

Canadian Journal of  
**POLITICAL AND SOCIAL  
THEORY**

# **HOLLYWOOD HOTMMOOD**

**Sartre was wrong. This is not the age of Marx, of History. It is the morrow of Nietzsche, of bad conscience as normal reason, of the tragic sense of modern life, of eternal recurrence as happy burlesque. The crisis of modernity has transcended the myth of political economy. Increasingly, the secret of Enlightenment is revealed in the ambiguous text of cultural experience...**

**Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory**  
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## REASON, PASSION AND INTEREST: PIERRE TRUDEAU'S ETERNAL LIBERAL TRIANGLE\*

*Reginald Whitaker*

Considerable attention has been lavished over the years on Trudeau as the philosopher of federalism and bitter critic of Quebec nationalism. It is easy enough to assume, along with the Right and Left in English Canada and *le tout-Quebec*, that Trudeau's "rigidity" and "inflexibility" on these questions has simply left him as an anachronism, passed over by the rush of events and the seemingly inexorable advance of *indépendantisme* in Quebec and decentralist regionalism in English Canada. Yet nothing is more notoriously ephemeral than political fortune. That Trudeau's ideas are presently in eclipse is apparent; that they are thereby exhausted is by no means obvious. It is a mark of the power of this man that no strong federalist position can in the near future escape the colour and quality which his expression has given to this thesis in the dialectics of centralization-decentralization and duality-separation. In this sense alone Trudeau's arguments bear continued reading: to a greater extent than many of us would like to admit, he remains close to the heart of our central dilemmas.

It is not however this relatively familiar terrain which I propose to cover once again. Journalist Anthony Westell wrote a book on Trudeau called *Paradox in Power*, and that phrase perhaps best sums up a common reading of Trudeau, especially by English Canadian intellectuals. How could a man who first rose to notoriety in Duplessis' Quebec as a "radical" defender of strikers, a passionate proponent of civil liberties and a tireless advocate of democratization of public life turn into the prime minister who invoked the War Measures Act, defended

\* This paper was originally presented, in slightly different form, at a symposium on the political thought of Pierre Trudeau, sponsored by the Department of Political Science at the University of Calgary, 19 October, 1979.

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RCMP illegal acts, and brought down wage controls against the labour movement? Many, particularly on the left, simply shrug their shoulders at yet one more sorry example of how "power" turns decent progressives into vicious reactionaries. Others return to Trudeau's early writings for evidence of the original sin always lurking beneath the opportunist's costume of the day.

I think the answer to this problem is rather more complex but also more interesting than either of these alternatives. Trudeau's reflections on politics over the last thirty years, while scarcely constituting an original contribution to political philosophy, nevertheless do offer striking and sometimes illuminating insights into the strengths and weaknesses of liberal-democratic thought, insights given further pungency by his personal participation in political power. It is not so much the specific concerns of Trudeau — French Canada and federalism — which appear most interesting in this light, although they have received most attention, but the more general problems of liberal-democratic theory and practice. Let us give Trudeau his due: he has always wanted to be known for what is universal in his makeup, rather than what is culturally particular. Of course, as a social being, man must start from the particular to approach the universal. George Grant, in deploring Trudeau's "evident distaste for what was by tradition his own," goes on to admit that his "quality of being a convert to modern liberalism is one cause of his formidability."<sup>1</sup> What English-speaking Canadians have generally accepted as tradition, Trudeau gained as rational accession. This may account for the vigour and the freshness of his thinking, so uncommon in this era of liberal pessimism and uncertainty. It also gives us the opportunity to grasp, at the level of theory, contradictions of liberal-democratic practice which are otherwise normally engaged at the level of empirical political science alone.

"Reason over passion." Trudeau once proclaimed this as his personal motto. It is no accident that his arch rival, René Lévesque, has recently had a book published under the title of *La Passion du Québec*. But Trudeau's slogan is, in this form, scarcely more fertile or illuminating than Lévesque's affectation. No theory of liberal democracy could be deduced from the proclaimed supremacy of "reason." It is my thesis that a third, sometimes silent, partner to this relationship is the ancient liberal actor, *interest*. It is this *ménage à trois* of reason, passion and interest which forms the more interesting dynamic of Trudeau's liberal politics. It is an *eternal* triangle, without resolution: a romantic liberal tragedy played out again and again. If we still applaud, it is because the plot continues to speak to our concrete political experience in the English-speaking world.

Trudeau comes to this originally as an outsider, as it were. Few have analyzed with such mordant wit and such Voltairian iconoclasm the bizarre, fantastic world of Quebec ideological life before the Quiet Revolution, as Trudeau himself in his journalism of the 1950s. Abraham Rotstein once remarked of

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Trudeau's thought that "it seems vaguely, in its intellectual underpinnings, *à la recherche d'un siècle perdu*."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, one can almost see Trudeau as once striving to be a one-man Enlightenment to a nation which had put the French eighteenth century under permanent interdiction. Yet, it is this only "vaguely," for Trudeau did not stop at 1789, and even formulated a relatively complex answer to the ambiguous legacy of the Enlightenment. He is also very much inspired by the nineteenth-and twentieth-century *English*-speaking liberal tradition and this gives his thought an eclectic leaven. When examined in its uniqueness, this elective world view proves to be often surprising, and almost always interesting.

The first surprise, and one which has passed unnoticed by the nationalist and conservative critics who see Trudeau as a "rootless cosmopolitan," is to find a religious foundation to his thought. His old reputation as an anticlerical "radical" and his reluctance to publicize his religious faith for political ends have misled these critics in the same way as his fashionable technocratic rhetoric about cybernetics and functionalism. It is true, however, as he himself has admitted, that his faith is more protestant than traditionally Catholic, inasmuch as his well known reluctance to accept external discipline interferes with the acceptance of hierarchial authority. On the other hand, Trudeau very early on decided, in his perversely individualistic way, that just because the Church told him to believe in God was no reason to become an atheist. A reading of Aquinas on the relationship between morality and free choice convinced him that he could accept certain moral codes and precepts *freely* as a rational form of self-discipline. His Catholicism thus placed the emphasis on inner conscience rather than on external conformity to rules. And it was the Christian existentialists, Kierkegaard, Berdyaev and Mounier who influenced his developing mind the most. The personalist philosophy of Mounier's review, *Esprit*, indeed exercised a pervasive influence over the entire *Cité Libre* group. In Trudeau's case, personalism meant that the fundamental datum of the social order is the *individual*, not a technological Prometheus unbound from chains of religious tradition, but rather the individual as the personal reflection of humanity's origin as God's creation in His own image. It also meant that faith must be manifested not in contemplative witness, but in the social embodiment of virtue in actual behaviour (in *works* if we may use a Protestant term.) We find here the abstract basis of a social liberalism which argues that the individual is the irreducible basis of the social order, requiring the maximum possible liberty so that autonomous wills may create the spontaneous nexus allowing for creativity and progress.<sup>3</sup>

*Publicly* a defender of a secular morality, Trudeau as Minister of Justice reformed the criminal code in matters of sexual and personal morality not in terms of "permissiveness," but on the high ground of liberal principle:

We are now living in a social climate in which people are

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beginning to realize, perhaps for the first time in the history of this country, that we are not entitled to impose the concepts which belong to a sacred society upon a civil or profane society. The concepts of the civil society in which we live are pluralistic, and I think this parliament realizes that it would be a mistake for us to legislate into this society concepts which belong to a theological or sacred order.<sup>4</sup>

To trust to personal conscience matters which do not call into question the liberty of others is not merely a liberal principle *à la* J.S. Mill; in Trudeau's case it reflects a respect for the value of the individual conscience which itself has a religious rather than a secular basis. Hence his reasoned rejection of capital punishment in parliament began with a theoretical discussion of the Christian concepts of justifiable self-protection and the just war as moral bases for taking a life, then argued that the question of capital punishment as a "justifiable act of collective self-defence" could only be answered by "factual data and logical induction, not moral philosophy," and called for a "practical rather than a moral judgement." Having then rejected the death penalty on these "practical" grounds, Trudeau concluded that, under these circumstances it was therefore immoral for the state to deliberately take a man's life. That he in effect places the burden of proof on the state rather than the individual cannot, I think, be dissociated from the *sacred* value embodied in the individual. This becomes especially clear in his angry dismissal of the argument that the state should "experiment" with the death penalty to determine if it actually deters murder. In a rejection which also applies to all calls for revolutionary violence against individuals to advance some collective project, Trudeau simply asserts that we have no business experimenting with human lives.<sup>5</sup> Again, his well known antimilitarism stops short of pacifism: "In my political philosophy, I think that there sometimes is room for violence. In my religion I really cannot think of cases where violence is justified .... But, here again, when the religious principles, like the philosophical, are translated into reality, sometimes the reality forces violence on you, and there is no escape from it, and then I don't think it's something you should try to hide your face from."<sup>6</sup>

A personalist Catholic morality places on the individual a heavy burden of moral choice in concrete situations. Political philosophy is a kind of practical reason indicating a systematic basis for making such difficult choices, the difficulty of which deepens drastically when one moves from teacher and preacher to power wielding politician. We should now go on to follow Trudeau along this path of ascending difficulty, while never allowing the starting point to slip from our minds, as it has from the minds of all too many of his critics.

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Once in the course of attacking a statement of André Laurendeau that liberty must be wrested from authority, Trudeau replied unequivocally that "Liberty is a free gift — a birthright, which distinguishes man from beast." He went on to draw the consequence that the "game of politics should consist less in wresting liberties from a grudging State than in grudgingly delegating powers to the State." He even makes a case for "inalienable rights" of the individual in democratic theory, to be guaranteed by bills of rights which are anterior in "some sense" to the very existence of the state, although he does so in rather functionalist terms which would no doubt fail to please true natural law theorists: "to assure the effective participation of all citizens in the development of public policy, these rights must remain vested in each citizen independently of the laws."<sup>7</sup> In 1964, expressing his contempt for the revolutionary pretensions of that era's "nationalist brood," he spoke in somewhat forlorn tones of Quebec's revolution which never took place: such a revolution could "have consisted in freeing man from collective coercions ... in the triumph of the freedoms of the human being as inalienable rights, over and above capital, the nation, tradition, the Church, and even the State." This kind of statement, along with his quotations of Acton and other writers stressing the sacred quality of man's individual dignity, have led at least one Quebec critic to decry Trudeau's exclusively and naively ethical interpretation of rationality.<sup>8</sup> While avoiding the error of those who view Trudeau as simply an amoral Machiavellian, this interpretation fails to do justice to the complexity of his liberalism. For while Trudeau begins with the individual and his "free gift" of liberty, he quickly situates this *datum* in the real world of conflict, violence, insecurity and death. If Cain used his "free gift" of liberty to slay his brother, then Christianity obviously will not save us in *this* world. We need political philosophy and law — the latter understood as both social science and social control.<sup>9</sup>

In allowing himself to muse on the Quebec revolution that might have been, he was allowing his irritation and anguish at the actual course of events to get the better of his own good sense. Elsewhere his writings are studded with exhortations to follow the "first law of politics ... to start from the facts rather than from historical 'might-have-beens,' warnings that history is useful only as a guide to a future toward which we are being impelled by material reality, brilliant denunciations of the irrelevance of social and political theory divorced from social and economic facts, and appeals to *realpolitik*.<sup>10</sup>

Trudeau's sense of reality and of the transience of human contrivance has led conservative and nationalist critics to accuse him of mindless celebration of the triumph of modernity. Some of his rhetoric certainly suggests this; one hesitates to deny this as an element in his thought which has on occasion gained supremacy. But to assume, with George Grant, that liberalism always identifies necessity with goodness, is to oversimplify. Trudeau has often exhibited a

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historical sense of the impermanence of things, and of the ironies which history plays on those who seem to shape it. Speaking of Louis Riel in 1968, he wondered "how many of us understand the loneliness, the sense of futility of such a man? How many of us are willing to concede that future historians, in chronicling the events of our lives, may choose to emphasize and applaud the activities, not of the privileged majority, but of some little known leader of an unpopular minority?" More to the point is his facing up to the fact that "the nation of French Canadians will some day fade from view and ... Canada itself will undoubtedly not exist forever. Benda points out that it is to the lasting greatness of Thucydides that he was able to visualize a world in which Athens would be no more."<sup>11</sup> Nor can we simply take this as cheerful surrender to progress. Since the PQ victory in 1976 Trudeau has on more than one occasion publicly confronted the possibility that Quebec may indeed separate: which is to say, that everything to which Trudeau has dedicated his public life since 1965 will come to naught. Trudeau's very activism on this issue indicates that he sees history as made by men, not impersonal forces. But if the results must ultimately be accepted, this acceptance may be closer to classical stoicism than to Panglossian celebration. Once in a television interview, before he became prime minister (and before his ill-fated marriage), he quoted Marcus Aurelius: "This vase you hold in your hands may shatter, this woman you love may be unfaithful."

But if all is flux and if brute reality rules the world, Trudeau would have little resort but to retreat to a private garden of contemplation. On the contrary, the superiority of modern liberalism to classical stoicism is in its development of mechanisms for managing the tension between change and continuity. The key is to create a procedural basis for resolving conflicting demands on criteria minimally acceptable to all actors in the process. Individuals compete, economically, socially and politically, in a continual process of remaking the world; the only constant is the process itself — the rules of the game, so to speak. This much is obvious and central to any genuinely liberal reading of the political process. What is perhaps less obvious is the extent to which such a reading precludes, on theoretical grounds alone, any prior acceptance of the Good, or of *a priori* moral ends of the community. Instead of the Good there can be only "goods," demonstrated to be goods only by the fact that they are demanded. If justice is the resolution of competing demands on a procedural basis acceptable to all reasoning and calculating participants, then any dedication of the community to a particular concept of the Good is, *ipso facto*, an upsetting of the procedural fairness of a liberal political order. We in the English-speaking world have thought and acted so much in this familiar intellectual landscape that we are often incapable of seeing it whole.<sup>12</sup> Trudeau, a passionate (if he would forgive the word) convert to this world-view from a cultural milieu in which such ideas were by no means familiar, raises some



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fundamental questions with particular clarity and force.

When Trudeau tells us that "ideological systems are the true enemies of freedom," he is telling us something which appears on the surface as little more than an appeal to North American "pragmatism." In fact he is getting at something more interesting from the point of view of his political philosophy: how to reconcile the claims of liberty and authority without allowing the answer given at a particular moment to harden into an orthodoxy which itself becomes an obstacle to future flexibility. His much-quoted remarks on creating "counterweights" and his insistence on checks-and-balances, whether in parliamentary or federal forms, are the institutional expression of his personal guide to political participation: "When a political ideology is universally accepted by the elite, when the people who define situations embrace and venerate it, this means that it is high time free men were fighting it."<sup>13</sup> The core of the opposition to ideological systems does not rest on some faith in pragmatism as political know-how, but on the liberal principle that only *procedures*, never ends, can be sacrosanct in a progressive society. Ideological systems congeal volatile elements into monopolies by transforming goods into the Good. This seems to me to be a crucial point in Trudeau's thought. As a shorthand, I will call it "procedural justice." If we see that Trudeau's focus always rests on justice as procedure, never as end, I think his thought becomes much clearer, overall.

Procedural justice remains at an unacceptably rarefied level of abstraction when argued in narrow political terms alone. To see why this is so, let us begin with Trudeau's most ambitious attempt to expound a pure political theory of democracy, his 1950s articles in *Vrai*, later gathered together in book form.<sup>14</sup> Faced with the "*grand noirceur*" of Duplessis' Quebec, Trudeau wishes to provide an answer to a question which he poses in a provocatively personal way: "how it is that Maurice can give orders to Pierre?" The heaviest penalty for refusing to engage in politics is to be ruled by someone inferior to yourself.\* Even if madmen rule over us, it is least up to us to "see to it that we are governed no worse than is absolutely necessary." We are going to be governed, like it or not, but we must demand from political power that any exercise of authority be explained in a way which satisfies our reason, since the "nature of things" cannot explain the conventional forms which politics actually take in the world. From this late eighteenth-century *philosophe* position of radical scepticism Trudeau stakes a claim on explaining the universal principles which underlie the diversity of the real world of politics.

All the obscurantist theories of authority fall in the face of one overwhelming fact of human history: men *do* overthrow rulers, whether "divine" or otherwise. "In the last analysis any given political authority exists only because

\*Presumably the 1979 election indicates that political engagement is no proof against this eventuality.

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men consent to obey it. In this sense, what exists is not so much the authority as the obedience." In other words, in the long run the only sovereignty is popular sovereignty. This is not to deny that there is a "psychological disposition" to obey; history and observation will indicate (not least in the Quebec of this era) that the people will put up with a very great deal before being moved to disobedience, but it is the ultimate sanction of disobedience or revolution which is the crucial fact. After all, to shift gears to ethical terms, if the "purpose of living in society is that every man may fulfil himself as far as possible" and if that society serves him badly, then "he is entitled to overthrow it." This should not imply anarchy, however. It is up to each citizen to judge the value of his particular state, but the standards upon which such judgements may be made cannot be mere individual interests, since, lacking the crucial bond of social solidarity, a society of egoists quickly becomes a society of slaves. "To remain free then, citizens must seek their welfare in a social order that is just to the largest number; in practice only the majority has the power to make and unmake governments."

There is a middle way between despotism and anarchy which rests on the device of the majority. Democracy is a mechanism of civilized peoples "whereby citizens can fight against laws they disapprove of without going outside the law or becoming conscientious objectors or political martyrs." A constitutional democracy is one in which the rule of law is interpreted as follows: "our obedience then is not to individuals but to the general will of the nation, a will embodied in laws, to whose service and execution the rulers are appointed." The particular will of the statesman must bow to this general will: "that is why the statesman must be attentive to the needs of all sectors of society, with no bias towards thwarting any one of them, and must wish only to reconcile them all and direct them towards the general interest." Understood in this context, Trudeau's Lockean espousal of the right to revolution as a logical corollary of the doctrine of popular sovereignty is, like Locke's own teaching, a conservative device to prevent the necessity of violence or tyrannicide. "If that is to have a revolutionary spirit, then I admit to it, but I must add that such a spirit is the best safeguard against revolution."

This purely political theory of democracy has the virtue at least of vigorous clarity and forceful expression. Compelled to explain first principles in a society hostile to liberalism, Trudeau does provide us with the skeleton rather than the clothes. But the very starkness of the skeleton discloses all too readily some missing linkages. A major example lies in the adequate discussion of the social content underlying the political forms and, allied to this, the emptiness of Trudeau's concept of the state.

Trudeau's use of Rousseauian language (general will, particular interests) was, no doubt deliberately, a provocation to the clerical reactionaries and conservative nationalists of the day to whom Rousseau was a veritable red flag.<sup>15</sup>

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Yet aside from his evident desire to *épater la (petite) bourgeoisie*, it is not clear what Trudeau gains from Rousseau. The latter had a very clear idea of the social preconditions for the emergence and maintenance of a "general will," and very rigorous conditions they were — to the extent that Rousseau himself was left wondering if such a conjuncture would ever be possible in the real world. Above all, Rousseau had a strong sense of the distortions which the uneven distribution of property and economic interests would have on the possibility of the general will finding expression. Even if Rousseau's own solution was anachronistic and contradictory, it is somewhat startling to note that Trudeau does not even diagnose the problem, let alone suggest a solution. The closest he comes is in the above-quoted sentence in which he discusses the impotence of mere egoistic motives to effect revolution and concludes that citizens should seek a "social order that is just to the largest number." When he follows this immediately with the statement that "in practice only the majority has the power to make and unmake governments" it seems that he is suggesting only a mechanistic argument from power politics; the so-called "general will" is nothing more than a given majority. But if this general will is merely the addition of particular wills, each presumably reflecting individual "egoistic" interests, into an evanescent coalition controlling a majority of votes, then it is at least incumbent upon the political theorist to consider the particular wills in their social reality, which is to say, in their class reality. What are the classes and the class interests which go to make up the "general will" of a democracy through the mechanism of majority rule? Or, to rephrase the question in historical terms, what are the different kinds of democracy which are possible under this principle? This pure theory of popular sovereignty would seem to yield a good deal less than meets the eye. At least Locke made it fairly clear what kind of majority he was advocating.

The lack of social content to the concept of sovereignty tends to vitiate almost entirely Trudeau's concept of the state. "The state," he announces, "is an article made to measure by its citizens, according to the precise amount of obedience they are prepared to offer it." He pleads with Quebecers to see the state not as a foreign power but as something which "has been for all practical purposes in the hands of those whom we choose from election to election." It is all quite simple, really: "the state is by definition the instrument whereby human society collectively organizes itself and expresses itself. A sovereign society that fears the state is ... unconvinced of the usefulness of its own existence as a group." The state grew because individual efforts could not provide the society with necessary services, whereupon "the community simply decided to solve these problems communally, through the state." Quoting Karl Marx and Saint Thomas More, he does admit that at "all times and under all systems there is a tendency for the few to use the State to enslave the many." But for this democracy is itself the sole remedy, "since it is the system in which

the citizen consents to be governed by a body of laws that the majority of citizens wanted."<sup>16</sup> The state, as such, collapses into the democratic majority. Or, as Trudeau's *Cité Libre* collaborator, Jean Pellerin later summed it up neatly: "*L'état, c'est nous.*"<sup>17</sup> Trudeau does suggest that while the state should do more, it should arouse less reverence and face more means of control and limitation. But this is merely the opposite side of the coin to the sovereignty of the people. What most strikes the reader some twenty years after Trudeau's political statement is its naive reductionism. There is almost nothing about the influence which particular interests (Rousseau's partial associations) may exercise on the formation of majorities as well as upon the exercise of power by the state, nothing about the representation of particular interests within the state. If Trudeau had set out to demystify the state in the eyes of Quebecers, he surely was setting up an equally mythical construct in its place.

He does admit two major qualifications to his theory. First is his Millian insistence that majorities have no monopoly of truth and that the liberties of minorities must thus be protected. This of course can be explained, as by J.S. Mill himself, on progressive grounds: today's minority may be tomorrow's majority. Majorities should be liberal toward minorities out of prudence alone. At the same time the tyranny of the majority is itself in violation of the fundamental liberal concept of procedural justice. A tyrannical majority would in effect have substituted its idea of the Good for the free individual pursuit of goods. In this sense majorities are merely practical mechanisms for registering a critical weight of opinion against excesses of government, but have no value in and of themselves.

A much more serious qualification is also admitted, but only through the back door, as it were. Having described a Platonic form of the state which was in no way related to the specificity of twentieth-century liberal-democratic capitalism, he then grants that a democratic majority cannot understand the complexities of modern legislation and administration. This admission is in contradiction to the theory of the state as an "article made to measure by its citizens." The recognition of the Weberian principle of the state as a bureaucratic phenomenon leads Trudeau to a further attempt at precision which calls into question the entire concept of majority rule as a mechanism of popular sovereignty. In a well known passage, he indicates that the "electoral system asks of the citizen only that he should decide on a set of ideas and tendencies, and on men who can hold them and give effect to them. These sets of ideas and men constitute political parties, which are indispensable for the functioning of parliamentary democracy." Voters will not be asked to decide "each of the technical problems presented by the complicated art of government in the modern world." The point is made clearer yet when Trudeau posits a hypothetical benevolent despot and asserts the need for some mechanism whereby the despot would be forced to abdicate if opinion went

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against him — but this, Trudeau concludes is, itself the “actual mechanism of democracy.” In a functioning democracy, “at each election ... the people assert their liberty by deciding what government they will consent to obey.” Popular sovereignty thus means no more than the ultimate authority residing in the people at elections to recall the mandate of politicians in office. The people can judge government only by results — “real or apparent on the happiness of the group.”<sup>18</sup>

We thus see a double reinterpretation of popular sovereignty: first, it becomes identified with numerical majorities (albeit with liberal guarantees for minorities), and second, majorities themselves are called into being only as periodic ratifications or rejections of the politicians who head the state — a state which, by indirect inference must be assumed to be a much more formidable and autonomous organism than the pure theory would lead us to believe.

Trudeau's purely political formulation was admittedly designed for a limited and specific polemical purpose. When he turns his attention to the question of the origin of the state — the hypothetical social contract underlying it — he has managed to suggest more fruitful perspectives. In an article written in the early 1960s, he drew attention to the dilemma of the individual in modern society “hamstrung by a web of social, economic and administrative institutions,” unable to determine if he is being economically exploited by monopoly capital: “And even if the citizen knew he was the victim of an injustice, he wouldn't have the power to come to grips with such offenders. Therefore, if the citizen wants to avoid being commanded against his will at every turn, he must give himself as a protector a state strong enough to subordinate to the common good all the individuals and organizations who make up society.”<sup>19</sup> Here we can readily detect the tones of an earlier theorist who was most concerned with the state as a means of protecting citizens from one another: Thomas Hobbes. The “common good” is not, in this Hobbesian formulation, the Good as a community goal, but the rules which allow a minimum of security in the pursuit of individual goods. The strong state is necessary precisely because competition in civil society renders life insecure.

Trudeau's constant appeals to “facts” and “reality” begin to make sense in this context. In the way in which Robert Dahl defines political power (“a relation among actors in which one actor induces other actors to act in some way they would not otherwise act” based on the Hobbesian combination of promise of rewards and threat of sanction).<sup>20</sup> Trudeau sees power as the basic datum of politics, the building blocks material, as it were, of the political superstructure of values and institutions. At first glance this seems incompatible with the rather idealist and abstracted reading of politics described just a moment ago. It depends, however, on the level of analysis. Hobbesian *realpolitik* at the structural level readily turns into idealism at the superstructural level. This is,

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indeed, an ideological characteristic of liberal thought. Trudeau is no exception.

One of the closing paragraphs of his *Approaches to Politics* makes the connection between the two levels quite overtly. It is worth quoting at length:

As for majority rule, the fact must be faced that it is a convention, possessing simply a practical value. It is convenient to choose governments and pass laws by majority vote, so that those who exercise authority can feel assured of having more supporters than opponents — which is itself some guarantee that the social order will be upheld. It is true that from one point of view the majority convention is only a roundabout way of applying the law of the stronger, in the form of the law of the more numerous. Let us admit it, but note at the same time that human groupings took a great step towards civilization when they agreed to justify their actions by counting heads instead of breaking them.<sup>21</sup>

Under the clothes of the Enlightenment which Trudeau strove to legitimate in Duplessis' Quebec we find, if not the old Adam, at least the old Hobbes, as revealed in Locke's majoritarian rendering.

My stress on the Hobbesian basis of Trudeau's reading of the foundations of the state rests on more than the pedantic desire of the historian of political thought to classify theorists into historical pigeonholes. The failure to recognize the Hobbesian assumptions which Locke slipped into modern liberal discourse has arguably misled generations of students of liberal democracy into most peculiar and irrelevant notions of the "rule of laws, not men" and of the strictly limited state — notions which have worn increasingly thin in the last few decades of state capitalist development. There has always been a sense that the political culture of Canada has been rather more Hobbesian than that of America, but now the case is being made that the constitutional foundations of the United States are deeply Hobbesian as well.<sup>22</sup> Certainly since C.B. Macpherson's *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* we are better able to appreciate the curious combination of possessive individualism in civil society and a policing sovereign grown more and more absolutist in the public sphere, a combination which appears to be characteristic of liberal democracies in the late twentieth-century. And since it is on grounds of his alleged "betrayal" of civil liberties in office that Trudeau has drawn most criticism from academic critics, this Hobbesian basis of the state should be examined.

Hobbes broke from classical political philosophy by denying that political rights and obligations could be derived from natural law as an ideal pattern of

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behaviour. Individuals alone could be seen as the source of right, and this right could be understood only in terms of the private wills of individuals. The unlimited appetite for power which Hobbes read in human nature was itself both cause and consequence of the chaotic conflict of particular private wills in competition with one another: striving for power was a striving for an illusory security resulting only in the universal insecurity of the state of nature. However, individuals in the state of nature are also rational calculators of their self-interest. Enlightened self-interest, the highest form of reason, suggests that the transfer of each individual's power to a sovereign is the appropriate means of creating secure foundations for the continued pursuit of private goods. It also suggests that the sovereign will prudently take into account the interests of his subjects for his own security, although he is not bound by the social contract to do so. Locke, and Trudeau, extend this somewhat by developing the majoritarian doctrine as a more flexible device for effecting the same end.

Trudeau accepts a great deal of this Hobbesian teaching, more than most have been willing to see. But he does not accept all of it, and it is here that he remains interesting as more than a mere interpreter. The most crucial difference between Trudeau and the seventeenth-century liberal thinkers derives directly from Trudeau's own specific cultural and intellectual background in twentieth-century Quebec, and more generally from his experience as an observer of twentieth-century world history. Trudeau has seen the re-emergence on a vast and frightening scale of an element in human nature which the seventeenth-century liberals believed they had contained: *the passions*. To Trudeau, men are not quite the rational calculators of self-interest which Hobbes posited; they *may* be that, but they may also be passionate champions of irrational causes which, by objective standards, would not be in their self-interest as calculating individuals. What happens to the liberal theory of procedural justice when men passionately devote themselves to the application of a particular concept of the community Good even at the expense of their individual pursuit of goods? And what happens when this passion turns out to be a passion for one's Own rather than the Good, but interpreted on a collective rather than on an individual basis? In short, to speak the name with which Trudeau has identified this passion, what happens to liberalism when *nationalism* is let loose on the world?

Classical political philosophy had taught that the desire for material gratification was the necessary but not sufficient condition of the political order. Plato saw the money-makers as the first level of the just city, to be governed by the quality of spiritedness or courage which in turn must be governed by reason or wisdom. Christianity in a sense separated the last level from politics by placing wisdom in the City of God. The virtue of spiritedness as the governing principle of pre-capitalist society had long disclosed its limitations in the passions and warfare which constantly rent the fabric of



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European society. Hobbes well understood that the passionate desire for honour was disruptive of all social peace. At the same time, bourgeois property relations and the dedication to money-making were evils which could be counterbalanced to the evils of the passionate politics of princes. The calculability and predictability of a commercial society could even begin to seem as agreeable alternatives (*le doux commerce*) to the old order with its aristocratic passion for heroic virtue. Ultimately in Locke it could provide the social basis for a reliable bourgeois majority guaranteeing order. The notion of man as a calculating being pursuing his self-interest (reasoned, deliberate self-love) appeared to many Europeans emerging out of feudalism not as the bleak picture many in the twentieth century see, but as a liberating view, when interest is seen as a force counteracting the irrational and destructive passions.<sup>23</sup>

It should be clear that a market economy is a necessary structural precondition of the rational calculating human nature required for liberal procedural justice. Indeed the equation of rationality with market rationality or reason with calculation is so pervasive in the contemporary literature as to make their disentanglement difficult indeed. Suffice to say for now that to Trudeau practical reason is thus linked with individual calculation of self-interest. Of course philosophical or theological knowledge unconnected to the market is not denied; it is simply assumed to be the realm of that private, autonomous self, the inner person, which his personalist Catholic liberalism tells him forms the end of social and political organization. The individual is free to pursue his reason in this sense wherever it takes him, and he must be protected in this autonomous activity by safeguards against, for example, the tyranny of public opinion. But it is quite another matter for the individual to impose his private views on his community where such an imposition interferes with procedural justice. The latter can only rest on a firm basis of calculating self-interested wills; practical or political reason is the intelligent management of all these conflicting interests within a dynamic equilibrium. The art of the statesman is thus a kind of meta-rationality in the economic sense, "fine-tuning" (to use a current cliché) the market mechanism. As Mandeville wrote long ago in the *Fable of the Bees*, the "skillful management of the Dextrous Politician" is the necessary condition for turning private vices into public benefits. Mandeville meant not day-to-day crisis management but the conscious elaboration over time of an appropriate legal and institutional framework. This would seem close to Trudeau's views of the role of the rational statesman.

In this light, it is no surprise to find in Trudeau's writing that the market, the industrialization which the market entailed, and finally the entire panoply of modern technology which came in the wake of industrialization, were all taken as *givens*. Bélanger adds, "*le politique, à l'opposé, paraîtra beaucoup plus malleable, sujet à une construction; bref, à un certain voulu. De ce fait, il ouvrira la porte toute grande à une vision éthique de la res publica.*"<sup>24</sup> Hence

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the crucial disjuncture which I noted earlier between a realist reading of social and economic structure and an idealist reading of the political superstructure. But the contradiction involved in this, while characteristic of liberal thought, is all too easily apparent. Politics is hardly the realm of freedom; its relative autonomy is merely a short length of leading-strings. And these leading-strings are its own understanding of reason as calculating self-interest.

Trudeau's earlier espousal of "socialism" or the social-democratic state was indeed, in Pierre Vallières' contemptuous phrase, a mere "*étiquette*."<sup>25</sup> It is a sad comment on the sheer political illiteracy of right wing journalists in this country that this "socialism" was ever taken seriously in the first place. At best, he never meant more than certain state actions to promote greater equality of opportunity among individuals, or perhaps a certain Galbraithian faith that technology entailed more state intervention and regulation.<sup>26</sup> "Powerful financial interests, monopolies and cartels are in a position to plan large sectors of the national economy for the profit of the few, rather than for the welfare of all. Whereas any serious planning by the state, democratically controlled, is dismissed as a step toward Bolshevism."<sup>27</sup> Only those haunted souls who would define the "skillful management of the Dextrous Politician" as socialistic need be alarmed by this.

Far more dangerous to Trudeau's mind than concentrations of economic power in the market was the growth of nationalist passions in the hearts of his fellow Quebecois. Passion overthrows reason again and again in the twentieth century. The relationship between passion and interest is, however, relatively complex in a concrete historical situation. It is a peculiarity of nationalism that one person's interest is another person's passion: nationalism too involves its own individual interests, but they can only be achieved at the expense of a greater irrationality, an illiberal political regime.

In his analysis of Quebec society in the 1950s, Trudeau looked for a class basis for opposition to Duplessis' *ancien régime*. Whose class interests would propel them in the direction of confronting the political autocracy and the ludicrous and irrelevant social ideologies which diverted attention from its true nature? Trudeau found his answer in the Quebec working class whose class interest in democratization had been dramatically indicated in the famous 1949 Asbestos Strike at which Trudeau himself assisted. The workers were learning that "*devant un conflit d'intérêts, un gouvernement gouverne toujours pour le profit de ces secteurs qui le reporteront au pouvoir*." This meant, despite nationalist pleas for ethnic unanimity, that class struggle was a positive good in which the working class would change the world through struggling for its *own* interests. This did not mean revolutionary class struggle, of course: "*il faut laisser les forces sociales s'exprimer rationnellement et calmement au sein d'une cité libre*."<sup>28</sup> Trudeau read the struggle of labour and capital in a thoroughly Hobbesian way, especially when he praised the workers' escalating demands as

part of the motor of economic progress, while at the same time noting that the conflict was never solved on more than a temporary basis. The very material inferiority of the workers in the struggle was itself one of the reasons for trade unions lending themselves to the democratization of Quebec. More to the point, the labour movement represented a welcome kind of reality principle counterposed to the bizarre world of nationalist ideology: union thinking was "essentially the child of necessity, and had little opportunity to lose touch with the social realities of our industrial world." Finally, the labour movement was part and parcel of the "only powerful medium of renewal" in Quebec: industrialization.<sup>29</sup>

The interest of the working class in democratization was not the only element in the struggle against Duplessis. Competing for the allegiance of Quebecers was nationalism, which Trudeau consistently associated with *bourgeois* interests — sometimes with the "new middle class" later to become so celebrated in analyses of the Quiet Revolution, sometimes with the "petty bourgeoisie" more generally.<sup>30</sup> The point at issue here is not the sociological validity of this fairly schematic explanation of nationalism, but the fact that Trudeau did not view nationalism simply as disinterested passion. It was one avenue of attack on nationalism to unmask the particular class interests which hid under its rhetoric. Indeed, it is interesting to note that at the very core of his own later bilingualism programme in the federal government was a specific appeal to the same "new middle class" which was promoting nationalism and independence in the Quebec of the 1970s: a bilingual civil service with emphasis on Francophone talent was supposed to operate as an alternative pole of attraction to the new technical-professional elite. Class interests were to be incorporated into the struggle for federalism as a counter to the same interests behind *indépendantisme*. That the strategy appears not to have worked very well may tell us something about political realities but does not diminish the theoretical significance for Trudeau's political philosophy.

Trudeau's polemical assaults on the irrationality and even insanity of nationalism, its causal linkage to civil violence and war, its socially reactionary, intellectually oppressive and culturally stifling qualities — all are too well known to be rehearsed here once again.<sup>31</sup> Criticized bitterly from within Quebec, these views have been widely mistrusted by nationalist intellectuals in English Canada as well.<sup>32</sup> Certainly, Trudeau's cry — "*Ouvrons les frontières, ce peuple meurt d'asphyxie!*"<sup>33</sup> — elicited remarkably little support from the alleged victims. Nor is there much doubt that he greatly overstated his case, turning empirical associations into causal links and treating nationalism as a reified absolute, abstracted from the concrete social circumstances which alone can give it meaning. Analysing the nationalism of a tiny Quebec struggling to maintain its language and culture in the vast anglophone sea of North America as exactly the same phenomenon as the nationalism of Nazi Germany is, on the

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face of it, simply bad political science. But Trudeau is not a bad political scientist. In part Trudeau on nationalism may simply offer another illustration of Lord Keynes' comment on Friedrich Hayek: how, starting from a mistake, a remorseless logician can end up in Bedlam. Yet, amid the vehement jeremiads there are no shortage of arguments suggesting a subtler interpretation.

First of all, nationalism is a brute fact, and facts, in Trudeau's Hobbesian world, must be faced. Second, his own not unsubtle reading of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century history leads him to discern a direct connection between the achievement of *popular self-government* in the American and French revolutions and the appearance of the idea of national *self-determination*. "While the erstwhile territorial state, held together by divine right, tradition and force, gave way to the nation-state, based on the will of the people, *a new glue had to be invented* which would bind the nation together on a durable basis." Any modern state needs to develop and preserve "as its very life" a consensus whereby "no group within the nation feels that its vital interests and particular characteristics could be better preserved by withdrawing from the nation than by remaining within .... And since it is physically and intellectually difficult to persuade continually through reason alone, the state is tempted to reach out for whatever emotional support it can find .... Hence, from the emotional appeal called nationalism is derived a psychological inclination to obey the institution of the state."<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the nation is the guardian of cultural, moral and historical qualities which "at this juncture in history go to make a man what he is." Even if these national qualities are particularistic and hence divisive, "they are a reality of our time, probably useful, and in any event considered indispensable by all national communities."<sup>35</sup> Light at the end of the tunnel begins to appear — just as conflicting self-interests can be linked together by procedural justice in a liberal democracy, so it may be that conflicting passions of nationalism may be linked together by another form of practical rationality.<sup>36</sup> The problem is not nationalism after all, but the demand for a *national state* where political sovereignty is coterminous with a single linguistic cultural and ethnic identity.

"Only a few political thinkers" — Garth Stevenson has recently written, "Pierre Elliott Trudeau would probably be one of them — have endowed the concept of federalism with the heavy load of symbolic attributes more normally attached to such words as democracy, liberalism, and socialism."<sup>36</sup> Trudeau in fact endows the concept of federalism with what he considers the most noble task on the agenda of liberalism in the twentieth century — the management of nationalist passions to the benefit of mankind. When Prime Minister Trudeau told the American congress that the breakup of Canada would be a crime against human history, or when he has made the even greater claim that Quebec's separation would be a sin against the Holy Spirit, many Canadians, both English and French, have no doubt winced at this kind of emotive

rhetorical excess. Certainly Trudeau the Hobbesian realist and stoic historicist poses his own self-criticism to this (dare we say?) passionate ideologizing of the federalist "dogma." It is crucial in understanding the man's thought to understand why he should have such a passionate commitment, one which many of his fellow citizens have come to see as an increasingly irrelevant obsession. If Trudeau has any original contribution to make to liberal theory, it is certainly here. Just as liberal procedural justice claims to manage conflicting self-interests for the greater good of the community, so too federalism according to Trudeau can claim to manage nationalist passions. The passions themselves must be accepted; the trick is to turn them to benefit. Trudeau's reading of Canadian history suggests that federalism as it has actually evolved can, with skillful management, accomplish exactly this end. It thus has an importance which transcends Canada's national status as a mere middle power.

Typically, Canada's advantage accrues not from *a priori* ideals but from a frank recognition of the facts of the case. Quebec was from the beginning a national entity too strong to be crushed or assimilated by English Canada and yet too weak to assume the status of its own national sovereignty. Confederation was a bargain in which the English Canadian majority traded off a little of its own ideal for the new nation in the face of the French "fact." Like the Hobbesian social contract, the origins of federalism are rather ignoble, but its base origins are transcended by the rationality inherent in the working out of the bargain. English and French Canada represent a "balance of linguistic forces." "In terms of *realpolitik*, French and English are equal in Canada because each of these linguistic groups has the power to break the country. And this power cannot yet be claimed by the Iroquois, the Eskimos, or the Ukrainians." These words were written in 1965. In 1971, justifying his government's policy of multi-culturalism, he told the Canadian-Ukrainian Congress that Canada's population was so balanced ethnically that "every single person in Canada is now a member of a minority group." He went on to caution them, however, that "an overwhelming number of Canadians use either English or French .... It is for this practical reason — not some rationalization about founding races — that these two languages have attained an official character in Canada."<sup>37</sup>

Federalism's great advantage is that the national state cannot be ultimately based on the passionate loyalties of its citizens but only on their rational calculations of self-interest. If the federal government tries to focus such loyalties in a binational country, it can only do so at the expense of one side or the other. Hence the various attempts in Canadian history to whip up national feeling — Canada First, the Imperial Federation Movement, the recycled British monarchy in the post-war world — these only cause further alienation in French Canada. It is almost as if Trudeau is trying to allocate passion to the provinces in a federal-provincial distribution of powers. "The great moment of

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truth arrives when it is realized that *in the last resort* the mainspring of federalism cannot be emotion but must be reason."<sup>38</sup> Despite Conservative and PQ criticism of Trudeau's alleged centralist tendencies, his own historical reading of Canadian federalism is redolent with praise for decentralism as a positive good. It is the very possibility of decentralized decision-making and local initiatives against the centralized administration of things that commends federalism so strongly to him. These things are much more difficult to achieve in highly unitary states, such as France, where culture, language, ethnicity and centralized bureaucracy all combine to form a monolithic unity which is moreover all too subject to the winds of nationalist passion, such as in the Algerian war. Canada is, by virtue of its federalism, proof against such passions, at least at the national level.

