and progressively increasingly more unequal) exchange. Whether such a situation would be stable in the medium term is doubtful.

Exploitation under Economic Democracy

Unequal exchange between worker-controlled firms in the Economic Democracy and capitalist firms among its trading partners would

represent an example of 'capitalist exploitation', as defined by Roemer (1982, 1988) – the workers in the Economic Democracy would be better off if there was a redistribution of all productive assets within the global economy.

This raises the interesting question as to whether capitalist exploitation might exist in the interactions *within* the Economic Democracy. The case considered earlier, in which new forms of interest payments emerged between capital-starved firms and community banks would be one case in point.

Might it be possible for a whole class of 'capitalistically exploited' people to emerge? There are some scenarios in which this is a possibility: one could imagine, for example, a situation in which a powerful clique within a particular community ensures that investment funds flow to one or two privileged co-operatives. In the commercial interactions between these capital intensive co-ops and the other enterprises a situation of unequal exchange might develop. The point is that while the investment process in Economic Democracy would be a lot more open and diffused than it is in capitalist societies, there is no guarantee that it would in any sense amount to equal access. Particularly in societies in which there are pre-existing bases for social differentiation (gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation) there may emerge systematic differences in the access to productive assets: minorities might be excluded from membership in the more profitable enterprises, not allowed ready access to investment finances and hence forced to rely on public sector works programmes. This possibility is, of course, not a necessary consequence of the model. To forestall these developments, one might think of legislating 'equal access' clauses into a bill of human rights.

Nevertheless 'actually existing Economic Democracy' is not likely to function as the pure model suggests. Indeed democratic institutions can be manipulated just as much as consumer spending can. To the extent to which access to productive assets can be controlled, it is likely that groups of individuals would find ways of exploiting this power.¹

This raises the question as to whether a full-scale restoration of capitalism (maybe in transmuted form) would be a possibility. For this to occur, some form of private 'ownership' of the means of production would have to be reintroduced and labour power would have to become a commodity once more. Arnold (1987a, 1987b, 1987c) argues that the existence of markets would *necessarily* lead to the restoration of capitalism. Arnold's case rests on the assumption, attacked by Schweickart (1987a, 1987b) that to succeed in the market place requires entrepreneurial skill, and that this is in short supply.

Enterprises would be forced to pay for this entrepreneurial skill thus reintroducing something akin to the private appropriation of profits. Furthermore these entrepreneurs would have to be given almost full control to decide the destiny of the enterprise. Although they might not legally 'own' it, in practice they would have full economic possession of it.

Even if one does not agree with Arnold's case, there are two points which can be noted, however. Firstly, the fact that there might be social *ownership* of the means of production does not mean that private groups might not be in actual *possession* of the means of production. In fact, there are real questions about what 'ownership' means in the model sketched out by Schweickart. If the community really owns the means of production could they dispossess a particular co-operative? What would happen, for example, if a particular co-operative decided to produce a product of which the majority of the community disapproved (e.g. pornographic magazines)? Could the community repossess the printing presses?

This seems unlikely. Indeed the success of the enterprise in the market place almost *requires* that the workers within the enterprise have the guarantee that they will reap the benefits of their labour. This seems to leave the members of the enterprise as *de facto*, although not *de jure* owners of the means of production. The only restriction on this ownership is that the means of production cannot be sold off (at least not below the level of community investment in the firm). To the extent to which there are inequalities in the level of productive assets possessed by different firms, there may be 'capitalist exploitation', as sketched out above.

A second point is that differences in skill and information can, of course, be bases for establishing inequalities. Indeed 'socialist exploitation' as defined by Roemer would certainly exist under Economic Democracy.

Markets and Socialism

While these differentials would not lead inevitably to the re-establishment of capitalism, the emphasis on the market in Economic Democracy does raise problems of its own. Arnold is correct, I believe, in arguing that Marx saw the market as a core constituent of capitalism and that many of the problems of capitalist society were due to the operation of the market.