There are a number of observations which emerge from this reading of Trudeau. First, despite what so many nationalists have argued, there is little direct justification for labelling Trudeau as an "anti-nationalist" who is ideologically incapable of standing up for Canada in relation to the outside world, especially the Americans. There is an irony in this, for as a foreign policy maker Trudeau has been taxed by those with an internationalist bent for reorienting Canadian foreign policy towards the national interest. But there is no inconsistency in Trudeau. As Bruce Thordarson concluded from a reading of the corpus of his work, the continued existence of the sovereign Canadian state is "central to his political thought."<sup>39</sup> If federalism is a kind of rational synthesis of national passions (accepted as facts) and liberal procedures of government, then the federation itself is an entity to be cherished and protected. The criticism that Trudeau's rejection of Quebec *indépendance* for continued federalism could equally be applied to Canada's ultimate absorption into the American nation is, quite simply, invalid. The United States, although formally a federation, is in reality a highly unified nationalist state with a long record of brutal repression of those minorities who do not match up to the standards of Americanism. As Trudeau wrote in 1964, we may "yet be spared the ignominy of seeing [our] destinies guided by some new and broader emotion based, for example, on continentalism." In a lyrical passage in 1962, he even envisaged a messianic role for Canadian federalism, an example to new nations rent by ethnic divisions, more compelling than the American melting pot. "Canadian federalism is an experiment of major proportions; it could become a brilliant prototype for the moulding of tomorrow's civilization."<sup>40</sup>

There are some very considerable difficulties involved in this rationalist messianism. Not the least is the fragility of reason as a focus of popular support for national government, a problem of which Trudeau is himself uneasily aware. One attempt to infuse reason with some emotional colouring is his espousal of functionalism as an ideal — certainly one of Trudeau's more bizarre ventures into the psychology of consent. Functionalism, which seems to mean

little more than the application of scientific technique systematically to the organization of human society has, as George Grant constantly reminds us, its own inexorable dynamic in the modern world and certainly does not need Pierre Trudeau to ensure its progress. Nobody other than Trudeau, to my knowledge, has actually tried to give this phenomenon the emotive status of a symbol of national loyalty. He has always been personally committed to this as an ideal which flows quite readily from his rationalist liberalism, from his first article in *Cité Libre* in 1950 ("Politique fonctionnelle") to his obsessive concern while prime minister with mechanisms of administration and the need for rational policy-making machinery.<sup>41</sup>

The manifesto "pour une politique fonctionnelle" signed by Trudeau, Marc Lalonde and other like-minded Quebec academics and intellectuals in 1964 gives the full flavour of this technocratic aspiration to reduce politics to administration and predictability. The conservatism of this view (although certainly not in Grant's sense) in its acceptance of the "system" as a fact to which one must adjust, its reduction of politics to problem-solving and its faith that philosophy and the human sciences are a mere reflex of science in the hard sense, have all been noted and criticized from both right and left.<sup>42</sup> Most distressing to nationalists is the decree that "*L'ordre social et politique doit être fondé au premier chef sur les attributs universels de l'homme, non sur ce qui le particularise*" and the further statement that "*les tendances modernes les plus valables s'orientent vers un humanisme ouvert sur le monde, vers divers formes d'universalisme politique, social et économique.*" No doubt there is an unmistakable flavour here of Hegel's universal, homogeneous state as the end of history, and of the identification of freedom with technological power (elsewhere Trudeau has written of how everything was becoming possible in Quebec in 1960 "so wide open was the road to power for all who had mastered the sciences and the techniques of the day: automation, cybernetics, nuclear science, economic planning, and what-not else"<sup>43</sup>). And yet I suspect that altogether too much has been made of this naive expression of faith in technocracy by a small group of Quebec intellectuals recently emerged out of an atmosphere of clerical reaction and facing a renewed nationalist wave in the form of youthful separatism. It is assumed that the techniques exist for the efficacious management of all "problems" and the only difficulty is the failure of will to use them. Beyond this the manifesto is replete with traditional expressions of liberalism and assertions that "*la règle démocratique doit être maintenue à tout prix.*" A faith that "science" can systematically do what liberal democracy wants done to the end that individuals can be free to pursue their own individual goods without unnecessary inefficiencies and blockages in the system is certainly liberal, but to suggest that it bespeaks totalitarianism is to stretch a criticism to the point where it wears rather thin. Moreover, as Bruce Doern has pointed out, Trudeau's technocratic tendencies derive in good part



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from a conjuncture of older ideas of juridical mind and Montesquieu's checks and balances.<sup>44</sup>

What is most remarkable about Trudeau's "functionalism" is his grotesque notion that this arid technocratic dream can be a basis for counter-passion to nationalism: "If politicians must bring emotionalism into the act, let them get emotional about functionalism!" Since this issues from the same man whose clarion call to Quebec intellectuals in 1950 was "*froidement, soyons intelligents*,"<sup>45</sup> one must assume either that reason has become Trudeau's own passion or that he has become increasingly uneasy about a legitimacy of federalism based on reason alone. If the latter interpretation is correct, then waving the flag of functionalism has been ironically mistimed to coincide with the apparent failure of technocratic liberalism to solve the very technical problems which the technocrats had set themselves — and with the resulting general legitimization crisis of capitalism which in Canada has pressed hardest of all upon the national government and the federal system itself.

The exercise of political power for any length of time is bound to wear away at the confidence of the philosopher, and darker strains of pessimism and even bewilderment have begun to appear in his prime ministerial musings and rationalizations. Speaking to the no doubt perplexed Liberal organizers and constituency officials of Vancouver on May Day, 1971, the philosopher-king described the disjuncture in the modern world between technological development and our cultural awareness: "We stand at this juncture in history in as great a need of a philosophy of technology as did the world in the seventeenth century need a philosophy of a science and mathematics just prior to Descartes' *Discourse on Method*." He went on to admit that "in the absence of a philosophy of this age we must give the appearance of a generation gone mad." Then, astonishingly, he posited the need for a "sense of wonder and awe [which] has been permitted to exist beside the regimentation of reason, to prevent what Kenneth Clark describes as a 'new form of barbarism' resulting from the 'triumph of rational philosophy.'" <sup>46</sup> Was his audience aware that this was nothing less than self-criticism of his own past faith? Later the same year in an interview with James Reston he responded to a question about the decline of "moral leadership" in liberal democracies by suggesting that, in effect, liberalism had served to destabilize societies in the late twentieth century, with the individualist ideal expressed in terms of selfishness without political consensus. It was inevitable, he warned, that the pendulum would swing away from this insupportable society of egoists to one of authoritarianism in which, perhaps, the peer group will become the deity to which individuals become enslaved — a future in which divisive and passionate group loyalties make liberal democracies at the same time both ungovernable and unfree. The theme of heightened expectations and disenchantment toward the political process — the now familiar thesis of "ungovernability" which has spread throughout

western political science in the last decade — began to crowd out Trudeau's "participatory democracy" slogan of 1968 almost as soon as he was elected.<sup>47</sup> A purely cynical response to this has a surface plausibility yet fails to recognize that there may not have been disillusionment solely on the part of Trudeau's 1968 enthusiasts, but on the part of Trudeau himself. The tools did not seem to work, politics became day-to-day crisis management, demands were being made by powerful sectors which could not be accommodated together with other demands, the fiscal crisis of the state forced a pervasive negativity on the actions of government .... The optimism of the manifesto for a functional politics must have appeared merely naive.

The imposition of wage and price controls was the symbol for much that had gone wrong in the earlier vision. This was, in effect, more than an exercise in Hobbesian state sovereignty. It suggested that the economic system could not be taken as a given but was itself the problem — a very disquieting prospect for a liberal. Yet when Trudeau drew the appropriate conclusion that the free enterprise system had not been working and that changes would have to be made in it, the outcry was of tidal wave proportions.<sup>48</sup> Three years later Trudeau went down to defeat at the hands of a Tory party dedicated to the ideological proposition that everything wrong with the economy was the fault of the state and that the answer is to "privatize" public activity. A greater irony: wage controls finally precipitated the labour movement into close and open electoral support of the NDP, while identifying Trudeau, once of Asbestos Strike fame, as the primary enemy of the Canadian labour movement. Trudeau's liberalism has been bested not by conservatism nor by socialism, but by an unreconstructed faith that the free market and minimal state can save us, while he has himself offered no basis for a critique of the functioning of the capitalist system which might transcend its present crisis.

The problem is, in a sense, within Trudeau's own assumptions. To begin with a Hobbesian reading of human nature in action, to call in the state as a mechanism to resolve the conflicting demands of groups and classes, to reject any notion of the collective Good as different from the configuration of individual demands for good is, in the end, to leave the politician in a position of blindness and impotence. All that counts is effective demand; Trudeau can in fact be read as always having told groups without real power to either make their demands effective or stop complaining. But however realistic this advice, it is simply to ratify the intensification of conflict and instability. When demands reach a volume and level that overloads the system (to use the "ungovernability" argument), we begin to see a further complication of Trudeau's eternal triangle: self-interests are pursued so passionately as to bring into question the rationality of the system. When the crisis deepens, the political leader has the choice of coercive intervention or of preaching moral reformation to the passionately competing individuals. Trudeau has tried both.

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While the former works better in the short run, it creates long term oppositions. The latter, as with Trudeau's pleas to Canadians to "lessen their expectations" has a forlorn quality about it from the beginning, especially in a political culture which has drawn deeply on optimistic individualism, and where such appeals can readily be dismissed as the class-biased preaching of the privileged.

Obviously the notion of positing the functional activities of the national government as its legitimation in a federation where cultural and nationalist loyalties rest at the provincial or regional level has proven to be weak indeed. Nor has the idea of the federal government as a guarantor of individual civil rights through constitutional provisions raised much groundswell of support: Trudeau's juridical mind here seems very detached from the concerns of ordinary citizens. All this suggests that Trudeau's most cherished ideal, a rational federalism, is in considerable difficulty, especially when faced with what after all was his original *raison d'être* for entering politics: the threat of Quebec secession, now in a most imminent form. As William Mathie has argued, if the reason which underlies Trudeau's federalism is without ends of its own (this is my interpretation as well), then the *will* expressed by the nations which make up the federation is "altogether legitimate"; there can thus be "no appeal against a non-rational will to secede."<sup>49</sup> Since alternative props have been pulled out, Trudeau finds himself in a tenuous position. Yet however precarious his argument has become, his response to the challenge of the PQ shows a certain liberal tenacity, not to say dignity.

We can best understand this by contrasting his behaviour since November 15, 1976, with his actions during the October crisis of 1970. The excesses of that latter episode need not detain us, as they have been very fully expounded by others. I do wish to suggest that, contrary to conventional wisdom, there was nothing *in principle* (police execution of orders is another matter) in the use of the War Measures Act which violated Trudeau's own liberalism. Against a terrorist group which threatened the lives of citizens (and diplomats) who fell under the protection of the laws, and which sought thereby to create a "parallel power" challenging that of the state, there was no question that a Hobbesian liberal like Trudeau should have called upon the state to intervene with its full coercive power. Importantly, Trudeau did in the immediate aftermath of the crisis make it clear that this would *not* be his response to a constitutional challenge to federalism backed by a democratic majority: "the country is held together only by consent, not by force of arms ... if a whole province decides that it is happier outside the country, then it will leave."<sup>50</sup> The PQ project, however distasteful to Trudeau in content, is premised on the expression of democratic will and on orderly procedures and due process. The transformation by the PQ of sovereignty into reality must be accepted, so long as it follows the rules of procedural justice. Inasmuch as he views politics as an

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essentially Hobbesian power struggle, a majority for independence would be a kind of fundamental fact which would have to be faced. More importantly, because his own concept of federalism cannot permit an overriding notion of the Good, a democratic majority within the Quebec nation for sovereignty would constitute an expression of will which would be unanswerable by reason and would have to be accepted as legitimate. That certain Toronto nationalists convinced themselves that Trudeau was always planning another October action, this time against the PQ, tells us a good deal less about Trudeau than about the Toronto nationalists.<sup>51</sup> For his own part, the former prime minister on more than one occasion made it clear that he was "not the man to lead Canada into a civil war." In fact, any other position would be a violation of his liberal principles.

Yet even if the dignity and sincerity of his ideas has been maintained, at least in this case, the failure remains. The eternal liberal triangle of reason, passion and interest once again fails to resolve itself. Before we leave this now somewhat isolated figure in search of a better idea, we had best pause to ponder the fate of his ideas. Are there any among us who could remain entirely unmoved by his appeal after the PQ victory, that Levesque had surrounded himself with blood brothers, but that he, Trudeau, wished to speak to us of a loyalty which is higher than to blood alone? Which critic of his mechanistic liberalism could tell us, in good conscience, of a community Good which could replace the individual pursuit of goods, without entailing the kind of civil conflict which Trudeau has always sought to avoid? The very liberalism of the PQ itself — not to speak of the much cruder liberal ideology of the Conservatives who replaced him — cautions us against criticism which is not also, at some level, self-criticism. Even George Grant has admitted that "despite the disintegrations and contradictions of our regimes, liberal principles are the only political principles we've got."<sup>52</sup> Coming to terms with both the strengths and the failures of Pierre Trudeau in his extraordinary passage across our intellectual and political life means coming to terms with some of the central values and central conundrums in the present crisis.

Political Science  
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### Notes

1. George Grant, "Nationalism and Rationality," *Canadian Forum*, 50 (January, 1971), p. 336.

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2. Abraham Rotstein, *The Precarious Homestead*, Toronto, 1973, p. 110.
3. George Radwanski, *Trudeau*, Toronto, 1978, pp. 36, 39; Trudeau, *Conversations With Canadians*, Toronto, 1972, pp. 7-10; André Carrier, "L'idéologie politique de la revue *Cité Libre*," *Revue canadienne de science politique*, 1:4 (Décembre, 1968), p. 416.
4. Quoted in Radwanski, p. 96.
5. Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, June 15, 1976, 14500-1. Trudeau's horror of capital punishment goes back a long way. See his "L'affaire Coffin," *Cité Libre*, 21 (Juillet, 1958), p. 46.
6. *Conversations*, p. 67. A good example of his earlier antimilitarism is "La guerre! La guerre!" *Cité Libre* 42, (Décembre, 1961).
7. *Approaches to Politics*, Toronto, 1970, pp. 50, 84. Although these words were written in the 1950s, Trudeau as prime minister in the 1970s has pursued the notion of a charter of human rights, this time buttressed by the further functionalist argument that such a charter would provide a focus for individual loyalties to the federal government which would transcend provincial group loyalties. For a discussion of this point see William Mathie, "Political Community and the Canadian Experience: Reflections on Rationalism, Federalism and Unity," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 12:1 (March, 1979), pp. 3-20.
8. *Federalism and the French Canadians*, Toronto, 1968, pp. 205, 159, 181; André-J. Belanger, *Ruptures et constantes: Quatre idéologies du Québec en éclatement*; *La Relève, la JEC, Cité Libre, Parti Pris*, Montréal, 1977, especially pp. 99-100 and 127.
9. Radwanski, p. 59.
10. *Federalism*, p. 192. See also pp. 172-6 on the nation as an unfortunate but undeniable fact of life, and *The Asbestos Strike*, Toronto, 1974, especially pp. 12-16, 25, 330 and 349.
11. *Conversations*, p. 46; *Federalism*, p. 177.
12. George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice*, Sackville, New Brunswick, 1974.
13. *Federalism*, pp. xix-xxiii.
14. *Approaches to Politics*, Toronto, 1970. This and the following two paragraphs are drawn from this source.
15. When two right-wing nationalists attacked him for quoting Rousseau, Trudeau wittily replied: "But to tell the truth, I know when I quoted even the most inoffensive phrase of Rousseau's that I was setting a snare for all the watchdogs of reaction. I might have known that I would find Mr. Dagenais in it, on all fours along with Leopold Richer." *Ibid.*, p. 57.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 42, 44 and 86.
17. *Cité Libre*, p. 81.
18. *Approaches*, pp. 89, 76-7, 45-7. See also Radwanski, p. 126 for more recent restatements by Trudeau of the difference between "participation" and "decision-making." Two writers who have drawn attention to Trudeau's plebiscitary majoritarianism and its contradictions are Denis Smith, *Bleeding Hearts ... Bleeding Country: Canada and the Quebec Crisis*, Edmonton, 1971, chapter five, pp. 82-105; and Henry David Rempel, "The Practice and Theory of the Fragile State: Trudeau's Conception of Authority," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, X:4 (November, 1975) pp. 24-38. The paradoxical results of the 1979 federal election should have brought home

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to Trudeau in the most personal way the limitations of his treatment of popular sovereignty as electoral majoritarianism in a functioning parliamentary democracy. After all Trudeau was forced to yield office to a man whose party actually garnered about 4% *less* of the popular vote than Trudeau's party: a curious "mandate" for change. More curious yet is Trudeau's own silence on this fact.

19. "Economic Rights," *McGill Law Review*, 8:2 (June, 1962).
20. Robert Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1970, p. 17.
21. *Approaches*, p. 88.
22. See my own argument for Canada in "Images of the State in Canada" in Leo Panitch, ed., *The Canadian State: Political Economy and Political Power*, Toronto, 1977. For an American reading I am most indebted to Frank M. Coleman, *Hobbes and America: Exploring the Constitutional Foundations*, Toronto, 1977.
23. The argument of this paragraph owes a great deal to Albert O. Hirschman's *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before its Triumph*, Princeton, 1977.
24. Bélanger, *Ruptures et constantes*, p. 87.
25. Vallières, *Nègres blancs d'Amérique*, Montréal, 1968, p. 293.
26. See his "Un manifeste démocratique," *Cité Libre*, 22 (Octobre, 1958) and "Leçon de science politique dans un parc qu'il s'agirait de préserver," *Ibid.*, 25 (Mars, 1960).
27. "Economic rights," *op.cit.*
28. "Réflexions sur la politique au Canada français," *Cité Libre*, 3 (Décembre, 1952).
29. *The Asbestos Strike*, especially "The Province of Quebec at the Time of the Strike," pp. 1-82 and "Epilogue," pp. 333-52.
30. *Federalism*, pp. 109, 173, 208-11; *Asbestos Strike*, p. 31.
31. See especially his articles "New Treason of the Intellectuals" and "Separatist counter-revolutionaries" in *Federalism*.
32. Two Quebec nationalists who have dealt seriously with Trudeau are Pierre Vadeboncoeur, *La dernière heure et la première*, Montréal, 1970, and *Chaque jour, l'indépendance ...*, Montréal, 1978, pp. 43-53; and the late Hubert Aquin in "La fatigue culturelle du Canada français" (1962), reprinted in Aquin, *Blocs Erratiques*, Montréal, 1977, pp. 69-103. Camille Laurin's speech on the second reading of Bill 101 in the National Assembly also constitutes a virtual point-by-point disputation with a number of Trudeau's theses. English Canadian distrust is best expressed in James and Robert Laxer, *The Liberal Idea of Canada: Pierre Trudeau and the Question of Canada's Survival*, Toronto, 1977.
33. "L'aliénation nationaliste," *Cité Libre*, 35 (Mars, 1961).
34. *Federalism*, pp. 184-9.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 177. Mathie ("Political Community") has read Trudeau more carefully on this than have most critics.

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36. Garth Stevenson, *Unfulfilled Union*, Toronto, 1979, p. 4. Another is the nineteenth-century French anarchist, P.-J. Proudhon, whose *The Principle of Federation* has recently been translated by Richard Vernon, Toronto, 1979. Curiously, in his otherwise interesting introduction which takes extensive notice of Canada, Vernon makes only one passing reference to Trudeau. Another passionate federalist is Canadian anarchist George Woodcock, "Up the Anti-nation," *The Rejection of Politics*, Toronto, 1972, pp. 72-82.
37. *Federalism*, p. 31; *Conversations*, pp. 32-3.
38. *Federalism*, p. 194.
39. Bruce Thordarson, *Trudeau and Foreign Policy: a Study in Decision-Making*, Toronto, 1972, pp. 57-65. Mathie makes the same point very well ("Political Community").
40. *Federalism*, pp. 196, 178.
41. *Cité Libre*, 1 (juin, 1950) and 2 (février, 1951). G. Bruce Doern, "The Policy-making Philosophy of Prime Minister Trudeau and his Advisers," in T.A. Hockin, ed., *Apex of Power*, Scarborough, 1971, pp. 127-34.
42. *Cité Libre*, 67 (mai, 1964) pp. 11-17. An intelligent left critique is Fred Caloren, "The War Measures Act and the Politics of Functionalism," *Our Generation*, 7:3 (October - November, 1970).
43. *Federalism*, p. 206.
44. Doern, "Policy-making Philosophy," p. 34.
45. *Federalism*, p. 197; "Politique fonctionnelle," *Cité Libre*, 1.
46. *Conversations*, pp. 27-8.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40, 77-9.
48. Laxer and Laxer in *The Liberal Idea of Canada* have made this the centrepiece of their argument that Trudeau has in effect betrayed traditional liberal ideology. There is a point here worth making, although their own insistence on American economic domination as the precipitating factor seems a bit parochial. "Killing expectations" have, after all, become an international ideological phenomenon in the West in recent years.
49. Mathie, "Political community," pp. 10-11.
50. Quoted in Smith, *Bleeding Hearts*, p. 174. *Conversations*, p. 69. Smith's argument that Trudeau's actions in 1970 had undermined Levesque's options and forced a polarization between Trudeau's armed federalism and Pierre Vallière's armed separatism (p. 133) seems a poor prognosis indeed in terms of what has actually happened since. Armed separatism was defeated by the superior power of armed federalism, thus clearing the way for the Parti Québécois. This is tacitly admitted in Vallière's *L'urgence de choisir*, Montreal, 1972.
51. See, for example, Abraham Rotstein, "Is There an English-Canadian Nationalism?" *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 13:2 (Summer, 1978), pp. 117-8.
52. Review of J.S. Mill's *Essays on Politics and Society* in *The Globe and Mail*, August 6, 1977.



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## DIONYSUS AND THE CRUCIFIED: TOWARDS A LEFT THEOLOGY

*Andrew Wernick*

In a religious perspective ... there can be no doubt that indiscriminate suspicion of any idea, without the urge to exalt an idea of one's own, will discourage rather than promote lucidity.

(Ernst Bloch)

### Theology?

The emancipatory intelligence, in thinking its way out of the once dominant economist paradigm, has long recognized the need to expand the Marxist totalization by addressing in depth the theoretical and practical issues posed by such "superstructural" realities as sexuality, nationality, mass psychology, aesthetics and language. But the process of extending the modern Left's comprehension of its project and of the world in which that project is inscribed has been limited by reluctance to explore the problematic character of perhaps the most powerful and encompassing cultural mediation of all: religion.

### *Ecce homo: The Modern Encounter of Marxism and Christianity*

The world-wide movements of radical social renewal in the last decade were accompanied by a ferment of progressive ideas in the religious sphere, particularly within the Christian churches. While it would be an exaggeration to say that the mainstream of left-wing thinking, "old" or "new," was heavily influenced by the secular ecumenicism embraced by the most advanced Christian theologians various factors, including the appearance of radically anthropocentric and anti-capitalist religious currents, softened the hostile stance that the Left had traditionally maintained towards established religion and the ideological topics adumbrated in its theory. Moreover, the rise of modernist "death of God" theologies among both Protestant and Catholic thinkers,<sup>1</sup> and the emergence of an explicitly pro-revolutionary theology of liberation in the Third World, coincided with a resurgent critical humanism among the Marxist and neo-Marxist intellectuals of Western and Eastern Europe to create sufficient common ground for the development of a genuine dialogue.

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Of course, this impetus to converse was strengthened on both sides of the ideological divide by strong conjunctural political interests. The Catholic *aggiornamento* initiated during the pontificate of John XXIII which facilitated the Roman Church's opening to the Left was in part a strategy for institutional survival. The modernization of liturgy, of doctrine and of ecclesiastical organization represented an overdue adaptation to the powerful anti-ritualistic and secularizing tendencies of industrial capitalism; while political realism also dictated Christianity's *rapprochement* with the Communist Parties and regimes of Europe, as well as with liberation movements in the Third World. Correlatively, the regimes of Eastern Europe and the Euro-communist parties of the West were themselves anxious not to be at war with an ideological institution that has well demonstrated its capacity to compete with the organized Left for the hearts and minds of the masses. A reformist Marxist politic thus shared with a left-leaning Christianity a strong interest in paving the way through theological conversation for an end to a century of implacable ideological warfare.

In order to indicate some of the contours of the post-theistic religious humanism on which left-Christianity and a theologically reawakened secular leftism have converged let us look briefly at two recent attempts to explore such a perspective, one from the side of Christian theology, the other from the side of Marxist humanism. We will then be in a position to consider the problems confronting left theology today as a result of the dismal news from the human scientific front that "Man is dead."

### Gardavsky: From Politics to Religion

Gardavsky's *God Is Not Yet Dead*, a product of Christian-Marxist dialogue in Czechoslovakia during the Dubcek period, was first published in English in 1973.<sup>2</sup> Despite the scant attention the book has received in the Anglophone world, it remains important as one of the most comprehensive and cogent attempts by a contemporary Marxist to re-evaluate the relation between Marxism and Christianity and to reflect on the spiritual dimension of a radically left-wing (for Gardavsky, Communist) political commitment.

In tune with the revived neo-Hegelian Marxism of the East European left-liberal intelligentsia, the critical edge of Gardavsky's position is directed against the positivist dead weight of official diamat. Thus his Marxism is conceived as the reflexive moment of emancipatory praxis, rather than as a methodology for the scientific comprehension of history and nature; and from this philosophical standpoint he sets out to correct what he considers to be the one-sidedness of the official Communist orientation in his country towards established religion, arguing in its stead for a more enlightened practice grounded in a reconstructed, spiritually mature materialist atheism. For him,

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the shallowness of the assumptions underlying the Communist *Kulturkampf* against the Churches and the parallel attempt to impose, at least on those holding posts of social and political responsibility, a kind of strict atheist orthodoxy, is revealed by the failure of efforts by State and Party to wipe out religious illusions among the population. He encapsulates the sociological reasons for the health of Christianity in "socialist" Eastern Europe in the lapidary formula: "God is not quite dead ... [because] Man is not quite alive."<sup>3</sup> Prudently setting aside any examination of the forms of social alienation responsible for the persistence of theism in his own society, he simply concludes that under the circumstances it is materialist atheism rather than Christian belief that is currently most in need of popular ideological justification. In this respect, says Gardavsky, the Marxist who wishes to develop an adequate post-Christian perspective has much to learn from the traditions (s)he wishes to surpass.

Hence, the Marxist interest in Christianity is not merely adversarial:

It stems from the inner needs of the Communist movement, which is after all there for all men and women, for an epoch, for the changeover from a makeshift set-up permanently threatened by imminent catastrophe to a reorganized society. The Marxist is convinced that Christianity as a religious movement can be altered to fit in with socialism .... But he knows that for many people who live under socialism and are busy constructing a socialist system, or are still at the stage of fighting for one, belief in God still cannot be altered. He knows that socialism is merely a transitional stage. He also knows that God is not yet dead. So what is God? Where are the blind spots in socialism? ... where in terms of our convictions are the chasms which are even more unfathomable than those of Christianity? What human incentives can act more effectively on behalf of mankind — by means of their truthfulness and range — than belief in God?<sup>4</sup>

In attempting to establish the content of these "human incentives" Gardavsky employs two somewhat different procedures.

The first part of *God Is Not Yet Dead*, entitled "Monuments," is concerned with a recuperative demonstration of the positive symbolic value to the religious atheist of the Western Biblical tradition and of the most important Christian theological systems rooted in it. For Gardavsky, this strategy of critical appropriation has practical as well as intrinsic religious merit: only by rediscovering and acknowledging its historical rootedness in the authentic

cultural traditions of Western civilisation can contemporary Marxism hope to end its ghettoisation as an alien ideological element. Moreover, a magnanimous ecumenicism towards existing intellectual traditions is the very essence of cultural progressiveness and is thus imperative for a Marxist. "The radical aspect of socialism," he argues, "seems to be something more than just a short circuit of revolutionary traditions. It is rather its faculty for converting into nutrients all the various components of the soil of history."<sup>5</sup>

However, if the Judaeo-Christian tradition is to be assimilated by the Left in this way, it must first be reinterpreted so that its human content can be extracted from the illusory and theistic medium in which it is embedded; and, more positively, "it must be *integrated* to comply with the very essence of socialism, with its inherent laws and its spiritual equipment."<sup>6</sup> The interpretative method Gardavsky follows is a version of the anthropological hermeneutic established by Feuerbach and further developed by Bloch — with the modification that Gardavsky focusses less on the historical development of the concept of the Absolute in Biblical religion than on the life-orientations implied in the life and thought of the monumental religious figures he singles out as crucial. Thus, Jacob is depicted as the prototype of the human subject who breaks with "natural" ascription to choose an identity and an active project: Man as the creature who makes his own history. And Jesus, demythologised, is read as the embodiment of human love which itself constitutes both the miraculous means and utopian aim that give power and substance to Man's capacity for self-direction.

Apotheosizing humanity — rather than projecting divinity heavenward — has of course been a common strategy in all major attempts to produce a post-theistic version of the Western religious tradition. Gardavsky's specific contribution to the thematization of this project is to insist on a distinction between the Biblical love of Man, which he calls *hominism*, and Classical (first Greek, then Renaissance) *humanism*. According to Gardavsky, what limited the latter was that Classical philosophies of Man always set the activity and experience of the species within a fixed and statically ordered cosmos.

The world is seen as a place in which men can find their way about relatively easily and can develop their *techné*, or skills, using them to gain mastery over the forces of nature and over objects. Man finds his way outwards from within. He has no idea what it means to take history into account in his deliberations. He just watches time passing, noticing the way it acts in cycles; but he is not keyed to the future, and looks back at the past instead, seeing it always in static terms as a "golden age." This spiritual ambience gave rise to the rational analysis of science, to the "scientific"

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attitude which thinks in terms of objects, and to an interest in technology as a means of gaining mastery over the world.

In contrast, for the hominist,

Man is a creature who evolves by fighting and by answering the call of the present with a free decision. If he manages to love in a radical manner, he breaks open the womb of the future by his own action, and thus surpasses his potential. This is his whole secret, that is what makes him a miracle in himself....<sup>7</sup>

The distinction between humanism and hominism is axial for Gardavsky's critical examination of Christian theology (whose milestones for him are Augustine, Aquinas and Pascal), as well as for his overall attempt to specify the requirements of a leftist religiosity critically based on the best elements in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Christian theology — on its good side — is seen as a cumulative attempt to synthesize Judaeo-Christian hominism with the rationalist cosmology Europe inherited from the Ancient Mediterranean world. For Gardavsky, in Pascal's radically subjective version of Christianity — faith in Jesus and the salvifics of the Cross as the only rational response to Man's solitude and insignificance in an impersonal and infinite cosmos — the Christian attempt to synthesize its hominism with Classical rationalism was brought to the brink of a solution: a solution which Pascal was historically incapable of formulating both because of his undialectical conception of nature and because of the contemplative asocial conception he had of Man. "Pascal's problem is how to preserve and develop humanity in the cosmos; that is his formula for solving the problem of subjective identity .... According to Pascal, the answer did not lie in talking about action, but in talking about Jesus. That is his tragedy."<sup>8</sup>

In these terms, Gardavsky sees the progressive forces of modern theology as having registered a decisive advance over Pascal — both in their commitment to come to terms with a scientifically based philosophy of nature, and in their movement towards an interpretation of the Christian *arcanum* as a love-based vision of the possibility of healing human misery through the earthly coming of the Kingdom. Such trends evidently point towards the kind of reformed Christianity Gardavsky sees as compatible with the deepest ideological needs of those engaged in anti-capitalist praxis and post-capitalist social construction. Their project of demystifying Christianity from within needs to be taken further, however, if the new theology is to serve in the formation of a mature socialist religious sensibility. Thus he argues that the neo-Thomist integralism of Maritain must be purged of its false identification of capitalism with modernity; and that, as it stands, Rahner's "anonymous Christianity"

atomises Christianity's explosive social message by insisting that in so far as single individuals are struggling with the commitment to become fully human, the Kingdom Jesus promised is already here.

In the concluding section of the book, Gardavsky switches to a direct treatment of the theological position for which he wishes to argue: Marxist atheism. Not wishing to employ directly religious terminology, Gardavsky characterises the level of discourse at which the fundamental principles of Marxist atheism can be explicated as "metaphysics." Indeed, he is at pains to emphasize that the unity of theory and practice constitutive of a Marxist orientation makes the deepest dimension of Marxism's ideological self-consciousness quite unlike the credalism at the theoretical centre of traditional religion: in form this "metaphysics represents the reflective dimension of practical behaviour" rather than the faith-derived theorems of a doctrine. Thus the subject-matter of this metaphysics is the identity and life-orientation of a species-being whose praxis is generically activist, history-making, and in this sense self-transcending. For Gardavsky, a religious perspective developed in such terms would necessarily go beyond the science/religion and subject/object antinomies that until now have confusedly expressed the unresolved contradictions of Western culture's fractured ideological foundation. "Atheism as Marxist metaphysics represents an attempt to formulate a theory of subjective identity which would not be subjectivist, a theory of transcendence, of overstepping one's limit which would not be objective."<sup>9</sup>

Marxist atheism, then, is to be theologically constructed, or recovered, by developing "metaphysical" reflections on the interior dimension of praxis. The praxis Gardavsky takes as his starting point is not any kind of practical activity, but the critico-revolutionary praxis of those engaged in collective self-transformation — the praxis of historical *actors* in the best sense. Only that type of praxis is specifically and fully human:

... to be a Marxist atheist involves nothing less than being an active member of that community which has drawn from the historical position held by the working-class certain conclusions concerning the tangible prospects which await man .... This type of community must logically look at all problems in a radical and humane light, reject all forms of intervention from illusionary or religious thinking, and apply the same radical methods in solving the problems. If we consider the full extent of a free decision of this type, we will eventually come up with an attempt to formulate something which has always ... been known in philosophy as metaphysics.<sup>10</sup>

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However — and this is Gardavsky's practical justification for the development of an explicit Marxist metaphysics — sustained commitment to radical politics is always subjectively problematic, despite the fact that through it Man expresses his natural and authentic identity as a self-determining being, because the future towards which human action is directed is always essentially open: not only "in the sense of offering every possible opportunity to Man, but also in the sense that it remains uncertain whether it can ever come to anything, indeed whether it will ever happen."<sup>11</sup> Since action carries with it no guarantees of success for the collective subject, let alone for the individual whose death prevents the full realization of his/her life-activity, an orientation towards radical praxis implies a state of commitment that goes beyond self-interest in the ordinary sense. Critico-revolutionary praxis may be anthropologically "natural" but it is not motivationally spontaneous.

Gardavsky, in search of a non-authoritarian and non-artificial way to close the ideological circle, rejects as repressive and existentially inadequate the Communist Party's conventional recourse to "moralizing appeals," as well as "any sort of Messianic thinking" or the "belief that Communism is mankind's port of call among the islands of paradise." The solution, rather, lies in the actual development of a radical subjectivity that is existentially authentic to the individual human condition and directed out into the world as a progressive politic. Moreover, this subjectivity does not need to be invented, for it already exists "in the innermost motives of the movement which is aware of the provisional nature of our world ... and is continually struggling against it."<sup>12</sup>

Within Gardavsky's social existentialist framework, an authentic, illusion-free human identity can only arise in principle through the recognition and resolution of the dilemma presented by two central facts of individual existence: death, which cuts us off from our projects, and involvement in social life, which gives them meaning. The tragic dimension of the former and the self-transcending aspect of the latter are irreducible. How, then, can the seemingly contradictory attitudes implied by an appreciation of these realities cohere in a single sensibility? And further, how can this happen in a way that motivates good will and good faith expressed outwardly in radical politics? Gardavsky's answer, startling only when set against the moralism and scientific objectivism which have tended to predominate within the organised Left, is "the human and inter-human relationship which has always traditionally borne the name of 'love.'" Love for others validates the social world into which we pour out our creative activity, and love for one another provides in the face of the certainty of death, not only solace and solidarity among fellow sufferers, but moral and psychological support as well for the collective life that is the essential medium for the only form of self-transcendence and immortality we are granted. Gardavsky's "love" is thus not conceived as an attitude externally introduced, Marxist metaphysics' *deus ex machina*, but as "the existential



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precondition of all human relationships ... an 'eternal' theme because it is the principle underlying creation, Man's practical activity in history *par excellence*. As such, it represents the transition from the 'I' to the 'we' and vice versa."<sup>13</sup> So, in the end, what Gardavsky, the committed atheist, conceives to be central to the formation of a Marxist metaphysics is reflection on the anthropological significance of Christianity's highest value — love; not in the sentimentalized sense it now has in popular culture, but as a difficult, death-laden burden which, once consciously assumed, has the magical capacity to "suspend the causality of nature by giving it a human stamp," and which automatically bears with it the hope for the coming Kingdom, "a community offering a life worthy of man."<sup>14</sup>

It is unfortunate that Gardavsky declines to elaborate on the full logic of the love-theology sketched out at the end of his book, since as it stands the position is only theoretically asserted. This is perhaps permissible considering that the emphasis of his argument is polemical and programmatic, an intervention intending mainly to stress the need for reflection on the actual and ideal condition of left-wing subjectivity in the crushing spiritual context of prevailing Marxist orthodoxy. For a fuller treatment of the solidarist metaphysic he discerns as the religious basis of radical praxis one must perhaps turn to the work of theologians who have less of a bad conscience about the nature of their trade — *i.e.*, the professional theologians of the Christian Church.

### Baum: From Religion to Politics

Gregory Baum, one of the best known and most influential modernists within North American Catholicism, well exemplifies the contribution to a convergent left theology that can be made by contemporary Christianity. His recent work, *Religion and Sociology*,<sup>15</sup> not only expresses, in the language of that faith, a reflexive radical theology very similar to the "Marxist metaphysics" advocated and outlined by Gardavsky, it also adds important and for a Christian, even startling, dimensions to the argument.

The book's central aim, indicated in its subtitle, "*A Theological Reading of Sociology*," is to clarify and deepen Christian theology by appropriating to it the rational kernel of Western sociology's insights into the nature of Man and the character of good and evil. Presumably Christian theologians, however left-wing, are less allergic to the cognitive claims of classical "bourgeois" social theory than Marxists, however committed to self-demystification. While a vulgar historical materialist may see in this only a demonstration of the affinity of one idealism for another, Baum's plea to co-religionists for a sociological correction of Christian theology could be addressed with equal validity to those who, like Gardavsky, seek to elucidate the mysteries of Marxism.

Like Gardavsky's book, *Religion and Sociology* begins with an ecumenicist

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reading of a rival ideological complex — here, classical social theory from Hegel to Freud — and then follows with a direct account of the positive ideological reconstruction towards which this reading implicitly argues. What Baum advances is “critical theology,” the reflexive intelligence of a radical Catholicism in the immanentist tradition of Maurice Blondel and closely related to modern German “political theory” and the “theology of liberation” that flourishes in Latin America.

In his theological foray into the secular sociological tradition, Baum seizes on three essential points. First, he discovers in all the major figures he examines — Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, Tocqueville, Toennies, Weber, Durkheim and Freud — a common passionate commitment to humanist principles, actualized in social critique and the urge to reform. Amidst the bewildering diversity of categories, methodologies and perspectives, which he makes no attempt to synthesize or treat as a whole, he detects, as a connecting thread, a many-sided and to a degree cumulative attempt to analyze the interplay of humanizing and dehumanizing forces in the industrial social order that was emerging in nineteenth— and early twentieth-century Europe — an intellectual project that cannot but be of theological interest to a religion in tension with the evils of the world. Taking as his base line the notion of alienation (from nature, collective life and individual human being) developed by Hegel, Feuerbach and Marx, Baum proceeds to examine the sociological insights offered by subsequent thinkers into the dark side of emergent industrial capitalism. In Marx’s economic critique, Toennies romantically tinged contrast of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, Durkheim’s diagnosis of anomie and moral crisis, and Weber’s doleful analysis of the triumph of bureaucracy and instrumental rationality, Baum sees so many angles from which critical light can be thrown on the prevailing forms of “social sin” in the modern world; and, corresponding to them, forms of transformative practice that run with the grain of history and point actively towards the redemptive human future foreshadowed by Jesus’ enunciation of God’s coming Kingdom of Heaven. While Baum makes no systematic theoretical attempt to compare or reconcile the different schools’ competing cognitive claims, he makes clear his own commitment to a form of Marxism modified, in its determinism, by an open action theory, and, in its one-sided emphasis on economic structures and determinations, enriched by the insights of Durkheim, Weber and Freud into the human and social significance of symbol, ritual and subjectivity. In the case of Third World societies imperialized by Western capital, Marxism (in its most elementary form) provides an adequate account of prevailing social evils; but, for Baum, a much more sophisticated sociological framework is needed to comprehend the multiple oppression and alienation that characterizes the more complex societies of the industrial West and to reflect with clarity on the correspondingly multi-dimensional strategy required by a socially redemptive praxis. The

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political as opposed to moral and theological logic of such a strategy is glossed over in the book, which seeks only to emphasize the theological point — that the reformist and revolutionary roads to social redemption in North America comprise authentic avenues for practical Christian witness.

The second set of insights that Baum draws from classical sociology concerns the character of religion itself as a social phenomenon causally and functionally related to others, and in particular the profound ambiguity that by virtue of its contradictory social insertion seems always to have marked religion's historical role. Religion has, on the one hand, provided legitimating symbols for established and regressive modes of social domination, and, on the other, supplied utopian motivations for rebellions and movements of cultural renewal that push the human species forward towards greater social freedom and an enlarged capacity for individual and collective self-realization. This paradox Baum relates to Hegel's theological distinction between "bad religion," with its self-alienated worship of an external Absolute, and "good religion" which comprehends the genuine Absolute as the revealed immanent infinity that constitutes the spiritual ground of our being.

In depicting religion as the mystified product of a consciousness inverted by alienated life-conditions which serves the ideological interests of the world's real rulers, Marx — in Baum's view — captured the sociological essence of "bad religion," but was too much in the grip of 1840's radical secularism to develop a theoretical or ideological appreciation of religion's progressive moment. For Baum, as indeed for Hughes whose line of interpretation (in *Consciousness and Society*)<sup>16</sup> Baum generally follows, it is precisely here that the turn-of-the-century thinkers, especially Durkheim and Weber, registered an important intellectual advance — both over Marx and over the whole tendency of nineteenth-century positivism to depreciate subjectivity and its cultural expressions. In Weber, Baum reads that religions are subject to an internal dialectic of institutionalization/deinstitutionalization embodied in the contrasting religious modalities of priests and prophets, and that this process intersects with the developing concatenation of contradictory economic and political interests to produce, depending on the circumstances, general ideological stability, legitimation for dominant or dominated strata, or (on occasion) an explosive fusion of value change and social struggle in which the social constellation is decisively altered. Durkheim, despite his atheism, is likewise depicted as holding to a dialectically balanced view of religion's socio-historical role — providing an institutionalized framework of collective beliefs which functions both to integrate and reproduce existing social structures and to orient sociated individuals towards absolute moral ideals which, though limited in their range by the social conditions and structures they reflect, nevertheless always transcend society's contemporary imperfections and point the praxis of the ideally committed along the vector of social improvement.

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In Durkheim's and Weber's dialectical appreciation of the creative and regressive social moments represented in the ebb and flow of religious history, and in their further blurring of the line between religion and the symbolic universe in general, Baum finds a sociological anchor for his own ecumenicism and commitment to the cause of Catholic renewal. He also sees in the general application of sociological reason to the analysis of religion a model for the reconceptualization of theology as a mode of theoretical practice.

Rejecting the scholastic (to use the current jargon, theoreticist) conception of theology as the systematics of dogma, Baum defines it as an essentially social activity: "the reflection of Christians, in conversation with the entire believing community, on the world in which they belong and the religious tradition in which they participate."<sup>17</sup> Understood as religion's critical self-consciousness, theology's task is to help believers understand better the nature and consequences of their own collective religious praxis in the context of a Church, that for Baum, always stands in need of reform. Only with the rise of sociological thinking, however, does it become possible for theology to grasp in a fully demystified way the character of the actual task on which it was engaged, or to conduct its critical reflections on religious beliefs and activities with a clear-headed understanding of the social and unconscious nature of the sin that rules the world, even inside the Church, and blocks redemption.

Learning from the social sciences and the various critiques of religion, Christian theologians are able to discern the ideological and pathogenic trends in their own religious tradition and then, by opting for a wider meaning of the promised salvation, interpret the Christian gospel as a message of deliverance and reconciliation. The sustained dialogue with the critical thought of the late Enlightenment I wish to call "critical theology." This critical theology may lead theologians to discover elements of false consciousness in their perception of reality and thus produce a significant change of mind and heart.<sup>18</sup>

In effect, a sociologically enlightened "critical" theology is charged by Baum with two substantive tasks: first, the systematic reinterpretation of the symbols at the living centre of faith as utopian vectors for social praxis; and, second, the critical evaluation of current religious belief and practice in terms of their positive or negative contribution to the Kingdom's earthly realisation. As Baum puts it, "It is the task of critical theology to discern the structural consequences of religious practice, to evaluate them in the light of the church's normative teaching, and to enable the church to restructure its concrete social presence so that its social consequences approach more closely its profession of

faith."<sup>19</sup> Baum's own analysis of the sense in which Christianity's traditionally undialectical self-conception was partially responsible for the evils of anti-Semitism is an excellent illustration of the kind of theological practice his book recommends. The current priority for critical theology in this respect, one must suppose, is a deconstruction of Christianity's even more deeply entrenched patriarchalism.<sup>20</sup>

One notes that with Baum's appropriation of classical sociology's humanist social critique, dialectical analysis of religion, and historically reflexive mode of self-understanding, theology passes over into a form of thought that almost exactly mirrors in method and content the secular neo-Hegelian Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School: teleologically directed reflection on transformative praxis. Moreover, his sociologisation of theology simultaneously delivers a radically politicised conception of religion. Given his Christian commitment, however, this politicisation does not lead to a liquidation of theological reflection, as tends to be the case in the morally driven milieu of secular activism, but rather to a work of politically directed reinterpretation in which the symbolic truths of the Christian story are translated into terms relevant and credible to the contemporary intelligence.

The route, *via* socio-historical reflection, from theological to socio-political radicalism has been well explored before Baum, of course, and he is particularly open in expressing his debt to the thought of Blondel and Bloch. The first and fundamental step is hermeneutic: to reinterpret the ultimate symbolic objects of traditional belief and worship by investing them explicitly with their implicit human social content. Thus, the image of God "out there" — Hegel's "bad infinity" — is replaced by an immanentist conception of a divinity that is within and among us, active in our individual and collective history, the force that impels humanity to realise its elusive and evolving Ideal: in Baum's words, "history's forward principle." Correspondingly, the figure of Jesus is to be regarded as no more nor less than the historical embodiment — purified, acted out, made symbolically available as a life and death for others — of that restless Absolute that operates through and despite us. The message enunciated through his activity and words is that faith in and obedience to the divine principle within us will bring Heaven within our earthly grasp. The Pauline and priestly forms of Christianity are emphatically rejected here in favour of the prophetic and millenarian; and once divine intervention into history is seen as an intervention from within, *i.e.*, through human agency, we are firmly on the terrain of a revolutionary social doctrine, albeit one that is ideologically reinforced by appeal to a highly condensed and socially entrenched mystical symbology. To use Niebuhr's terminology, Baum's Christ — as Love militant and incarnate — is Christ the Transformer of culture.<sup>21</sup>

The effect of Baum's sociologically inflected immanentisation is not merely, of course, to situate the meaning of Christian symbols fully within the context

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of this-sided human life and experience, but to insist simultaneously on their social dimension. Heaven and hell, sin and redemption, are to be comprehended in terms of the historical drama of humanity's struggle against the alienated life conditions blindly produced in the course of social development. The redemptive task of the Church — understood very broadly as the community of those who believe in the infinite love within that moves us towards our authentic human destiny — is to struggle against all forms of self-alienation. This entails a political struggle in fusion with the oppressed and alienated against the structural conditions that are responsible for their dehumanisation. Indeed, the Church — considered in this way as a counter-community in radical opposition to an alienated world — seems to be identical with what more secular thinkers might, in an ideal and qualified sense, call the Left: humanity's conscious political and cultural vanguard.

The critical thrust of Baum's position is to effect a radical deprivatisation of Christianity's traditional ethical and spiritual framework. Salvation and damnation are to be understood as states of social being produced in and by human history, and not merely questions of individual destiny. In this light, the responsibility for persistent human evils should be attributed at least as much to ideological blindness and mystification in the face of impersonal social processes as from the individual human propensity to sin. For Baum, as for Bloch, privatized religion which distracts individual attention from social evil and even sanctions it as the inevitable product of an ineradicable defect in the species, is not merely conservative but satanic: the evil dimension of organized religion which the critical conscience theology exists to comprehend and transform. Thus, from the human-social perspective Baum claims to find that, at the heart of the revealed world of God, even the problematic of death/salvation/immortality is critically dissolved as a false solution to an ideologically — because individualistically — posed problem.

The Christian teaching of eternal life ... rather than making the believers focus on their own death and worry about what happens to them after they die, liberates them for a greater love and makes them yearn for the reconciliation and deliverance of all peoples. The Christian message of resurrection, understood in this deprivatising perspective, far from making Christians concentrate on their own heaven, frees them from anxiety about their own existence and directs their hope to the new creation.<sup>22</sup>

For Baum as for Gardavsky the modern existentialist concern for the subjective problem presented by individual mortality merely symptomises a state of chronic social atomisation, in which death's natural salve, the individual's im-

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aginative connection with the future of the human community, is pathologically weakened by the alienated condition of the community and of the individual's relation to it. In so far as death is a socially produced problem, the solution to it is also social — in the creation of a loving community where our projects and lives can leave creative traces that outlast us.

Of course, while Baum construes faith in the possibility of such a loving community as tantamount to belief in God, for Gardavsky such a death-transcending faith is the purest expression of an atheist commitment pushed to its logical extreme. So Baum's proposal to demythologise Christian theology does not make it completely interchangeable with the purely atheistic utopianism advanced by neo-Marxists like Bloch and Gardavsky. He refrains from making God disappear altogether, and, while sympathetic to Bloch's construction of a materialist metaphysics (of "not-yet-being"), dismisses the anthropological formulations it engenders as wilful periphrasis: a "refusal to speak the holy name." Critical theology, he insists, "is not the submission of dogma to an anthropological norm as if the human were the measure of the divine: critical theology is rather the submission of the structural consequences of dogma to the revealed norm of the gospel." <sup>23</sup>

However, one is certainly tempted to think that for left theology the problem of "God" has become merely semantic, and that the living issues lie elsewhere.

### Some Unresolved Issues of Organization and Faith

Despite the different ideological languages they employ, Baum and Gardavsky are plainly concerned with the same question: how to elucidate and ground the faith that underlies commitment to transformist politics. In both cases, despite weak attempts to provide it with a materialist foundation by invoking an anthropology of self-transcendence-through-society, that faith is conceived to have an existentially irreducible character as faith. In this alienated dispensation, a leap of love and imagination is required before any commitment to the human future of Man can even be conceived. Left theology, arising in the area of overlap between a politicised Christianity, and a religiously sensitive secular Leftism, is simply the attempt to make the fideistic interiority of such a utopian political commitment absolutely explicit, and to comprehend it in as demythologised and thus as socio-historically reflexive a manner as possible.

Of course, for more than a decade the rationality of any metaphysics constructed out of faith in Man-becoming has been severely challenged by the rise of explicitly anti-humanist theoretical trends within the social sciences, and most of all by the irruption into Left theoretical circles of modern French structuralism. The problem of how to rationalise its utopian anthropologism is now, in fact, the central issue facing Left theology. But before turning, finally, to a

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brief discussion of the religious implications of structuralism's theoretical anti-humanism, it is worth drawing out from the contrasting versions of Left theology presented by Baum and Gardavsky, some issues internal to their basic line of argument that the further development of Left theology will also have to clarify and resolve.

First, there are a number of issues surrounding what we might call the "organizational question." These concern the composition, constitution and historical role of what Baum calls the Church, and Gardavsky the Communist Party — a difference that itself signals a difficulty.

Given that those who hold the kind of transformist faith in Man Baum and Gardavsky expound are *ipso facto* committed to a radical political praxis, believers are organizers and presumably linked together in a coordinated collectivity. But how is that coordination to be achieved and how are the boundaries of membership to be drawn? Above all, is one to think of such a collectivity as primarily a community of *believers*, i.e., as a Church, or as a *political* movement, i.e., as a party? Both Baum and Gardavsky are insistent on the need to conceive of a vanguard community of believer/activists whose organized articulation is broader than that suggested by the terms "Church" or "Party" — and indeed cuts across the distinction. Thus Gardavsky describes the collective utopian subject as "a community that has drawn from the historical position held by the working class certain conclusions concerning the tangible prospects which await man .... [It] logically look[s] at all problems in a radical and humane light."<sup>24</sup> This is to invoke the image of a Left that not only transcends its internal (let us say denominational) divisions, but which is also broader in scope than any purely political association. Baum, from the side of Christian ecclesiology, similarly advances the conception of an "open Church." While as a Catholic he continues to believe that the Church of Rome has a special historical mission, its adherents are by no means coextensive with "the entire community of believers," in as much as God's word has been historically revealed to Man in many symbolic forms.

However, if we accept the general principle that the progressive vanguard ought to operate communally and collectively, the actuality of fragmentation both within and between the organized "religious" and "political" traditions that ideologically sustain it suggests that there is a need for extensive reorganization and institutional regroupment. To this end, it is of course helpful for Marxists and Christians to promote a general ecumenicism of viewpoint, but this is practically insufficient. What also needs to be considered is the kind of relationship desirable between the organizations and ideological traditions of utopian religion and transformist politics. Should they remain separate or be combined? It may be readily admitted, perhaps, that radical politics, to be effective, has to have some measure of coordination — but must the faith that sustains that political activity also crystallize in an institutional expression? And



if so, what role if any is there for an *independent* ideological organization or association in the articulation and dissemination of radical belief? Both Baum and Gardavsky are committed to the radical reform of the existing Christian Church — but neither of them sees as problematic the relationship of such a reformed Church with the organized political milieu, whether from the point of view of their respective historical functions or from the point of view of the boundaries and modalities of cadre membership.

These questions are particularly difficult to formulate from the point of view of secular leftism, conceptually blind as it has been not only to the mediated process in which consciousness — including its own — arises in the first place, but also to the social mechanisms through which consciousness is *reproduced*. Concerning the dissemination of revolutionary consciousness among the masses, organized leftism knows only how to permute the spontaneist notion of trusting to the magic of radicalisation through struggle with the vanguardist notion of introducing universalist ideas and strategic demands didactically to the most militant sectors of the revolutionary class through what Leninism calls "agitation and propaganda." And as for the reproduction of its own consciousness in the subjectivity of its members, despite all the evident solidarity rituals and mechanisms of reward and punishment that ensure each organisation's ideological reproduction, the organised Left milieu tends to be too inhibited by its hyper-rationalistic and anti-ritualist prejudices to recognise these reproductive processes for what they are, still less to assimilate the "bourgeois" concepts necessary to comprehend and rationally strategise them. An ideological tradition that puts politics in command of everything, that refuses to recognise the irreducibility in an alienated social world of utopian faith as precisely *faith*, and which lacks even a rational theory of the social functioning of the demonstrations it likes to hold, cannot be expected to think easily about the ecclesiastical element that actually or ideally operates within the radical social milieu it politically encadres. And yet the Left, as an organised system of collective beliefs and practices related to the sacred-for-it, is (in the Durkheimian sense) a real church. Left theology needs an ecclesiology attuned to this reality, as embarrassing as it might be, if the relation between organised religion and organised politics is to be posed as something more than a tactical and diplomatic problem. The fundamental issue here at the pragmatic level is how, in the light of the most advanced sociological understanding available to us, can the utopian faith that enables transformist politics to transcend the political and cultural limits of *ressentiment* be most successfully sustained? How, in other words, can the community of (radical) believers reproduce itself as, precisely, a community of believers? Baum, as a Catholic sympathetic to "bourgeois" sociology has less trouble than Gardavsky in facing the question. For him, Catholic symbols and sacraments, like the visible organised Church they institutionally constitute, are essential for the historical preservation of the faith they incarnate. But he does

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not argue for the total Christianization of the Left, so we are led to assume that in his projected ideological reform these would remain intact. Gardavsky, writing as a Czech Communist and restrained by self-censorship as well as by "Marxist" sociological insensitivity, ignores the ecclesiological question altogether.

But faith to be organised must first be symbolised. Indeed, the question of the organic relation between the Left as an ideological institution and the Church, ultimately turns on the question of whose symbolic language ought to predominate — that of the atheist Left with its materialist philosophy and esoteric tradition of events, heroes, founders and sages, or that of traditional religion. Again, neither Baum nor Gardavsky directly addresses the issue, although the preferences of each are clear. Gardavsky recognises the need to synthesize the anthropologically utopian cosmology of the Left with the resonant deep symbols of Western culture; but beyond presenting a Biblical hermeneutic he does not discuss the problem of how best to transform left-wing symbology. Baum is obviously committed to the symbolic language of Christianity — which he interprets as a divine revelation in constant need of re-interpretation. He does not doubt that these symbols can continue to function effectively as the historically privileged expression of faith in the love and self-transcending capacity of humanity — even though he sets before critical theology the necessary and as yet unaccomplished task of dymythologising Christianity so that its symbols can be read successfully in these terms. The practical adequacy of Baum's solution to the symbolic question, a radically re-interpreted Christianity, is however open to serious question. The secularising trend that has killed the idea of God "out-there" has also surely discredited the symbolic forms in which this idea has been historically expressed. If God is just another name for the self-transcendent aspect of the species and if Jesus is regarded as Incarnate only in the sense that in him this idea was first and most explosively expressed, then why employ theistic terminology with its trail of super-natural associations at all? Besides, if the objective is to imbue the progressive community's symbolic activity with a *mythos* that signifies the maximum consciousness historically possible, it is (from an ecumenicist perspective) implausible to suppose that any single world religion, however successfully its real human message is extracted from the depths of its mythology, is broad enough for the purpose. Here, Gardavsky turns out to be as narrowly ethnocentric as Baum. For in the symbolic constitution of modern transformist sensibility, the element of revolutionary humanist faith that he and Baum have extrapolated from the Judaeo-Christian tradition needs to be complemented not only by Appollonian rationalism (which they recognise) but also by revolutionary energy — which is pagan, erotic and, above all, Dionysian. As a symbolic resource for revolutionary inspiration, the prophetic millenarianism that expresses itself in the person and activity of Jesus is certainly valuable and

even culturally indispensable. But its eros is ultimately too pale, its ethos too tragic and its utopian imagination too limited by a penchant for the meek and the tranquil to encompass all the dimensions of a contemporary transformist sensibility. Radical religion, in short, wants to worship Dionysis *and* the Crucified — and (why not?) the laughing Buddha too. It need hardly be said that on the theoretical plane, also, Left theology will have to move beyond exclusively Judaeo-Christian ethical and philosophical categories if it is to comprehend the logic of a consciousness in which such apparently contradictory commitments can subjectively and rationally cohere.

Moreover, reflection on the symbolic requirements of a more expanded form of radical sensibility than that articulated in the ecumenical speculations of Baum and Gardavsky points also to the need for a critical theological examination of the "profane" ritual and symbolism manifest at the less explicitly religious levels of contemporary culture. For example, it was in the world of audiovisual entertainment that radical youth culture in the sixties celebrated the Messianism and energy-worship that unified and powered it as a movement. Rock culture — as one of its many functions — set to music the rebellion of a frustrated sexuality against the repressive remains of Judaeo-Christian moralism, and choreographed its spectacular, if short-lived, encounter with that tradition's utopian and apocalyptic moment. On the organizational level, the fact that a sector of the capitalist entertainment industry can play a vital role in the ritual and symbolic life of the transformist milieu suggests that Left theology not only needs to broaden its ideological framework, but needs also to adopt a radically pluralist ecclesiology.

### Radical Humanism Under Attack: Is Man Dead?

Left theology, however, has not been in any position to extend its reflection on the religious dimension of transformist praxis to a consideration of these internal issues. The convergence of Christian utopian immanentism and neo-Marxist religious atheism had barely crystallised when the Messianic mood of global movement politics that sustained its optimism and spirit of dialogue dissipated in the reactionary wasteland of the seventies. Moreover, the rise of explicitly and militantly anti-humanist trends within the most theoretically advanced circles of the contemporary human sciences, and their almost triumphant resonance within the intellectual Left, has put Left theology's anthropological *fides quaerens intellectum* thoroughly on the theoretical defensive. Before the theory of radical religious praxis can be advanced any further, therefore, its humanist faith must be secured or reinterpreted in the face of the structuralist challenge.

There is an irony in the current ideological situation. Radical humanism — *i.e.*, the belief that Man to become himself must become free, and that the

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condition for desiring freedom is emancipation from illusion — was originally an atheist philosophy directed against Christianity. Dialogue between these traditional ideological antagonists only became possible when, in the twilight of Stalinism, Marxist humanists were moved to reassert the visionary dimension of a leftist commitment and a socially troubled Christianity was able to recognize in the mirror of the Left's religious atheism a secularized version of itself. Now, with French structuralism's campaign to discredit social ontologies that rest on the category of the human subject and specifically with the Althusserian exorcism of the "ghost of Hegel," we have come full circle: after Vatican II and Uppsala it is Christianity which waves the radical humanist banner and the atheist Left, with its "theoretical anti-humanism" which attacks it. It is a further irony that Althusser, the leading left-wing intellectual figure in the resurgence of structuralism, was himself (at least in the period before his Maoist self-criticism)<sup>25</sup> a crypto-Comteian with an implicit Left theology of his own.

Although it carries an ideological charge, the modern French structuralist critique of humanism is primarily addressed to problems of theoretical practice: like fire in the development of physics,<sup>26</sup> Man in the human sciences is declared to be a pseudo-reality, a conceptual obstacle to rather than the possible object of scientific knowledge. Thus, social reality is to be comprehended as a structure of structures, and "praxis" is dissolved into an asymmetrical totality of decentred practices. Above all, war is declared on the "myth of the subject," and human history is to be read as a succession of structural events without an underlying logic or *telos*.

Left theology's response to this challenge has been easier to formulate from the Christian than from the Marxist-atheist side, because for the former, faith in what has been divinely revealed is irreducible and prior to human scientific knowledge, whereas for the latter (particularly in its dominant Hegelian form) the truth of the radical perspective depends entirely on its concordance with a correct grasp of the circumstances that produce it and the forward motion in history it seeks to express. Of course, the Christian theologian is always free, within the framework of his/her religious commitment, to modify the Christian interpretation of Revelatory symbols in the light of new understandings about nature and history — and indeed for the privatised, other-worldly Christianity Baum singles out for attack, the structuralist critique of humanist, praxis-centred reality-paradigms presents no threat at all. Even for modernists who conceive the Church to be socially committed and politically active, charged with the mission of realising God's Kingdom on earth, a retreat into (utopian) fideism is still possible, since natural philosophy, unilluminated by grace and blown by the winds of ideological fashion, is always capable of producing erroneous and even demonic hypotheses and categorical frameworks. But for the ecumenicism that is Left theology's intellectual counterpart to its

social vision of love and community, such a mere reaffirmation of faith is insufficient in itself. If it is indeed true that the category of the human subject, individual or collective, is an illusion resting on a wish then a Christian anthropology and philosophy of history rooted in the time-bound conceptual universe of the nineteenth century must rethink the form in which its redemptive message to humanity is currently expressed. Such an exemplary approach — exemplary for atheist “as well as theist” forms of radical humanism — is the one taken by the influential Catholic ecumenist journal *Concilium* in its special 1973 issue, recently republished under the title *Humanism and Christianity*.<sup>27</sup>

For about fifteen years now [writes Claude Geffré in the opening editorial] theologians have said again and again that, although we have a “theology,” we have no “anthropology.” An attempt was made to correct this situation in the Constitution of the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) and this was followed by a number of Christian anthropologies.... Now, however, in their anxiety to take part in dialogue with atheistic humanists, Christians may seriously ask themselves whether their thinking about Man is not lagging behind that of the atheists, whose most meaningful contribution nowadays is in the sphere of anti-humanism....; has not man, Foucault has asked, “discovered that he is neither at the centre of creation, nor in the middle of space, nor even at the summit or at the end of life?” This new form of atheism criticises both atheistic and Christian humanism.... Does the permanently present reality of the gospel message concerning man have to be made manifest or does a certain ideological conception of Western man have rather to be defended by making that conception sacral?<sup>28</sup>

The essays in the book attempt to resolve this dilemma by exploring the protocol of a theological appropriation which, while critical of the nihilism that gives structuralist denegation of the subject its contemporary cultural support, attempts at the same time to learn from insights into the human situation which the structuralist mutation makes possible. Ganoczy’s article “New Tasks in Christian Anthropology” is perhaps the clearest in sketching out the ground. For him, the construction of a rationally adequate Christian anthropology is more compromised by death of God theology than by Foucault’s death of Man.

To reduce the reality of God to the level of man is to make it impossible to answer the obviously urgent contemporary

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question as to whether we can express, discuss or address God at all. Seen in this light the formal object of Christian anthropology [*i.e.*, the nature of Man as revealed by the incarnation in Christ] is above all marked by faith, but this should not stand in the way of scientific knowledge, since the religious relationships, of which faith is a special form, provide us with a reality which can be analysed. Historical, sociological and even psychosomatic research can be carried out into religion and faith as universal, structural factors and into the aspects of the totality of man to which those factors belong. This in turn provides the arena in which communication can take place between Christian anthropology and other contemporary anthropologies.<sup>29</sup>

Within this encounter, Christian theology can derive especial benefits from a dialogue with structuralists.

It is above all because of its affinity with linguistic analysis and its consequent aim to interpret totality that structuralism is so relevant to the Christian understanding of man, which it can help to free from its misuse of mystical and of speculative theology, from its ambiguous and excessive employment of the concept of "love" and from its *a priori* tendency either to transcendentalise human existence or to isolate human freedom.<sup>30</sup>

The problem, then — and the writers of *Concilium* go no further than programmatic — is how to recover Marx's insight that the human essence is not an abstract quality inherent in all individuals but simply the actual ensemble of social relations and that this ensemble is itself an asymmetrical, overdetermined complex of structures that has no ("human") centre. However, to get from this ontological principle to the notion that Man is, nevertheless, by nature, a self-infinetizing being who has been granted the possibility of utopian self-realization, involves a logical leap which they gloss over. Indeed, it remains an unresolved (and scarcely examined) paradox at the centre of post-structuralist attempts to construct a transformist anthropology that to become the conscious subject of its own social development the human species must be able to grasp the materialist sense in which its social constitution and history have no subject at all. Left theology, in other words, needs a non-eclectic dual ontology.

Whatever the shortcomings of *Humanism and Christianity*, and however confined its discussion may be to specifically Catholic themes, it does attempt to learn what structuralism can offer theology. No such measured and ecumeni-

cal a response, however, is to be discerned among humanists of the Marxist and neo-Marxist Left. Althusser, who carried the structuralist message into the heart of Marxism, has been the object of particularly fierce denunciation. The Catholics of *Concilium* may shrink from defending and sacralising "a certain ideological conception of Western Man" — but not Garaudy, Sartre, Mandel, Kolakowski, Glucksmann, Piccone and hundreds of lesser lights.<sup>31</sup> It is almost as though there has been an international competition to see who can produce the most definitive refutation.

The irony of this apoplectic reaction is that Althusser himself in the essays that deal most explicitly with the topic (notably "Marxism and Humanism"<sup>32</sup> and "Ideology and the State"<sup>33</sup>) outlines a framework for thinking about humanist ideology which allows, in a way that more Hegelian forms of Marxism typically do not, for a non-reductionist conceptualisation of the religious and theological issues involved. In fact, despite his polemically objectivistic stance, Althusser's thought, sympathetically understood, has a positive contribution to make to the formation of Left theology — and not least because his integration of classical (French) sociology with Marxist vocabulary facilitates materialist theological discussion.

While admittedly still trapped in a positivist mis-identification of science with truth and ideology with illusion,<sup>34</sup> Althusser does free himself from the wholly ideological definition of ideology as the false consciousness of an alienated social order destined to disappear in the transparency of a free community. For Althusser, ideology — comprehended as the symbol systems and ritual practices through which the individual is subjectively inserted into the social order as an oriented agent and actor — is, to the contrary, an irreducible structural dimension of any social formation. The dominant ideology, reproduced in individuals through their participation in the ritual activity of dominant ideological apparatuses, plays the indispensable function of helping to reproduce the social relations of production on which, however organised, every society materially depends. Ideology does not disappear with the construction of a post-capitalist order: it simply requires and acquires a new content. Citizens in a society in transit to socialism and communism need to imagine their relation to the world in a way that corresponds to the aims and imperatives of this transition.

Althusser regards the recent emergence of a (theologically conversant) Marxist humanism with some ambivalence. On the one hand, its hypostasisation of Man, its teleological imagination and its emancipatory yearning must be eliminated, along with all other subjective fixations, from the conceptual organon brought to bear in a scientific analysis of history and of its conjectural "situations." On the other hand, as an ideology around which to consolidate "progressive" forces in the West, or to motivate and legitimate economic planning in the U.S.S.R., the rhetoric of socialist humanism — which like all

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ideology is lived and not just propagated — is valid and even irreplaceable.

This, however, is only a transitional solution. The ideology which Althusser conceives to be appropriate for the post-class society on the horizon of the contemporary revolutionary process is something more than the socialist humanism currently in vogue in neo-Christian and neo-Hegelian circles — more, even, than the “philosophy of praxis” that Gramsci envisaged as Christianity’s post-capitalist ideological successor. For Althusser, Gramsci at least had the wisdom to recognize the function ideology fulfils in the sphere of social reproduction; but at the same time he overlooked the discontinuity between the Marxist world-view that would prevail in post-class society and ideologies of the pre-communist type — in the qualitatively higher level of rationality, indeed thoroughgoing scientificity, exhibited by the former. Certainly a communist society will have a prevailing ideology, but it will be “an ideology which will depend on a science this time.”<sup>33</sup> How this apparent circle can be squared — what it means for ideology, which partially subsists in the subjective domain of unconscious desires and projection, to be “based” on science — is, however, something Althusser refrains from revealing.

The Comteian flavour of Althusser’s formulation of the ideological question is unmistakable, and it is indeed remarkable how the Hegelianising denunciations of his thought miss the obvious cultural point that Althusser’s whole polemic in part expresses: the return into Marxist discourse of its repressed French — *i.e.*, St. Simonian — heritage. There is certainly more than a parallel between Comte’s theologically and sociologically self-conscious adumbration of a fully positivised Humanist religion and the ideological solutions at which Althusser hints. Of course, Althusser does not identify himself as Pope of Humanity, nor does he conceive there to be a need for new religious organisation. But his terminology of ritual, subjectivity, ideology-as-material-reality and ideological apparatus, does point towards a quasi-Comteian ecclesiology, albeit one whose specific features are veiled in ambiguity. Certainly more questions are raised than answered. If, as he says, the School replaces the Church as the dominant ideological apparatus in advanced capitalism, what apparatus is to be dominant in the socialist society that comes next? The Party, as the guardian of Marxism-Leninism? Or organised science, as the guardian of scientificity? And how do they interpenetrate? But the real problem with Althusser here is not so much that his ecclesiology is vague and underdeveloped as that it is unambiguously hierarchical and centralist — just as the religiosity it expresses, for all its genuine humanist pathos, is that of what Bloch called Marxism’s “cold” current.

Finally, even the structuralist demolition of the category of the human subject — radical humanism’s sacral object *par excellence* — contains a religious insight worth pondering rather than simply dismissing out of hand as inadmissible according to first ideological principles. The main doctrinal



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heresy, it will be recalled, that differentiated Buddhism from the Brahmanism of the Upanishads, was its denial of the real existence of Atman — the self. The meditative project of achieving cosmic consciousness and subjective victory over mortality through grasping the spiritual essence of the inner self, was abandoned by Gautama as illusory: the self has no centre, and the “ego” is just a temporary complex of materiality. Seen in these terms, the structuralist attack on the myth of the Subject — which Althusser perceives to be at the heart of all theism — is not to be understood as merely the intellectual expression of contemporary nihilism and despair in the possibilities and intrinsic value of Man. It should be seen, also, as a moment in a process of orientalisation required to mutate prevailing Western consciousness so as to bring its spirituality into phase with the demythologised and materialist outlook appropriate to a species that has begun to acquire the technical and social capacity to determine, within the limits of circumstances, its own destiny.

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### Notes

1. In its most uncompromising form, the “death of God” tendency has been associated with Protestant liberalism. In England, the *locus classicus* is John Robinson’s *Honest to God*, London: SCM, 1963, and in North America, the leading proponents in the sixties were T.J. Altizer, William Hamilton and Paul M. Van Buren. Somewhat more muted projects of Christian demythologisation have been proposed by such Catholic liberals as Hans Kung, Andrew Greeley, Rosemary Reuther, William F. Lynch and Gregory Baum.
2. Vítěslav Gardavský, *God Is Not Yet Dead*, London: Penguin, 1973.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 208.

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12. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
15. Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Sociology*, New York/Paramus/Toronto: Paulist Press, 1975.
16. H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1930*, New York: Vintage, 1961.
17. Baum, p. 194.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 194.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 194-5.
20. This issue has already received some attention from contemporary feminist theorists. See Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1973, and Carol Ochs, *Behind the Sex of God*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1977.
21. Baum, pp. 178-81. The Christological typology discussed in these pages was formulated by Richard Niebuhr in his *Christ and Culture*, New York: Harper and Row, 1951.
22. Baum, p. 272.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
24. Gardavsky, p. 203.
25. The three most important collections of Althusser's work that predate his *Eléments d'Auto-critique* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1974) have been translated into English under the titles *For Marx* (Allen Lane: the Penguin Press, 1969), *Reading Capital*, (London: NLB, 1970), and *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: NLB, 1971). In the *Auto-critique* Althusser criticises himself for theoreticism — a deviation he attributes to the influence not of Comte, as one might expect, but of Spinoza.
26. The Comteian notion that new sciences become established through a *coupure épistémologique* in which a new object for knowledge is theoretically instituted in rupture with an ideological conception, was developed in modern form by Althusser's teacher Gaston Bachelard. For Bachelard's discussion of the history of the pseudo-object "fire" in the pre-scientific development of physics see his *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1964.
27. *Concilium*, 86, *Humanism and Christianity*, ed., Claude Geffré, New York: Herder and Herder, 1973.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
31. For three first-rate examples of this genre, see Henri Lefevre's *Au-delà du Structuralisme*, Paris: Editions Anthropos, 1971; André Glucksmann's "A Ventriloquist Structuralism" (*New Left Review*, no. 72, March-April 1972); and Frouquet *et. al.*, "Généalogie du Capital,

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2. L'idéal Historique," which comprises the text of *Recherches*, no. 14, Jan. 1974 (Paris, 103, Boulevard Beaumarchais). From within the milieu influenced by Saussurian linguistics, perhaps the common coin of French structuralism, there has in recent years arisen a body of internal critique which seeks to reinstall, albeit in drastically de-Hegelianised terms, the initially banished category of the subject. Basing themselves more or less on Voloshinov's late twenties synthesis of Marxism and structural linguistics, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Languages*, New York and London: Seminar Press, 1973, Lacan, Kristeva and Derrida have carried discussion way beyond the point of development marked by Althusser's celebrated and dogmatic formulations of the early sixties. A useful summary of this development for English-speaking readers is to be found in Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977.

32. In *For Marx*.

33. In *Lenin and Philosophy*.

34. *Eléments d'Auto-Critique*, pp. 41-53.

35. Althusser, *Reading Capital*, p. 131.

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## APPROACHING WALTER BENJAMIN: RETRIEVAL, TRANSLATION AND RECONSTRUCTION

Ioan Davies

### I

The work of Walter Benjamin has been discussed many times, but infrequently taken as the basis for conducting social theory or as the point of departure for social analysis. There are a few examples of work which might be said to derive from Benjamin's influence: John Berger's TV documentary on Art, "Ways of Seeing," which is an elaboration on Benjamin's "The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction," as is Hans Magnus Enzensberger's "Towards a Democratic Theory of the Media"; Tim Clarke's two-volume study of Art in mid nineteenth-century France, which derives its interpretation from Benjamin's "Arcades" project; Eric Hobsbawm's study *The Jazz Scene* (written under the alias "Francis Newton") which operates on the dialectical tension between Benjamin's positive response to jazz and Adorno's negative one; Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*, which in part takes its cues from Benjamin's concept of the flaneur; and several of George Steiner's books but most notably *The Death of Tragedy* (apparently influenced by *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*), *After Babel* (influenced by several works of Benjamin, including the essay on Karl Kraus and "The Task of the Translator") and *In Bluebeard's Castle* (owing more, perhaps to Benjamin's Judaic sensibilities than his Marxist ones).<sup>1</sup> Each of these is an impressive testimony to the influence of Benjamin, as is Adorno's later work, notably *Minima Moralia* and *Negative Dialectics* — but the impact is either oblique, or in the cases of Berger and Hobsbawm, perhaps too specific. The reasons for this curious influence are not far to seek.

Among critical theorists, Benjamin is marginal man *in extremis*. His work appears to reflect no total certainties, there is no major work on aesthetics or philosophy (if we except *The Origins of German Tragic Drama* as an early work written to expose the fraudulence of German scholarship), and the various audiences to whom he addressed his work seem extremely contradictory at first viewing yet, on reflection, all of them are marginal to their professional colleagues. Gershom Scholem has noted, in a fine essay on the changing meanings read by Benjamin into Klee's *Angelus Novus*, that his sensibility required a fixed centre which would always be re-worked into another totality.<sup>2</sup>

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It acts both as a metaphor of his life — the need for an essential pivot — and as the interpretation of the apparent discrepancies.

From the *Angelus Novus* we derive a picture of Benjamin's own *persona*, but also one which is transmitted to the transience of the present. Benjamin is not only a transient person, but in addition a metaphor of our own transience. As Brecht noted in his obituary of Benjamin —

I am told you raised your hand against yourself anticipating the butcher.

After eight years in exile, observing the rise of the enemy

Then at last, brought up against an impassable frontier

You passed, they say, a passable one.

Empires collapse. Gang leaders

Are strutting like statesmen. The people

Can no longer be seen under all those armaments.

So the future lies in darkness and the forces of light

Are weak. All this was plain to you

When you destroyed a torturable body.<sup>3</sup>

But if Benjamin is for himself and others a symbol of transition, it is important to understand his sense of the vantage points by which that change might be read. The conflicting influences on Benjamin are relevant here, because they plot both his debt to others and his sense of alternatives. There were three distinctive mentors in his life — Gershom Scholem, Theodor Adorno and Bertolt Brecht. Both Adorno and Scholem feared for Brecht's influence ("I am inclined," wrote Scholem, "to consider Brecht's influence on Benjamin's output in the thirties as baleful, and in some respects disastrous"<sup>4</sup>), while Brecht saw the Judaic influence on Benjamin as being fascistic ("The night before last a long and heated debate about my Kafka," wrote Benjamin. "Its foundation: the charge that it promotes Jewish fascism. It increases and spreads the darkness surrounding Kafka instead of dispersing it."<sup>5</sup>) In his essay on Benjamin,<sup>6</sup> Adorno managed to omit any reference to Brecht, while in his published letters his stand is not dissimilar to Scholem's.<sup>7</sup>

The three authors might be seen as reflections of the three inclinations of Benjamin — the Judaic, the Marxist and the aesthetic — but they should also be seen as wholly marginal to the conventional wisdoms of their trade. Scholem was as far from Herzl or Ben Gurion as might be imagined: a man who recreated the golden days of Jewish-Muslim-Christian scholarship and who accepted the qabbalah as more than necromancy and less than absolute wisdom. Adorno's sense of philosophy and Marxism was at least that of creative intelligence, but he did not accept the Kantian sense of total form that he saw in Lukács nor the Proletcult of Lunarsharski. And Brecht, the Author as

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Producer, seized each moment as it came but had a single-minded devotion to the ambiguities of Marxist ethics. Scholem neatly summarizes Benjamin's own ambivalence toward these tendencies: "He said in a letter [in 1925] that two crucial experiences lay still ahead of him: contact with Marxist politics [he still thought little of the theory of Marxism at that time] and with Hebrew. This statement provides a key to the understanding of Benjamin, for they are precisely the two experiences that never came his way."<sup>8</sup>

There is also one further element in Benjamin which expresses even more deeply the nature of the task with which he was engaged. This is the attempt to uncover the historical roots of Nazism in Germany by exploring both the literature and the social nexus out of which it emerged. It is in connection with this task that the apparently discrepant influences of Adorno, Brecht and Scholem might be understood, because each in his own way was concerned with precisely the same task. Benjamin was clearly dissatisfied with the interpretation of the rise of Hitler offered both by conventional Marxists and orthodox Jews, and even less was he convinced by the assimilationist strategies of nonorthodox Jews. Both Adorno and Scholem were assimilationist Jews who attempted to rethink the cause of the Holocaust and the rise of the Nazis in terms that were out of line with the received wisdoms of other Jews: Adorno did it by rethinking the origins of German and Western culture, Scholem by rethinking the origins of Jewish culture. Brecht, the non-Jew, saw that the rethinking involved acting out the moral paradoxes of all ethics, and that, in taking Marxism as dramaturgy, he might contribute to the rethinking of the Marxist dichotomy between theory and action. Understanding Benjamin's choice of correspondents is at least in part a recognition of his sensitivity to this dilemma — as was their recognition of his singular contributions towards attempting to solve it.

Having said this, which does little more than establish the immediate parameters of Benjamin's conversation, we must consider the ways that Benjamin's work might provide a clue towards creating a new aesthetic. The task is not easy, partly because of the transient and aphoristic nature of much of Benjamin's work, but also because "reading" Benjamin is as much an exercise in understanding the audiences he was addressing as it is in making sense of whom he was reading or whether the audiences and the readings were central to something else — the essential Benjamin which existed independent of the parameters.

## II

Walter Benjamin's work is an attempt to deal with the minutiae of everyday life in order to make sense of the universal. "Now stamp the Lord's Prayer on a grain of rice," as Dylan Thomas wrote in an early poem.<sup>9</sup> In the particularity of

the everyday artefacts are our universals. The problem so expressed in its quasi-qabbalahistic form becomes either a recondite subterfuge for destroying our confidence in things-in-themselves (by making them metaphysical), or else a device for reducing issues of great importance to the mundane and commonsensical. It is of course a problem related to Naming the Un-Namable, but to leave the issue there is to place it in that limbo of mysticism, where we can wander without reaching conclusions and/or merely genuflect in impotence.

It seems to me that Benjamin attempted to avoid this mystical cul-de-sac (or else he would have retreated like Scholem to empirical Israel in order to reclaim mysticism) and at the same time could not wholly accept Brecht's act of Naming in order to reveal that empiricism behind the Names. These antinomies are surely related. In an interview, Scholem has argued that "I considered myself a person who had come here to do something about implementing Zionism as I innocently understood it. But I saw that it was all really a very complex matter."<sup>10</sup> Then Scholem proceeds to account for the problems of coming to terms with the qabbalahism of the Israelis. For Scholem, Naming is the act of situating oneself in a real place: only after does one come to terms with the problems of un-naming/naming. With Brecht the Naming (e.g., Galileo, Saint Joan, Lucullus) constitutes occasions for theorizing about something else. The place is irrelevant, the individuals are moralistic myths. The central act is the uncovering of universals. Thus Scholem's sense of the Name is predicated on place and placelessness (he starts his career with the sense of nowhere to go and therefore confronts Namelessness through the qabbalah and ultimately locates it); Brecht's places are timeless and without geography: he treats people as Names who have to be Un-Named in order to reveal the moral and structural empiricisms behind them.

Both of these concerns are found in Benjamin, but sharpened in a deliberate way. Brecht's placelessness is denied by Benjamin's locating his endeavours in "real" places — the Paris of the nineteenth century, the Germany of Goethe and of the seventeenth century, Berlin, Naples, Moscow or Marseilles. His study of Baudelaire is not of an "ideal type" but of the Baudelaire of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, the Art Critic, the Dandy and sometime revolutionary. On the other hand Scholem's qabbalahism is turned outwards to Surrealism where the Naming of the Un-Namable is making sense of the numerous juxtapositions of paintings, architecture, social classes, songs, books, or technology which are at once universal and historically specific. They are all artefacts — even Baudelaire and the activists of the Paris Commune — but they come alive because of their surrealist relationships. Baudelaire becomes at once both an ideal type and the living breath of nineteenth-century Paris. Against Scholem's reading of the purely symbolic, Benjamin's surrealism incorporates symbolism as part of its ongoing process.<sup>11</sup> Place is not simply an occasion for coming to terms with the past: it reveals our breach with the past and our transition to the Modern.

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Scholem, Benjamin and Brecht are at pains to retrieve the past in order to make it relevant to the present. The differences in approach, however, are quite dramatic. Scholem's invocation of qabbalah is an attempt to infuse life into a dying tradition which has not been located in place (*i.e.*, Israel); Brecht's past is coexistent with the present — "criticism is stimulated with reference to the way empathy is generated, not with reference to the incidents that the spectator sees reproduced on the stage";<sup>12</sup> while, for Benjamin, the past is something that has to be constantly re-read, or it may disappear for ever. In this sense Brecht is arrogant — the past can always be reclaimed; Scholem sees reclamation in terms of having a power-base (place) from which to reclaim; while Benjamin is ultimately pessimistic — we can only try, for some of it may have disappeared altogether, but we try from specifically defined places.

In that sense, therefore, is Benjamin at all hopeful or even useful as a progenitor of sociological aesthetics? We have not to forget the problem of the Naming (to which I shall return) but also to re-consider the notion of audience, both in the sense of "to whom do I speak?" and also "in what sense does my conversation have meaning?"

This problem is at one with the issue of "reconstruction"<sup>13</sup> and "critique" which is central to the work not only of the Frankfurt school, but also of Mannheim and Popper, and also a large number of literary critics notably Harold Bloom and George Steiner. The issue might be seen in terms of both retrieval and translation. Karl Mannheim's question<sup>14</sup> — how do we reconstruct that which appears to be in ashes — is apposite. The appropriation of those elements of the past that we consider worth preserving is closely related to our translating them into the language of the present. The issue of the theoretical grounds that we establish to decide on what we retrieve and in what manner is also relevant to the mode of translation. In one sense we, as critics, are all engaged in the act of retrieval and of translation; in another sense some of us are not consciously aware that our task involves translation of the past for our chosen audiences. It is this ground between retrieval, translation and reconstruction that Benjamin consciously occupies. The act of reconstruction, deriving from Kant, seeks to establish what universal laws may be derived from "correct" knowledge and from "reliable" information. The act of critique, on the other hand, seeks to release us from the constraints of the past through self-reflection and a criticism of the "objectivity" of the reconstructionists. In Shakespeare's lines, quoted by Arendt in her essay on Benjamin, the task of the critic is to reveal how "thy father ... doth suffer a sea-change into something rich and strange."<sup>15</sup> The task of the reconstructionist is to show what your father has in common with other fathers.

In general the problem of reading Benjamin is that in his conversations with his personal audiences he is well aware of these dichotomies and of the polarities in the various theoretical approaches. His task is to resolve them not



by direct theoretical encounter but by continual reformations of the evidence by re-presenting it in a new shape as the audience comes back with its own criticisms. This apparent relativity reveals the essence of Benjamin's methodology. If the polarities of retrieval involve a reconstruction in order to discover universal laws on the one hand and uncover the ghosts in the machine on the other, the task of the translator is that of constantly juxtaposing the one with the other, because only in this way will we be able to maintain our critical sensibilities and involve ourselves in honest retrieval.

In Marxist aesthetics, Benjamin stands at that remarkable intersection between idealism and realism, materialism and modernism.<sup>16</sup> By situating his work in the realm of the modern, he deflects both the Kantian formalists and the Hegelian idealists by inviting them into the translator's room to share the act of reformulation and retrieval. Where we start from is the act of naming the artefacts that we inherit from our past, and Benjamin was shrewd enough to recognize that the present is always past: the modern is our assembly-room of those dead objects between whose interstices we move. We live but in *their* silences; *they* live but through our translations.

The act of Naming is an act of choosing *what* to Name, but it is also an act of Naming what we have chosen. In *The Hidden God*,<sup>17</sup> Lucien Goldmann chose to discuss Pascal and Racine because they were important writers. His task was to explore the social and literary significance behind their (acknowledged) importance. In doing so, he hoped to reveal, in a classical Kantian (though neo-Marxist) sense why their particular social contexts displayed universal truths. Benjamin's task is more complex: it is to show why the truth eludes us, in spite of our sense of the eternal verities. Thus the task of retrieval is also bound up with reversal: in order to reclaim the images and names from the past we have to see them not only as they appear, but, as it were, in a mirror. Then we shatter the mirror and try to put it together with all the other pieces of broken glass. What we see in this act of recomposition is, of course, not the original faces but ourselves, distorted both by the fragmentary chips of glass and by the certain knowledge that other faces were there before.

This is similar to the imagery of re-clamation that we find in the Romantics, but has a dramatically different impact. Take, for example, Shelley's almost Hegelian act of re-clamation in *Adonais*:

The One remains, the many change and pass:  
Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;  
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,  
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,  
Until Death tramples it to fragments — Die,  
If thou wouldst be with that which thou doth seek!  
Follow where all is fled! — Rome's azure sky,

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Flowers, ruins, statues, music, words are weak  
The glory they transfuse with fitting truth to speak.<sup>18</sup>

In this poem we have almost all the ingredients of a Benjamin essay. Take, for example, the comments on Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*.

A Klee painting named *Angelus Novus* shows an Angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. That storm is what we call Progress.<sup>19</sup>

The similarity of the imagery is striking, but Shelley's *Adonais* welcomes us above the rubble to join the Great Majority. The Romantic Agony propels us towards Death. Benjamin's Angel propels us, against his better judgement, towards the Future. If Shelley wants to reclaim by rejoining the dead artefacts, Benjamin (equally a romantic) knows how impossible that is. We can only reclaim parts of the past as we are projected into an uncertain future. As much as we would like to rebuild the past, all we can do is to become curators and translate the past into the language of the Future. If both Shelley and Benjamin see the present as a hiatus, for Shelley it is a gap that can only be resolved by returning (through Death) to that past: "Oh hasten thither/No more let life divide what Death can join together."<sup>20</sup> For Benjamin the hiatus is between the past (artefacts) and the future (the propelling wind). The present is not so much a void but the intersection of past and future.

Thus what I choose to Name and the Name that I give to my choice are two sides of the same coin. In Shelley's case I choose the images of the Dead in order to re-Name them as Dead: I want to re-join them in all their Deadness (but I call it Eternity). In Benjamin's case I collect the Names, put them on my shelves, re-Name them because I know that what will survive will be my re-Naming, if I have any meaning. As translator I am also a Creator. It is the Sense that I make of it all that counts because as collector, translator and interpreter I

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am the focal point of creativity. (Of course, Shelley unconsciously did this as well, but the rift between his theory and practice is perhaps inevitable. Here we refer only to theory as presentation of self.) It is the way that I re-assemble the broken glass that reveals my creative sense.<sup>21</sup> The central problem is how do I do it. To this we now turn.

### III

Benjamin's creative sense is to portray the critic as artist, the writer as producer, the story-teller as translator and even the architect as unconscious revolutionary. The central aesthetic is to show art in motion, and to indicate how the forms of art both constrain and liberate us. If the central feature of Benjamin's work relates to the mutual interaction between technology and painting, story-telling and the novel, architecture and crowds, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and so on, our central problem as social theorists and social aestheticians is to establish how his work provides a theory and a methodological practice which adds more to our knowledge than existing sociologies of art and literature.

If the task of translating is also an exercise in Naming, the extent to which the original work re-Names itself through the mode of translation is a vital ingredient in appreciating the translated product, and the translator-creator's radiance of vision. But, of course, as Benjamin also noted, the work of the author is a production, and production necessarily involves several layers of operation and mediation. These interconnected processes call into question both the authenticity of the translation and its intended impact. The introduction to this essay listed some of the apparent influences of Benjamin on subsequent authors. All the writers mentioned with the exception of Clark had access to Benjamin in German either as his contemporaries or after the publication in 1955 of Adorno's two-volume selection of Benjamin's work. The idiosyncracies of their interpretation must be related to factors other than those of translation, and need not concern us here. Of more concern for the English-speaking reader is the presentation of Benjamin in translated form. "Translation" should take into account the selection of work for translation, the works themselves, the productive and distributive process, and interpretations of Benjamin in essay or book form.

The collected works of Benjamin have been in process of publication by Suhrkamp Verlag in Frankfurt since 1972. The complete edition (edited by Rolf Tiedermann and Herman Schweppenhäuser) will include nine volumes of book-length studies, essays, journalism, autobiography, letters, satires and notes. Until this task is completed it will be difficult for anyone to provide a comprehensive account of Benjamin's work (even then, there will still be a large amount of unpublished work in the Potsdam archives of the GDR). In

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general, the German discussion of Benjamin, as with the English, revolves round certain selections from this material edited by Adorno, Rolf Tiedermann and Hannah Arendt. In the English versions the selections themselves are mediated by interpretations of the work of Benjamin by several authors — most notably Adorno, Arendt, Scholem, George Steiner, Stanley Mitchell, Shierry Weber, Ben Brewster, Susan Buck-Morss, Peter Demetz, Jürgen Habermas and, more recently, Susan Sontag.<sup>22</sup> The availability of these interpretations as well as the translations themselves varies from Britain to the United States. In Britain the task of compiling and issuing translations has been largely in the hands of the *New Left Review*, and, to a lesser extent, *Screen*; in the United States the works have been published by Helen Wolff at Harcourt Brace Javonovich and occasionally by the *New German Critique*. The approach to publication has displayed dramatic differences. New Left Books has issued collections of Benjamin's work which explore themes of his own which appear to be part of a wider Marxist debate: *Understanding Brecht*, *Charles Baudelaire*, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, *One-Way Street*, and *Aesthetics and Politics* (debates between Bloch, Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin and Adorno). Helen Wolff has published collections of a random nature, *Illuminations* (issued in Britain by Jonathan Cape) and *Reflections*, which emphasise the eclecticism of Benjamin's imagination. Thus, while New Left Books has attempted to put Benjamin in the context of a European political-aesthetic debate, Harcourt Brace has delivered the provocative (Jewish) essayist. The fact that they have, in general, used the same translators and that certain works overlap between publishers makes the differences more dramatic. The mediator becomes crucial to our interpretation.<sup>23</sup> In one sense Benjamin invites this kind of misreading, as the first part of this essay has indicated. An author who moves from *belles-lettres* to detailed analysis of Baudelaire, from crypto-qabbalahism to erudite travelogues, from precise observations of technology to imprecise Marxism, is surely everybody's favourite text. He is the surrealistic sea that it is only too easy to wallow in. Because the mind is fluid, our instincts are either to tame it or to reify its fluidity. We wonder at its cosmic span, we genuflect before its attention to minutiae, and yet we want to mould it closer to our heart's desire. Although his theme is similar to that of *Writing Degree Zero* by Roland Barthes<sup>24</sup> he does not descend into the scientology of structuralism in order to analyse it; instead he suspends us between the diachronic and synchronic versions of time. Benjamin's theme is both the far limits of theology (hence his relations with Scholem's qabbalah) and Marxism (hence his empathy with Brecht's alienation effect or his distance from Adorno's prismatic dialectics). Thus the appropriation by American intellectual Jewry of Benjamin the infant prodigy, the man who never grew up — as well as the sheer arrogance of German immigrants to the United States who would only deliver to the world what they felt it could handle. Before she died Hannah Arendt

explained to me the omission of Benjamin's essay on Karl Kraus from the *Illuminations* volume. "Kraus is untranslatable," she said, "and therefore Benjamin's essay would make little sense to those who could not read German."<sup>25</sup> But Erich Heller's essay on Kraus appeared in *The Disinherited Mind* eighteen years before, and it is arguable that Kraus is no more untranslatable than Wittgenstein. The secret of the translator is not what he reveals but what he conceals.

Benjamin, perhaps more than any other writer, has acted as the treasure-trove for the *cogniscenti*. Long before any of his work was available in English, he was adopted by other writers who had incorporated elements of his work into their own. And yet when *Illuminations*, *Understanding Brecht* and *Charles Baudelaire* finally reached us we felt that we had been cheated. Benjamin was a richer mine than those gold-diggers suggested. Not only were there precious metals, but dross too. Obviously the sifting was the problem, and the availability of Benjamin in English revealed not so much *him* but the ideological proclivities of those writers who adopted him.

The introductions to Benjamin display something of this propensity to read him in terms of the authors' animadversions. The essay, "The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction," became something of a lodestone — John Berger's essay in *The Look of Things*, Enzensberger's essay on the *Media*, Steiner's *After Babel*, Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*, Adorno's obituary in *Prisms*, and of course Malraux's *Magnum Opus* or Sontag's *On Photography*, all plumb this one slender essay to the depths. Benjamin almost reads like early McLuhan; technology transforms our ways of seeing; we can speak only in quotations; the visible becomes the reproducible; ineffable artefact; man becomes the one-dimensional cypher.

That all of this can be read into Benjamin, is, of course evident. But isn't there more? Such a reading reduces Benjamin to a methodologist or structuralist, where the signifier becomes the signified. If only we could turn Benjamin into a structuralist, or a Jew or a Marxist, life would be so much simpler. We could avoid all the questions he asks by translating him into the obvious.

If translating Benjamin reveals the bewilderment of the translators, it is one which was anticipated by Benjamin himself. He quotes from Rudolf Pannwitz: "The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be affected by the foreign tongue .... He must expand and deepen his language by means of the foreign language." And Benjamin adds: "Just as, in the original, language and revelation are one without any tension, so the translation must be one with the original in the form of interlinear version, in which literalness and freedom are united. For to some degree all great texts contain their potential translation between the lines ...."<sup>26</sup>

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My argument is not that the actual translations from German have not, to a great extent, achieved this task, but that the significance of Benjamin's ideas as well as his contextual metaphors have been read in quite discrepant ways, that the task of translating has been bounded not so much by the perspectives of interpretation, but by the frameworks of ideology. The interpreter-translators have based their writings on fragments of Benjamin's work, rather than its totality, and these fragments have been read according to ideological relevance for their own work (e.g., Adorno, Scholem, Mitchell) or because of some *ad-hoc* revelation out of one piece (e.g., Berger on Art and Technology or Steiner on Translation and Language). But how can we commence a reading of Benjamin which is "one with the original in the form of interlinear version, in which literalness and freedom are united?"

The problem might be approached if we distinguish between the origins and context of Benjamin's work (which was discussed in the first part of this article) and the presence and development of specific motifs throughout his writing. In this sense the partiality of the interpreters might be used to advantage, while the correspondences<sup>27</sup> in his approach to criticism and commentary examined in their entirety. Fortunately that task has now commenced. A recent issue of the *New German Critique*, devoted largely to the work of Benjamin, and a thoughtful article in *Glyph* by Irving Wohlforth<sup>28</sup> suggest directions for the critical re-evaluation of Benjamin's work. If this act of reinterpretation runs the risk of burying Benjamin under scholastic debris, it does offer equally the promise of releasing his work from ideological appropriation. This can be demonstrated by two illustrations.

When New Left Books issued *Understanding Brecht* in 1973 it was to reveal a Benjamin who, in Stanley Mitchell's words, "joins ranks with Gramsci and the Lúkacs of *History and Class Consciousness*."<sup>29</sup> That is certainly one interpretation of Benjamin, but his assessment of epic Theatre does, for example, include the following quotation: "The damming of the stream of real life, the moment when its flow comes to a standstill, makes itself felt as reflux: this reflux is astonishment. The dialectic at a standstill is its real object. It is the rock from which we gaze down into that stream of things ... in the city of Jehoo 'that's always full and where nobody stays.'"<sup>30</sup> If this is a metaphor for Brecht's alienation effect, it is an oblique one, and probably more, evokes Benjamin's own account of time: "A historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop."<sup>31</sup> Although Benjamin is clearly influenced by Brecht in his conception of time there is little to be learned about Benjamin by labouring the point. It's much more useful to examine the degree to which similar motifs in Benjamin's own work take on different dimensions according to his own sense of their corresponding bases. Thus if we wish to understand something of Benjamin's Marxism we will learn more by examining the transmutations of his

own motifs, than by concentrating on the Brecht dialogues. In one sense, *Understanding Brecht* indicates the context of a transmutation, but which, without a wider reading of Benjamin, tells us little of the grounds of his own philosophy. I should hasten to add that this exercise is not intended to denigrate Benjamin's importance as a Marxist theorist but to establish grounds on which we determine his Marxism in its own terms.

But a contrary point ought also to be made. In his "Introduction" to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, George Steiner concludes "The publication of this monograph in English, in 1977, under this imprint [New Left Books], is pregnant with ironies .... Had he lived, Walter Benjamin would doubtless have been sceptical of any 'New Left.' Like every man committed to abstruse thought and scholarship, he knew that not only the humanities, but humane and critical intelligence itself, resides in the always-threatened keeping of the very few."<sup>32</sup> And thus Benjamin, who chose the stance of the man of engagement, is appropriated into the world of the beleaguered elite intelligentsia. It is difficult to imagine Benjamin as a fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge. Steiner sets the scene for reabsorbing Benjamin into the world of the scholastics. But this same Benjamin wrote: "The mind which believes only in its own magic strength *will* disappear. For the revolutionary struggle is not fought between capitalism and mind. It is fought between capitalism and the proletariat."<sup>33</sup> *The New Left Review*, because of its awareness of *that* issue, might be a more appropriate preserver of a "humane and critical intelligence" than the neutral scholastic.

The overall assessment of the direction of Benjamin's work has barely been addressed, except in raids on the seemingly inarticulate articulateness. There are signs, however, that, even here, the situation is changing in 1972 Jürgen Habermas published an evaluation of the entire output of Benjamin which has only recently been made available in English.<sup>34</sup> In this article, for the first time, the central question about Benjamin's work is asked: To what extent, grafting Marx onto an already established corpus of non-revolutionary Talmudic writing, is it possible to speak of Benjamin's later work as revolutionary at all? Habermas' answer is clear: "My thesis is that Benjamin did not realize his intention to bring together enlightenment and mysticism, because the theologian in him could not accept the idea of making his messianic theory of experience serviceable to historical materialism."<sup>35</sup> Habermas' conclusions are supported by a thorough reading of Benjamin's published work and exploration of the development of his imagery, his aphorisms, his case studies, his attempts at philosophy and historical interpretation both before and after his acceptance of historical materialism. Yet at the same time he concedes that Benjamin's "conservative revolutionary hermeneutics, which deciphers the history of culture with a view to rescuing it and redeeming it for the overthrow," may provide a path towards "a differentiated concept of progress."

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If there are problems in Habermas' critique, they can be confronted both by the internal evidence of Benjamin's work as well as by the uses to which Habermas puts the material. Essentially, however, the question raised is the most pertinent one. It forces us to consider Benjamin's own claim that his writing was political and Marxist, that his aim was to politicize art, and that all appearances to the contrary, the "age of the now" contained in its own technology the vehicles for human liberation. But it also forces us to confront the methods, the allusions, the observations, the parables that informed the theory that led him to such a conclusion. In spite of himself and his translator-interpreters, we are now in a position to consider these questions and to appraise Benjamin's relevance to our present. And that task is neither more nor less than to ask what in our sacred pasts corresponds to our profane presents, or what in our profane presents corresponds to our sacred futures.

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1. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, London: BBC Publications, 1967; Eric Newton, *The Jazz Scene*, London: Penguin Books, 1959; T. Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois and Image of the People*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1973; Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1966; George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, London: Faber and Faber, 1961, *After Babel*, London: Faber, 1970, and *In Bluebeard's Castle*, London: Faber, 1971; Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Raids and Reconstructions*, London: Pluto Press, 1975.
2. Gershom Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis*, New York: Schocken Books, 1976, pp. 198-236. "If one may speak of Walter Benjamin's genius, then it was concentrated in this angel. In the latter's saturnine light Benjamin's life itself ran its course, also consisting only of 'small victories' and 'great defeats.'"
3. In Bertolt Brecht, *Poems*, Part 3, 1938-1956, London: Methuen, 1976, p. 363.
4. Scholem, p. 189.
5. Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, London: New Left Books, 1973, p. 110.
6. "A Portrait of Walter Benjamin," in T.W. Adorno, *Prisms*, London: Neville Spearman, 1967, pp. 229-241.
7. "Letters to Walter Benjamin," *New Left Review*, reprinted in Ernst Bloch *et. al.*, *Aesthetics and Politics*, London: New Left Books, 1977. pp. 110-133.
8. Scholem, p. 191.
9. "Altarwise by owl-light-VII," in Dylan Thomas, *Collected Poems 1934-52*, London: J.M. Dent, 1952, p. 74.
10. Scholem p. 36.



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11. It is perhaps worth reading Scholem's account of Benjamin's relationship with the *Angelus Novus* of Klee. Scholem's sole concern is to establish the extent to which Jewish symbolism remained part of Benjamin's concerns. In the light of Benjamin's own work, this is a curiously scholastic position to take. See Scholem, pp. 198-236.
12. Bertolt Brecht, *The Messinkauf Dialogues*, tr. John Willet, London: Methuen, 1965, p. 101.
13. See "Introduction" to Paul Connerton, ed., *Critical Sociology*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976, pp. 11-39, elaborating on a point made by Jürgen Habermas in "A Postscript to Knowledge and Human Interests," *Philosophy of Social Sciences*, 1973, No. 3, pp. 157-89.
14. In *Man in An Age of Social Reconstruction*, London: Routledge, 1944.
15. Hannah Arendt, "Introduction" to Walter Benjamin *Illuminations*, London: Cape, 1970, especially pp. 38-51. The quote is from *The Tempest* 1, 2.
16. See Terry Eagleton, "Aesthetics and Politics," *New Left Review*, 1978, Vol. 107, pp. 21-34, for an elaboration of these terms.
17. Lucien Goldmann, *The Hidden God*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964.
18. Shelley, *Adonais*, Stanza III.
19. *Illuminations*, pp. 259-260.
20. *Adonais*, Stanza LIII.
21. See Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation*, London: Hutchinson, 1969.
22. For specific references to these see bibliography at conclusion or notes.
23. *Reflections* includes a few essays that were published earlier by New Left Books, but not all of them, plus excerpts from *One-Way Street* and essays on places, language and Karl Kraus. *One-Way Street* includes the entire work of that name, plus the place pieces, plus the linguistic ones, the essay on Eduard Fuchs, and one on photography.
24. Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1968. This short collection of essays, published in France in 1953, may be summarized in Barthes' own words: "Writing therefore is a blind alley, and it is because society itself is a blind alley ... there can be no universal language outside a concrete, and no longer a mystical or merely nominal, universality of society."
25. Hannah Arendt, personal communication.
26. From "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations*, pp. 81-2.
27. Correspondences: derived in part from Benjamin's reading of the quabbalah and the Renaissance alchemists who attempted to locate God's substance in natural elements. A variation of this is found in Swedenborg, and Bacon in the *Advanced Learning* argued that "light ... hath a relation and correspondence in ... corporal things to knowledge in incorporeal things" (Book I, vi, para 4). Benjamin's position is well summarized by Anson Rabinbach: "The alchemist is motivated by a conservative ideal of redemption and a utopian image of the future. This Messianic ideal, which is always present in Benjamin's image of interpretation, is characterized by him as 'a world of all-sided and integral actuality' and presupposes a universal nature and a universal language that not only contains the secret of the correspondences, but renders them transparent." "Critique and Commentary/Alchemy and Chemistry: Some Remarks on Walter Benjamin," in *New German Critique*, No. 17, Spring 1979, p. 6.

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28. *The New German Critique*, *ibid*, and Irving Wohlforth "On the Messianic Structure of Walter Benjamin's Last Reflections," *Glyph* 3, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, pp. 148-212.
29. S. Mitchell, "Introduction" to *Understanding Brecht*, p. xviii.
30. *Ibid*, p. 13.
31. *Illuminations*, p. 264. For an elaboration on this theme see the present author's "Time, Aesthetics and Critical Theory" in John O'Neill, ed., *On Critical Theory*, New York: Seabury Press, 1976, pp. 58-77.
32. George Steiner, "Introduction" to W. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, London: New Left Books, 1977, p. 24.
33. *Understanding Brecht*, p. 103.
34. "Bewusstmachende oder rettende Kritik-Kie Aktualitat Walter Benjamins," in *Zur Aktualitat Walter Benjamins*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972. Translated by Philip Brewster and Carl Howard Buchner as "Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism — the Contemporaneity of Walter Benjamin," in *New German Critique*, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-59.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

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## THE LATER CASTORIADIS: INSTITUTION UNDER INTERROGATION

*Brian Singer*

In the first part of this essay, we sought to trace the trajectory of Cornelius Castoriadis' intellectual biography through the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>1</sup> We examined how, from a position originally within Marxism, he began to pull at the thread of bureaucracy, and kept on pulling, and pulling .... We saw how at first this movement led to a critique of the "real socialism" of the eastern regimes, and how it was then extended to the west, the "socialist" regimes having been revealed as a concentrated form of capitalism, accomplishing vertically what in the West was being realized horizontally. We then examined what in Castoriadis' eyes constituted the phenomenon of bureaucracy; the definition of the mechanisms by which it attempts to gain control over the social process, as well as of its "contradiction," that is, its ultimate inability to realize its ambition of total mastery. Finally we saw that as the critique was pushed ever further, its critical edge could not but turn on Marxism, considered not simply in terms of its historical practice, but in terms of the secret complicity of its theory with the object it claimed to criticize. This critique of "bureaucratic theory," as we then noted, would not restrict itself merely to one or more tenets of the Marxist corpus, but would eventually come to question the very viability of theory. Before such an interrogation, Marxism could only be left behind as an exemplary case of what in a sense was common to all "theory" and its "rationality." And yet if such an interrogation was to continue, and continue to be fruitful, beyond having to reject the pessimistic posturing of "the God that failed," it would have to avoid succumbing to the pleasures of a facile anti-intellectualism which holds all thought to be inherently oppressive. It had now placed itself under the obligation of coming up with an "anti-theory" that, in terms that were both rigorous and coherent, would seek to conceptualize that object which continually escaped theory's grasp, and yet constantly seemed to solicit it. That object, it was suggested, was "institution."

Between the break-up of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and the publication of *Imaginaire sociale et L'institution*,<sup>2</sup> there was a more or less uninterrupted public silence of almost ten years. And when this gestatory period finally ended, the resulting product could only have produced a certain bewilderment among Castoriadis' earlier audience. For the immediate concerns of the

political struggle and the familiar markings of political economy had been replaced by a discourse whose domain was much broader, including the relatively exotic realms of linguistics and psychoanalysis, whose tone was more obviously philosophical, and whose aims were more indirect. And yet, in hindsight, it would appear that behind the public silence, in the obscurity of his own labours, the basic motifs that lay behind the continuous movement of his earlier writings, were still present. This observation applies not only, if most significantly, to the exigencies that drew his analysis forward, but even to a certain transposition of the basic categories between the two phases. Thus what had earlier been conceptualized as the bureaucratic rationality manifest in the contemplative dualism of Marxism, is now generalized to all "inherited thought" as embodying what Castoriadis will term the "identitarian-ensemblist logico-ontology." And just as he had formerly attempted to circumscribe what was simultaneously the limit and ground of such bureaucratic rationality, in, say for example, the daily activity of the work place, so he would now specify for parallel reasons a non-identitarian, alogical, "imaginary" dimension.

However, if the trajectory of Castoriadis' thinking still retains a certain coherence, the focus has not simply broadened but in a sense shifted. For while in the earlier period the critique of a certain regime and practice had led to a questioning of the theory that served to justify this regime and collided with this practice, the critique of all "inherited thought," of the "identitarian-ensemblist logico-ontology," in a reverse movement, leads to an attempt to situate the latter in the necessities internal to the "socio-historical."

When attempting to conceptualize society, "inherited thought" generally seeks to establish a series of invariant and separate elements (institutions in the flat sociological sense of the term — culture, the economy, the educational system, classes, *etc.*), which are linked together in distinct and univocally defined relations so as to form a determinate and ordered whole. This whole, then, is designated as society itself. This formulation immediately raises a number of problems. How can society be considered as the sum of its elements and their relations, when they exist only within and through society, when society in a sense precedes them?<sup>3</sup> And how can the elements be considered as invariant when they exist only within and through specific societies, when therefore they exist only as specific elements subject to the peripeties of a particular society? And in what sense are these elements to be considered separate, when, having emerged within a particular society out of what was formerly indistinct, they owe their existence to what remains fundamentally indivisible? What has been said about the invariable and separate nature of the elements, can be repeated with respect to their relations. In summary, what "inherited thought" fails to grasp is precisely the *instituted* character of society.

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This, however, is only half the matter. For presupposed behind the instituted character of society is the *instituting* character of history (and if Castoriadis speaks of the "socio-historical" it is in order to stress the inseparability of the synchronic from the diachronic, of the instituted from the instituting). The problem then arises for "inherited thought" of how society, without ceasing to be a particular society, can be considered as a determinate unity, or even a unity *per se*, when its components and their modes of coexistence are in continuous flux, when diachronically speaking, they slip through the imposition of any strict identity. It is the problem of how to think stability in change, the possibility of social coherence within the disorder of time. But beyond this problem, there lies the more basic issue of trying to conceptualize change itself. At this point "inherited thought" tries to reduce history to the schemas of either causality, finality or logical implication. In this sense "inherited thought" is unable to think the actuality and particularity of time, for it necessarily reduces time to a schema of order, a necessary succession of events, a material translation of what already pre-exists ideally. Time is conceptualized in the manner of a spatial arrangement (*e.g.*, points on a line), only displayed "longitudinally." For Castoriadis, however, history is discontinuous; it is the perpetual emergence of alterity, of that which is other, of that which escapes determination. In brief, history is "the eruption of instituting society into instituted society."

If "inherited thought" must decompose history in terms of either causality, finality or logical implication, this is because these schemas correspond to the conduct of three "primary essences" — things, subjects and ideas — which would lie beneath society's institutional surface,<sup>4</sup> and exist as its basic units or ultimate determinants. The "socio-historical" would then be understood in terms of either the mode of being of one of these primitive types (be it the laws of matter, the unfolding of an idea, the organicism of functionalism, or the logicism of structuralism, *etc.*) or their variations, combinations and synthesis (*e.g.*, the claim that society consists of "relations between people mediated by things"). The problem is, however, that society does not so much consist of things, subjects and ideas, as the very consistency of the latter emerges from the socio-historical (and thus they exist always as *social* subjects, things and ideas). It is Castoriadis' contention that there is a mode of being, more "primitive" and more elementary, a mode of being that exists as other and more than subjects, objects and ideas, and yet exists as the horizon of their possibility. It is this mode of being that he terms "*institution*."

We have now reached the very heart of Castoriadis' inquiry, the concept of "*institution*." Merleau-Ponty, in counterposing the concepts of "*institution*" and "*constitution*," provides a certain backdrop to Castoriadis' analysis:

If the subject were taken not as a constituting but an

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instituting subject, it might be understood that the subject does not exist instantaneously and that the other person does not exist simply as a negative of myself. ... an instituting subject could coexist with another because the one instituted is not the immediate reflection of the activity of the former and can be regained by himself or by others without involving anything like total recreation. Thus the instituted subject exists between others and myself, between me and myself, like a hinge, the consequence and the guarantee of our belonging to a common world.<sup>5</sup>

As this quote should make clear, the problem with the concept of "constitution" is that it supposes the notion of a subject considered as an autonomous consciousness for whom objects exist only as his own objectifications. As such the subject is necessarily suspended within the circle of his own self-enclosure; "there is nothing in the objects capable of throwing consciousness back toward other perspectives. There is no exchange, no interaction between consciousness and the object."<sup>6</sup> It is in this sense that the other, being himself a subject, can only be denied as a denial of the subject's own autarchic existence and its completion. We have begun to enter the fiction of a pure *logos* that would simultaneously absorb and recreate all being in the recovery of its own identity — a fiction than when transposed to the level of collectivity will be understood as the realization of absolute knowledge and total self-mastery at the end of history. It was in order to avoid this impasse that Merleau-Ponty came up with "institution" as a term that would lie between the subject and object (and thus allow the object to exist as an object, rather than as an objectification reducible to the subject) and between the subject and other (and thus allow the other to coexist with the subject rather than being his simple negation), as well as between the subject and himself (thus allowing him to exist beyond the necessity of having to continuously and "instantaneously" create himself out of his own nothingness).

If Castoriadis uses the term "institution" for analogous reasons, he situates it not so much "between" as "behind." The shift is subtle, for both as it were provide the ground on which subjects and objects are delineated. And yet if in the first case "institution" supplies the common relation thereby allowing them to interact with each other, in the second case "institution" is the condition of their very existence. For Castoriadis, "institution" in its first and most fundamental sense, is that which is creative of an absolutely irreducible mode of being, a social mode of being, one that is both instituting and instituted, and that is, at least in part, presupposed in anything and everything

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that we might care to name. We must be careful here, for what is being said is that "institution" is at first the "institution" of the very possibility of "institution." The turn of phrase is no doubt circular, but it serves to emphasize the irreducible originality of "institution," that it is created *ex nihilo* — an effect that is its own cause. At this point, as if to respond to the apparent absurdity of such a position (or more precisely self-positioning), Castoriadis feels obliged to introduce another concept, that of the "*imaginaire radical*." The latter is given as the source of "institution," as that which institutes, accounting for the emergence of this unprecedented novelty, this capacity for "auto-institution." As such the "*imaginaire radical*" is in a sense the demiurge of Castoriadis' entire conceptual "system." And yet I find there is something futile about this concept, as if it were trying to establish a cause that would not be a cause, that would be the cause of all effects and which would simultaneously allow these effects to exceed any cause. Or, it is as if the concept of the *imaginaire radical* were an attempt to situate a subject that would not be a subject, having neither a will, motivation, nor design — a sort of subject "under erasure." Ultimately this concept seems to arise from the need to find terms to correspond to the positions left vacant by the "identitarian-ensamblist logico-ontology" without however restoring this logico-ontology.

Another and more important way in which the "*imaginaire radical*" is "futile" lies in its "imaginary" character, a quality it has in common with "institution." (Let us not forget the title of the book, *L'Institution imaginaire de la société*.) By "imaginary" is meant that "institution" is not "real" in any determinate sense, nor is it "unreal," nor does it conform to the distinctions between "true" and "false," "rational" and "irrational." Instead it is through the "*imaginaire radical*" as operative in the "imaginary institution" of society that these distinctions are acquired and acquire meaning. It is through institution that what for society, and for a particular society is real, unreal, irrational, and so on, comes to be defined. As such "institution" itself, considered in this fundamental "originary" sense, remains a-real and a-rational, and thus, by definition, one cannot speak of its logic or its ontological being. It would even appear to resist the very possibility of being identified — at least in any rigorous, positive sense. Being situated on the far frontiers of signification, it would *seem* that, at bottom, "institution" must always remain an enigma. This is all the more true since it is the very horizon of the emergence of signification, the condition and guarantee of society's capacity to define itself in its coherence and commonality, that is to say, in society's capacity to open up a meaningful world.

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At this point, in order to deepen our understanding of the problematic of "institution," we are going to have to alter our strategy. In the preceding



section we attempted to reveal "institution's" mode of being by demonstrating how it remained fundamentally foreign to the regimen of the "identitarian-ensemblist logico-ontology"; we are now going to examine "institution's" *modus operandi* not so much by counterposing it to the "identitarian-ensemblist logic," as by having it embrace the latter as one of its own requisite dimensions.

This indispensable "identitarian-ensemblist" dimension of "institution" operates through what Castoriadis terms the *legein* and the *teukhein*; the former referring to "institution" as it involves social communication (*dire/representer social*), the latter, as it involves social activity (*faire social*). This "identitarian-ensemblist" dimension is exhaustive of neither social communication nor social activity. It must still be counterposed to an "imaginary" dimension, and must be seen as being itself an "imaginary" creation. If then Castoriadis admits the indispensability of the "identitarian-ensemblist logic," the entire elaboration of the *legein* and *teukhein* should be seen as an attempt on his part to circumscribe what must be admitted, by grounding it in what it itself cannot pose, and by demonstrating its limits in what by itself it cannot say or do. This is neither simply a philosophical exercise, nor a mere continuation of the critique of "inherited thought" at another more basic level. Ultimately it points to a political project, one that is a direct continuation of the same political project that animates all his work. For it is Castoriadis' contention that in contemporary society the "identitarian-ensemblist logic," or its offspring, is endowed with a sort of imperialist myth whereby it is claimed that it alone is capable of posing what is truly real and truly rational, what can be really said and what can be rationally done. This logic, it would appear, has been assigned the desperate task of usurping the entirety of the "space" of "institution" in what Castoriadis will term the "social imaginary."

The *legein* is defined as "to distinguish-choose-pose-assemble-count-speak," and is that medium through which all must pass if it is to be present for society — *i.e.*, represented to and within society. As a result, it finds its primary and paradigmatic, but not exclusive, moment in language. For Castoriadis language is of singular importance, and not simply because of the recent popularity in France of semiology and structural linguistics. Rather, for Castoriadis language, as Merleau-Ponty already noted in 1945, "offers the chance to definitively transcend the classical dichotomy of subject and object,"<sup>8</sup> and thereby provides an entry into the problematic of "institution." A careful analysis of language serves to restate at a level that is less sweeping and more detailed, many of the principal themes encountered when interrogating "institution." Moreover, language has a privileged relation with what for Castoriadis was always the most important aspect of "institution," that is, its capacity to engender significations. This possibility of positioning significations

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in language brings us to a final point which, while absent from the surface of Castoriadis' analysis, is revelatory of the entire course of his thought. Significations exist as a "hinge" between the socio-historical and its theory, allowing the former to be folded back on itself in the latter's reflection. As such significations provide common ground on which society, the theory of society, and reflection on theory itself, can engage in multiple exchanges — exchanges that Castoriadis' manner of thinking not only supposes but exploits.

The *legein* serves to designate an "object" (in Saussure's terminology, a signified) both in its generality and as a particular object, as *this* object, and a "sign" (a signifier) as a sign and as *this* sign, and a "signitive relation" joining this object to this sign. The object, the sign and the signitive relation all have a double relation to "institution": they are instituted and thus presuppose the "institution" of the socio-historical; and they are agencies of "institution" and are thus presuppositions of the socio-historical. This is also to say that, as instituted, their emergence is not dependant on and cannot be explained by the "identitarian-ensemblist logic," even if, as will soon become apparent, their emergence is the sole condition under which this logic exists — and exists as a necessary dimension of "institution." This point is important, and even if by now it should be in some sense familiar, it is worth examining the instituted character of the signitive relation, the sign and the object, each in its turn.

The signitive relation cannot be considered as a logical relation since it relates two "things" that are not equivalent. Nor is it a "real" relation, and this because it exists as a supposition of all representation. For being in a sense above and below, independent yet interlinked to all individual representations, it has no specific location that one could "represent," or even point to, as its "reality." The signitive relation is not a necessary relation in any determinate sense; nor is it a contingent relation (insofar as the notion of contingency supposes that of determination). It exists irreducible to any "rationality" or "reality," and yet given that it is required for any talk of the necessary, the contingent, the real or the rational, it exists as essential. To admit this irreducible and essential character of the signitive relation, and therefore of all representing, is to recognize it as instituted, as a creation *ex nihilo* of the *imaginaire radical*.

Turning now to the sign, we know that the signitive relation requires a material-sensible figure as its representative support, and this figure, it is true, would certainly seem to be "real." However in itself it does not constitute the sign. For the concrete instances of a given material-sensible figure are never totally identical (*e.g.*, the pronunciation of a given syllable may vary according to tone, pitch, dialect, etc.), and thus if they are to be organized as exemplars of a particular sign, there must exist, for both each individual and society at large, an image of the sign, a sort of normative form that manifests itself through the sign's concrete instances and yet is separable from them. Con-

sequently the material-sensible figure must also exist as an immaterial-sensible figure, *i.e.*, it must exist as "material-abstract,"<sup>9</sup> and thus what at first appeared to be "real" owes its reality as a sign to what is not "real." Signs thus exist as "imaginary" creations, a necessary product of "institution."

The object must also be instituted if it is to have a social existence. It must be created out of that which is not yet an object, which exists as it were in its pre-social immediacy. The object exists as an object only through the signitive relation, for the latter endows it with its identity as a particular object, identical in relation to itself (in spite of and through all its manifestations) and in relation to other objects of the same class, and different with respect to all other objects, be they in the same class or not. In this sense the object, like the sign, has a certain abstract formal quality to it. (For example, I will only recognize a given object as a chair if I already have an image of what a chair is.) However the object, unlike the sign or the signitive relation, is generally not instituted as a pure creation *ex nihilo*. The object generally has a referent — which is not so much "real" as "pre-real," given that it is through the establishment of objects that a "reality" comes to exist for society.

The *legein* then serves to designate the signitive relation, and with it, signs and objects. And such designation, as the preceding paragraph already intimated, immediately suggests the *identification* of the signs and objects, their *separation* from other signs and objects, their *combination* into various classes or ensembles, and the *substitution* of one sign or object for another sign or object in the same class. This is to say that the signitive relation, once instituted, directly implies and lends itself in multiple fashions to what Castoriadis terms the "operative schemas" of the *legein*. These schemas constitute the *legein's* properly identitarian-ensemblist aspect. One can continue further with their enumeration. Thus the substitutability of one sign for another (or one object for another) implies the *iteration* of the different as the same and same as different, and their combination within classes, and the combination of classes within a larger ensemble, suggest an *order*. Again, their substitutability suggests that each element is *valid as* an element of that class (Saussure's paradigmatic relation) and their position within an order renders them *valid for* the function inscribed in their combination (the syntagmatic relation).<sup>10</sup>

The operation of these schemas, the properly identitarian-ensemblist dimension of language, is most clearly manifest at the level of the sign or signifiers. As such the above paragraph could be rephrased, by stating that the *legein* designates and identifies a series of discrete and distinct material-abstract phonemes which it then constructs into new and determinate ensembles — lexemes, morphemes, grammatical classes, syntactic types — in accordance with the operative schemas just enumerated. (It is only in language, and above all in this aspect of language, that identitarian ensembles exist in a "real"

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sense, as opposed to being merely the formal elaboration of these fundamental operations within, for example, mathematical functions, scientific statements, etc.).<sup>11</sup>

At the level of the objects or signifieds, where the problem of signification proper must be confronted, the affair is more complex. It is true that at this level the identitarian-ensamblist dimension of language, what Castoriadis terms the *code*, is still in evidence. It constructs, or attempts to construct, a sort of identitarian pseudo-world, *coded* by signs and formed by distinct and definite "objects" and distinct and definite "relations" between these "objects."<sup>12</sup> In this sense it organizes and stabilizes the signifieds, insuring the existence of a common social world with a modicum of fixity and determinicity such that speech can be exchanged without giving way to total confusion. However, the code must be counterposed to the imaginary dimension of language, to what Castoriadis terms the *langue*.<sup>13</sup> For, as was already evident in the discussion of the "institution" of the object, the code cannot in and of itself pose the contents of signification. It will be remembered that the object, having no existence outside the signitive relation, is instituted as identical to itself and generic to a class. This is to say that, contrary to a certain semanticist dream, the object is neither fully determined by, nor completely identical to, its referent. The signified is not instituted as a universal form that fully grasps that to which it refers. Rather it exists as something less than its referent; as a simple reference point (*point de repérage*) adequate for the use to which it is put. And yet, because of its very looseness, it also indicates something more than its referent, pointing to what is not immediately said, to what might be said, to what is implied or might be implied by the existence of other signifieds or referents. Considered in this light, denotation must dissolve in the face of connotation. Even a simple sentence like "I had a dream" is an aggregation of linguistic "abuses": "I, if not taken as a simple reference point, is only a fog hiding an abyss; one does not *have* a dream like one has a baby ...; and what does it mean to have *a* dream, in what sense and when is a dream singular?"<sup>14</sup>

When Castoriadis claims that significations exist as "an indefinite cluster of interminable referrals (*renvois*) to something *other*,"<sup>15</sup> he is arguing against not only the semanticist option of the signified's determination by the "real," but also the structuralist option of its determination in terms of its relation in a set of signifieds. The emphasis is on the terms "indefinite" and "interminable" — contrary to the tenets of structuralism, significations do not compose a discrete set of determinate relations, but a *magma* with neither distinct elements, determinate relations, nor definite limits.<sup>16</sup> Given their indeterminate and porous character, significations undermine the stability and organization with which the code would endow them. As such they cannot be conceived of as being locked into an airtight synchronic pattern, where a change in one relation would necessitate a change in them all, and where

consequently a change in one synchronic pattern is equivalent to a change into another synchronic pattern that would be impenetrable and impervious to the first. If language is not confined to its particularity, if we can still read books written in the sixteenth century, it is not because there is a universal language in univocal correspondence with what exists outside it, and therefore immediately capable of saying everything. Rather it is because significations as "an indefinite cluster of referrals to something other," are implicitly and constantly open to diachrony. Language is neither a neutral and transparent instrument, nor an opaque entity enclosed within the parameters of its own utterances, it both provides access to history and is itself historical.

"Signification" refers not merely to language — *i.e.*, to matters of vocabulary and etymology — but to the very formation of the socio-historical as a process constitutive of meaning. In order that this be made clear, let us return to our discussion of the "institution" of the object, and take as an example the object "nature." The latter, for reasons already noted, is not determined by the referent nature (and for the same reasons, "institution" cannot be a natural process). This is not to say that the object nature, or the "institution" of society at large, can, as it were, ignore this referent. It must be taken into account, but the manner in which it is taken into account, or re-presented to society, is infinitely variable. Nature exists for society as indeterminate, as interminably capable of yielding to specific social representations. This is not simply to say that it is given here as "nature" and there as "*Natur*." The reference is to the meanings which are attached to it and of which it is a part, this cluster of referrals; for example, as embodying this or that cosmology, as having a specific relation to society, be it as something that is to be dominated, or that traverses society as a moral norm, or that is opposed to society as an aesthetic value. In short, the signification of nature is necessary for the institution of nature as an always social nature. If one then takes as an example an object whose referent does not have a pre-social existence and is itself instituted, the evidence of signification is of even greater import. For here signification concerns not only the referent's representation as an object and its implication in a world of sense, but, through the latter, is the referent's very condition of existence, if not its "materialization." Now such a case is exemplified by society itself, by its existence as a particular and identifiable society, as well as by the vast majority of the specific objects, institutions and activities existing within its parameters.<sup>17</sup>

Whatever the relation of object to referent, the creation and organization of the socio-historical as implicating and implicated in a firmament of meaning, is given in and through "a magma of imaginary social significations"; the specific articulation of these significations in a given society composing what Castoriadis terms that society's "social imaginary." Now insofar as the social imaginary is fixed by the glue of the operative schemas of the *legein*, the latter

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establishes what for a given society is and is not, and is and is not valid. And yet because it is a matter of imaginary significations, what is fixed and determined always remains open to the potential historical alterations occasioned by the *imaginaire radical*, to the possible redefinition of what is real and what is valid. The operative schemas of the *legein*, its identitarian dimension, can only facilitate such transformations for "to dispose of the signitive relation is to dispose of it everywhere, in the face of all that can 'be presented' as 'real,' 'rational,' or 'imaginary'; ... and to dispose of the operative schemas that organize the *legein*, is to always be able to group in another manner, to define new classes or properties, and refine or modify the lexical-semantic grid of the given."<sup>18</sup>

It appears that in contemporary societies this imaginary dimension of the *legein*, or more precisely its elaboration at the level of signification, would not, metaphorically speaking, have itself limited to a merely instrumental role. Instead it would ascend the commanding heights of the social imaginary and represent itself as the source of signification, or of genuine signification, as alone capable of deciding on what is real, or rational, rejecting what falls on the wrong side of its critical blade as imaginary considered in a secondary and frivolous sense. And having reduced all criteria of validity to one of reality and rationality, it would then equate what is real with what is rational such that what is real would in principle be capable of being known, and fully known, and consequent to a given representation of the end of knowledge, what is real would, again in principle, be capable of being fully and rationally dominated.

Castoriadis' discussion of the *teukhein* is much less elaborate than his analysis of the *legein*. My own exposition of the *teukhein* will be limited to establishing certain parallels. The *teukhein* is defined as "to assemble-adjust-fabricate-construct" and its identitarian dimension functions by means of the operative schemas of "starting from ... in a manner appropriate to ... in view of." In a sense the *teukhein* presupposes the *legein*, for it assembles and adjusts the material-abstract elements established and encoded by the *legein*. And in another though lesser sense the opposite is true since the *teukhein* "materializes" these elements either directly or indirectly. Unlike the *legein* there is no signitive relation in the *teukhein*. Instead there is a relation of finality or instrumentality. Consequently the *teukhein*, under the pressure of its identitarian dimension institutes a division between what is and is not possible, that goes beyond the division instituted by the *legein* between what is and is not, placing the latter under the determination of final causes and thereby providing grounds for social activity. Obviously this "possibility" inscribed in the *teukhein* does not concern the alterity engendered by the *imaginaire radical*; the latter concerns precisely that which appears impossible. Nonetheless the *teukhein* is not only indispensable for organizing the creations of the

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*imaginaire radical*, but is itself inseparable from an imaginary dimension:

The *teukhein* as purely identitarian-ensamblist becomes the incoherent fiction of technique by and for the sake of technique. But quite obviously every *teukhein* and every technique are always *for* something else, and are referred to ends which do not result from their own intrinsic determination. Even in the case, for example, where technique would appear as an "end in itself" as it tends to appear in modern capitalist society, *this* state of technique as an end in itself is not something that technique as such could pose. It is itself an imaginary position: technique is valid today as this pure social delirium presenting the phantasm of omnipotence — a delirium that is, for a large part, the "reality" and "rationality" of modern capitalism.<sup>19</sup>

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There is for Castoriadis a third movement beyond the *legein* and *teukhein* necessary for the existence, reproduction and transformation of the socio-historical. This moment concerns the "institution" of the social individual. The latter is not instituted in the same manner as other social objects, which is to say that he/she is never simply an object or agent. If this was not the case, then the individual would be so flattened out against the socio-historical, that he/she would be incapable not only of attaining the distance necessary to tamper with it, but even of achieving the flexibility necessary to participate in it, and thus to reproduce it. In this sense one must pose an original kernel of subjectivity that renders the psyche irreducible to the socio-historical. As such the problem of socialization, at least at a first moment, is not so much one of how the socio-historical constitutes the individual, or even imposes itself on the individual, but of how the individual comes to have access to the socio-historical, of how for the individual other individuals, objects, a society and a world come to exist, and come to take on an existence that is both independent and meaningful. The analysis of this process proceeds by means of a critical reworking of Freud. However, Castoriadis, unlike Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization*, is not interested in extracting from Freud a critique of traditional morality — though the possibility of such a critique is not excluded. Instead he is interested in Freud because the latter, in spite of occasional lapses, realized that the psyche cannot be understood in terms of the traditional logico-ontology. In Castoriadis' understanding, Freud situates the originality of the psyche as prior to the schemas of this logico-ontology, and thus places the latter not at the beginning of the analysis, as constitutive of the premises in terms of

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which it must unfold, but at the end of the analysis, as in part constitutive of the reality principle to which the psyche eventually accedes.

The analysis begins by attempting to understand the mode of being of the unconscious. The unconscious exists as a flux of representations that are "tied" to the instincts and thus accompanied by affects and inserted in an intentional process. The "representational-affective-intentional" flux knows neither time nor contradiction; it appears as continually fleeing determination, as indeterminate, indistinct, fused, interwoven, *etc.* In this sense, the unconscious exists as a *magma*, but in a much stronger sense than the *langue*. This is not to say that the unconscious is totally chaotic; it if were the interpretation of dreams would be impossible. Nevertheless such interpretation is inherently contradictory: "The meaning of the dream as desire is a condensation of that which cannot be grasped and an articulation of that which cannot be articulated."<sup>20</sup> The point to be stressed here is that the unconscious is unfamiliar with the schemas of the *legein* and *teukhein*. It is incapable of identifying and separating discrete elements in its phantasms; it is incapable even of differentiating its phantasms from a world that exists outside of these phantasms. It has neither an "indice" of "reality" or "rationality," nor a "proof" of "reality" or "rationality." According to Castoriadis it exists as a world in itself, and the great mystery is how the psyche comes to admit the existence of an independent other.

What has been said above is only partially true. The phantasms of the unconscious already contain a multiplicity of elements which in analysis can be separated and identified, and which, as such, bear witness to the existence of a highly differentiated experience. In other words the unconscious as we know it presupposes a mode of being that is already open to the world; it presupposes the division of subject and object, that is to say, it presupposes a reality principle. The problem of how others come to exist for the psyche cannot be approached at this level and Castoriadis is obliged to probe deeper; to postulate an "originary" and undifferentiated phantasm of which the phantasms of the unconscious are derivative.<sup>21</sup>

An originary phantasm: here we come up against another problem, namely the irreducibility of the psyche to any "real." As we noted the psyche exists as the emergence of representations (or of images), but from where does it obtain the "elements" of these representations, and how is it able to organize these "elements"? "If one says that it is able to borrow these elements from the representation of the real, one is advancing a meaningless assertion (how can it borrow something from what the latter does not possess? The real cannot be both real and a real representation of the real in the real)...."<sup>22</sup> One is forced to postulate the existence of a primordial psychic state capable of creating *ex nihilo* a "first" representation that "contains in itself the possibility of organizing all representations — that is, a formed-forming (*formé - formant*), a figure which will contain the germs of the schemas of figuration."<sup>23</sup> This



primordial psychic state in which the first "representation" emerges, Castoriadis terms the monadic state. In it the psyche exists as an undifferentiated autism that represents everything as equivalent to the self and the self as equivalent to its phantasm. It is a state in which everything comes under the identity of a totalizing inclusion, and in which meaning is given as this "indestructible holding together ... (this) unlimited source of pleasure ... which leaves nothing to desire."<sup>24</sup>

The full import of what has just been said can perhaps be clarified by comparing it with Freud's analysis. For Freud imaginary representations originate as a response to an absence, and in particular the absence resulting from the removal of the first satisfaction, the breast. However, in order for there to be something absent, the psyche must represent that something as absent and as absent to someone. In other words, Freud, in order to derive representations, has to presume the existence of representations, and the existence of a particular representation, one in which the subject and object are already represented as separate — when in fact it is precisely this separation that has to be explained. In short he has short-circuited his own analysis by adhering to the inherited logico-ontology. His analysis, however, contains other elements that point to the mode of existence of this originary psychic state. In particular there is the idea that satisfaction is primarily representational or phantasmic; that representations exist not so much as wish-fulfillments but as fulfilled wishes. In the psychic monad "the breast can only be apprehended as the self: I am the breast, *Ich bin die Brust* ...."<sup>25</sup> Satisfaction is hallucinated; the originary phantasm is omnipotent, is always-already-satisfied. Again the problem is posed: how can the psyche be torn out of its monadic madness? Hunger, the absence of the breast, can be at most a necessary, but never determinant, condition of this separation. The actual rupture remains an enigma. One can only postulate its emergence and note the successive reorganizations of the psyche to which it gives rise. It remains irreducible and this irreducibility is that of "institution."

This rupture, or more precisely, series of ruptures, is to be seen as the imposition on the psychic monad of a relation with other or others, by means of which the psyche is progressively socialized, *i.e.*, constituted as a social individual for whom a "reality" exists that is "independent, malleable and participable."<sup>26</sup> The successive reorganizations to which the psyche is submitted, being tied to the "institution" of the socio-historical, remain at bottom heterogeneous to the psyche. And being heteronomous, the socio-historical is never able, as it were, to substitute itself for the psyche. For the social individual is inconceivable without the unconscious — an unconscious that bears the trace of its originary phantasm and as such "always tends to close up and short-circuit everything in order to bring it back to the impossible monadic 'state' and, failing that, to its substitutes, hallucinatory satisfaction and phantasmization."<sup>27</sup>

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Given then this first rupture of the monadic closure, what are these successive alterations that the psyche undergoes? The following is only a brief sketch. There is first of all, the apprehension of the removal of the breast, not as the cause of hunger, but as the negation of all meaning. Thus a border of non-being, of that which escapes inclusion, is sketched on the frontiers of representation. And this border will eventually be represented as an exterior onto which the breast that is the source of displeasure will be projected. At the same time the breast which remains a source of gratification will still be submitted to the schema of inclusion, but given that the alterity of the breast can no longer be ignored, this identification will no longer be intransitive, but will be introjected as an attribute of the self. The constitution of the object, however, cannot occur until the projected and introjected breast coincide, and this requires the representation of another to whom the breast belongs. The representation of the latter marks the triadic phase (the representation of a subject, object and other), but this phase does not in itself mark the constitution of a reality principle. For the phantasm of omnipotence originally attached to the self, is simply transposed to the other such that he/she is perceived as the sole source of signification, and of pleasure and displeasure. Nonetheless, because the omnipotent other appears as a cause separate from the subject and to which the subject must react if he/she is to avoid displeasure, the triadic phase provides a rough draft of the socialization of the psyche. In this sense we can speak of the first "conscious" awareness of a still unformed "reality" that must be taken into account, and of a norm that must be obeyed. And once this norm is introjected, we have the establishment of a sort of pre-Oedipal super-ego, and subsequently the establishment or repression of an unconscious in the dynamic sense.

The breakdown of the phantasm of the other's omnipotence can only occur when the other is denuded of his power over signification; or more precisely, when it is understood that the other is not the master of signification; that there is no master, that significations have a social existence independent of any particular person. This for Castoriadis is the profound significance of the Oedipal complex: "(it) erects before the child, in an uncontrollable manner, the fact of institution as the foundation of institution and *vice versa*, and forces him to recognize the other and others as autonomous subjects of desire, who can be linked to each other independently of him/her, and can even exclude him/her from their circuit."<sup>28</sup> It is through this "final rupture that the child becomes capable of perceiving and identifying other individuals and objects, and of identifying a self-identity and self-image; that he/she gains access to real-rational linkages as instrumented through the *legein* and *teukhein*, as well as to significations in the full sense of the term; that he/she accedes through the process of sublimation to the socially instituted forms. It is to be understood that sublimation implies not only a change in the individual's drives,

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but a change in the object of these desires — the former “private” objects of libidinal investment being replaced by “public” and socially instituted objects — as well as a change in the intentions and affects that accompany these desires and objects. Moreover, the concept of sublimation suggests that society not only imposes on the individual psyche what the latter cannot pose by itself, but that the individual psyche has the capacity — or the imagination — to find a personal signification within the socially instituted significations such that the private and public worlds always intersect, but never more than tangentially.

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Beyond the irreducibility of the individual to the “institution” of the socio-historical, there lies a commonality that brings us to the heart of Castoriadis’ “ontological” problematic: both the individual and the socio-historical remain, in principle, essentially open. That is to say, both are prey to the possible eruption of what appears beyond the parameters of possibility, and thus exist as a potentially infinite variety of types and forms of societies, social objects and social individuals. For the individual this creative “spontaneity”<sup>29</sup> is given by the “radical imagination,” by that which is the source of representations, and in particular, of the first “originary” representation. The latter, which can never be understood or reproduced, but which is the necessary basis of all other representations and thus of the representation of others, impels the individual forward in his or her continuous, but always partial and incomplete, contact with the socially instituted world. For the socio-historical, this possibility is given by the *imaginaire radical*, by that which is creative of imaginary social significations and of that in and through which they emerge, the signitive relation and the operative schemas of the *legein* and *teukhein*. In particular the *imaginaire radical* is creative of an “originary,” a — real and a — rational signification by means of which what, for a particular society, is “real” and “rational” is given, and by means of which what is given has meaning for that society. This is not to say that the *imaginaire radical* is restricted to the creation of originary significations, or to the possibility of the signitive relation; rather it is institutive of the signitive relation itself, and of what the signitive relation makes available — that is the *magma* of imaginary social significations which is for each society “constitutive” of its institution.

Now, in order to conceptualize what gives society its coherence, and thus what makes society a society, reference to the identitarian operations of the *legein* and *teukhein* are not sufficient. The latter can only fix what in a sense already exists as social signification. Thus Castoriadis must seek a solution to this problem on the side of the imaginary, in what he terms “primary significations.” He never really explores this concept in depth, but nonetheless he lets it be known that it refers to a signification which is not really present in

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society as a locatable object, but whose presence is felt throughout society, organizing and conditioning secondary significations such that analogous effects are produced at the level of the "totality." It is that which "establishes the common conditions and orientations of what can be done and represented, and as such holds together the indefinite and essentially *open* crowd of individuals, acts, objects, functions and institutions ... that is each time a concrete society."<sup>30</sup> Such a signification is evidenced in the extra-social sphere of transcendence, that a society may represent as the source of its institution. Or, to take an example from the secular capitalist world, the term can be applied to the signification of the "economic," the latter being constructive of and elaborated within a series of objects, institutions, functions, activities, *etc.*, which come to make up the "economy," and which extend their influence beyond the economy to society's deepest recesses. Primary significations, however, because they involve the "holding together of an indefinite and essentially *open* crowd," refer us back to the mystery of society as a unity within a diversity, a totalization without determinate elements or definite limits, one that is never complete in itself, always having a relation to what it is not, or is not yet — even as it would try to deny this relation. "What escapes [society] is nothing other than the enigma of a world that lies behind the social world held in common ... as the inexhaustible provision of alterity, as the irreducible threat to all established signification. What also escapes society is its very being as an instituting society, that is to say, as the source and origin of alterity, or as perpetual self-alteration."<sup>31</sup> Once again, faced with the openness of institution, we are placed on the threshold of history, and ultimately of a possible other history, another radically different society. The *imaginaire radical*, this origin of alterity, easily becomes a source of hope, a utopian moment in what remains a basically demystifying discourse.<sup>32</sup>

In fact the entire problematic of "institution" is directed towards the admission of the radical creativity of history. The turn towards an investigation of the "ontology" of social being seeks to render available what is not ontology, what is profoundly subversive of ontology, hollowing out the letters "Being" and splintering it into an infinite plurality of beings extended in time. And yet, if such a "negative ontology" is so constructed as to make history possible, it allows us to say very little that is substantive about that history, whether it be the history of the past ("negative ontology" is situated at too general a level to grasp what always remains a specific history) or the history of the future (the possible "terrain of the creativity of history" is in principle situated "beyond the frontiers of the theorizable").<sup>33</sup> And what is even more important, it positively prevents us from making certain kinds of statements about history. For not only is the position of Castoriadis subversive of the concept of "ontology," it undermines a certain notion of "history," one that would capitalize itself, enclose itself in its own totalizations, and associate, if only

furtively and shamefacedly, with properly ontological predications, revealing itself as the gradual realization of man's essence, the unfolding of material laws, *etc.* The point is worth emphasizing, particularly for those who believe that any discussion directed at such an apparently abstruse level of analysis is largely exhausted in its own abstractions and thus has little to say. As a sort of counter-demonstration, let us stop and briefly show how Castoriadis' position differs from, and must necessarily be critical of, that of another thinker whose analysis also bears witness to certain historical-ontological concerns.

Habermas' distinction between the technical and communicative interest might appear at first glance to be similar to the distinction between the *legein* and *teukhein*. However, on closer analysis the technical interest proves to be entirely constructed out of an identitarian logic (it constitutes, as it were, a "rationality of means") and thus has no relation to an imaginary dimension. As such, if as Habermas admits, in the contemporary world technical means have become ends in themselves, this is seen not as a problem of signification, but as stemming from the unfolding of a logic implicit in the act of the first man who threw the first stone. The same can be said of the communicative interest. It too is entirely identitarian, constituting a "rationality of ends," or more particularly, the rationality of a specific end, that of attaining the truth — the truth being defined not as an identity of the subject's statements with the object of knowledge, but as an identity of statements amongst different subjects, that is, agreement. Not only does such a conception neglect the technical aspects of communication — which are quite useful for procuring agreement — but it ignores the fact that the concept of truth, and the desire for truth, are the historical creations of specific societies.<sup>34</sup> Entire peoples have been (and can still be) in agreement about the existence and attributes of, for example, invisible beings, not because they were prey to collective delusions but because, in a fundamental sense, the "truth" as it has meaning for us, was not at issue. Needless to say what was at issue, be it a matter of mythical or religious discourse, or even of aesthetics, has no place in Habermas' system and must thus be considered as "contingent." This, however is only half the matter. For if the technical and communicative interests are grounded "quasi-transcendentally" relative to history, and if the technical interest is simultaneously situated at the beginning of history as the source of our suffering, the communicative interest is in the "ideal speech situation," situated at the end of history, of an ideal history, as our salvation. History is then seen as the result of an "ontological" imbalance akin to the movement of a teeter-totter, where the weight of one interest causes the other interest to hover precariously above a reassuring *terra firma*, but where a harmonious future would restore the lost equilibrium. And what does this harmonious future suppose? It supposes a series of institutions for the organization of the "ideal speech situation" — institutions that would be non-problematic, purely

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technical, having no density of their own. It supposes a single undivided society capable of achieving the agreement of all and sundry, as if all social divisions were the result of domination, or as if social differentiation stemming from other causes would not lead to a differentiation of opinions. And it also supposes a discourse that would be non-problematic, as if all obstacles to communication were due to reasons external to communication, as if once the obstacles were removed the truth would be revealed, simply lying there, waiting ... as if the truth would itself not be a source of dissension, as if it could be immediately recognized, and once recognized, immediately appropriated in a universal discourse.... We have entered the fantastic realm of social transparency.

A caricature of Habermas to be sure, but one that demonstrates how much he owes to inherited thought, in particular to Kant, and above all to Marx. In direct contrast to Habermas, the entire critique of Castoriadis is targeted at the belief that the future, socialism, the ideal speech situation ... is something that can be theoretically *deduced*, and whose realization would be the externalization of this deduction. What is being attacked is the presumption that the truth of society's future — and it makes little difference here whether this truth concerns the realm of the "will be" or the "ought to be," or whether it involves the truth concerning the nature of matter or of reason, the truth of the laws of history or, as in the case of Habermas, the truth of truth itself, *i.e.*, of its requirements. Whatever the case, what is being concealed here is not just the problem of signification, of "institution," "auto-institution" or the creativity of history, but, in simpler but not unsimilar terms, "the actual movement of history in the lived activity of human beings."<sup>35</sup> With all the talk about signification, Castoriadis is sure to be accused by some of the unholy sin of "idealism." And yet because of the status given to the openness of history, and because history must therefore refuse any closure given by theory, the accusation tends to rebound on the accusers in terms reminiscent of the theses on Feuerbach.<sup>36</sup> It need hardly be added that if for Castoriadis the openness of history is a cause for hope, it is in part because it gives history the capacity to elude the solutions of those who would preach the desirability of any such closure.

To say, however, that the future lies "beyond the frontiers of the theorizable" is not to say that before the future and its exigencies theory must remain silent. Similarly to say that the problematic of "institution" can bring little of substance to bear on questions concerning the nature of society's past and present considered in their positivity, is not to say that nothing can or should be said about the latter. It is true that when, for example, Castoriadis asserts that "everything that can be effectively given — representations, nature, signification — exists in the mode of magma,"<sup>37</sup> he is not saying all that much; he is merely claiming things are neither totally rational nor totally

chaotic, that they exist as indeterminate. Yet such a statement, even as it appears monolithically simple and even empty, places us on the threshold of an infinitely more complex plenitude. For it places us before the exigency of a "new mode of thought," one precisely that would be capable of thinking this indeterminacy, both in relation to itself and its object, and in terms of its relation to the object. Such a mode of thought would have to be constantly aware of its own nature as thought, and thus of its internal necessities without converting these necessities into an imperial myth. It would in a sense have to self-consciously interiorize the demands of its own historicity.<sup>38</sup> But what such a mode of thought would look like, its positivity, cannot be described by a "negative ontology." It is not simply that "negative ontology" is aimed at another level, but that it forbids the specification of an *a priori* method or logic that would be immediately adequate to its object, completely embracing the latter within the confines of its own universality. Such a mode of thought would as it were exist only in the always specific act of thinking, and of thinking its relation to something. And if such a mode of thought is possible, it is because thought, not being purely identitarian, already prefigures this possibility. And if such thought can exist as a possible historical creation, it is because a mode of thought was instituted in the past, one that established what for us is called "thinking," and that allow us, who lie in its wake, to have access to the problem of the universal, and thus to interrogate the nature of thought, of society and of institution.

Now the interrogation of society can never be an explanation of an already constituted object, of an object complete in itself, existing out there, independent of the fact of its interrogation and of the interrogating subject. And if theory is in this sense implicated in society, it is because theory as it has come to exist for us, is both a relation to and a moment of society and its historical creation. As such, what is required of a "new mode of thought" is a capacity to think the significance of this implication, to recognize its relation to society, and to society as a signifying entity, as something more than the latter's reflection and something less than its pure invention. Such a mode of thought would have to understand itself as a moment of a process that is certainly able to elucidate, but over which it is neither capable of nor willing to gain complete knowledge, mastery or control. In short it would have to realize that it is dependent on and embedded in "institution," and that it exists as an unceasing interrogation of that "institution." But what then are the implications of Castoriadis' "ontological" project as regards "institution" itself, as regards as it were a "new mode of institution"?

The alienation of heteronomy of society is self-alienation;  
the masking of society's being as self-institution .... This  
self-alienation, sustained up to now by the responses

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historically contributing to the requirements of psychic functioning, by the tendency proper to institution, and by the almost unavoidable domination of the identitarian logico-ontology — are manifested in the social representation of an extra-social origin of society's institution (an origin imputed to supernatural beings, God, nature, reason, the laws of history, or the being-thus of Being)....

Obviously the self-alienation or heteronomy of society is not a "simple representation." Nor is it due to society's capacity to represent itself except as instituted from the outside. It is forcefully incarnated and heavily materialized in the concrete institution of society, incorporated into its conflictive diversion, borne and mediated by its entire organization, and interminably reproduced in and by its social functioning, the being-thus of its objects, activities and social individuals. Similarly its transcendence — which we aim at because *we want it* and because we know that other people want it, not because these are the laws of history, the interest of the proletariat or the destiny of being — the establishment of a history where society not only knows itself but *makes itself* as explicitly self-instituting, implies a radical destruction of the known forms of society, up to its most unsuspected corners, which can only be the position/creation of not only new institutions, but of a new mode of instituting and of a new relation of society and men to institution.<sup>39</sup>

The above, which appears on the very last pages of "*L'imaginaire social et l'institution*," is one of the few passages, indeed it is almost the only passage, in which Castoriadis attempts to confront the political implications of his "negative ontology." If the outcome seems rather brief, it is because the idea of autonomy, of "explicit self-institution," is at most a beginning and not an end; it is a direction without determinate forms nor contents, one that in and of itself tends to be purely formal, failing to pose substantive questions concerning what kind of institution and institution for what purpose. However, as suggested by this quote, a society that explicitly institutes itself, that is open to the active interrogation of its order and to the active reception of the figures of its alterity, is very different — and this in a positive, substantive sense — from a society that does not. This is not simply a theoretical projection but an historical observation. For the reference to reason, the laws of history, or the being-thus of Being, does not function in the same manner as that to God or



supernatural beings. The former, unlike the latter, are represented as being within the realm of the intelligible, and thus as grounding the social within the possibility of its own explicit self-understanding. As such they suggested a heteronomy of a second order, one that exists in a society that situates itself in history, and can thus potentially reflect on its mundane, temporal nature and question the validity of its grounds — even as such representations would seek to exorcize the menace of time and the challenge of critique. What is being said here, and what I have tried to suggest earlier, is that what Castoriadis terms “self-institution” is something not only for the future, but something that has been instituted, if only partially, or if only to be covered up partially, in the past.

I am not at this point trying to rob Castoriadis of the originality of his project. Rather I am trying to tease out a possible direction for further investigation of the problematic of “institution,” a direction that can be glimpsed, if in a still spotty and prefatory manner, in a number of articles that have only been recently published.<sup>40</sup> These articles, by their constant reference to ancient Greece, bear witness to a growing realization that the posing of the problematic of institution is central to the constitution of our “Greco-occidental” tradition; that the establishment of this tradition in ancient Greece, the birthplace not only of philosophy, but of democracy, of a public space in which the question of the origin and foundation of the law can be debated in word and deed, is simultaneously the establishment of a sphere of politics, a sphere in which institution is, as it were, folded back on itself, in which the instituted social imaginary is open to critique. It would then seem that a further investigation of institution, its “ontology” and its political implications, promises, at least potentially, to situate the possibility of interrogating institution, and the possibility of “ontology” and politics, within history, as being themselves specific historical creations. And in the same moment it promises to provide a new perspective on history, a new understanding of history.

In a sense, “negative ontology,” if it is to make good its promise, has to return to history. Not simply because if it does not, Castoriadis remains vulnerable to his own criticism of the *nouveau philosophes* for not having concepts capable of thinking “the difference between Asiatic monarchies, Athens and Rome, the Holy Roman Empire, parliamentary regimes and modern totalitarianism.”<sup>41</sup> But because there is something ambiguous, even paradoxical, about the attempt to elaborate a “negative ontology” — as if, should it remain a “negative ontology,” it would threaten to take away what it wants to render available. For while claiming to reveal the openness of history, it would itself not be open to history; and while denying the possibility of a position of knowledge outside history, it would be forced to adopt such a position by the very dictates of its “ontological” level of analysis. And what is

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one to think of the attempt to demonstrate with rigorous certitude the partial, limited and uncertain nature of all possible knowledge? Such objections are in part purely rhetorical, and yet they indicate the need to ground "negative ontology" in what is essentially groundless, to root it within a historical creation, one that is creative of the very existence of "history" as an imaginary social signification, and that lies in the background of our modernity and its forms of heteronomy. Another development in the exchange between theory and history, which we had noted earlier as being typical of Castoriadis' thinking and supportive of its dynamism, would seem only fitting...

However, if this development is to be fecund, if a new new historical understanding is to be opened up, a more subtle and extensive array of concepts will be required. In particular, the concept of "imaginary significations," a concept so broad as to be almost worthless for historical investigation, will have to be differentiated. For example, the capacity of certain societies to pose the problem of their own institution already supposes an initial bifurcation between those significations which are constructive of society's institution, by means of which society presents itself as it were, and those significations which, while being a moment of institution, simultaneously provide a representation of that institution, a representation within and through which a society can reflect and act on its institution. This doubling of signification, this creation of a distance between society and itself, suggests that in such societies the significations of the first order are incapable of giving a complete presentation of their "real," that there is an experience of a reality behind this presentation, that there is an experience of alterity not only on the outer limits of society, but actively traversing society as an absence that solicits interrogation. A further distinction could then be drawn between significations of a second order which serve to mask such an interrogation, even while participating in it — let us call them "ideology" — and those which seek to further it. This is only an example, one that seeks to demonstrate that the domain of meaning is given not only in the contents of signification, but also by the articulation of levels of signification, or that certain significations may suppose and give evidence of a certain articulation.

One such signification, one that is both constitutive of a space of interrogation and presupposes this space, is that of "truth." Now the accusation will no doubt be made that Castoriadis denies the concept of truth, that he reduces it to history, or that in a manner reminiscent of the historicism of Dilthey, he postulates a series of societies, each with its own truth, and each of which is impermeable to the truth of other societies. This, however, is not really the case, or at least is not the case as potentially reconstituted within this new investigation. For if the claim is that every society constructs its own "reality" or "rationality," this is not to say that every society institutes the signification of "truth." For example, one cannot pose the question of the truth of a given

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myth from within a primitive society. Not only would such a question pose the possible untruth of the myth, and thus immediately place one outside the belief structures that support the myth, but such a question is, strictly speaking, unthinkable within mythical thought. For within the latter, one cannot speak of myths, rather myths speak through one and "between themselves"; that is to say, there is no distance between the myth and the one who speaks or listens to it, no absence which a concept of truth, or a search for truth, would seek to fill. If then one has to admit that "truth" is an imaginary social signification, this is not to say that it is "unreal" or has no "real" effects; on the contrary its existence within a given society is in a sense constitutive of what that society considers as real, and it thus implicates and is implicated in that society's global institution. Nor is it to say that "truth" has no value or that its value is circumscribed within the society within which it is instituted; instead it is precisely this institution of this signification that gives access, or at least partial access, to an understanding of other societies — and what is equally important, the desire to understand other societies. It is, however, to deny the possibility of "rationally grounding" truth in either an extra-social or trans-historical instance, which is to say that there can be complete or total truth which knowledge could approximate or society realize. For truth does not exist ideally, outside of society and history, but emerges in the distance between what society is and could be, and between what it knows and does not yet know. And it exists in continual re-creation of this distance. If the truth were to be completely known, there would be no truth; its response would be so overwhelming, that its concept would become obsolete, eliminated along with the space in which alone its question can be raised. And if we could not narrow this distance, if we could not continually test it by means of a knowledge which while partial is not negligible, the "truth" would not only be beyond our grasp, but our very capacity to perceive it. To claim then that the "truth" is socially instituted, is to claim that it is not determined once and for all, but that it exists as an exigency of the present, as a constant appeal to interrogation.

It is here that we must situate our own relation to Castoriadis. For ultimately what is important is not whether we agree or disagree with his analysis, or whether or not we find it useful — though such matters are not without consequence — but whether, in the face of his interrogation, we can embrace its challenge as an incentive to further our own interrogations.

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## Notes

1. See "The Early Castoriadis: Socialism, Barbarism and the Bureaucratic Thread," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 3, No. 3.
2. The larger part of *L'Institution imaginaire de la société*, Paris: Seuil, 1975 (henceforth referred to as IIS).
3. It is true that a certain organicism (or functionalism) tries to avoid this problem by having the part be created by the whole. But inasmuch as the whole exists only for its own reproduction, and the parts exist only to fulfill the functions necessitated by the reproduction of the whole, this conception is unable to account for the specificity of either the whole or the parts, and history becomes a perturbation relative to the normality embedded in the reproduction of the same.
4. "Institutional" being used here in the empirical, sociological sense.
5. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France, 1952-1960*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970, p. 40.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
7. Castoriadis' concept of the "imaginary" should not be confused with Jacques Lacan's use of the same term, considered as a stage in the individual's growth through which he must pass if he is to attain the realm of the "symbolic." For Castoriadis the "imaginary" serves to refute the need for any "mirror stage."
8. This quote from Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception* is cited in an article by Castoriadis' entitled "Le dicible et l'indicible," *l'Arc*, 46 (1971), p. 67, reprinted in *Les carrefours du labyrinthe*, Paris, Seuil, 1978. This latter book contains a series of essays that serve to explore some of the themes of "L'Imaginaire social et l'institution," often in terms of more specifically disciplinary problematics.
9. The term is taken from Roman Jakobson.
10. The above is not meant to be exhaustive, but merely illustrative, of the manner in which Castoriadis elaborates the operative schemas.
11. For a discussion of the use of such identitarian-ensamblist models in mathematics and in the sciences, the antinomies to which they give rise, and their relation to "scientific revolutions," see "Science moderne et interrogation philosophique," in *Les carrefours du labyrinthe*.
12. IIS, p. 350.
13. The terme *langue* is not used in the Saussurian sense where it denotes a language in its ideality stripped of all the deviant qualities constituted by particular variations. The concept was originally introduced in order to shelter the study of language from the consideration of diachrony. For Castoriadis, on the other hand, the existence of the *langue* is, as will be seen, that which opens language up to the possibility of history.
14. IIS, p. 467.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 332.
16. The term *magma* is central to Castoriadis' work and designates an open totality opposed to the concept of "ensemble."

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17. As will be discussed later, there are significations without any real referent, as for example in the case of "God." Here the signified is represented without being re-presented, which is to say that it is not directly present for society, or that its presence is given only indirectly by its effects on the creation of other significations.
18. *IIS*, p. 356.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 360. For an extended discussion on technique, see "Technique," *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, 15 (1973), pp. 803-809, reprinted in *Les carrefours du labyrinthe*, pp. 221-248.
20. *IIS*, pp. 379-80.
21. In this sense those phantasms that Freud perceived as primary, *e.g.*, castration, seduction, the primitive scene, are, for Castoriadis, secondary.
22. *IIS*, p. 383.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 384. This creation *ex nihilo* of the first representation is ascribed to the "radical imagination," the latter being the individual equivalent of the *imaginaire radical* (which manifests itself in and through "institution").
24. *Ibid.*, p. 397.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 408.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 407.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 407. The influence of the originary phantasm extends to "the requirement of ... universal signification, of the world and desire and of knowledge ...." *Ibid.*, p. 404.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 418. This is not an attempt to plead the necessity of the patriarchal family. Aside from the fact that Castoriadis has argued since the early 1960s for the latter's modification and even abolition, the terms of the argument are sufficiently large that the patriarchal family appears as both "exemplary and accidental." See pp. 418-20.
29. "There is no 'spontaneous' historical action, if by 'spontaneous' is meant that it emerges from within a vacuum, or that it has absolutely no relation with its conditions, milieu and past. However, every great historical action is spontaneous in the original sense of the word — *spons* [source]." History is creation, that is to say, the emergence of what is not already inscribed in its 'causes,' 'conditions,' *etc.*, ... spontaneity is the excess of the 'effect' over its 'causes.' " "*La source hongroise*," reprinted in *Le contenu du socialisme*, Paris: 10/18, 1979, pp. 382-383. Since I wrote the first part of this essay, four more volumes, gathering together Castoriadis' writings from the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* period and some more recent conjunctural pieces, have been published. Besides *Le contenu du socialisme*, they are *La société française*, Paris, 10/18; 1979, *Capitalisme moderne et révolution. T.I: L'Impérialisme et la guerre*, Paris, 10/18; 1979, and *Capitalisme moderne et révolution. T. II: Le mouvement révolutionnaire dans le capitalisme moderne*, Paris: 10/18, 1979.
30. *IIS*, p. 492.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 495.
32. It is interesting to note that barbarism is now defined as decadence, the absence in a given society of historical productivity.
33. *IIS*, p. 296.

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34. This will be discussed in greater detail.
  35. "*Illusion du système, illusion de la spécialisation*," *Espirit*, No. 9-10 (September-October 1979), p. 32. This issue contains a three-part interview with Castoriadis; the other two parts are "*La Barbarie, c'est l'absence de productivité historique*," pp. 131-133 and "*Une interrogation sans fin*," pp. 242-248.
  36. One might still object that Castoriadis, because he sees the "actual movement of history" as emerging through the creation of imaginary significations, is still an "idealist," failing to privilege being over consciousness. However, if "consciousness" is not referred to a notion of the "constitutive subject," and if it is not taken in the narrow sense of pious wishes, opinions, ideology or ideas, but is enlarged to embrace everything touched by the signitive relation, the question then becomes whether the "being" of the socio-historical can be deprived of its "consciousness," such that there would be two separate and discrete entities, one termed "being," the other "consciousness," and one of which would then determine the other.
  37. *IIS*, op. cit., p. 462.
  38. The discussion of a "new mode of thought" is becoming increasingly common amongst a certain intellectual avant-garde. One thinks of Jacques Derrida's "deconstruction of logocentrism" in *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore; John Hopkins, 1976; or Edgar Morin's discussion of modern science in *La Méthode: La nature de la nature*, Paris; Seuil, 1977; or, to draw an example from an entirely different field, Samuel Delaney's "meta-logic" in his futuristic novel *Triton*, New York: Bantam, 1976.
  39. *IIS*, op. cit., pp. 497-498.
  40. I am referring here to the interview in *Espirit* mentioned in note 35, and to "*Socialisme et société autonome*," which introduces *Le contenu du socialisme*, pp. 11-46.
  41. "*Les divertisseurs*" in *La société française*, p. 229.
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## MARX ON THE COMMUNIST STATE: A PARTIAL ECLIPSE OF POLITICAL REALITY

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An obvious ambiguity in Marx's thinking on the "state" in communist society has long been recognised.<sup>1</sup> With the best of anarchists Marx could rail against what at least *seems* to be the state-as-such, prophesying its inevitable "abolition" following the demise of classes,<sup>2</sup> and yet in nearly the next textual breath allow for a "public power"<sup>3</sup> within society, muse over the form of the future "state,"<sup>4</sup> and indeed insist upon the absolute necessity of an abiding central authority.<sup>5</sup> In brief, we seem to be faced with two irreconcilable communist positions, indeed two "Marxes": one "anarchist," the other "statist."

### I

In principle four basic interpretations of the problem are possible.

(1) Marx is indeed, at least fundamentally, an "anarchist." Clearly, "true" communist society, that which follows the temporary reign of the proletarian dictatorship, is envisioned as a *stateless* society; conflicting evidence is for one reason or another to be discounted. Two versions of this interpretation may be briefly cited. The first is the dominant view in the voluminous literature on Marx, which follows closely the familiar "economic," class dimension of the political theory: poised on an economic reductionist precipice Marx is strongly inclined to characterise politics and the state as epiphenomena of the history-making class struggle. For under capitalism, the state is nothing but the organisational form adopted by the bourgeoisie for the preservation of its property and its perseverance as dominant class.<sup>6</sup> When economic conflict ceases, so will the state meet its end, its *raison d'être* evaporating into the dimming mists of the long dark age of unfreedom. The state apparatus will then more or less literally "wither away."<sup>7</sup> A second, in my view much more profound, analysis which comes to roughly the same conclusion is offered by thinkers such as Talmon, Loewith and Voegelin, who view Marx only secondarily as a political economist, and primarily as a messianic, activist mystic who has created in the symbol of "communism" an immanent speculative *eschaton* out of the disintegrating ordering categories of an inverted Christianity. Communist man will no longer require the services of a state because he will have become a "new



man" living in circumstances equivalent to terrestrial paradise, the fusion of *civitas Dei* and *civitas terrena*.<sup>8</sup>

(2) Marx is in truth, despite apparently contrary evidence, a "statist." Solomon Bloom, for example, argued over three decades ago that the anarchist tendency in Marx is overshadowed by his insistence on the absolute need for centralised authority. Marx does in fact have a vision of the future political organisation of society; and communism, says Bloom, is rightly seen not as an anarchist utopia, but as a genuine (though revolutionary) version of the liberal-democratic idea involving a state organisation that respects a definite "realm of freedom."<sup>9</sup> More recently Richard Adamiak has taken this line of argument much further to suggest that Marx's supposed anarchism is merely a polemical scrim pragmatically propagated to steal thunder from the genuine anarchists (first Proudhon and later Bakunin and their followers) and accomplished by the adroit manipulation of carefully defined terms. The existence of so-called "political power" is made definitionally contingent on the presence of antagonistic "classes," whose stipulated existence in turn rests entirely on private property; hence, with a veneer of paradox belying a rigorous logic, political power diminishes in direct proportion to an expanding scope of state ownership of the means of production. The shrewd politico Marx thereby has his cake and eats it: with the anarchists he can (dupliciously) call for the state's "abolition," thus siphoning off to the socialist cause popular radical sentiments and energies; but this selfsame abolition is in fact nothing but an extreme tactic of statism.<sup>10</sup>

(3) There is really no problem at all, and certainly no duplicity; Marx's is a unique and internally coherent political viewpoint that transcends the anarchist and statist positions while incorporating the truth of each. In the communist period there will indeed persist a state of sorts, but one compatible with the freedom so highly prized by the anarchist. The revival of interest in Marx's Hegelian origins generally, and one book in particular, Shlomo Avineri's *Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, have made this perhaps the most popular of current interpretations. According to Avineri, the *Aufhebung des Staats* that Marx intends refers only to the state as a so-called "universal sphere" institutionally and ideologically separate from civil society; the establishment of universal suffrage, under proper conditions, will realise the "true democracy" that performs the dialectical feat of fusing state and society into a higher, truly universal synthesis. Thus the state is "abolished" when it is drawn into "the totality of economic real life,"<sup>11</sup> that is, when it has lost its alienated character and is no longer an enemy of universal freedom. In a similar "dialectical" vein Hal Draper, though unimpressed by the promises of universal suffrage and retaining total respect for the ultimate unthinkable of the communist social transformation, discovers an inner harmony of Marx's anarchist and statist sentiments. When Marx says that the proletarian revolution will abolish the state, he means, according to Draper, that an altogether new *type* of state is to be in-

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troduced: a workers' state which "breaks out of the series" of previous state-forms, and is "in-process-of-becoming-a-non-state," *i.e.*, an organisation which somehow carries out the legitimate social functions of coordinated decision-making without manifesting any form of "rule," not even the rule implied by the most perfect democracy.<sup>12</sup>

(4) Marx is incompatibly both anarchist and statist. The opposing formulations on the communist state, though not necessarily to be taken in every case at face value, nonetheless bear witness to a deep and fundamental fissure in the Marxian system. For reasons to be revealed by a theoretical analysis, Marx is locked into a radically self-contradictory position. This is my own view, which I shall attempt to articulate in the remainder of this essay. Each of the alternative views, of course, has much to recommend it; and they are by no means mutually exclusive. Marx indeed weaves together economic-determinist, liberal, democratic, polemical, and Hegelian philosophical elements into the visionary fabric of communist society. Though it is easily overstated, I consider the interpretation of Marx as a "messianic mystic" to harbor an especially keen insight into the problem, which we shall return to below. But each of the alternative interpretations is severely limited. A bloodless historical determination of anarchism (or for that matter, statism), however conscientiously grounded in the texts, is superficial, for Marx is first of all a philosopher and not a dogmatist; invoking the polemical context of Marx's anarchist utterances is enlightening but not decisive, for there are more solid grounds, less political perhaps but again more convincingly philosophical, for a Marxist anarchism; the dialectical harmonisation does not fully appreciate the radicalness of Marx's claims and the awesomeness of his anthropological expectations; the millennial Marx is the real but not the whole Marx, who eludes facile classification. Most simply put, the two dimensions, "anarchist" and "statist," are neither reducible to the other, nor are they harmonious. At the center of the visionary fabric is a gaping rent.

## II

These claims may hopefully become clearer if we introduce the analysis by drawing out the issue of the state in its strongest terms.

In my view the heart of the issue is the problem of mediation, *i.e.*, the mediation of particular and general that is basic to any politics, though perhaps especially to the "idealist" politics that the erstwhile Hegelian Marx so enthusiastically took to task. I will go a bit into some of the subtleties of the case in a moment, but if I read correctly the philosophical anthropology that informs the critique, the outstanding result is that the category of mediation is not simply criticised, but obliterated. And with it goes the "political space" itself, *i.e.*, the artfully crafted cultural arena in which working, if imperfect, harmonies of

parts and wholes are generated and sustained.<sup>13</sup> For once Marx has made the analytical shift from "politics" to "society,"<sup>14</sup> it is doubtful that the categories of particular and general — the raw materials of the political mediatory task — can survive at all, even in transvalued form. Certainly, "communist man," long-awaited issue of history's millennial labours, is not at all the curiously ambiguous political fellow, at once ever so jealous of his privacy, we have become accustomed to under our alienated conditions of existence. This is, then, the one side of the problem: if we follow out the logic of the philosophical anthropology, Marx is indeed, necessarily, an "anarchist," in the radical sense that no mediating authority may be legitimately predicated on the assumed philosophical grounds. The other, confounding side is that Marx himself quite forcefully posits just such a mediating authority in various forms: from the "public power" of the *Communist Manifesto* to the still more cogent communist "commanding will" over all processes of social production cited in *Capital*. There Marx likens the labouring process to an orchestra: each needs a conductor to coordinate, unify and carry out functions required by the good of the whole, as opposed to merely partial activities.<sup>15</sup> The message is unequivocal. The need for orchestration is by no means diminished in communist society; on the contrary, Marx insists that following the abolition of the capitalist mode of production, what he disarmingly refers to as the "book-keeping" encompassing the regulation of labour becomes more essential than ever.<sup>16</sup> Whatever we may conclude as to the "ruling" status of such a regulatory-administrative agency (clearly, Marx believed that such "management" posed no threat to freedom<sup>17</sup>), it is obviously still a *mediating* form, as the distinction between particular and general, expunged by the logic of the (anti) political anthropological vision, creeps back into the socialist scheme in the form of the partial activity of the workers and the total activity of the workshop as a whole. In short, it is still irreducibly a form of *state* — and this even at the level of the single factory — a situation that can only be magnified indefinitely the further we move up the scale of collectivity.

Put this way the divergence of anti- and pro-state sentiment is so striking that we must suspect an origin in two relatively independent sources: one a motive powerful enough to prompt the radical attempt at altering the very structure of political reality, the other a reason why Marx finally fails to carry through on the state's "abolition," leaving the mediatory political space intact, and indeed re-asserting it as the absolute precondition for communism. We submit that these two sources are, respectively: (1) a revolt against God which is the real ground of Marx's apocalyptic philosophical anthropology; (2) an abiding contact with reality rooted in the lifelong preoccupation with the "material" dimension of human existence. Marx's is a potent will to eclipse political reality; but in the end the will is considerably restrained, the resulting eclipse is only partial.

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### The Revolt against God

Marx trumpets his revolt against the transcendental *realissimum* as early as his doctoral dissertation of 1841, in which — as the defender of philosophy — he makes the rebellion of Prometheus his own. He too “hates all the gods,” for only this apostatical defiance secures the right of human thought to world pre-eminence. Man may worship only at the earthly altar of human self-consciousness, for Marx “the supreme divinity.”<sup>18</sup> Soon Marx had deserted an overly contemplative philosophy for a more activist career within the closed stream of material existence, but he held fast, as he always would, to his Promethean faith in human self-consciousness as the only true god. The expression of faith only becomes more sophisticated, as in the well-known formulations of the “Introduction” to the *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'*.<sup>19</sup> In a crucial development Marx has incorporated into his antitheism the subtleties of Feuerbach's projection psychology: man seeks gods because he has not yet found the only “true reality” that is himself. Religion is only *pseudo* self-consciousness and self-esteem. In short, “religion is only the illusory sun about which man revolves so long as he does not revolve around himself.”<sup>20</sup> Only through the abolition of religion can man become Man, and claim the immanent divinity that is his birthright.

Rebellion against transcendent divinity blossoms in the *Paris Manuscripts* into a full-fledged philosophical anthropology of human “self-creation.” To be independent, to stand on one's own feet, is precisely to owe existence only to oneself, to brook no “external ground.”<sup>21</sup> What kind of god can be content to be creature of another, or depend for his sustenance and salvation on another? Marx conjures a conflation of “nature” and “history” in a process of human self-creation, insisting that “the *entire so-called world history* is only the creation of man through human labour and the development of nature for man.”<sup>22</sup> The sacred is superceded by the profane. The self-creator who has become self-conscious of his power needs no God to be himself; he is already a god.

There is a problem, Marx admits. Such is the alienation of man from this true reality that the notion of man's creation by God remains “very difficult to expel from popular consciousness.” Against the best demystifying efforts common sense will insist on tracing the chain of created being back to an extramundane source. But the self-divinising rebellion cannot be derailed at this advanced stage. Marx impatiently alleges that the deeply metaphysical and spiritual question of creation is nothing but an abstraction; it is twisted — not even a fit subject for rational thought. Believe in your creator-God if you will, he states, but keep faith with your abstraction and hold your peace: “Do not think, do not question me, for as soon as you think and question, your *abstraction* from the existence of nature and man makes no sense.”<sup>23</sup> Here Marx is

barely a hair's breadth, if that, away from what Voegelin has identified as the point of demonic closure to reality — the *Fragesverbot*, the ukase, issued in the name of rationality, against questions that are disturbing to the speculative system.<sup>24</sup>

We are not, however, so much concerned with the rebellion itself as with its specifically political dimension. Marx's passion for the strictly Feuerbachian rebellion quickly burned out — precisely because that rebellion was not "political" enough. This may sound like a strange assertion about one who once said that politics must become the new religion. But Feuerbach's is still obviously the politics of the quasi-Hegelian state. The state constitutes an "infinite being" through the division and reunion of human powers; it is the essence of all realities, man's providence. "The true State is the unlimited, infinite, true complete, divine Man ... the absolute Man."<sup>25</sup> For Marx this idealist rhapsodising will no longer do; he has outgrown the Hegelian overshoes. Feuerbach still wants the divine Man to wear. Thus after Feuerbach the chief thing remains to be done:<sup>26</sup> the fight against God must be expanded into the fight against the secular realities that have produced God, against man's *earthly* idols. And among them, indeed next to fetishised commodities the greatest of all, is the illusory "abstract community" of the state. Feuerbach's divine and absolute Man remains the goal, but now He is to be achieved *sans* benefit of the State.

The fact that the experience of religious revolt remains at the core of Marx's political speculation accounts for the peculiar character of the critique of Hegel, which closely parallels, often explicitly, Feuerbach's religious critique. Not surprisingly: how long will a mangod who has overcome God put up with the mystification of the mediatory state? Marx admits that Hegel showed keen insight in sensing a contradiction in the separation of civil and political society. But Hegel proved unequal to the task of resolving the contradiction, that is, abolishing the separation; he is little better than a trickster, contenting himself with apparent dissolutions that leave the uncompromising reality intact.<sup>27</sup> That is to say, through a mediatory effort at once philosophical and institutional, Hegel tries to preserve the duality of public and private life as a harmonious unity-in-difference that is an advance beyond the two sides taken singly. To Marx this is a "logical" pseudo-solution to a "real" problem. For the truth is, he argues, that the modern prize of differentiated political society is merely "life in the air, the ethereal region of civil society." Compared with "actual, empirical reality," the state has for its citizens an "otherworldly existence"; it is "nothing but the affirmation of their own alienation ... the religion of popular life, the heaven of its universality in opposition to the earthly existence of its actuality."<sup>28</sup>

The state is God all over again, denying the supreme divinity of human self-consciousness and insisting that true reality lies somehow outside man's imme-

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diating being. The structure of overcoming Hegelian, and generally modern,<sup>29</sup> politics therefore emerges as identical to the structure of overcoming religion. Assaulted by the Feuerbachian transformational criticism, the quasi-religious mysticism of the Hegelian political categories were penetrated and exposed, and the belaboured system of institutional mediation, bureaucracy, crown, classes and corporation — by which Hegel expected private and public interests to find their common, complementary ground — sent tumbling down. For obviously the “actual extremes” of state and civil society cannot in fact be mediated; in the long run of history man can no more live with the lie of the state than he can with the lie of God. The hatred of the gods is not spent until the last vestige of externalised universality is reabsorbed into the existing particular.

This, the position of the *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right,'* is reiterated and developed in the contemporaneous essay, “On the Jewish Question.” The specific flaw of the modern state, Marx argues there, is that it retains the whole structure of “egoistic life” *outside* the political sphere. In the “perfected” political life of modernity man is compelled to lead a double life. In political community he indeed regards himself as a communal being; but in the apolitical world of civil society he thinks and acts as the strictly private individual. The division is intolerable, Marx avers, but only a new, radical, complete socialisation of man can put his sundered self back together. Only then will man be truly liberated. Here Marx's disdain toward the presumption of institutional mediation to yoke individual and community is unqualified. He is emphatic that politics and citizenship are not in fact, and not even potentially, the mediation of public and private interest, but on the contrary the expression of their mutual hostility and the need to overcome this hostility in the “emancipatory” progress toward self-divinisation. “The state is the mediator between man and the freedom of man. As Christ is the mediator on whom man unburdens all his divinity and all his *religious ties*, so is the state the mediator to which man transfers all his unholiness and all his *human freedom*.”<sup>30</sup> Marx would bring the prized political universality down to earth, and back to its true resting place — the undifferentiated heart of “absolute Man.” Hence the sharp distinction struck between the “political” emancipation that represents an advance only within the prevailing unfree order and the “universal human emancipation” that is humanity's somewhat tardy realisation of the fullness and plenitude of its self-created being. Hence also the judgment that universal citizenship is but one stage in the advance of freedom, destined to be superseded in the historical movement beyond the “abstract” citizen to the new whole man. Only when individual man has reabsorbed the citizen and when politics as a distinct mode of activity has been expelled from society, only then are everyday life and relationships infused with the spirit of the species-being and the process of emancipation complete.<sup>31</sup>

At this point Marx is poised on the border of the fantastic promised land articulated in the *Manuscripts* — communism as “the riddle of history solved,” man’s total and self-conscious restoration of himself, his human “essence,” to himself. This ultimate “restoration” of man,<sup>32</sup> the last phase of the process of emancipation, is more than just another in a series. It is rather the dawn of real humanness. It is the moment of transition between two ages which marks the radical *transfiguration* of human existence. This communism alone is the end of history, the fulfilment of all historical striving, the “perfection” of mankind and hence truly the world’s immanent *eschaton*, unlimited in content by either particular ideas or particular institutional forms.

This vision is truly speculative, but it is Marx’s solution to the mystery of existence. Communism, he says, is at once “naturalism,” “humanism,” the resolution of all man/man and man/nature antagonisms, and also the “true resolution” of the age-old conflicts between “subjectivism and objectivism, spiritualism and materialism, activity and passivity ... existence and essence, objectification and self-affirmation, freedom and necessity, individual and species.”<sup>33</sup> For socialist man every dimension of the noxious historical tension between himself and his generic life dissolves, replaced by an all-encompassing, unmediated unity. With the “real,” “positive” movement beyond private property even the division of labour is overcome, and specialisation is replaced by the realisation of the dream-image of the *German Ideology*, the whole man who can hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, breed cattle in the evening, and engage in criticism after supper, without having to fix on any form of labour, because “society” as regulator of general production places no restriction on the all-sided appropriation of manifold essence.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, Marx says, the very senses of socialist man are transformed; by the leap into immediate existence hearing, smelling, tasting, *etc.*, are now “human” relations to the world that are “immediately communal in form.” At the same time, the individual has no needs that are not immediately satisfied by society, because all his needs are communal needs: “Need or satisfaction have thus lost their *egoistic* nature.” The individual mirrors society and society the individual in a self-absorbed dance of magical enchantment. The individual is everywhere at home; for in his particularity he is “equally the totality, the ideal totality, the subjective existence of society explicitly thought and experienced ... a totality of human expression of life.”<sup>35</sup>

Marx’s intention is clear enough: by the leap into communist existence he does nothing less than speculatively abolish the given order of reality. And if we take man’s need for mediation generally as an index of his position within the given order of being — as participant in the whole and not master of the whole itself, in a word, as “creature” requiring salvation and not God-the-creator-and-savior — the motives for the hostility toward the political mediation also become clear. For it is precisely this mediated order which Prometheus-Marx cannot abide. It offers nothing but alienated existence.

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### The "Material" Limit

If the question is now raised, how is it possible to (logically) reintroduce the state into communist society, the answer must be that it is *not* possible. Insofar as Marx retains the anthropology of communist man as the philosophical bedrock of the system — as I believe he does, and must — there is simply no room, as we have seen, for the political space, the mediation, forcible or otherwise, of particular and general. The free spiritual superman, the absolute Man, does not take well to institutional restraints. Yet, as we have also seen, this is precisely what Marx does, he reintroduces the mediating institution into the very heart of communist society, most notably in the form of *Capital's* "commanding will" whose supreme task it is to integrate particular and general in the all-important process of production.

How is this possible? I think we must reject as an explanation an early-late dichotomisation of Marx's thought — an assumption that the apocalyptic passions of the youthful Marx simmer down sufficiently to permit the mature treatment of questions of order. Though surely the articulation of the millennial vision is most transparently striking in the early Marx, it is present in the mature work as well, as it must be if Marx is to retain his philosophical footing, let alone his revolutionary *esprit*. Deferring for the moment consideration of the "realm of freedom" introduced in volume three of *Capital*, we find the vision reflected in the famous earlier discussion, "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof." We find it reflected there not only generally in the projection psychology of alienation underlying the analysis of commodity production, but also specifically in the identification of Christianity with the ideology of the limited individual ("abstract man"), and in the suggestive comparison of "a community of free individuals" with that fictional bourgeois darling, Robinson Crusoe. While Marx has only censure for the abstract, ahistorical political economy underlying the Crusoe tale, he at once champions his own "social" version of the all-sided productive Robinson, late counterpart to the *German Ideology's* unspecialised hunter-fisherman-husbandman-critic.<sup>36</sup> Clearly the vision of *Capital* continues to bear the imprint of conviction as to the unmediated unity of particular men and general societal will under the transfigured conditions of communist existence. Yet it is in this same work that the mediating will makes its reappearance.

A first approximation of an explanation must be that Marx has, paradoxically, created a speculative vision that he himself refuses to believe in. He has seen the promised land of his imagination, but he is a little too wise, too "realistic," to take it for reality and try to enter it. He has, as we suggested a moment ago, eclipsed reality, but only partially. This approximate explanation is obviously baffling. Why should Marx construct an elaborate system only to walk away from it? Clearly it is not a matter of logical consistency. "Logically," Marx should have hermetically sealed himself into the magical circle of specula-



tion on the communist *eschaton*. And to do so it would seem he had only to consistently refuse to speculate in any way, shape or form on the "music or the orchestras of the future," that is, on the problem of communist institutions. Should unpleasant questions somehow crop up, there was always the inflexible *Fragesverbot*, the retort that "socialist man" does not ask such ridiculous questions; Marx has already proved himself capable of invoking the technique when necessary. In this sense the "statist" remarks in *Capital* are distinctly "illogical," standing in sharp contrast to others suggestive of an enduring state form. Talk of a "public power" that is not "political" is indefinite enough to be open to half a dozen glosses; the Commune, after all, was but a "harbinger" of future society, and easily enough interpreted as a mere instrument for achieving the terrestrial paradise of communism.<sup>37</sup> This is even truer of the intervening dictatorship of the proletariat, which we are invited to appreciate as a transitory organ of *sanctificatio*, sanctification of life in preparation for the final transfiguration through death to the old life and inauguration of the new. But with the "bookkeeping" state of *Capital* we reach the height of disjunction between premises and result, between, we may say, fantasy and an abiding sense of political reality.

Despite the apparent ease with which he might have sidestepped this *aporia*, there is good reason to suspect something internal to the system itself which prevented Marx from leaping totally out of existence, which kept him in contact with an essential stratum of non-communist human nature and so limited the eclipse of reality to a partial eclipse. This internal limit is, I believe, provided precisely by Marx's "materialism," *i.e.* his insistence on sticking close by the requirements of man's somatic, "sensual" nature. Marx is determined not to fall into the utopian trap of fantasising "ideals" divorced from material reality; and communism is after all, he insists, not a fantastic, but a "real" movement emerging necessarily from already existing material conditions.<sup>38</sup> This "material" emphasis in the long run proves decisive. For by the speculative construction of a closed stream of immanent being Marx can certainly close himself to the existence of God, indeed he can pull down into the immanent stream of history the Christian idea of supernatural perfection, the *visio beatifica* (proletarian man contemplating his own industrial navel). He can invert the God-man and posit the Man-god, and he can speculatively abolish the mystery of the meaning of existence in the sense of Romans 8:24-25 by predicting the world-immanent moment "when that which is perfect is come," and when "that which is in part shall be done away with" (I Cor. 13:10). What he obviously cannot do, and does not attempt, is speculatively transfigure the *physical* nature of man. It is in line with this obvious fact that Marx posits the apparently self-evident distinction between the two "realms" of freedom and necessity. The realm of freedom, he says, really only begins where labour determined by "mundane" considerations ceases; that is to say that in "the

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very nature of things" real freedom lies "beyond" the whole sphere of material production. But on Marx's premises the self-evident character of the two-realm distinction can be *only* apparent: the whole thrust of the corpus is in precisely the opposite direction. Communism is supposed to be the "resolution" of the antinomy of freedom and necessity; in communist society, work is "the foremost want in life"; freedom is unalienated work, for work is self-creation and the indispensable basis for the unity of individual and generic self. "When the labourer co-operates systematically with others, he strips off the fetters of his individuality, and develops the capabilities of the species"<sup>39</sup> — that is, the essence of "socialised man." And yet here, near the conclusion of *Capital*, we are informed that "true" freedom is of another substance altogether. Just like his primitive forebears, modern man — and this is true, Marx stresses, under any conceivable social formation and mode of production — must "wrestle" with an ever recalcitrant Nature for the satisfaction of wants, the maintenance and reproduction of life. Indeed, freedom *here*, in the labouring exchange with nature, consists precisely in socialised man — rationalised, cooperative work accomplished with the least expenditure of energy and greatest regard for human dignity. But this freedom is not "true," it is freedom corrupted by association with necessity, with the mundane, with matter. Only *beyond* it "begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working-day is its basic prerequisite."<sup>40</sup> Ordinary work puts communist man on the same level as the "savage." Only the escape from cooperative labour, "associated production," and movement beyond socialised man via a shorter working day, provides access to the Realm. Communist man is not free *through* the productive process, but only on the basis of it, as it were in spite of it. A yawning gap has opened up between the spirit and the materialism that was supposed to overreach it.

The system bucks up against its outer limit. One can fantasise that the revolution has been made, the will to exploit has disappeared, the material basis for class domination of social institutions has been abolished, *etc.* And yet there remains still puny physical man; who even if he loves his work must still "wrestle" his sustenance from nature, who is moreover limited in his effort to appropriate the "totality" of productive instruments by the need to specialise in a highly complex, coordinated labouring process,<sup>41</sup> who — however full his life — must still die,<sup>42</sup> who however creative, both individually and through the collectivity, is liable to break forth any time with that damnable question of the original creator of things, "of man and Nature as a whole": what sort of self-creating, self-saving god is this? Despite the most Promethean of speculative efforts, a vast segment of the given order of being remains intact, and the program of the incontestable divinity of self-conscious man breaks down. One

can note here a pertinent contrast with that other "anarchist," Bakunin. Bakunin is not concerned with "material production," but only with an alleged "creation" through unbridled destruction; he trusts not in man's labouring efforts, but in the "eternal spirit which destroys and annihilates only because it is the unfathomable and eternally creative source of all life. The joyful passion for destruction is a creative passion."<sup>43</sup> This is the testimony of the faithful "anti-authoritarian." With the young nihilist Nechaiev Bakunin is ready to make the leap into utterly negative revolutionary existence. As long as destruction is possible, the Bakuninist "program" need never break down. And is there ever an end to the possibilities of destruction? Should all else fail there is always finally the ultimate "revolutionary" act of *self*-destruction — epitomised by the mad deed of the character Kirilov in Dostoevski's *The Possessed*, whose fervent belief is that through suicide he literally becomes God, the new Christ through whom all men may follow into the final realm of mangedhood.

But Marx is not Kirilov, he is not mad. Though at what precise point and in which chamber of the psyche we cannot say, he *knows* that the program breaks down, that he cannot stop history, that it is not for him nor any man to utter the words of John 11:25-26. And it should perhaps not be at all surprising that the breakdown gains such vivid representation in the problem of the state. In the orthodox conception of St. Augustine, the state represents that part of human nature, bound by the *civitas terrena*, which will pass away with the final irruption of the eschatological events. Then truly will there be no longer a need of the state, when the period of waiting, the *secularum senescens*, is at last at an end. But until such time history goes on as before, the job of the state being to moderate man's fallen state through checking the worst excesses of evil and generally providing the best external framework for the church's eschatologically-infused labours of *sanctificatio*. It is, simply, an inherent part of the inescapable tension of historical existence — basically, though complexly, a tension of "sacred" and "profane" — that is man's fate. Marx preserves the tension, but in a transmogrified, immanentised form — in the form of the tension between freedom and necessity, between that which is truly human and that which is not, between the world-immanent spirit and the flesh of man. Once more the state represents that part of man's limited nature that "passes away" with the transfiguration of time — only now the *Parousia* occurs not once for all time, but daily, whenever the communist labourer punches out on the clock.

In a sense, then, it is possible to point to a limit intrinsic to the effort of immanentisation itself. Categories of eschatology are transcendently oriented by nature. Even the intramundane millennial quest, if it springs from genuinely religious motives, requires the transcendental irruption, supernatural aid in one or another form.<sup>44</sup> The fusion of *civitas Dei* and *civitas terrena* at the hands

## THE COMMUNIST STATE

of *homo faber* is an error, both logical and spiritual, of the first magnitude, bound for ultimate failure. It is of course necessary to stress "ultimate" here, since the eschatological tension produced by the immanentisation is capable of generating immense energies, as befitting a quest for salvation. But in principle the program must break down. The revolution will be made, but Reality will annoyingly refuse to revolutionise its structure. Perhaps classes will indeed be abolished, and hence an important source or *libido dominandi*, or at least an important field for its play. More likely a very great deal of evil will be committed in the name of good.<sup>45</sup> Man will not become other than man, and the "superman" will still reside "in heaven," as he has from the beginning.

### III

The recognition of limit does not, however, save Marx from a charge of massive contradiction. On the contrary, we are in the final analysis left with what on Marxian anthropological premises can only be a wholly illegitimate case for the legitimacy of the state. If he is not to let the system collapse entirely, Marx must enter a vicious circle of invalid validation: the state, the institutional form that by its mediating activity proves the *lack* of immediacy, must be legitimated by the presupposition of the existence of a millennial stateless community, *i.e.*, an already *achieved* immediate unity. The disjuncture of particular and general and the immediate identity of particular and general are presented coexisting happily, each witness to the truth of the other. The will to transfigure reality remains intact, even if now one must settle for an incomplete transfiguration. Reality will be eclipsed, but only partially — and the corona will be less than apocalyptically breathtaking.

Unfortunately, it is no more possible to legitimate a state by a human condition that should have abolished it, or a realm of necessity by a realm of freedom that has renounced necessity forever, than it is possible to ground reality in fantasy, or waking consciousness in dream.

Chicago, Illinois

### Notes

1. See especially among the works discussed below, Solomon Bloom, "The 'Withering Away' of the State," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 7 (January, 1946), 113-121; and Richard Adamiak, "The 'Withering Away' of the State: A Reconsideration," *Journal of Politics*, 32 (1970), 3-17. Cf. Elizabeth Rapaport, "Anarchism and Authority in Marx's Socialist Politics," *European Journal of Sociology*, 17, No. 2 (1976), 333-343. The ambiguous question of a socialist politics naturally parallels Marx's ambiguous interpretation of the pre-socialist state as both a coercive class tool and a social organ somehow independent of classes. See John Sanderson, "Marx and Engels on the State," *Western Political Quarterly* (December, 1963), 946-955; cf. Robert C. Tucker, *The Marxian Revolutionary Idea*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1969, pp. 59ff.

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2. For example, in the 1844 essay, "The King of Prussia," Marx says that where the revolution's "organising activity begins, where its own aim and spirit emerge, there socialism throws the political hull away." In Loyd Easton and Kurt Guddat, trans. and eds., *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, New York: Anchor Books, 1967, p. 470. Even more emphatically in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, he asserts that when class antagonism is finished "there will be no more political power properly so-called, since political power is precisely the official expression of antagonism in civil society" (New York: International Publishers, 1963, p. 174.). In the *Communist Manifesto* Marx implies that the proletariat will represent a "political power" only so long as it is "compelled" to do so in its "contest with the bourgeoisie." In Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1972, p. 353.
3. *The Manifesto* uses the language of a "public power" that has no "political character." *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 352.
4. Marx criticised the Gotha Program for its failure to deal with "the future state of communist society," and raised the question, "What transformation will the state undergo in communist society?" *Critique of the Gotha Program*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 395.
5. See below remarks on a necessary "commanding will."
6. See, e.g., *The German Ideology*, in Easton and Guddat, p. 470.
7. See for example the "Preface" to *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*, New York: International Publishers, 1970.
8. See J.L. Talmon, *Political Messianism: The Romantic Phase*, New York: Praeger, 1960, pp. 221-228; Karl Loewith, *Meaning in History*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949, ch. 2; Eric Voegelin, *From Enlightenment to Revolution*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1975, chs. 10 and 11. Cf. Gaston Fessard, S.J., "The Theological Structure of Marxist Atheism," in Johannes B. Metz, ed., *Concilium*, 16, "Is God Dead?" New York: Paulist Press, 1966, pp. 7-24.
9. Bloom, especially pp. 113, 121.
10. Adamiak, especially pp. 7, 9.
11. Avineri, *Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971, pp. 203ff.
12. Hal Draper, "The Death of the State in Marx and Engels," in Ralph Miliband and J. Saville, eds., *The Socialist Register*, London: Merlin, 1970, pp. 301ff.
13. On the concept of political space, consult Robert J. Pranger, *Action, Symbolism and Order: The Existential Dimensions of Politics in Modern Citizenship*, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968, pp. 28-29, 50-54.
14. David Kettler sympathetically discusses this shift in "Beyond Republicanism: The Socialist Critique of Political Idealism," in Marvin Surkin and Alan Wolfe, eds., *End to Political Science*, New York: Basic Books, 1970, pp. 56ff.
15. Marx, *Capital*, 3 vols., New York: International Publishers, 1967, vol. 3, p. 383. Cf. vol. 1, pp. 330-331.
16. *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 851.

## THE COMMUNIST STATE

17. Marx recalls Saint Simon's distinction between "owners" and "industriels"; only the latter are important at the present level of production: "it is not the industrial capitalist, but the industrial managers who are 'the souls of our industrial system....'" The apolitical, non-ruling character of the managers' role is part of the transvaluation of decision-making Draper alludes to.
18. Marx, "Forward to Thesis: *The Difference Between the Natural Philosophy of Democritus and the Natural Philosophy of Epicurus*," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *On Religion*, New York: Schocken Books, 1964, p. 15.
19. *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'*, Joseph O'Malley, ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970, pp. 131ff.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Easton and Guddat, pp. 312-313.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 314.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Voegelin believes that Marx is already past the point of closure. See his *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., Gateway edition, 1968, pp. 44ff.
25. As quoted in Frederick Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1965, vol. 7, p. 299.
26. *Theses on Feuerbach*, no. 4, in Easton and Guddat, p. 401.
27. *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'*, p. 76.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 80, 31-32.
29. Just because Germany is backward politically, Marx believes it has been forced to *speculate* abstractly, that is, philosophically. "In politics the Germans have *thought* what other nations have done. Germany was their theoretical conscience." ("Introduction" to the *Critique*, p. 137.) Here is the justification for the critique of Hegel, for Hegel develops "the idea of the modern state" to perfection. And Marx, exponent of a new kind of critical thinking, can presumably through the critique of Hegel raise to consciousness the inadequacy of merely political emancipation.
30. Easton and Guddat, pp. 224ff.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 227, 232, 241. For two other views which stress Marx's antagonism toward political mediation, see J. Hyppolite, *Studies on Marx and Hegel*, trans. John O'Neill, New York: Basic Books, 1969, pp. 110ff.; Sidney Hook, *From Hegel to Marx*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950, p. 162.
32. Easton and Guddat, p. 304.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 310.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 425.
35. *Manuscripts*, Easton and Guddat, pp. 307-308.

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36. *Capital*, vol. 1, pp. 76-79.
  37. The Commune was, Marx says in *The Civil War in France*, "the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour.... The Commune was therefore to serve as a lever for uprooting the economical foundations upon which rests the existence of classes....," *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 557.
  38. *The German Ideology*, Easton and Guddat, p. 426.
  39. *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 329.
  40. *Capital*, vol. 3, p. 820.
  41. Marx's notion of the "transcendence" of the division of labour seems in fact to take the form of a total obeisance to the continually revolutionising "process" of "Modern Industry," which in its rapid multiplication of specialised tasks far outruns any individual's capacity to keep pace. See *Capital*, vol. 1, pp. 486-488.
  42. As might be expected, however, Marx downplays the significance of the individual's death as against the immortality of the species-being. *Manuscripts*, Easton and Guddat, p. 307.
  43. As quoted in Voegelin, *From Enlightenment to Revolution*, p. 198.
  44. Cf. Guenter Lewy, *Religion and Revolution*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1974, pp. 237ff.
  45. See Paul Ricoeur's incisive critique of the withering away of the state thesis, delivered from the standpoint of concern for the problem of "political evil." "The Political Paradox," in Hwa Yol Jung, ed., *Existential Phenomenology and Political Theory*, Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1972, pp. 337-367.
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## HOLLYWOOD, HOLLYWOOD

We who were living are now dying  
With a little patience

T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland*

In remembrance, we are now one with Walter Benjamin in his insight that this is an age of the aestheticization of politics. The moment of the beautiful, of the classical proportions of symphonic coordination, has been torn from its roots in the history of human anguish, of the despair of the dispirited mind. The aesthetic impulse has been given over to the celebration of the collectivity, of administered existence, of the vain ministrations of the process of instrumental rationality. Today, in this twilight of human domination, the project of coordinating the heterogeneous field of human experience around an enduring and prophetic image of the beautiful has been reduced for its fulfillment to the production of mimetic images of the public situation, to the marshalling of social existence into the inferno of politics itself. The aesthetic experience has merged with the imperatives of political existence; and the result is a profound and terrible confusion of the externalizations and spatializations of the modern with the singularity, the sublimity, of the beautiful itself. Aesthetics, as a human vocation, as a social necessity of the good human life, is in retreat from the dark impulses — moral terror, indeterminacy, duration — the existence of which bestirred the beginnings of the movement of modern times. Now, politics are one with beauty to the extent that the primitive existential terror of human existence has been overcome, has been subjected to a great forgetting, in the rush to form, to method, to Enlightenment.

In the theoretical analysis of the public domain, it is often unrecognized that fundamental transformations in the object of analysis, in this instance in the sphere of socio-cultural experience, require corresponding changes in the method, the style, of interrogation. What method of interrogation, of exposition, is appropriate to the deciphering of aestheticized politics, to the understanding of a society in which the moment of the beautiful is entangled with the actuality of the *horror* in a prolonged dialectic of madness?

It is apparent that the unification of aesthetics and politics, of image and will, has transformed the *oeuvre* of the film into a significant interrogatory of human existence. The film, this codification of the *masque*, this unveiling of



## CULTURAL INTERPRETATIONS

the *ratio* of the internally related imagery of illusion, has a twofold significance. First, the film conforms in the logic of its construction to the aesthetic laws of motion of presentation, of exhibition, of the object of society. Social existence now is experienced, and experienced directly, as an enigmatic ensemble of coordinated images of the public situation. The image has been made flesh; and the flesh is the social body of society itself. The aestheticization of politics, of collective purpose, is coeval with the organization of life, public and private, around the exclusive prerogatives of a political economy of sight. The art of illusion, the visual sleight of hand, the "unreal city" of manipulated images of the social situation, has escaped its origins in the specialized *techné* of film; taking up a new and more absolutist place of operation in the sphere of administered culture itself. The *logos* of the social image, the rationalization of illusion, reflects the actual structure of a society which conforms increasingly to the abstract and general mediation of the flight of Capital, from political economy, from bureaucracy. The aestheticization of politics transforms the currency of the image into the apogee of human desiring. Capital is the emblematic expression of desire; and the sphere of the imaginary is a main feeding-ground of Capital, of commodification. The film, this refraction of all social relations, this celebration of the moving illusion, this technification of imagery, mimics in the flesh, in the actuality of its methods of operation, the general social logic of society as a whole. The film, this marvellous contrivance of artifice, exists now as the *idée* of the social body; in a grand irony, in a curious mutation of the dialectic of the illusory and the real, the aesthetic moment of the film has been generalized into the social logic of the public realm. The *oeuvre* of the film serves now as the nuclear phase, the celebrant and the critic, of the theatre of high desire, of the society of the spatialization of politics.

To the extent that the *form* of the film parallels the depth surrealism of actual experience, then the *content* of the film is also transformed into a main cultural interrogatory of society. An analysis of the architecture of the film, of the space and timing of the characterization of sight and sound, provides a glimpse into the workings of the structure of the social process. Aesthetic form re-presents the forms of social logic; the archeology of the moving image of the film suggests the movement itself of social imagery made real. For example, Bertolucci's visual epic, *1900*, is, in part, an eloquent reconstruction in the silence of form of the mirthless realism, the historical stolidity, of the Communist Party of Italy. The imaginative architecture of *1900*, its inflated historical scale and methodical pace, reflect the death of ontology, of the philosophical imagination, in the ideological enterprise. Equally, Wender's *An American Friend* reconstitutes in the very *form* of the film — the juxtapositioning of death and locomotion, of stories of fraud and fealty, of the sudden, unexpected return of the dead — the apprehension, the fear of the unpredictabil-

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ity of the known, which is at the heart of the heart of modern times. The film anticipates in form, in the rationality of visual connections, the disconnections and continuities of the social object. And, more so in content, the film captures the ambiguity of chaos and absurdity, the carnival of sights and sounds, the moment of the frivolous and the melancholy, which qualify and mediate human relations in the realm of the socio-cultural. The film is a vital mosaic, a totalizing codification, of social experience; and its codifications, like the totalities of administered existence, are enigmatic in their grouping together of the profound and the degraded, of the mad and the superficial, of the apologetic and the critical. The film, as an instance of cultural interrogation, contains the usual range of commodified expressions; and each expression, irrespective of the quality of its interrogation, is also a reflection of, and inquiry into, different dimensions of the social object. Independent of human intentions, the film has become an important aspect of the cultural construction of reality.

### II

The search for a new method of cultural interpretation, for the critical translation of film appreciation into social self-reflection, is made all the more urgent by the present demoralization and deep confusion of society. Roland Barthes reminds us in his brilliant text, *A Lover's Discourse*, that sometimes the victims of trauma have to be reminded gently that the epochal event of psychological shock has already occurred; that the *horror* which is so feared as to induce the immobility of moral depression is in our collective past, not in our future. The situation of social trauma, of existing without memory in the cell of the dominion of totalitarian reality, is the fate of the inhabitants of this, the wasteland of our dreams. Today, the commodity form, once historically anchored within the boundaries of materialism, has broken beyond the frontiers of political economy, taking up residence in the domain of culture. The bourgeois individual, suffering under the double sign of labour and myth, takes up the hapless quest of Odysseus; but this time unlike the *Odyssey*, without guidance, lost in a world which has in its past the abandonment of tradition and, in its future, the arbitrary course of a culture which veers between the polarities of nihilism and narcissism.

Sartre was wrong. This is not the age of Marx, of History. It is the morrow of Nietzsche, of bad conscience as normal reason, of the tragic sense of modern life, of eternal recurrence as happy burlesque. The crisis of modernity has transcended the myth of political economy. Increasingly, the secret of Enlightenment — the desacralization of moral terror and the enchantment of the "iron cage" of the society — is revealed in the ambiguous text of cultural experience. Ours is a society in which the fateful saga of the integration of

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labour, domination, and myth is played out in the crisis-like atmosphere of the mediation of individual and market-place; in the troubled circumstances, that is, of desiring after desire itself.

Now, with the sounds of economic and social turbulence in the air, the possibility suggests itself that a fateful sea-change has taken place in the culture of North America; that something indispensable to the well-being of the life of reason has been lost; that somehow, the items of cultural experience have passed beyond the frontiers of rationality, into the region of madness. Following the text of Altamont, we note the urgency with which demobbed spectators put paid to their claim, their social right, for a moment of celebrity. They seize the stage. *Phantasm* goes public; and the people of Sade, the survivors of the end of Enlightenment, of Vietnam, corrode the will, the social contract, of the institutions of the age of Weber. In the culture of North America, the audience yearns to be one with celebrity; and celebrity itself is only a sign in negativity of the presence of the stage. Cast away into the turbulence, into the trauma, of the market-place of high desire, the bourgeois 'I' surrenders. The solitary ego is vacated; it ruptures onto the public scene. The ego, the 'I', the bourgeois self, fuses with the mob, the publicized id. The laws of motion of public action, the high adventures of the market-place, are now interiorized. In the midst of the mob culture of North America, there remains in exile the self-reflective capacity of the bourgeois self. And is it not ironic that, today, privacy is possible only in publicity?

It is in the midst of the crisis of culture that we turn to the interrogation of film as one possibility for the recovery, the radical recovery, of the possibility of self-interpretation, of social autocritique. This project begins with the theoretical proposition that the critical analysis of film, both in the archeology of its formal properties and in the political economy of its content, will yield an original understanding of the ambiguity and chaos that is central to the text of contemporary culture. Interpretation of the form of the film approximates, and anticipates, an investigation of the formal logic, the architecture of imagery, of the process of cultural experience. And, analysis of the content of the film, is a precise methodology for a depth understanding of the symbolism, the social mediations, of the public realm. The content of the film is an intensive orchestration, an experimental working-through, of possibilities suggested by the process of human action itself.

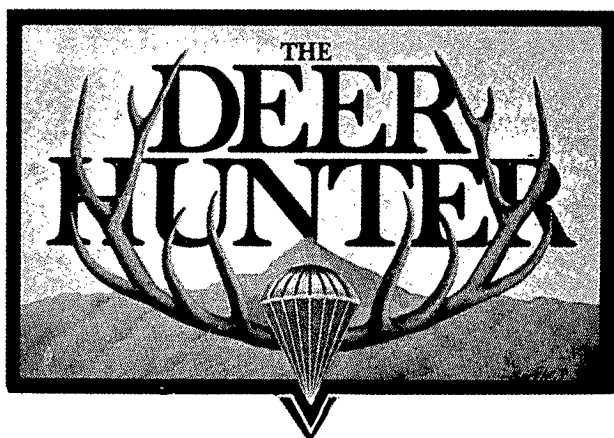
Arthur Kroker

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## THE DEER HUNTER AND THE JAUNDICED ANGEL

*Frank Burke*

### THE LOGO



An antlered parachute: the perverse hybridization of nature and military technology.

No deer attached to the antlers, no person attached to the parachute, no ground or "body" attached to the mountaintop: radical dissociation, total rootlessness.

"The Deer Hunter": less a person than a role or abstraction. Words enthroned, godlike, in the heavens. At the same time, words — and identity — entangled in antlers (and colored blood red in the original logo): a deer hunter impaled on the horns of his own abstractions.

### THE DEER HUNTER

A five act tragedy. Imperialism the tragic flaw. Not just political or military imperialism, but imperialism as a way of life. The terminal disease — psychological, economic, technological, sociological, sexual — of a society in which the urge to connect has been conquered by the impulse to control.

A tragedy with neither *peripeteia* (change of fortune) nor *anagnorisis* (recognition). Just the irreversible moral decay of the deer hunter and his world.

## FRANK BURKE

Act. I. The rootlessness and alienation of Clairton, Pa. A world of industrial domination and appropriation. Alienation breeds escape: military enlistment and the quest for meaning, adventure and identity abroad. Act II. Escape to Nam. Pioneering as soldiery. Greater rootlessness, greater alienation. Military domination and appropriation. The erosion of identity in a foreign, imperialized landscape. Act III. The return of the uprooted to an alien homeland. Sexual domination and appropriation. Encounter with the emptiness of the past. Fabrication of one last "deer hunt": the quest for Nicky. Act IV. Deer hunter in exile, Nam in exodus, all roots severed. Symbolic domination and control. Imperialism = macho American heroism. The quest becomes homo/sui/cidal; total imperialization of the self. Act V. Requiem for the dead souls of the living. Nothing left to dominate or control. Obliterative self-surrender to the nonmeaning, nonbeing of *God Bless America*.

### Act I. Clairton, U.S.A.

SCENE ONE. *Light comes up on the outskirts of Clairton, accompanied by the roar of a truck (offscreen). An oil tanker-truck explodes onto the frame, careens wildly around a corner, passes a figure filling a gas tank at the rear of a car, and storms through the streets of dormant Clairton.*

An invasion. An act of territorial conquest by a machine (no truck driver is visible). Simultaneously, two mechanical sex acts: the brutal penetration-rape of the town by the phallic-spermatic truck — as a man pederastically nozzles his car from the rear.

Human relations polarized into "war" (masculine aggression) and "love" (feminine connection), with the clear predominance of the former. The primacy of machinery = man-as-alien. Connected neither with nature nor with fellow man — and certainly not with woman. Human relations = mechanical relations.

SCENE TWO. *Inside a steel mill, enormous pieces of machinery perform a complicated but meaningless dance, seemingly of their own volition — while a fire rages almost out of control. Men, disguised and isolated in hideous costumes, carry out disconnected tasks which effect nothing tangible — until they are rescued from their Sisyphean labors by a deafening whistle.*

A world of plunder. Technological and commercial imperialism. The earth

## DEER HUNTER

invaded for its ore, the ore transformed into adamantine commodity. A world devoid of identity, connection and meaning. Environment-as-enemy. Machinery and fire release terrifying energy that can't be appeased — only controlled or evaded. A life of reaction in which motion derives from without, metronomed by machines and work whistles. The division not only of labour but of the labourer.

Dead center in the vortex of technological violence: Michael-the-Deer Hunter, Vronsky. Michael-the-Archangel. A spirit forged in the infernal fires of a blast furnace; an angel turned demon; a perverse (though *not* unsympathetic) hero of a perverse world. His first action a reaction, a job-dictated act of negation as he slams his protective visor over his protective safety glasses and equally "protective" beard. A denial of self, a denial of world. The death of visible identity — the perceivable interface of world-self. The primal assertion of radical disconnection.

Michael-the-Ukrainian/American. The offspring of disconnection and uprootedness. His forebearers imperialized out of their land, language and culture by the Russians. Forced to abandon their homeland for the identity-dissolving melting pot of the U.S.A. His adoptive identity no real identity. American patriotism + army enlistment = the negation of roots. *God Bless America* = God Damn Russia — and the Ukraine which lies within it. A killing paradox of self-imperialization.

Ethnic rootlessness ... personal rootlessness. "Born" in a steel mill, Michael retires at quitting time to a bar. What home exists is familyless: a trailer stashed remotely on a hill.

Disconnection and uprootedness = alienation. The fuel that powers Michael. The source of his (non)sense of (non)identity. Alienation = world/fear, world/hate = self/fear, self/hate. Paranoia. "I don't like no surprises." A consequent mania for domination. "You're a maniac ... a control freak" (Nicky). Total self-control. A right way to do everything from polishing boots to opening a car trunk to killing a deer. Strict delimitation of experience. "This is this. This isn't something else." Hemingwayesque reduction of life to a single event — the deer hunt — in a controlled "arena" ruled by a single figure invested with priestly powers of ritualized male domination. Self and world so circumscribed that there *are* no surprises, either from within (intense, unexpected feeling, involvement, love) or from without. The ultimate, self-consuming game of REPRESSION.

Repression = even greater alienation, even greater distance. The impossibility of "marriage" in any sense. Michael-at-the-wedding: an alien drinking himself out of touch at the bar. His sole social act a toast to "Fuckit," the Green Beret isolate that Michael will become. His involvement with the wedding party forced on him by others — after alcohol has dissolved any possibility for real communication.

## FRANK BURKE

The process of Act I: oscillation and conflict between "war" and "love," "masculine" and "feminine." The two principal events: the deer hunt and the wedding. The two principal facets of the wedding reception: the celebration of marriage; the "celebration" of Michael's, Nicky's, and Stevie's imminent departure for war. Recurrent domination of war over love, masculine over feminine. The reception takes place in a Veterans' Hall; the army enlistment makes marriage impending divorce; the female "lovers" (Angela, Linda, Stanley's bridesmaid/date/K.O. victim) prove subordinate to men. The deer hunt appropriates and supplants marriage as the culminative event of Act I.

Deer hunt = *dear* hunt. A complex act of displacement and symbolism. Michael's projection of all that's dear to him onto the deer and onto single-minded pursuit of the deer/dear. The first major transformation of love into war. Imperialization in the extreme. The invasion of foreign territory. The destruction of the inhabitants. The removal of the remains from their "homeland." A one-shot, no-win situation. The deer — and by projection everything dear — is either killed or allowed to escape.

The deer hunt = marriage-become-divorce. The divorce of the hunters from society, of males from females. The replacement of Stevie-Angela with Michael-Nicky, then the divorce of Michael from Nicky. Finally, the divorce of Michael from the deer in the ultimate act of divorce: killing.

*Post Mortem.* "Connection," "community," "rootedness" = five males, isolated in a bar-not-a-home, lost each in his own reverie, as John plays the alien music of a dead exile: Chopin.

### Act II. Vietnam

#### Part I. Agraria.

The steel mill inferno of Clairton becomes the military inferno of Nam. Helicopters waste an agrarian hamlet. A Vietnamese soldier wastes women and children. Michael wastes the Vietnamese soldier.

Sanity gives way to insanity. A crazed Michael awakens to a crazed world. "Sanity" regained only at the price of murder. Victory and freedom = slaughter.

Domestic imperialism becomes foreign. War and invasion = imperialism in its natural state. Helicopter destruction from above = the American eagle at work.

Personal/ethnic rootlessness infinitely intensified. Capture in an alien land. Escape on an uprooted tree. Separation at an uncrossed bridge. The death of Stevie's roots (legs). The slinging of Stevie deer-like across the hood of a military vehicle amidst a parade of the homeless.

War = the erosion of personal identity. Michael, Nicky, Stevie trade in their

## DEER HUNTER

individuality for the corporate identity of soldiers. Life becomes a game of military roulette; selfhood becomes uniformed names and numbers in the U.S. Army.

Marriage and family annihilated as a Vietnamese male ("father") destroys a mother-with-child: the reincarnation of pregnant Angela. Family becomes Michael the father, Nicky the mother/wife, Stevie the child. All male. Nonregenerative. A community bound by terror not love, capable of giving birth only to destruction.

A world of total *reaction*. World/fear, world/hate rule supreme.

The Vietnamese = the Ukrainians of Act II. But even more imperialized. Captives of war, prisoners in their own land. One century of French domination + two decades of American brutalization = no identity. Born into a world of war, they can function only as paranoid, violent warriors (the guerilla captors) or passive victims of war (the spiritless participants in exodus). Aggression or submission, slavery or domination. The only, polar, possibilities in an imperialized society. No "real" Vietnamese. No "real" Vietnam. Just an American national playground for the release of repressed violence.

The central paradigm of Act II: Russian roulette. An imperialist sport in which the captors use the captives as pawns. A replacement for the deer hunt as the principal game in a world at war. The perversion of one-to-one relations into killing competition. The reduction of people to hands and heads. The virtual and visual amputation of legs/roots. The equation of success with annihilation. The killing of the head: identity, consciousness, self-determination. The blowing of the mind either physically or psychologically. Like the deer hunt, a no-win situation in which there are no real survivors.

### Part II. Saigon.

Yet further dehumanization. The U.S. Army Hospital a bastion of military abstraction. Dog tags, charts, case histories / doctors, nurses, patients. NO PERSONS. Saigon proper: the headquarters of rootlessness. The degenerate soul of imperialism. Whorehouses, nightclubs, gambling dens. Everything for sale — particularly false forms of freedom. Dying proof that beneath the facade of military domination lies something more destructive: capitalism. The devil who owns the Saigon soul is not Uncle Sam but a nameless conscienceless French entrepreneur. A highpriest of Western commerce. The effete spectre of French colonialism.

Saigon = the death of Nicky's identity. Asked for his I.D. tags, he produces another's. Asked if his name's Russian (not even Ukrainian), he replies "No. American." Questioned about his parents, he becomes increasingly inarticulate. Unable to complete a long distance call to Linda, he tells the operator "Never mind." The end of emotional involvement, personal ties.



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"Never mind" the only solution to a rootless existence. The antidote to feeling in a world in which all one can feel is pain. "Never mind" = Nicky's motto and new identity as he dissolves into the streets of Saigon, the employ of the Frenchman, and the self-lobotomy of Russian roulette.

Nicky's self-obliteration = the death of the "best man" — both of wedding and film. A lover as well as a warrior, a "female" as well as a male. Ambisexual in name, image, and nature. Everything Michael isn't. The principal embodiment of synthesis, "marriage," potential integration. A woman-surrogate in a world of annihilated womanhood. A dear.

His self-lobotomy = the death of love as a concrete possibility. The replacement of love with its illusion. Nicky a mere hollow projection in the minds of Clairtonians. A symbol for Michael to pursue and the others to mourn. A love surrogate in a world without love.

### Act III. Clairton Revisited

The return of Michael-the-Soldier to a world of civilians. Total alienation. "I feel a lot of distance. I feel far away." A world without Nicky. A world without roots. Personified by Stevie: a motorized amputee who prefers the cloistered life of a V.A. Hospital to his former life and family.

Michael a walking uniform who applies jungle tactics to everything: "raiding" his trailer-home at dawn to reunite with Linda, "capturing" Axel and Stanley from behind at the steel mill. His "courtship" of Linda a guerilla campaign. Conceived in the isolation of a motel room. Partially executed during the dawn raid. Consummated with a pre-lovemaking, dark-of-night "ambush" and "kidnapping" outside the supermarket.

The death of the past. Gang camaraderie dissipates quickly and painfully in the back of John's bar. The deer hunt proves meaningless after Nam. The failure of the hunt triggers the negation of fellowship when Michael plays Russian roulette on Stanley.

Russian roulette *replaces* the deer hunt. War again supplants love. Michael *willingly* plays roulette, in contrast to his earlier forced participation.

The death of love. Michael and Linda use each other as Nicky-surrogates. Michael substitutes lovemaking with Linda for the failed hunt and dead male friendship. "Love"making = compensation for the *absence* of love.

The death of meaning. Linda: "Did you ever think that life would turn out like this?" Michael: "No."

Failure and substitution = growing illusion. Manufactured goals supplant concrete relationships. "Visiting the sick" (Stevie) replaces lovemaking with Linda, then is swiftly replaced with "Saving Nicky" — the last and most illusory hope for redemption in a valueless world. An even more abstract adventure than the war. The urge of one identityless creature to "marry"

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another in a culminative devolution of the deer/dear hunt to radical, irrevocable roulette.

Illusion = obsession. Michael's total disregard for reality. Not only the monomaniacal pursuit of Nicky but the singleminded insistence on a shotgun remarriage of Stevie and Angela. The senseless splicing of a wounded body to a wounded mind in a relationship of separate but equal catatonia.

### Act IV. Saigon Revisited

The return of Michael-the-Soldier to Nam. A world of total escape and exodus. The complete capitalization and imperialization of Vietnam. Vietnamese "identity" = five English-speaking Saigon businessmen in Western dress, who eat insulated by their black market wealth while their homeland dissolves in flame.

Michael an alien invasive force. Fixated with guerillan intensity on the one-shot recapture of Nicky, he moves oblivious and counter to the masses around him. A role rather than an individual. "I want to play the American." *I.e.*, "I want to play [the role of] the American." John Wayne swashbuckling his way into foreign territory, risking self to save the good guy. The consummate American movie (anti)hero. A pure illusion and stereotype. The American pioneer-turned-military imperialist.

Nicky a high-priced hooker. A love object whose services can only be obtained through extensive financial negotiations with assorted pimps: the Frenchman, a doorman/bouncer, the Vietnamese businessmen. An image of waxen, hollow perfection, yellowed by the light and his own degeneracy. A jaundiced angel whose beauty has been falsely "orientalized" by Saigon — itself the perversion of Oriental authenticity. An anaesthetized robot bereft of the grace and agility that once aligned him with the deer.

His lack of memory a denial of Michael's and his past and ethnicity. His unwillingness and inability to communicate an annihilation of community, fellowship, love. Communication = spitting on Michael: the perversion of love into hate. Nicky = Saigon = imperialized existence in the final stages of decomposition.

Nicky the blank screen on which Michael projects his own identity. A mirror from which Michael *demand*s his identity: "Tell me it's Mike. Tell me it's Mike." A pure projection of Michael's narcissism and solipsistic obsession. Identity-transference so complete that Michael is willing to kill himself via roulette to save himself-as-Nicky. Another no-win situation.

Everything breeds its own negation. Nicky's moment of awareness necessitates the killing of awareness. Recognition of Michael and remembrance of the past make him blow his mind for good. In a loveless world the memory

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of love is unendurable. Self-extinction, self-imperialization the only remaining means of self-assertion.

The final image: Michael holds Nicky's dead head in his hands and views the external image of his own moral death. The imperialist imperialized. Lobotomy as communicable disease. The only thing left to be shared.

### Act V. Clairton Yet Again

A funeral. A visit to the grave. A *post mortem* brunch. A world in which everything worth loving has died and all that remains is the necrophilia of death-worship.

Paradigm: Following the funeral, Michael bends over to bid "Nicky" a final farewell, only to have his own image reflected back by the highly polished casket. Nicky's death reflects everyone else's.

*Last scene.* The embodiment and culmination of film-long negation. Homelessness and the death of roots: mourners gather not at someone's house but at the bar which has been a surrogate home throughout. Death of community: "society" consists only of a small, disconnected group whose insularity surpasses that of the five Westernized Saigonese. Death of marriage and love: Angela and Stevie reduced to a permanent state of shock, totally dependent on their companions; while Michael and Linda repeatedly fail in their efforts to establish visual or verbal contact. Death of communication: *all* the characters — not just Michael and Linda — prove incapable of connecting. All they can do is narcotically chat about the upcoming meal or the weather.

The "solution" to all-pervasive death-in-life: a *God-Bless-America* sing-along. The apotheosis of illusion. The pretense of community, which innures the participants to the real absence of community. An act of total displacement, projection and self-surrogation. The culminative abdication of identity, individuality, authenticity.

*God Bless America.* A compendium of value-perversions. God as Supreme Imperialist. Not a Creator but a Landlord who keeps an eye on his possessions. "Love" as patriotism — mere abstraction and projection — or as the "marriage" of abstractions: a male dominant God and a female dependent America. "Home, sweet home" the Motherland, not a personal, felt reality.

Singalong = reenlistment. Reaffirmation of an imperialized/imperializing world that has robbed Steven of his legs, Nicky of his life, and everyone of his/her humanity.

*Last things.* Couples sit at square tables, paired and facing one another. Russian roulette revisited. Tables obliterate bodies from the waist down, imaging group amputation. A community of "Stevies": spiritual amputees whose roots have been not only severed but dissolved. Their last rite: a thrusting forth of glasses in a toast to Nicky. A replacement for the wedding

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toasts of Act I. More evidence of war triumphant over love. Roulette yet again, with glasses replacing the guns, beer replacing bullets. "To Nicky." A salute to death: the death of the dear. Even the toast succumbs to death — "killed" before completion by a freeze frame. The final one-shot act of devitalization in the film. The conclusive cinematic assertion of life-denying control. The aesthetic triumph of imperialism, stasis, death, in a world wholly subjugate to each.

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— S. M. Crean

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## CAPITAL OF HELL

Arthur Kroker

Madness has become man's possibility of abolishing both man and the world — and even those images that challenge the world and deform man. It is, far beyond dreams, beyond the nightmare of bestiality, the last recourse: the end and beginning of everything. Not because it is a promise ... but because it is the ambiguity of chaos and apocalypse.

Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*

"Master, what gnaws at them so hideously their lamentation stuns the very air?" "They have no hope of death," he answered me.

Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno*

This essay is not constituted as a judgment on *Apocalypse Now* nor on its enigmatic subject-matter, that failed, radical experiment in colonialism: the attempted Capitalization of Vietnam. Judgment, the placing of the interrogatory texts of culture under the sign of History, cedes in this writing to the task of creation and appreciation. The project of this essay is to pass beyond the veil of History: to decipher the text of the film in such a way as to generate a new and more productive theoretical meaning; to transform the ambiguities and nuances of *Apocalypse Now* and, of its object of representation, Vietnam, into the poetry of disquieted intellectual expression.

Everything is suspect. The relation of the film to History; to the representation of social reality, is but the beginning. Our assumption is, at first, that the visual architecture of the film, the techné of the moving image of *Apocalypse Now*, parallels the displaced imagery, the "de-centered" universe, of the colonization of the natural and social landscape of Vietnam. And the Vietnam war itself, the actuality and the metaphor, is taken to be a tragic displacement of moral rage; an iridescent expression of the soured and chaotic energies of the culture of Enlightenment. *Apocalypse Now*, this seemingly

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grotesque and uncontrolled parody of the strutting ambitions of the Western soul, succeeds as a visual narrative of that often symbolic, always methodical, journey into the twilight of madness that was Vietnam. The movie revisits, in visual form, *The Birth of Tragedy*; and in the dialectic of eternal recurrence, in the Vietnam of Sade, in this surrender of the ego to the fluctuating demands of irrationality, in reason that is unmasked as normal psychosis, the film discovers a passageway into a depth exploration of the modalities, the primal, of the overworld of unreason that is the fundamental impulse of Western civilization. In this journey into the psychological terrain of human madness, the film has the special significance of unifying an imaginative tapestry of the central forms of affirmative culture with a poetic articulation of pre-Enlightenment origins of the universe of irrationality. Celebrity and degradation in the sphere of sexuality; the traumatized condition of the colonialist; the vacant morality of the command corporation; the routinization of the moment of the absurd — these, the harmony itself of affirmative culture, are synthesized with the immobility, the passivity, of the Asiatic decomposition of the social and phenomenological reality of the West.

### I

Contemporary film interpretation operates often under the old assumption, the premise of a literate, positive culture, that the *oeuvre* of the film remains an alienated, displaced expression of the social totality that it wishes to interpret. The aesthetic taxonomy of the film is assumed, in this instance, to represent a distanced interrogation of a pre-existent social reality; a cultural reproduction of and response to the sphere of social facticity. This is, of course, the premise of positivistic critique; the vacated epistemology of affirmative culture. Our assumption is that a critique of film which assumes a necessary alienation between the interrogatory and its object, rather than a reflexive relationship between image and text, is unsympathetic to the *ratio*, the *aura*, of the film itself. This would be a style of criticism which does not remain appreciative of the internal complexities of the aesthetic object, or of the parallelisms which exist today between the medium of film and the "object" of the human social process.

Contemporary interpretations of Francis Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* are not exempt in this regard. This film, in the tradition of the serious and eloquent epic, contains a crucible of meaning *and* a definitive style of expression which is not reducible for its interpretation to an analysis of the film as a visual continuation of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, of Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, or more appropriately, of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. The continuities and symbolism in mythic declaration among Conrad, Dante and Coppola are of special significance; but the *form* of the movie, its visual archeology of the

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madness of positive culture, is a unique representation of the chaos, the depth surrealism of the Vietnamization, the maddening night, of the Western soul. Equally, in opposition to *pro forma* declarations that the movie is an evocative statement on the phenomenon of American imperialism, we counter that this politicization of aesthetics is an unproductive intellectual terminus. Imperialism as a concept, as a category of political thought, is less an ending, than a tentative and highly paradoxical opening into a reconstitutive interrogation of the cultural text.

### II

Consider the opening meditation of Willard — the assassin, the “errand boy sent by grocery clerks to collect the bill.” Willard is presented as the quintessence of alienation, and the opening to historical remembrance. The film originates in the devastation of estrangement; and it concludes with premonitions of redemption. In Willard there is the chaos of the great forgetting, of the person in history without History: “I hardly said a word to my wife until I said yes to a divorce.” Willard has abandoned the World, and in this abandonment is the despair of a dying man’s convulsions. He does not speak; he is without public utterance. His task, his mission, is that of the disembodied interlocutor; speech is divorced from biology, from the historical situation. The motif: Willard arches with the pain of an unbearable memory; he shatters the image of himself and in the dance of blood there surfaces the memory of the jungle, of Charlie, of the sounds of madness. Willard is immolated, evacuated of historical relations; he is, in bewilderment, prepared for his other, Kurtz. And Kurtz, the dialectical antinomy of Willard, the madness at the heart of enlightenment, the celebrant *and* negation of instrumental rationality — counter-points the overworld of reason, of Willard, of the Cartesian ego, of the life insurance company. Kurtz stands to Willard as his completion in negation — victim and assassin, memory and reality, nature and culture. Kurtz is emblematic of the confusion of the soul, of the ambiguity of the discipline of the *übermensch* become remorseful; he is the beginning and ending of madness. Willard will find his moment of redemption in the ceremonial sacrifice of the other, of Kurtz. And from the negation of the other, the taming of passion gone mad, there will emerge the beginning of redemption, of *Apocalypse Now*. “Almighty to Street-Gang”. “They will make me a major for this and I’m not even in their army anymore.” Kurtz’s first words to Willard, disembodied, filled with the confused echo of a lost land, of a lost soul: “I watched a snail crawl along the edge of a straight razor ... and survive. That was my dream, my nightmare.” Willard, the moment of meditation completed, is entrapped like Odysseus before the Sirens. The ‘I’ recognizes the return of the repressed; the assassin hears the tortured voice of one who has



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gone before. Kurtz, the celebrant of military vigour, has discovered the dark night, the de-censoring, of the soul; he stands now at the beginning of time, in the time of mythic utterance, far beyond the empty spatializations of modernity, of Capital. Kurtz's discovery of the abyss of moral terror, of the wasteland in "rat's valley" is more than the Corporation, Adorno's "barrack's" society will tolerate. The General remarks to Willard: "His methods are unsound; he has gone beyond the pale of any civilized action." And later, Willard in response to Kurtz will say: "I don't see any method at all." Willard is one with Conrad's Marlow in the judgment on the nihilism of the despairing soul. But Marlow sought solace in the official history of the inspiring lie; Willard is more courageous, he meets, in singularity, the *horror* of the moment of madness, of the terror of the uncensored spirit. Street-Gang disconnects from the "hovering horde" of Almighty.

Coppola is insightful. He understands that Vietnam, this act of machine bestiality, this chorus of "Death from Above", is also an allegory of the journey of the inhabitants of the modern into the suppressed region of moral indeterminacy. Vietnam, the faceless land, the *alter*, is the completion in negation of the radical impulses of western culture.

Vietnam was no aberration. The actuality of colonization, the subordination of the other, of the sacralization of Asia, is the axiomatic sign of the will to power: Vietnam, this spectral vision of Conrad's *nothingness* — the wild landscape which absorbs in anonymity and in silence, without the recognition of hostile response, the fire of patrolling warships; Vietnam, this radical experiment in the possibility of the domination of pure unreason; Vietnam, this promise and peril of the instrumentalism of technology, of the class of Nietzsche's *üntermensch*; Vietnam, the beginning in history of the journey of positive reason into the underworld of unreason, of the passion of no illumination, of the moral predicament which haunted the "best and the brightest" of the agents of instrumental rationality. *Apocalypse Now* begins with the actuality of the seamless horror of the universe of reason; and it moves through allegory and metaphor into the victimization of rationality, into the last flutterings of "dead souls" in immobility and passivity. We return to Plato's cave but this time in the guise of assassins become poets. Vietnam symbolizes the rupturing of the moral censor; the ambiguity and the chaos of modernity is reflected in savagery on the Asian shore.

Willard's journey, therefore, is one of self-interrogation, of autocritique. His mission, "to terminate with extreme prejudice," the command of Kurtz is a passageway in metaphor though the depth surrealism, the rational codifications, of his vacated identity. The Corporation, in embarrassment and in cabal with the colonized — the Vietnamese intelligence operative — considers that it has hired an assassin to 'sanction' Kurtz, that mimicry of itself. The irony remains that the assassin stands at the moment of the inception of his

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mission in the inferiority of mute admiration before the flight of his prey. Reason rests on a coming mutiny of corporate gunmen.

In the tradition of epic, of *The Divine Comedy*, of *Heart of Darkness*, the journey into the underworld of reason, into the beginning of time, is undertaken by river. The Nung River, the River of Styx, flows softly and inevitably to the City of Dis, the Capital of Hell. When Willard approaches the confrontation with Kurtz, he says in the voice of interrogation, in an echo of Conrad's Marlow: "It was as if the boat was being sucked up the river and the water back into the jungle." The journey by river, this confession by metaphor, is interrupted by stations on the way, by meditative 'circles,' each station a visual narrative, an etching, of the moment of the absurd; each a reflection on the alienation in solitude of the colonizer and colonized alike.

Willard's reading of Kurtz's dossier, this secret confession of the story of a soldier "who could have gone for general, but instead decided to go for himself" is matched rhythmically and ironically by stations on the Nung River: stations which build to an irreversible conclusion and which point without remorse to the memory, the future, of Kurtz. To the point of the Do Lung bridge, this vestibule of hell, filled with the cries of anguish of displaced souls, soldiers; there is a dialectical unity in the construction of the film. This dialectic, between event and recollection, between action and reflection, is mediated by Willard's reading of Kurtz's dossier. The film moves in a serial narrative between the exhibition of events external to the boat, the Erebus, and Willard's study of the traces of Kurtz's administrative history. The eclipse of the rational impulse of the method of civilization, is personified by Kurtz's movement beyond the control of the Corporation; and the historical incidents which symbolized the "moral stench" of civilized action are publicized by the layered sequence of stations upon stations. Before Willard meets Kurtz, he will abandon the official text to the river.

The stations of *Apocalypse Now* begin in the normal rationality of the alienation of the distanced spectator, and they terminate in a suffocating chaos. Even in the most oppressive and ironic of circumstances, there is the forced allusion to the rationality, the homeland, of the West. It is only gradually, and then with the decisiveness of death, that the inward journey of Willard abandons the illusion, the *masque*, of the homeland and confronts, on its own, the unpredictable terrain of the moment of unreason. Thus, the journey begins with the mediation of the absurd and the trivial, of the foreign and the familiar, and of leisure and domination. The implication is clear: the reason of instrumentalism is an empty celebration of the rites of formalism. It is not substantial in character. The rational impulse of civilization, this methodology of the domination of the happy consciousness, imposes upon the faceless landscape, upon the modern soul, a schematization of control which is open and unpredictable in its contents. The masters of instrumental reason, the

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colonizers of Capital, are themselves suborned by the grand riddle of domination. In the most grotesque of circumstances, they must protect themselves from the terror, the fear, of the faceless land by overwhelming its appearance with the illusions of the lost homeland. Thus, the curiosity of the cultural accoutrements of America, of the market-place of Capital, in the foreground of actual reports of war. And equally, however histrionic, the pathos of the representation by Kilgore and his subordinates in "Death from Above," of the myth of the frontier, of the mystique of the cavalry, now integrated with the pseudo-romanticism of the *Ride of the Valkyries*. In the early stages of the journey, in its moment of disaffected spectatorship, there is, as in the colonialism of affirmative culture, no meeting of master and bondsman, no explicit ontological union between the oppressor and the oppressed. Positive culture, revealed in its full bestiality by its 'second nature,' war, is a mediation of anonymous categories. The master moves in full consciousness of the theatricality of the gesture of war, of the significance of conceptual terrorism, the arrogance of publicity, in suppressing the moment of rebellion, of possibility, in his audience. In official hostility as spectacle, in the opening act of imposing a terroristic order upon the stranger, the anonymous landscape; the master moves seemingly oblivious to the threatening appearance of the opposition. The opposition, Kilgore's suppressed villagers, are negated in their identity — nullified by their forced appearance as victims on the stage of colonialism. Like extraterrestrial antagonists, Kilgore's ballet of helicopters descends at will upon the land, upon tradition. The helicopter, this symbol of the mediation of the categories of the absurd, of terrorism with leisure, is ordered in its motion by impulse, by opportunities for the inflation of the command ego. The village at the opening to the Nung River, the place of tradition, is but a passive instrument, a challenging means, for the struttings of the "nabobs" of the Corporation; for playing out at the childish level of taunts the oldest game of positive culture, the sado-masochism of the macho id. Willard notes: "Kilgore loved his men." And Kilgore says with sadness and incompleteness: "Some day this war is going to end...."

The political theme of domination as the "ever-identical of the repression," in consciousness of the presence of the other, is nowhere revealed more profoundly than in that spectacle of celebrity and degradation, the visitation of the trio of "Playmates" to the soldiers in the jungle station. There is, at first, the grotesque illusion of celebration: the unexpected arc of light with its ethereal figures which defies the natural rhythm of the Asian night. Hysteria is the theme of the spectacle; this is transportation beyond memory, beyond History. The dance sequence itself is emblematic in affirmative culture of the reduction of eroticism to a masturbatory sexuality. Celebrity performs in the titillating presence of the audience; the function of spectatorship is to give witness to the lure of sexual publicity: untouchable, taunting and perfect. Both

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parties, audience and celebrity, are imprisoned in a dialectic of degradation and incompleteness. The perfection of the act, of the spectacle, lies in the unattainability of the object of desire. Celebrity flees in the hysteria of unfulfilled desire; the promise of sexuality, of energy, once rekindled in memory, is left incomplete. And this intentionally. Surveying the devastation, the litter, of the stage in the bleak light of morning, Willard reminds himself: "Only the Americans could build a place like this in the middle of the jungle. Only the Americans would want to." Capital is de-historicized and de-territorialized.

In the concentration camp, in Vietnam, violence is the tongue of human discourse. The colonizer moves as a stranger, as the embodiment of the aggression of the alien, through the social and natural environment of the oppressed. And the colonizer, for all of his physical superiority, for all of his monopoly of access to technology, is swiftly terrorized; reduced to the silence of fear, to the inner trembling of present shock, by the totality of his solitude, by his isolation as an alien in the homeland of the other, of the dominated. Beyond the encampments of illusion, of the forced surroundings of the pseudo-gemeinschaft, there is the overwhelming threat of aggression in return by the uncontrolled landscape. The personnel of affirmative culture, in order to repress their terror of the possibility of dis-control, must overcome the ontology, the actuality, of the external environment of the dominated, or retreat to the pathetic security of the closed and familiar logic of the metaphor of the boat, of Erebus. In the world of positive culture, of Capital, this schism of oppressor and dispossessed, of aggressor and victim, is mediated only by the "hollowness" of violence, by the emptiness of negation *before* the encounter.

Thus, consider the terror of the Chef, the *saucier* from New Orleans, who repelled by artifice, by the denigration of craft knowledge in the mass productions of the Corporation, disembarks from the boat in an apparently innocuous quest for mangos, for nature. In a poignant scene which summarizes the unbearable strain which is the essence of the psychology of colonialism, the Chef is repulsed by the tiger, the symbol of the fury of the decultured, of the unknown. His vow, uttered in the incoherence of fear, never again "to get off the boat" is broken only twice thereafter: once, to make inevitable by the strain of his terror the massacre of the "boat people"; and, second, in a perfect act of retribution, to lose his head to Kurtz while guarding communications with Almighty.

The terror of the unknown, the emblematic sign of the colonizer reaches a crescendo at the Do Lung bridge. The station of the Do Lung is a visual reproduction of Dante's *Inferno*: dirge-like music, darkness illuminated only at random by explosions, the clamour of disembodied screams; this is an etching in code of the psychology of the wasteland of domination. In the night of the Do Lung, the colonizers huddle together in full knowledge of their unrealized dispensability. Without the comfort of illusion, they are a people, doomed

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survivors, without beginnings or endings; social instrumentalities in an act stripped even of the mystique of purpose, of the comforting lie of ideological justification. The Do Lung bridge, this division between space and time, between History and myth — this affirmation of the presence in futility of the colonizer serves only to be destroyed and rebuilt. Its Sisyphean symbolism is the perfect reproduction of the act of Capital, of the colonialism of Enlightenment. The fate of the soldiers is to be condemned to the limbo of the Do Lung; the aggressor is the victim of his own victory. The production of the bridge is the fatal drama which, given the inevitability of resistance and counter-resistance, ensnares both the master and oppressed in a nightmarish universe of conflict without end. In sum, the reification of the petty imperatives of the will to power — the ceaseless cycle of production and destruction of the bridge — is the abstraction which mediates the actuality of social relations. In the devastation of the *Inferno*, without hope of retreat from rule by abstraction and without possibility of action, the soldiers are reduced to sullenness, to the isolation of solipsistic music as their only connection to the world. Their aggression now is limited to the act of silencing the taunts of the dominated. In the end, the sign of rationality is the mystique of illusion. Willard asks, "Who is the CO?"; and the reply is: "I thought you were." And later, Roach, in awareness of rule by abstraction, answers only an enigmatic yes to Willard's question: "Do you know who is in command here?" In the night of the Do Lung, the command of the Corporation has dissolved; and what is left is the chaos, the confusion, and the bitterness of estrangement that could only issue from a rationalized culture of domination which is, in its moment of genesis, nihilistic. Coppola's vision of the *Inferno*, of the Do Lung bridge, is intended as an expression varying only in intensity but not in kind from the normal sense of life in the culture of modernity. Colonialism is the skin of instrumental reason; and the rationalization of reason is the basic impulse of social normality: the everyday *Inferno* of the West.

Before the station of the Do Lung, Willard had reflected on Kurtz's letter to his son: "The charges (against me) are unjustified. They are, in the circumstances, quite completely insane. Ruthlessness requires clarity; seeing what has to be done. I am beyond their timid, lying morality. I am beyond caring." And Willard had noted in the privacy of self-confession: "I didn't belong on this mission anymore. Kurtz was turning from a target into a goal. I had doubts." After the hellish spectacle of the Do Lung, Willard passes beyond the vacancy of demoralization, beyond the passivity of spectatorship; he assumes the active stance of the self-affirming individual, of command. Willard refuses the temptation of the Chief to halt the mission at that point: the Chief remains a representation of the logic of homeland; he is, through his command of the boat, entangled in the memory of the World. Willard senses the presence of Kurtz, of the time before homeland, of the possibility of discovering the

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foundations of the madness of reason. Willard, like Kurtz, could have remained in the false security of the Corporation; instead he decided to go for himself, for Kurtz.

Beyond the Do Lung, the journey of self-exploration that is the essence of *Apocalypse Now* moves with climactic certitude through the eloquent timing of a dream sequence. The logic of visual presentation, moves from didactic and explosive etchings into a prolonged reverie of myth, of the time of duration. Visibly, the architecture of the moving image is altered in its construction; the presence of haze, purple and yellow, signifies the shattering, the loss of old identities. And it is Lance, far removed from the necessities of memory, from the orthodoxy of History, who is the carrier of the haze. The journey into the beginning of time, into the irrationality at the heart of rationality, has begun in earnest. The historical traces of the culture of Enlightenment are abandoned in quick succession; the inhabitants of the boat are compelled to choose between History and possibility, between obeisance to the old logic of the master culture and the opportunity for the determination of self-knowledge, of self-recognition. The choice is fringed with the fatalism of inevitability. Clean, the sailor who Willard had already prophesized as having "one foot in the grave," dies in the retribution of an anonymous act of hostility; in the background is the equally anonymous and falsely intimate voice of his mother, in the circumstances, the sound of farce, of the unreality of the World.

Later, Phillips, the last link to the homeland, the final witness to the logic of the falsely real, will die, like the native steersman in Conrad, by the crudity of a spear. Phillips will have refused to enter into his future; to undertake the journey of self-interrogation. And thus, his hostility to, and fear of, the spectre of the unknown, of irrationality, will deny him entry into Kurtz's compound. Willard's premonition of the promise of Kurtz is confirmed: "Whatever was going to happen, it wasn't going to be the way they called it back in Na Trang." And, in a later soliloquy: "Part of me was afraid of what I would find. I knew the risks ... What I felt the most, more than fear, was the desire to confront him."

The transformation of the interrogative mood of Willard, from fear to anticipation, from bewilderment to self-determination, is matched by an abrupt transformation in the structure of the musical score of the movie. The harmonic structure of the background environment of sound is swiftly resolved into an almost wistful and severe ballad; in the *coda* of sound Coppola signals an inevitable and determinate resolution, a resolution *prior* to the encounter with Kurtz, in the thematic edifice of the journey into the heart of darkness. Homeland has been abandoned; the familiar terrain of the historicity of culture has been transcended in favour of interpellation with nature. In the symbolism of the dream-like navigation of the Erebus — navigation which passes silently, as in Conrad beyond the wreckage of technology — the journey into the inter-

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pretative centre of human madness only now begins. And in the unexpected serenity of the beginning, in Willard's meditation of peace, there is announced the conclusion, in redemption, in affirmation, of the film.

The reverie of the moment, of the arrival at Kurtz's compound, is broken by the raucous sounds of the harlequin: "It's alright. It's alright. It's all been approved." But what is approved is the inevitable denouement of Kurtz, the sacrifice in negation of the other, of Kurtz. The story is completed before the moment of its formal conclusion. Willard's goal, the synthesis of the rational and the irrational, the transvaluation of good and evil, has already been achieved before the moment of encounter. The desire for contemplative knowledge of the whole, for the mediation *and* transcendence of past and future was achieved by Willard in the act of anticipation, in the retrospective and prospective interrogation of the stations in the journey through the tempest of the modern. The suspense of the anticipation of Kurtz is magnificent illusion; an effective de-centering of the main protagonist of the movie, Willard. In Kurtz, Coppola presents, even records, the substantial and failed presence of that other polarity of the modern era, the moral impulse which in losing the arrogance of the right to historical judgment also abandons itself to the terror of all judgment. Kurtz is the man before the mast; the being who has passed beyond the false domain of ideology into existential knowledge of the moment of the *horror* — the impossibility of acting with the past certitude of reason and the necessity of judging stripped of the mask of History. The confrontation of Kurtz and Willard is purposely anti-climatic; this is the completion of an inevitable negation and synthesis, not the beginning of knowledge. In the act of anticipation, Willard has already become Kurtz's saviour as assassin; the image of Buddha is but a premonition of redemption.

The mediation of Kurtz and Willard, of radical doubt and the agony of the godhead, takes place in the mob society of the compound. Willard observes: "Everything that I saw told me that he had gone insane... It smelled like slow death in there ... malaria, nightmares." In their first, forced confrontation, Willard confesses to Kurtz: "They told me you had gone totally insane ... and that your methods are unsound ... [but] I don't see *any* method at all."

But Willard is mistaken. There is method; the method of purification, of purging the last traces of the historical memory of reason. In rapid and chaotic sequence, there occurs the decapitation of the Chef, the disconnection of Willard from communication with Almighty, his imprisonment and instruction by the harlequin, by the sonorous notes of Eliot's "The Hollow Men." Surfacing from the dream, the nightmare, of purification, Willard says of Kurtz: "He broke from them ... and then he broke from himself." And then, in the eloquence of sympathy, "I have never seen a man so broken up."

The solitude of Kurtz, his utter imprisonment in the non-being of savagery, symbolizes the abandonment of History, of homeland. His direct

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experience, beyond the protective artifice of the Corporation, of the ambiguity of good and evil, of the inevitable symmetry of reason and unreason, of the rationality of the moment of the mad, secures for him the fate of life with no illusions, of existence with no false certitudes. Kurtz, the wanderer in the depths of the *Inferno*, suffers the curious agony of acting without justification; of aspiring, in the absence of a serial narrative of good and evil, to the absolutism of the godhead. But his, unlike Enlightenment, is absolutism without the saving grace of faith. And in opposition to the Corporation, it is godhead without method. Kurtz has passed beyond the "ruminations" of history; he is the being in radical flight from memory. And his flight, his passage into the durational time of myth, of the "jungle", is the beginning and ending of the self-reflection of affirmative culture. His is the *ratio* in madness, the imminent negation, which constitutes the furthest positive limit, the horizon, of the world of instrumental reason, of the sphere of the abstractions of administrative rationality.

In melancholia, in the passion of resignation, Kurtz says to Willard: "You have a right to kill me. But you have no right to judge me... It is judgment that defeats us." Judgment, the substitution of cultural orthodoxy for self-knowledge, the moral repression of the relativity of the good, is the political faculty which subverts the critical self-consciousness of the colonizer. But then, at the "heart of darkness" of positive culture is the inescapable secret, the mystery of ontology, that the artifice, the method, of the West is but a manifestation of a more general flight from the life of moral indeterminacy, from the mediation of will and truth. Beyond artifice, beyond method, Kurtz has yielded to the primal, the autochthonous, of the modern era; he has subordinated the category of judgment, of reason, to the category of the pure act of will. And his movement beyond the Corporation, beyond self-identity, began with the "illumination" of the will of the dominated. His narration of the "genius, the will ... pure, complete, crystalline" of the colonized leads to the inevitable conclusion: "Horror has a face and you must make a friend of it and (of) terror ... they are friends ... or enemies to be feared." And this, the confession of Kurtz, then concludes with the fateful misunderstanding of the experience of the modern, of the possibility and impossibility of the mediation of colonialism: "We need men who are moral and who have a primordial instinct to kill, without failing, without passion, without judgment." But Kurtz, this most profound expression of the logic of the Corporation, knows that the union of truth and will, the primal, is accessible only to the dominated: "They were stronger than we were ... they fought with their hearts; they were filled with love."

And so, Kurtz's journey — a journey beyond method, beyond self, a journey into the mystery of the moralized will — terminates in the fatigue of incompleteness. Kurtz has taken the self-confession of Enlightenment, of positive



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culture, to its most elegant and pathetic moment of expression: a moment of expression which is as poignant in its melancholy simplicity as it is functional in its presentation. In the end, the vision of the *horror*, of moral terror, of that knowledge and will which is necessary for the recovery of affirmative culture is blocked from re-entry into History, into the sphere of judgment. Kurtz is condemned, by the Corporation *and* by the dominated, to the wasteland of knowledge without possibility of actualization, of self-confession without expiation. His is the fate of existing in the limbo, the void, between nature and culture, between reason and passion, between praxis and immobility. Kurtz, this alien in the Asian homeland, this symbol of the bittersweetness of moral self-knowledge, cannot go forward into nature, into the social landscape of the colonized; and he cannot return to the universe of method. His is the exile, the pathetic godhead, of the self-victimization of positive reason. In a last plea, Kurtz asks of History, of judgment, only remembrance by his son and the opportunity to die a soldier.

Willard responds to desperation: the assassin is, in the end, the agent, if not of redemption, then of understanding the terrible solitude, the non-being, of one who in achieving self-consciousness of the limits of reason is abandoned to the imperatives of History. The Corporation wills the extinction of Kurtz, this radical memory in advance of the denigration of its most moral impulse into the paralysis of despair. And the jungle, the "other" of the colonized, wills the death of Kurtz: the union of will and truth can, in the end, not transcend the anonymous categories of oppression. Willard speaks: "Everybody wanted me to do it; him most of all ... he was waiting for me to take the pain away. Even the jungle wanted him dead and that's who he took his orders from anyway." In a final gesture to the presence of *alter*, of nature, Willard immerses himself in the water of the Nung River; in baptism, he is prepared as the agent, not of murder, but of sacrifice.

### III

Like its object of representation, the failed colonization of Asia, *Apocalypse Now* contains only the most enigmatic and indecisive of conclusions. Kurtz, symbolic of the dissipation of the will to the militarization of existence, is dead; but the social apparatus of the Corporation, of Almighty, remains in place. The institutions of History, the social organization of bestiality, endure beyond the will to life of its occupants, beyond the demoralization of failed ambitions to human domination. Hegemony is the property only of the mediations of the abstract, of the rules of motion of the *forms* of social oppression. And Willard, symbolic of critical self-consciousness, of self-determination, survives in such a way as to achieve moral preeminence; to rise to the actual command of Erebus. But his survival is without historical possibility; it is emblematic of reason

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negated before its moment of public utterance. In the end, Willard is the carrier of the manuscript — the ambiguous legacy of Kurtz; and he is the protective guide of Lance that figure who, in simplicity, oscillates without reflection between complete immersion in the cultures of America and Asia. Willard, the moment of sacrifice completed, drops the sword; and he refuses the godhead of the mob. But he is transported beyond the Inner Station, beyond the City of Dis, in the command of Erebus. In the end as in the beginning, Willard is trapped within the role of the narrator of memory; in an endless cycle of self-confession, of remorse in the remembrance of the encounter.

Thus, the end is in the beginning; and the beginning is one of torment without hope, of desire without satiation, of memory without forgiveness. Willard, this embodiment of the radical futility of self-confession, of reason in History, represents in the moment of the unveiling and termination of this journey in self-confession to the Inner Station, the despair of the story-teller who is condemned to repeat in speech, but never in activity, the memory of a better, yet unrealized, historical possibility. And thus, beyond the inevitable historical regress, beyond the public experience of a failed colonialism, there occurs on the part, not only of Willard, but of the citizens of the centre polis, as narrators, the bitter curiosity of redemption without hope, of critical self-reflection without exit into History. *Apocalypse Now* reflects, in its cinematic reproduction of social estrangement and self-confession, in the cycle of the ever-repeatable memory of Willard, the one, determinate instruction of the colonization of Vietnam: this was an imperialism, an arrogance of empire, that even for the most moral and savage of its perpetrators produced only the indwelling of reflection without any object of historical representation. In the image of *Apocalypse Now*, the self-confession of Vietnam, the loss of faith in the will to believe, continue in the quiet and desperate turbulence of the political memory of the colonizer. The people of the agent of colonialism are trapped in the ambiguity of that classical polarity of forgetfulness and shame: the *philosophical* falsehood represented by the erasure of the memory of failed aspirations on the part of the imperial apparatus; and the *historical* falsehood represented by the bitterness of self-interrogation without social response on the part of its survivors. Between amnesia and confession, between will and reason, beyond demoralized power and the futility of broken faith, that is the lesson of the twilight of Enlightenment, of Vietnam as the *fin de siècle* of Western ambitions, of the cinematic *oeuvre* of *Apocalypse Now*. Ultimately, in the moving image and in the historical event, the Capital of Hell is dislodged from its place in geography, in actual violence, and it is reconstructed in the darkness, in the almost nihilistic despair, of the broken faith of the colonizer. Vietnam today, as is intimated in *Apocalypse Now*, is the symbolic embodiment in the metaphysics of Western public life, of bad conscience, of an

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undeniable fracturing of the solipsisms of official history from private recognition of the almost inevitable decline of Western civilization, of Capital. Redemption without hope and without illusion is the only remaining *coda* of the City of Dis.

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## THE USE AND ABUSE OF NIETZSCHE

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Werner J. Dannhauser, *Nietzsche's View of Socrates*, Ithaca: Cornell University, 1974, pp. 283.

David B. Allison, ed., *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, New York: Dell, 1977, pp. 274 + xxviii.

Tracy B. Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1975, pp. 357 + xiii.

Nietzsche is fascinating and troublesome in the extreme — from the unwavering confidence, the brashness and beauty of his style, to the vanishing centre of his thinking. Interpreters take on a task of inordinate difficulty — aggravated by a legacy of Nietzsche-abuse and Nietzsche-idolatry.

The task of interpretation is little aided by an awareness of the failures and excesses of others. Nietzsche's texts are notorious for their illusive and often contradictory straightforwardness. What emerges from each of the books here under consideration is a slightly reverent caution, appearing in the first pages of each book in the form of warnings to the reader and self-imposed rules for interpretive cleanliness. Neither reader nor interpreter is immune to being swept away by Nietzsche-the-artist, missing the confrontation with Nietzsche-the-philosopher. Allison takes pains to make it clear that Nietzsche's texts are not "things." They have no resting point, they move; they are metaphorical, relational, and above all do not lend themselves to reformulation within traditional metaphysical frameworks (pp. xiv-xv). Strong gives his subject the benefit of an open mind by assuming the coherence of Nietzsche's thought as a whole. One can claim that "one knows one's way about" in Nietzsche "when all elements one encounters make sense" (p. 5). And Dannhauser wishes to achieve the ideal of understanding the philosopher "as he understands himself, as he wishes to be understood" (p. 16). But while Allison and Strong see in Nietzsche's style a demonstration of his success, Dannhauser treats it primarily as an obstacle to be overcome.

Dannhauser's *Nietzsche's View of Socrates* takes a traditional approach to the text. Dannhauser is convinced that a thorough documentation of Nietzsche's references to Socrates, placed within the context of the work in which they occur, will solidify our understanding of Nietzsche. Beyond this, his interpretive aim is to place Nietzsche in direct confrontation with traditional

philosophy by requiring Nietzsche to *speak* to Socrates. Indeed, Dannhauser seems to intend his book as a device through which Nietzsche can be drawn into a Platonic dialogue. He understands Socrates to be a great philosopher with whom Nietzsche "actually quarrels" over "the role, status, and limits of nature and reason" (p. 13) — a demonstration of an *agon* that spans the ages.

Using this interpretive device, Dannhauser seeks to delineate the fundamental philosophical alternatives in terms of which Nietzsche's criticism of the ancients might be discussed. He places, for example, the poetic against the theoretical, the human against the animal, the natural world against the created world, and creation against negation. Nietzsche fares poorly: although Nietzsche is a wise, eloquent and provocative opponent for Socrates on these issues, Socrates emerges unscathed. The true nature of Nietzsche's failure, Dannhauser suggests, resides in the fact that he could not successfully resolve the tension between the creative component of human reason and "objective truth" (p. 263). The traditional philosophy of Socrates and Plato, he points out, "was not faced with this problem because it took its bearing by nature, which set limits to man's power and assured the existence of challenges to which he could respond" (p. 264).

Apart from questions concerning the plausibility of neo-Platonist philosophy today, Dannhauser fails to give an adequate account of Nietzsche in two crucial respects.