One of the central Marxist critiques of 'generalised commodity production' was that

the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things. (Marx 1976:164-5)

Obscure as Marx's account of the 'fetishism of commodities' might appear, it does pinpoint a key feature of commodity production: that the *social* character of production is evident only after the event – if the commodity that is produced is actually exchanged for another one. In other words, the fact that a particular enterprise is embedded in a broader social division of labour becomes evident only if the product of that enterprise is actually exchanged in the market place. *Private* production becomes *social* production through the interchange of commodities.

Because the social character of the production process is realized only after the event, and is contingent on a sale being made, it is always possible that the private production effort is wasted – either because there happens to be a glut in the market or because there actually is no demand for the product (maybe people do not really *want* talking toilet seats). The fact that social needs could be communicated only through the properties of things – the price that a particular product fetched in the market – was one of the core criticisms levied by generations of socialists.

The solution envisaged was, of course, that of centrally planning the economy. As Schweickart (and other market socialists) note, this solution was in many ways much worse than that of the 'anarchy' of the market. Social need, as the very particular needs of countless *individuals*, could not communicate itself all that effectively through a central planning bureaucracy. Furthermore the power that went with such a centralized system ended up creating incentives inimical to either the expression of truly popular opinion or the efficient operation of the economy.

Do the undoubted failings of centralized systems, their informational inadequacies and perverse incentives mean, however, that we need to praise market solutions as uncritically as Schweickart is wont to do? What an uncritical embracing of the market prevents is a careful analysis of how markets actually function and how their operation might be improved, or modified to meet human needs much more satisfactorily.

In the first place, the idea that markets are the only (or perhaps major) mechanism by which information about needs and desires is transmitted from one economic agent to another seems a misreading of contemporary reality. With the direct computer linking of suppliers to their clients and 'just in time' technology at least some aspects of production are moving in directions where production is not for a disembodied 'consumer' but for a very particular client. Private production therefore becomes immediately social production.

Secondly, the purpose of market research is to supplement the

information obtained from the relationship of supply and demand in the market. It is to ascertain the particular needs of particular kinds of consumers. The development of 'user groups' by software companies is perhaps the largest step towards 'decommodifying' the relationship between buyers and sellers.

If these examples suggest that prices are not the *only* way in which economic agents discover the needs and projects of other agents, there are also arguments which suggest that prices serve many *other* roles than equilibrating demand and supply. Post-Keynesians have suggested that prices play other roles as well. Sawyer (1991) suggests that, *inter alia*, prices play a 'positional role' – to differentiate high-end products from their mass-market counterparts, or to signal the position of workers within the skill hierarchy; that they have a 'strategic role', in that they feature in the competitive strategies developed by firms; and that they have a 'financial role', since internally generated finance is important for the expansion plans of firms.

What these accounts suggest is that market competition will, in general, be *imperfect competition*. In these situations the price that is realized does not reflect only the relationship between supply and demand, but just as much the relative market power of different firms. Competition, to the extent to which it occurs, may just as easily focus on the quantities that are supplied, as on the price itself. Such 'fix-price' models seem to fit most commodity markets much better than the 'flex-price' models of neoclassical theory.

If power relations impinge on the setting of prices, this raises the question how power could be diffused. As Elson (1988) points out, one of the most important power asymmetries in the market place is that between households and firms. While firms, on the whole, collect fairly comprehensive information about households, this may not be equally true in the opposite direction. Consumer Associations are one mechanism that have arisen comparatively recently to try to counter-balance this asymmetry. By providing more detailed information about the nature of the product or the nature of the company, the anonymity of the market exchange is overcome to some extent. Similarly consumer campaigns targeting firms that engage in bad labour or environmental practices (such as the various 'Don't buy South African' campaigns) are another way in which the social nature of the market exchange is revealed.

It seems that any attempt to rethink the socialist project in the late twentieth century also needs to think of ways in which these trends towards the 'decommodification' of market exchange can be promoted.

The Future of Socialism?

In conclusion, let me try to summarize where I believe Schweickart's vision to be on the whole correct, and where I think that more work needs to be done.