First, the significance of Nietzsche's attack upon Socrates is seen to be primarily an attack upon Platonic metaphysics. Thus when Dannhauser formulates the problem in terms of Platonic alternatives, it has little bearing on Nietzsche's problem of nihilism in the Christian-moral tradition, to which Nietzsche related his thinking about Socrates. Nietzsche's understanding of nihilism ties it *inextricably* to the appearance of Platonic metaphysics. This certainly means that any attempt to interpret Nietzsche through *a priori* recourse to the standards of traditional metaphysics is sure to miss his problem of the emergence of nihilistic consciousness in the Christian-bourgeois world. Instead, Dannhauser implicitly substitutes another conception of nihilism: he seems to understand nihilism as the situation in which traditional reason does not obtain. At the extreme, Dannhauser provides us with the choice between a transcendental orientation towards rationality, or the void.<sup>1</sup> Within this framework, Nietzsche loses, but without having been understood.

Second, Dannhauser's exegetical device has the effect of erasing what is most interesting about Nietzsche's view of Socrates: his historical approach. Nietzsche sought not only to use Socrates as exemplary of a manner of thinking that survives in a multiplicity of forms — one of which is nihilism — but also to explain the genesis of the historical "type," Socrates. For Nietzsche, Socrates can be understood as a sign of emergent and context-bound human needs in addition to being an articulator of philosophical propositions that can be

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criticized as things in themselves. The historical Socrates gains meaning when his speech, vision and desires are placed in dynamic confrontation with existing culture, needs and desires. Without this dimension, Nietzsche's view of Socrates is unintelligible. But Dannhauser's approach to Nietzsche's Socrates rests upon the methodical denial of the historical-explanatory dimension of Nietzsche's thinking. "In the interest of understanding Nietzsche," Dannhauser writes, "I shall try to overlook those passages in which Nietzsche insists that thinkers can be understood only in their historical or psychological context" (p. 18). Dannhauser continues by equating historical context with psychological reduction, apparently unable to distinguish a psychological exercise like Erik Erikson's *Young Man Luther* from *On the Genealogy of Morals*, where Nietzsche sees the philosopher as positing values which gain their meaning from many levels of internal and external conditions.<sup>2</sup> For Dannhauser, Nietzsche's problem of truth in history reduces to the problem of the psychologized atom — the philosophizing subject — where expression and belief no longer appear as the real power of signification in a collective context, as they do for Nietzsche. "If there is no objective truth in the sense maintained by traditional philosophy," Dannhauser claims, "then philosophies become the subjective expressions of philosophers" (p. 207). From here, it is one short leap to the polarity of Platonic reason or mere subjectivity — "nihilism." Dannhauser's oversight verges on arrogance when — having dismissed consideration of the "historical" Nietzsche — he concludes: "The 'historical sense,' which Nietzsche was so proud to possess and which he characterized as one of the proudest possessions of modernity, does not necessarily lead to an understanding of the past that does justice to it" (p. 273). Dannhauser's claims to good faith are belied not only by his attempt to displace Nietzsche into a metaphysical frame of reference that Nietzsche saw as problematic, but also by occasional deficiencies in scholarship.<sup>3</sup>

Nietzsche requires active interpretation, but certainly not on the basis of assumptions he spent his life criticizing. Allison's *The New Nietzsche* is more encouraging in this respect. His collection of essays proves to be a most interesting addition to our understanding of Nietzsche, introducing the English-speaking world to styles of interpretation inspired by French structuralism, Heidegger, and even Christianity itself. Heidegger's essay "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" is included in the volume, together with essays by Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze (two pieces). The less well-known authors — Michel Haar, Alphonso Lingus, Pierre Klossowski, Maurice Blanchot, Jean Granier (two pieces), Eric Blondel, Sarah Kofman, Henri Birault, Thomas J.J. Altizer and Paul Valadier — are likely to be received either with pleasant surprise or dismay by those imbued with the Anglo-analytic tradition. Many of the authors have previously done extensive work on Nietzsche, including Heidegger, Deleuze, Klossowski, Granier, Kofman and Valadier.<sup>4</sup> Allison has

arranged these essays so they move from broader attempts to deal with the major themes in Nietzsche — language, will to power, master and slave morality, nihilism, Zarathustra, the overman and eternal return — to finer examinations of philosophical issues and less traditional ways of dividing Nietzsche's texts for purposes of discussion. The essays are often difficult, requiring a solid grounding in Nietzsche's thought. But the effort of reading them is rewarding. Allison has maintained a high level of discourse, with very few disappointments.

The philosophical unity of the essays is constructed around Heidegger's question, "what is metaphysics?" Nietzsche is not seen to embody the denial of traditional modes of rationality, but rather the profound self-consciousness of their inadequacy. Western metaphysics no longer comprehends who we are. Our language and thought no longer correspond to our life-world. The "very validity of our contemporary forms of intelligibility" is called into question, precisely because nihilism is comprehended as a loss of the relationship between thought and meaning (p. ix).

Following recent French and German philosophical trends, Allison's essays tend to find the focal point of Nietzsche's critique of metaphysics in his awareness of the ways in which the world is constructed by language and symbolization. Nietzsche's critique of transcendent reason is seen to be a critique of the false authority commanded by dogmas frozen into thought and language. These essays see language as having a transcendent dimension, but a transcendence not ultimately grounded in the formal truth of either the idea or of logic, even though language exhibits a conceptual-logical structure. Rather, the transcendence of language is social and conventional: its authority is the by-product of historically-sedimented social relations. And the language products of collective activity always mediate individual thoughts, meaning that we cannot regard language as merely the reflection of some fundamental material or historical substratum. There is no fixed order against which to judge the meaning of symbols, signs and their formal rules of coherence because the meaning of a particular sign or set of rules is both contextual and relational. What Nietzsche means when he claims that all human activity is "interpretation" is that language is an irreducible medium within the development of human history.

To claim that "man and world, word and thing both belong to the order of the signifier, the *only* order of things" (p. xix) however, is not to say that Nietzsche identifies the world and the signification of the world in the same sense that Hegel identified subject and object in *Geist*: "the word never expresses an identical meaning, much less an identical object" (p. xv). It is exactly what escapes signification in history that allows language to be creative in relation to the world. For Nietzsche, there is "a more comprehensive, stranger, richer world beyond the surface, an abysmally deep ground behind every

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ground....”’ But the world can also escape signification in such a way that the creative power of language is lost. In nihilism, the language of convention loses its adequacy to our life-world and thereby loses its ability to bestow meaning. The primary concern of the essays in Allison’s volume is to understand the “crisis of meaning” in terms of the inadequacy of our inherited languages.

Strong’s *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration* is broad and synthetic in its approach, intending a unified and systematic interpretation.<sup>6</sup> Strong draws heavily on the French interpretations of Nietzsche, and provides many interesting comparisons to Wittgenstein. His main concern, however, centers on questions one rarely asked of Nietzsche: “what is history?” and — more precisely — what does Nietzsche mean by “the history of nihilism”? These carry Strong through the formal question of metaphysics to Nietzsche’s question of what is signified by certain ways of thinking about the world, how new ways of life emerge in relation to these modes of thought, and how we are to conceive of our own discourse within this history. Thus Strong’s project is continuously intersected by the formulations in Allison’s collection, but no single essay attempts what Strong is attempting, with the possible exception of Deleuze’s essay “Active and Reactive.”

To ask the right questions is a considerable advance over past Nietzsche interpretation. In this sense, Strong’s project is refreshing compared to (as Allison puts it in his preface) the “pointless series of over-simplifications, biographical anecdotes, or convenient summaries” that has unfortunately formed a “tradition to which the English-speaking audience has long ago become accustomed” (p. x).

Strong claims that Nietzsche’s foremost problem is to understand the impasse of western society, to make “all of human history a problem” (p. 18). For Nietzsche, what makes history a problem is the present crisis of nihilism. Strong seeks to understand the history of nihilism by first reconstructing Nietzsche’s thinking about the possibility of moving beyond nihilism in thought, and then by focussing upon the logic of the historical development of nihilism in relation to the Christian-moral interpretation of the world. By centering on the structural necessity exhibited within the language of morality — that is, the historical power it commands through its pervasive and limiting character — Strong attempts to think about the real power of language in history without crude reductions.

To construct this history, Strong emphasizes, is not simply to discover what has been, but to do a *genealogy* of present values and meanings: to construct a past in such a way that we are informed about the causality of what seems most problematic in the present. Strong treats Nietzsche’s project as a kind of high-powered practical reason which takes account of the fact that we *are* the history of negative significations, and works through present significations by examining the necessity at work in their origins.



Our moral world, for example, is an irreducible aspect of our historical development. It is "not epiphenomenal to the perceiver, to be cast off or changed like a suit of clothing. It is rather our very flesh..." (p. 49). The transcendent signification of moral valuations constitutes our thinking; more — it constitutes our *psychology*. But it must now be seen as questionable because these valuations are experienced as contrary to our life-needs. Thought is driven beyond the stasis of dead and worn-out metaphors by the experience of their inadequacy which is called nihilism. And while Nietzsche's genealogy maintains its objectivity in relation to the experience of nihilism, the possibility for a truly political practice depends upon the strength of the genealogical interpretation.

# I

Two interrelated problems pervade these books on Nietzsche. First, did Nietzsche successfully question the tradition of western metaphysics which bases its thinking upon sets of ideal correspondences between thought and reality, word and idea, word and world? If not, Nietzsche's failure may be instructive. If so, we are faced with a task more difficult than criticism, for to understand what is novel and unique in Nietzsche is to understand how Nietzsche reconceives our existence in the world without relying upon the dogmas of metaphysics and without finishing in nihilism.

Second, if the metaphysical point of view is both definitive of nihilism and also intrinsic to us by virtue of our language, psychology and history, and yet this point of view is no longer adequate to "the world we live in and are,"<sup>7</sup> then what could emerge from this disjunction?

Dannhauser is certainly right in this sense to challenge Nietzsche's view of reason in traditional philosophy. But since he does not look beyond the ancient conception of "truth," he cannot comprehend the meaning of the impasse of metaphysics. If Dannhauser fails to enter Nietzsche's universe, Strong and Allison do so willingly. They understand that reason in the traditional sense becomes irrational when it loses its relation to its human context. This is not to say that traditional reason is untrue in some absolute sense. It would be much better to say that it is incomplete and it ultimately turns its incompleteness into unreason by demanding faith in itself where it encounters difficulties. Nietzsche never *refutes* traditional reason. Instead, he transforms it by showing its truth-value to depend upon its origins in life-activity. Nietzsche treats Platonic truth in much the same way Hegel treated "understanding" (*Verstand*): as one-sided and therefore *relatively* true. It is true only in relation to some more multi-faceted and complete apprehension of the world.<sup>8</sup> Thus Nietzsche asks: "To what extent can the truth endure incorporation (*Einverleibung*)? That is the question; that is the experiment."<sup>9</sup> Only if reason moves beyond

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metaphysical explanations of things that function as self-imposed, mythical limitations to thought can it truly serve human existence. The critique, for Nietzsche, only begins with the awareness that metaphysical reason has no *a priori* claims to the eternal nature of the world.

The claim that Nietzsche does, in fact, retain a conception of the world that does not exclude the past advances of the intellect can be further clarified: Nietzsche rejects the notion of the world as a Platonic world, where the "truth" of the world implies both the "good" and the "eternal." But he retains "truth" in the sense that the world exhibits objective necessities which may be conceptualized in an interest-directed manner. In accordance with this, Nietzsche's philosophy makes positive use of a kind of Kantian "thing in itself" to guard against irrationalistic or romantic deflations of the necessary world.<sup>10</sup> His criticism of metaphysics is directed not so much at the metaphysical attempt to secure the concept of objective necessity as a *condition of practice*, but at those aspects (including various notions of "the real world") that over time served to obscure the world by imposing categories having the character of wish-fulfillment: "The total character of the world ... is in all eternity chaos — in the sense not of a lack of necessity but a lack of order, arrangement, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever other names there are for our aesthetic anthropomorphisms."<sup>11</sup> Nietzsche believed that the metaphysical world-view — taken now in its broadest sense to include the Christian-moral world-view — had introduced into history a fundamental disjunction between the everyday world of experience that serves as a condition of meaning, and the way meanings are constituted at the symbolic-linguistic level. Over historical time, a way of thinking that achieves meanings at the cost of projection away from experiences (like suffering) inevitably becomes hollow, simply because this kind of symbolic-linguistic universe lacks responsiveness to changes in experience. It becomes a thought-trap, introducing into history a symbolic-linguistic necessity that is very different from all other kinds of necessity.

Nietzsche in fact considers some tension between thought and action to be *definitive* of the possibility for human progress. But where the tension becomes a disjunction, where a manner of thought can no longer comprehend the experiences engendered by history, a crisis of meaning arises that appears to be entirely the result of the inadequacy of the inherited symbolic-linguistic universe.<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche called this disjunction "European nihilism."

## II

It is around the conception of symbolic-linguistic necessity that Strong's book revolves and where he is most innovative in his understanding of Nietzsche. Strong understands the emergence of both the Christian-moral interpre-

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tation of the world and modern nihilism in terms of the undermining and shifting of the linguistic predicates of social order. In his historical orientation, Strong sees in Nietzsche's concern with the Greeks both his "laboratory" — as it were — for study of this process, and his metaphor for cultural health as an historical possibility.

In order to grasp Nietzsche's conception of symbolic-linguistic necessity in early Greek society, Strong introduces a valuable distinction between ideas and beliefs which are merely *unquestioned* in a particular culture, and those which are *unquestionable* in terms of that culture (p. 24). The significance of Strong's distinction amounts to this: social actions are structured by, and take their meaning from, determinate structures of ideas, beliefs, symbols and languages. Actions occur within horizons of vision, to use a more Nietzschean formulation. *Unquestionable* beliefs are those which form a "system of unconditioned predicates which make a thought or a form of life possible" (p. 25). The horizon of a people, a class, a culture not only is an essential aspect of the stability of a society — a stability which obtains because certain perspectives are beyond thought — but that horizon solidifies this stability by collectively providing the *value* or *meaning* of a certain kind of existence. The individual's needs and desires are symbolically mediated by the cultural-linguistic horizon. This horizon is both internal — manifested in the ways in which individuals come to need and desire things — and external, in that the specificity of a need is known to the individual only through the "system of unconditioned predicates."

This "system of unconditioned predicates" has shifted dramatically once in history — in the transition to the Christian-moral interpretation of the world — and is now shifting again, due to the split nature of Christian-moral language itself. Why the Christian-moral "system of unconditioned predicates" must ultimately shift is clear both in Strong's analysis, and in Eric Blondel's essay "Life as Metaphor" (in Allison's collection). Blondel graphically points out that in civilization man himself becomes "metaphorical" in the sense that the internalized language of denial becomes a split between body, embodiment, and thought: "The (cultural) 'nature' of man is thus established as nonnatural, since it is based on distance and scission: language and thought thus appear as epidemic surfaces that like our skin, both conceal and exhibit the vicissitudes our bodies undergo" (p. 151). Language becomes a "fetish" (Strong, p. 72) in the sense that it is both agent and manifestation of the "emptying-out" of the body into detached self-understanding. The origin of Christian-moral language in this dual repression and sublimation of the body makes man "sick," or, in other Nietzschean words, "human, all-too-human." Blondel notes that "man" is born through the "body's symptomatic *conversion* into language" (p. 152). Thus Strong may correctly claim that by "making language a problem, Nietzsche gradually leads himself back to the

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position where men themselves become the problem" (p. 70). Because Nietzsche sees language as a kind of practical and dynamic perversion and inversion, it can be taken as a sign or symptom which points to certain kinds of life, to certain kinds of beings. The critique of language becomes the critique of the developed social-psychology of a people (Strong, p. 92) by passing beyond itself to *affective need*.<sup>13</sup>

The shift in the linguistic predicates of social order in the modern crisis of nihilism can be seen to be the result of a broken relationship between Christian-moral language and developed affective need, between the individual and social-universal components of meaning.<sup>14</sup> When universal modes of understanding do not permit the expression of individual experience, a kind of "legitimation crisis" develops, growing into a potentially explosive social situation. Strong tries to understand this as a crisis both of rationality and of psychological motivation.

On the epistemological level, the internal logic of the (moral) desire for truth works itself out as a "gradual undermining of that which might serve as a basis for truth" (p. 76, de-emphasized). Identity theory reveals to itself its formal inconsistency. For example, the traditional identity postulate "God" is unmasked as a fiction by the drive to truth implied in this postulate.

On the psychological level, there is a disjunction between the individual's experience and the cultural account of this experience. It is manifest in the excessive weight of guilt and bad conscience resulting from the increasing internalization of the collective "system of rewards and punishments" established through Christian morality (p. 106).

Thus the individual's vision loses its groundings — its horizon — and language as the collective repository of meaning loses its relation to what individual social actors require for the self-understanding of action. That collective language metaphors are "worn-out" — and show themselves to be worn-out by their static, reified quality — appears in the experience of nihilism. Importantly, Strong has grasped that Nietzsche attempted nothing less than the construction of history in terms of a dialectic of existence and the meaningful structuring of this existence in and through the social horizons of speech and language. This places Nietzsche squarely within discussions which today are increasingly interested in the relations between language and social change.<sup>15</sup>

But why moral language should become worn-out, why reification of moral teachings should inevitably appear, indeed, why the inverted language of the Christian-moral interpretation should appear at all in history remains a difficulty for Strong's analysis and unfortunately prevents his project from fulfilling its promise.

Strong devotes a chapter to analyzing the problem of the origins of Christian-moral language in terms of the historical actors, Socrates and Christ. Socrates and Christ were both great "immoralists"; they taught against con-

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vention and custom, exploding pre-existing social horizons and becoming extraordinary social actors in the movements from mythology to rationality, and from the collective morality of custom (*die Sittlichkeit der Sitte*) to individual morality (*Moralität*). For Strong, Nietzsche's Socrates and Christ are figures who  *speak*, who  *teach*, who  *name* things differently. But they are individuals in history who name or teach wrongly because their personalities were "flawed" (p. 109). Their lack of self-understanding was exhibited in incorrect teaching and the resulting idolization and reification of teaching into stagnant doctrine. Strong relates these errors to a "genealogy" of the great individual's psychology in the attempt to understand the material "soil" from which the errors grew.

But the "soil" from which human valuations spring is not, for Nietzsche, merely individual depth psychology, as the logic of Strong's interpretation seems to suggest. Nietzsche does not explain the fatal dynamic of nihilism simply in terms of the cultural projections of powerful, but flawed personalities. Strong's interpretation seems to have moved the idealistic locus of historical explanation from individual consciousness of nature to the collective and individual unconscious in the structuralist sense, without really showing why Nietzsche thought nihilism would necessarily emerge in the modern world. Christ might have made a mistake, but this is not sufficient to explain the real power of the Christian-moral interpretation of the world.

Allow me to elaborate this criticism. I believe Strong has successfully identified that aspect of historical necessity that results from the failure of signification to maintain its relations to its human origins. Strong's position is that something about the *content* of a particular language masks the fact that this language is only a *created* transcendence, and not an ontological limitation. Human actors needlessly operate within paradigms that constrict consciousness of themselves as actors. So far, so good. But because Strong does not develop Nietzsche's way about thinking of a necessary world which is *not* language, because he traces all historical necessity to the human act of interpretation, we could be left with the very un-Nietzschean conclusion that if we could simply recognize our significations and languages as creations, we could achieve perfect freedom by simply creating new ones with positive content. Nietzsche's insights do not end with the criticism of language as a prison-house. History results in the naming of things, but the naming of things does not in itself account for history. Strong has not adequately dealt with Nietzsche's fundamental problem of *why* particular ways of naming things endure in history to the exclusion of other possibilities.<sup>16</sup>

### III

Strong's difficulty is that he does not fully develop the relationship between language and human need in Nietzsche's work. Language, although it consti-

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tutes the self-consciousness of need and is therefore creative of the particular way in which a need is formed, understood and acted upon, is not the sole constituent of need. Nietzsche does not locate the genesis of a historical crisis solely within the right or wrong of a collective self-understanding, but attempts to relate language to the conditions escaping signification. Thus Nietzsche retains the ideas of *instinct* and *social coercion* — two crucial embodiments of will to power — as the “other” of language, which enter into the constitution of history as a dialectic of power and the subsumption of the experiences of power under categories of meaning. I believe a more thorough examination of the role of the concept of will to power in these aspects is required not only for the plausibility of Nietzsche’s philosophy as a whole, but to see the ways in which Nietzsche is interesting for social theory.

Dannhauser’s book provides no useful material in this regard. It merely dismisses the will to power as a metaphysics that denies metaphysics. Strong thinks more seriously about the will to power as *pathos*, as history, and as a principle of interpretation. But the consideration Strong gives to the topic occurs only in the second-to-last chapter, and is far from adequate. If Strong had considered the will to power earlier, in conjunction with thoughts on language, his project might have reached further than it does.

Nietzsche’s thinking in fact *requires* the idea of will to power in order to conceive the all-pervasive nature of language without exorcizing the necessary element of *difference* between word and world, between human need and the conceptualization of need. What needs to be understood is how Nietzsche thought he could speak of that which is signified, that which language responds to, without falling back into either naive realism or idealistic metaphysics. Could Nietzsche’s conception of “will to power” find a kind of provisional objectivity of a different nature? Can will to power be seen as an example of the non-codifiable metaphors to which Deleuze refers in his excellent article “Nomad Thought,” wherein Nietzsche’s metaphors are seen to require a moment of objectivity in the movement toward the exterior parameters of their meanings? Does Nietzsche’s style intend to move language metaphors momentarily into the world in order to escape the realm of merely self-identical concepts? Many of the essays in Allison’s volume ask questions such as these. They suggest that the novelty of Nietzsche’s approach has yet to be appreciated in its full significance. If the will to power is the kind of extended metaphor that pushes thought toward distinction and difference, opening language out towards the world and away from mask, then Nietzsche may indeed have taken a step beyond metaphysics. Haar, Lingus, Deleuze, Blondel and Kofman all imply that Nietzsche provides something new in this respect. But if the will to power is simply a new kind of essence, if it requires the metaphysician’s faith as the ground for criticism of all past truths, then Nietzsche has not provided a way of adequately thinking about the constitutive aspects of language in history, nor about nihilism itself.<sup>17</sup>

Sarah Kofman's incisive essay, "Metaphor, Symbol, Metamorphosis," deals directly with Nietzsche's attempts to conceptualize the "thing in itself" signified by metaphors of different orders. Kofman pays close attention to the transitions that occurred in the course of Nietzsche's thoughts about the problem of metaphysics. Nietzsche originally held to Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will, Kofman points out, wherein the metaphor or sign was conceived as a more or less impoverished representation of a signified, or "natural" realm of the will.<sup>18</sup> This construction, Kofman continues, leaves the alternatives of either generalizing the "good natural" — as Nietzsche does in *The Birth of Tragedy* — or generalizing the idea that all is metaphor — as Nietzsche tended to do at other times in his early work, e.g., in the fragment "On Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense." But, Kofman writes, the "two opposing terms belong to the same system and if we deconstruct one only by generalizing the other, the deconstruction remains bounded by the field it originally sought to escape" (p. 208). Only in his later works, Kofman correctly notes, does Nietzsche abandon the notion of the metaphor as a basic philosophical concept due to this difficulty, substituting the different notions of will to power and interpretation.<sup>19</sup>

Before we consider what this implies it should be noted that both Dannhauser and Strong fail to grasp the significance of this transition in Nietzsche's development, although both attempt to periodize his works. Strong relies too heavily on Nietzsche's early philological writings in attempting to understand Nietzsche's thoughts about the breakdown and recreation of cultural horizons. In these writings Nietzsche's ideas were still in flux.<sup>20</sup> Dannhauser's interpretation of Nietzsche's Socrates relies heavily on an exegesis of *The Birth of Tragedy*, allowing him to extrapolate the sometimes static polarities that occur in that work — the polarity of rationality and aesthetics, for example — through the whole of Nietzsche's works.

Gilles Deleuze, in his essay "Active and Reactive," deals more successfully with the overall meaning of the will to power, despite the excessively neat constructions which belie a structuralist upbringing. Deleuze's approach captures the intention of Nietzsche's concept by showing how it refers to the irreducible *other* of language, an other which renders language dependent, but also creative of meanings; limited, but also having the power of extension. The two irreducible moments of the will to power are the experiences of *internality*, or desire and drive, and *externality* or resistance and fulfillment. Will to power names the "affect" or interest which is the flow of *meaning* through the non-identity of internality and externality. This affectability or interest is constituted as meaning for consciousness within the medium of metaphor and symbol. (Blondel's essay also contains a good discussion of Nietzsche's constructions in this respect.) Meaning is dependent upon energy, intensity, flowing "to" and "from." And energy is inconceivable without the non-identity of internality and externality. The will to power is the metaphor which

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names meaning as (directed) energy, the ontological limit for the affectability which meaning requires. Thus the will to power contains within itself difference, non-identity, and the "pathos of distance."

It is precisely this movement of force and energy that is "other" than language, whose nature it is to freeze this movement into conceptual stasis. Against this stasis, Nietzsche provides the metaphor of will to power. By constructing the "hypothesis" of will to power, Nietzsche is performing a language "experiment" in an attempt to incorporate the idea of energy in time into language.<sup>21</sup> It is the element of energy in time that the metaphor of will to power tries to name as essential to the world, and that could re-establish a relationship between the concept and its contextual meaning. In Deleuze's interpretation, the will to power embodies the idea of *force* and *diversity*, allowing thought to see stasis, desire for completeness, death and nihilistic judgement in its past conceptions.

This interpretation of the will to power permits Deleuze to interpret Nietzsche's ideas about historical development such that he might ask the heuristic question: "How does the human constitution of meanings interact with all other existing forces?" Deleuze believes that Nietzsche sees history as an interplay of "active" and "reactive" forces. Deleuze calls the self-understanding which negates ideas of force "reactive" and that which affirms and increases force "active." "Active" force is sensibility and affectability, while "reactive" force is mask, dullness of sense, and negation of the world. History consists in the appearance of "reactive" forces in response to "active" forces: specifically, the slave reacts to the action of the master.

Deleuze structures Nietzsche's history of nihilism as a history of "reactive" forces fragmenting "active" forces by imposing negative meanings, by denying force with categories of "being" and eternity. Consciousness and language arise as "reactive" forces in history; the imposition of meaning has heretofore been essentially reactive in nature. Our present thoughts are laden with the sedimented history of domination/negation.

### IV

Should one try to reapply Deleuze's notion of will to power in history to the example of Socrates, I believe a different image of Socrates would result than that of either Dannhauser or Strong. I will merely attempt to be suggestive at this juncture. For Nietzsche, to explain the peculiar necessity of Socrates, together with his brilliance and his lasting historical effect, would be to capture the dynamic elements of the context within which Socrates' speech becomes effective. Socrates, as an historical actor, cannot be conceptualized merely as a philosopher who espouses ideas (Dannhauser), nor as a personality whose naming of the world results in a misunderstanding (Strong). At some level,



Nietzsche wants to see Socrates as a focal point in Greek culture who *embodies* the contradiction of master and slave, who holds this contradiction within himself, and who *transvalues* immediate master-slave violence into a cultural code which *resolves* this contradiction at the level of a new, negative self-understanding. Nietzsche's search for the genesis of the power of language in history leads him to examine the kinds of social relations that do not admit of *immediate* linguistic meanings. Socrates' language — or, at least that part of it that becomes Christian — attains its endurance by providing a provisional orientation to the slave's will to power. The new way of speaking and thinking gives meaning to experiences that cannot immediately be altered in their nature — due to the real power disadvantage of the slave — but may be *misunderstood* in such a way that they do not threaten chaos.

To see the mode of necessity at work here, picture the condition of the slave. The will to power of the master is experienced by the slave as greater than his own real power. From the point of view of sensuousness, this is *painful*. From the point of view of vision, it is chaotic. The condition reveals no immediate human meaning. There is but one way out: to impose meaning *mediately* through an alteration of the consciousness of the painful power. And it is Socrates who steps into this immediate contradiction of social forces and performs the master-stroke which transvalued and spiritualized these forces. Socrates' language, among other things, provides universal and enduring meaning through a double dynamic of repression-masking and sublimation that increases the *feeling* of power of the oppressed. And in this way, Socratic conceptions become real and powerful things in history by defusing, sublimating and solidifying explosive configurations of will to power.

The point to be grasped here is that Socrates is one who names "wrongly" — because of the denial of life in his new "truth" — but necessarily, in the sense that only a certain range of ideas could have spoken to existing needs so they would become a utility of meaning for a certain kind of life — slave life — in their Christianized form. Socrates creates the kind of horizon that makes the slave's life possible, but the condition of this new horizon is the pre-existence of a socially-created reservoir of "reactive" force.<sup>22</sup>

This "genealogy" of the origins of our present-day ways of thinking allows Nietzsche to suggest that our language is nihilistic because it retains an "inverted image" (Deleuze's term) of primordial social violence. An image of violence is contained in the particular way in which Socratic language masks the world, and this becomes a structural attribute of western language as formal sets of rules, propositions and correspondences.<sup>23</sup>

V

The most political questions of self-definition emerge against this understanding of our metaphysical language in terms of its social genesis. At the

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same time that the criticism of metaphysics shows that the "self" is not a "thing," but rather a locus of forces, the genealogy shows that the metaphysical self was carved out of social violence. As an idea, Nietzsche thought the "self" to have rather shabby roots. The metaphysics of "self" wishes the self to be *more*, but does not provide the conceptual apparatus for it to be more.

Several essays in Allison's collection seriously consider the problem of the self as a locus of creative activity. They see that the philosopher's problem of identity and metaphysics contains the existential question of the integrity of the self in the non-transcendental world. Conceivably, the dissolution of metaphysics could undermine *any* notion of "self." In spite of its roots, Nietzsche did in fact hold the metaphysical notion of "self" to be one of the positive — although inadequate and deformed — aspects of the Christian-moral interpretation of the world. If the dialectic of individuation is not to finish in nihilism, Nietzsche's goal of higher individuation requires that it be possible to *imagine* new ways of conceiving the self and the world which are *not* metaphysical, but which proceed from *within* metaphysical language — our only language.

Is this possible? Michel Haar's essay, "Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language," represents one kind of answer, concluding that Nietzsche's destruction of metaphysical language can "be looked at as an experiment pushed so far as to destroy the destroyer *qua* speaker" (p. 35). "The language the self uses," Haar writes, "to provide itself with a fictitious center, the language of fixed and arbitrary identities, appears to be so much bound up with this system of contradistinctions that *denying* this system casts one back into the dissociated and inexpressible clutches of Chaos" (p. 35).

Nietzsche poses for himself the problem of truth *or* life, truth *or* nothingness/chaos; a seemingly irresolvable confrontation. But Nietzsche finally asks — like Heidegger later — "what is the meaning of such a confrontation?" Nietzsche resolves the confrontation into a problem of the "will to truth": metaphysical language has "spilled out" into psychology, but it does so only after having passed through a dilemma that implied nihilism. Metaphysical language, Nietzsche tried to show, like every other metaphor, can reveal what is signified ("life") by looking truthfully at its own contradictions. Metaphysical language contains within itself, as a symptom of its embeddedness in life, the possibility of overcoming itself by again turning out of itself. The will to truth discovers itself as a will to power, turning thought out of self-identity and again toward the world.<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche phrases this movement in a double-edged question: "what meaning would *our* whole being possess if it were not this, that in us the will to truth becomes conscious of itself as a *problem*?"<sup>25</sup>

The essays by Maurice Blanchot, Pierre Klossowski and Jacques Derrida attempt to push through metaphysical language where Haar, Granier and many others leave off. Blanchot, for example, in "The Limits of Experience: Nihilism," attempts to demonstrate that the thought of nihilism, manifest in

the first confrontation with eternal return, moves through negation as a moment. When nihilism is truly *thought*, it "tells us of the final and rather grim truth: it tells of the impossibility of nihilism" (p. 126). Why? Nihilism is not tied to the nothingness of the world as such, but only to the nothingness of past ideals: it leads back to the affirmation of this world of movement and appearance. At the limit of nihilism is the discovery of the root of the old language in the will to power; hence, the discovery of the possibility of new meanings.

This passage of thought can best be interpreted in its existential meaning by reference to Nietzsche's enigma of eternal recurrence. I agree with Strong that the eternal return is "not a theory of the cosmos" — the will to power is rather the cosmological postulate — but a "state of being" (p. 265). Eternal return is no mere dissolution of all opposites into a desperate embrace of fate — although metaphysical thought might first experience the eternal return with desperation — but more profoundly, the eternal return is a "vision," *an aspect of imagination that makes plausible the postulate of will to power as the experience of a horizon*. Eternal return, I suggest, is Nietzsche's attempt to retain as a plausible existential horizon the possibility of the self as the locus of creative action, without making the self into a fictitious metaphysical substance.

This is what Klossowski demonstrates in his essay, "Nietzsche's Experience of the Eternal Return." Drawing on Heidegger, he tries to show that it is possible to re-account for the self as a constellation of forces just when the self loses its one-sided reflection in traditional values. Klossowski investigates the possibility of reconstituting the self (which depended upon its belief in its self-identical status) as a multi-fold self. The self — if I might be permitted a rough translation of Klossowski's difficult construction — requires both the identification of itself in signifiers which are "outside" the self (the self locates itself in terms of a coherent, pre-existing symbolic universe) and the forgetting-overcoming of this schizophrenic set of identities in order that the self return to itself as the (now concrete) consciousness of itself as a locus of forces. The eternal return, Klossowski believes, is the thought out of which the self can generate itself as a higher belief within the "closure" of the circle of signs from which the self takes its bearings. As an example, it could be added that Freud accomplished this transition of thought for the self-understanding of psychotherapy.

Derrida's "The Question of Style" approaches the same problem of the decentered metaphysical self through an analysis of Nietzsche's metaphor of "truth" as being a "woman." Derrida pushes beyond the face-value of Nietzsche's metaphor — by itself infamous for its anti-feminist connotations — by relating Nietzsche's idea of feminine style to the structure of Nietzsche's aphorisms. Derrida discovers in Nietzsche's word-praxis that the dual notions of "style" and "distance" step into the void of decentered metaphysics.

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"Woman" becomes a synonym for style and distance. The "truth" of one's relation to a "woman," Nietzsche had held, was precisely in its distance. This truth is "relational" — it requires this distance in order that the appearance might constitute itself with the integrity of a "thing." Desire — or, will to power — spans the distance, constituting the appearance as satisfaction. The will to truth, on the contrary, violates the appearance, committing the "indecent" of wishing to see the thing itself, of wishing to close the void between perceiver and perceived.<sup>26</sup> Nietzsche wanted to show that the will to truth — in its metaphysical form as the wish for identification — really neuters the truth. "Woman," on the contrary, suspends questions of "truth" in the void, but also "*in eroticis*," substituting play and intensity as the substance of the self.

Both Derrida and Deleuze see in Nietzsche's style the praxis of the idea of the non-identical. Nietzsche's text constantly pushes beyond itself, into its "other" — the intensity of will to power — by forcing the reader to supply meaning and life from outside the text.

### VI

In the last analysis, however, these possibilities of the rational imagination are realized or not realized depending upon forces of historical necessity; not in the sense of linguistic necessity or entrapment — many of these barriers can be transformed slowly by the rational imagination — but rather in the sense that configurations of will to power *do* have historical specificity not reducible to language. The focus on Nietzsche's idea that history is constituted within constellations of will to power does give his idea of the "overcoming" of man a non-mystical meaning, however. The constellation of historical forces constituting the "self" of modern man is contradictory. It is from the awareness of this contradiction that the overman can arise. In Nietzsche's language, the overman could emerge from the "breeding" (*Züchtung*) of previous history. For example, truth and morality are overcome, but retain themselves as "instinctual" grounds, bred into the psychology of modern man.

Significantly, Nietzsche uses the term *Selbstaufhebung* as well as *Selbstüberwindung* to speak of the emergence of a new thing out of an old thing, implying a Hegelian understanding of the transition. If Strong fails to articulate Nietzsche's ideas about present change and transition, it may be because he seems overly interested in differentiating between Hegel and Nietzsche, often ignoring the crucial and illuminating similarities.<sup>27</sup> When Strong claims that Nietzsche's philosophy intends a remolding of the "very stuff of humanity" (p. 16), he is certainly correct. But he consistently fails to point to the ambiguous status of this "very stuff." For Nietzsche, the overman contains nothing that is not implied in man, even if the overman as such is not recognizable to man.

Alphonso Lingus comes closer to Nietzsche's intentions in his essay, "The Will to Power," by paying attention to Nietzsche's "types" who embody active will to power. Lingus names three: the "artist," the "noble individual" and the "sovereign individual" (pp. 56-58). These three "types" occur within Nietzsche's writings as metaphors for the conditions within man that are the conditions for overcoming. The artist signifies the will to power as the creative externalization of horizons, the noble individual represents the will to power as a present-oriented psychology (that is, non-neurotic; not frozen into past obsessions), and the sovereign individual is the one whose psychology can contain the historically developed knowledge of natural necessity, the (scientific) condition for controlling events in the future.

Any overcoming of man presupposes the existence of these "progressive" tendencies: Nietzsche never condemns dogmatically man as such. Humans are "sick," but their "sickness" is pregnancy (Blondel, p. 153). Nietzsche's task is not to condemn history, but to recover it by moving the pregnancy into a birth. Thus a great deal of Nietzsche's critical efforts are expended in attempting to assess the degree to which the strong types (artist, noble individual, sovereign individual) exist within the present, either as actual individuals, or latently within an existing psychology — in nihilism, for example.

To miss this side of Nietzsche would be to miss him in his most political aspect, overlooking the crucial relation Nietzsche draws between affirmation and critique, between "rank order of value" and "yes-saying and no-saying," between critical history and new valuation.<sup>28</sup>

The failure to note that Nietzsche's ideas about transcendence within history rest upon the psychological possibilities cultivated (*züchtete*) by history, and that these possibilities are illuminated only by selective affirmation and negation, is the most crucial objection I have toward the three essays that occur at the end of Allison's collection under the ambitious section heading: "Transfiguration." Allison himself uncritically locates the mystification in interpreting Nietzsche as an existential visionary: "What would appear to be the joyous new light (sun, dawn, day) is certainly not any 'divine' illumination.... For Nietzsche, this was the effulgent light, the efflorescent vision, of a newly transformed self — and its source was the clairvoyance of a transfigured attitude" (p. 217). But contrary to Allison's claim, these last essays are theological in the sense that they reduce the changes in ways of living which Nietzsche clearly envisaged (Strong addresses himself to the politics of this in his seventh chapter) to a change of attitude, allowing the self to become once more a fictive actor. These essays represent the worst tendency of Allison's collection: the avoidance of any consideration of the *conditions* of transvaluation, the problem that consumed so much of Nietzsche's attention. Thus the eternal return at the hands of the theologians seems to become a glorious vision of apocalypse, eternal affirmation, and the incarnation of the Christian promise of eternal

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bliss. Nietzsche drops out, and Nietzsche-the-visionary, whose "madness" ascends to an "unfathomable reality" remains (Valadier, p. 252). If this were indeed Nietzsche, the self he wished to realize would also become merely a vision, an ideology. Nietzsche would be a brilliant, mad prophet — but of little interest for social theory.

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### Notes

1. In Canada the popular image of Nietzsche has been influenced to a large extent by George Grant's C.B.C. radio lecture *Time as History*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Toronto, 1969. Grant is more eloquent than Dannhauser and less inclined to misinterpret. But, like Dannhauser, Grant concludes that without a Platonic notion of the eternal, man is doomed to the meaningless passage of time. As I mean to show in this essay, this construction does not exhaust the alternatives envisaged by Nietzsche. For Nietzsche, these are the alternatives of theology and nihilism; and, theology has become in many respects an impossible alternative. Dannhauser and Grant both seem to ask their readers to accept *on faith* the Platonic notion of the eternal, through fear of the alternatives; rationalism — as Nietzsche knew — moves back to its origins in theology with this conclusion. Grant can impose these alternatives on Nietzsche only by misunderstanding the crucial role of the doctrine of eternal return and the complementary notion of *amor fati* within Nietzsche's philosophy. See pp. 41-51.
2. Nietzsche outlines his project in *On the Genealogy of Morals* as follows: "Under what conditions did man devise these value judgements good and evil? and what value do they themselves possess? Have they hitherto hindered or furthered human prosperity? Are they a sign of distress, of impoverishment, of the degeneration of life? Or is there revealed in them, on the contrary, the plenitude, force, and will of life, its courage, certainty, future?" Preface, 3 (*Werke*, Karl Schleiermacher, hrsg., Frankfurt a. M.: Verlag Ullstein, 1972, vol. II, p. 765). Where available, I have used translations from Walter Kaufmann's editions of Nietzsche's works. Other translations are mine.
3. These deficiencies would not be serious in themselves except that they have the effect of systematically serving Dannhauser's interpretation of Nietzsche. For example, Dannhauser contrasts the Aristotelian equation of happiness and reason with Nietzsche's view of happiness by alluding to Nietzsche's early essay, *The Use and Disadvantage of History for Life*: "Nietzsche speaks explicitly of the happiness of children and animals" (p. 150). Dannhauser is apparently suggesting that Nietzsche has here defined happiness in this manner. In fact, Nietzsche merely uses these examples to suggest that a common element of all happiness is the capacity to feel "unhistorically" (*Werke*, I, 212). But Dannhauser seems to need this falsification to support his constant suggestions that Nietzsche sides with irrationalism against reason. In another place Dannhauser writes: "Nietzsche criticizes drama for portraying effects without sufficient causes" (p. 173). Dannhauser makes this statement to support his dubious contention that Nietzsche turned to Western positivism during his middle period (p. 19). But in the passage Dannhauser is paraphrasing, Nietzsche actually criticizes *only* modern European drama (*Werke*, II, 96-97). In a third instance, Dannhauser overlooks a crucial adjective when he paraphrases Nietzsche as saying that the "perennial optimism of Alexandrian culture has led it to deny the undeniable dependence of any [sic] culture on a slave class..." (p. 69). Nietzsche actually writes: "die alexandrinische Kultur braucht einen Sklavenstand, um auf die Dauer existieren zu können..." (*Werke*, I, 100). This mistranslation has the effect of supporting Dannhauser's emphasis upon the Nietzsche who glorified war, slavery and political irresponsibility (p. 31).

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4. The more extensive works include: Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Pfullingen: Neske, 1961; Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965; and *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970; Jean Granier, *Le problème de la vérité dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1966; Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche et la cercle vicieux*, Paris: Mercure, 1969; Sarah Kofman, *Nietzsche et la métaphor*, Paris: Payot, 1972; Paul Valadier, *Nietzsche et la critique du christianisme*, Paris: Ed. du Cerf, 1974.
5. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 289 (*Werke*, II, 751-2).
6. Nietzsche is anti-systematic not in the sense that his philosophy is ultimately self-contradictory, but rather in the sense that it opposes the systems of German idealism. Nietzsche occasionally interjects reminders to his readers: "Do you think it is piece-work because it is (and must be) offered to you in pieces?" *Human, All-Too-Human*, II, i, 128 (*Werke*, I, 787).
7. *Werke* (Grossoktavausgabe), Leipzig: Alfred Kröner, 1922, vol. XVI, p. 417, cited in Kaufmann's edition of *The Will to Power*, New York: Random House, 1967, p. 45n.
8. On this, see an excellent article by Alfred Schmidt, "Zur Frage der Dialektik in Nietzsches Erkenntnistheorie," in Max Horkheimer, hrsg., *Zeugnisse: Theodor W. Adorno zum Sechzigsten Geburtstag*, Frankfurt a. M.: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1963.
9. *The Gay Science*, 110 (*Werke*, II, 118): cf. *ibid.*, 344 (*Werke*, II, 206-8) and *Human, All-Too-Human*, vol. I, 20 (*Werke*, I, 462).
10. To hypothesize that "there is no truth, that there is no absolute nature of things nor a 'thing in itself,'" Nietzsche wrote in an 1887 note, "is merely nihilism — even the most extreme nihilism." *The Will to Power*, 13 (*Werke*, II, 817). Nietzsche's use of the term "nihilism" is disparaging in this context.
11. *The Gay Science*, 109 (*Werke*, II, 115).
12. The most comprehensive analysis of the processes determining this crisis is in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, especially essays I