- (1) The vision of the democratically managed enterprise is, I think, one which social democrats will, on the whole, concur with. Indeed, Bowles and Gintis (1993) argue that it is the possibility of the abuse of power (e.g. sexual harassment) which makes some form of democratic control imperative.
- (2) The question of the appropriate form of ownership needs to be debated further. Besides Schweickart's suggestion of community banks one could also consider mechanisms like Roemer's investment funds with all adults having shares in one or more of these funds. The key question would be how to design institutions which do not allow one section of the community the power to arbitrarily deny access to economic resources to other sections.
- (3) More thought needs to be devoted to ways and means of supplementing the information emerging from the market. Independent information about the nature of the production process (e.g. whether it is environmentally friendly or not) seems a prerequisite for making competition meaningful – to ensure that a lower price is, indeed, a signal of more efficient production and not due to the pillaging of natural and human resources.

The key question is, of course, how to get there. In this regard I am less optimistic than Schweickart. For reasons outlined above, I am not sure that 'socialism in one country' will succeed (unless, perhaps, that country happens to be the United States of America). Nevertheless I do believe that struggles over the establishment of more democratic working conditions and over more information about products and labour processes can significantly alter the concrete workings of contemporary economies and serve as the foundations for the establishment of a more democratic order. What this means is that the agenda (for the foreseeable future) is a reformist and not a revolutionary one. This means that social democrats will have to look critically at different *types* of capitalism and decide which ones are most compatible with their long-term vision. *Laissez-Faire* and Post-Keynesian capitalism are certainly not on a moral par.

The virtue of a book like Schweickart's is that it keeps social democrats focused on the 'big' picture. Its main dangers are that we forget that actual societies rarely, if ever, work in the way that

our visions would like them to; and that we overlook the more short-term improvements that we can make in our existing economies.

NOTES

1. Lest it be thought that every economic system might have this problem, it appears to me that Roemer's 'coupon economy' (1995) would perhaps experience this problem to a lesser extent.

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Contributors to *Theoria* 86

Zygmunt Bauman is Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Leeds. He is the author of *Legislators and Interpreters*, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, *Postmodern Ethics*, and *Modernity and Ambivalence*, among other books. His latest publication is *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (1995).

James Bohman is Professor of Philosophy at the University of St Louis. He is author, among other works, of *New Philosophy of Social Science*.

Simon Critchley is Reader in Philosophy at the University of Essex and Director of the Centre for European Philosophy. He has published *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, and co-edited (with Robert Bernasconi) *Re-Reading Levinas*. He is also the author of numerous articles on Derrida and Levinas.

Raphaël de Kadt teaches in the Department of Politics at the University of Natal, Durban, and is Editor-in-Chief of *Theoria*.

Michael J. C. Echeruo is William Safire Professor of Modern Letters in the Department of English at Syracuse University. His recent publications include 'Re-defining the "Ludic": Mimesis, Expression, and the Festival Mode', in *The Play of the Self*; 'Negritude and History: Senghor's Argument with Frobenius', *RAL*, 24:2, 1993; and 'Shakespeare and the Boundaries of Kinship', in *Shakespeare in Africa*. His *Standard Dictionary of Igbo* is forthcoming (1996) from Yale University Press.

Harvey J. Kaye is the Ben and Joyce Rosenberg Professor of Social Change and Development and Director of the Center for History and Social Change at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. He is the author of *The British Marxist Historians*, *The Powers of the Past*, and *The Education of Desire: Marxists and the Writing of History*, which was awarded the 1993 Isaac Deutscher Memorial Prize.

Shane Moran teaches in the Department of English at the University of Natal, Durban.

Claus Offe is Professor in the Philosophische Fakultät III of the Fakultätsinstitut Sozialwissenschaften at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. He is author of, among many other works, *Disorganised Capitalism* and *The Contradictions of the Welfare State*.

Michael Pendlebury is Professor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, and is at present Visiting Professor at the University of North Carolina.

Martin Wittenberg lectures in the Department of Economics at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg.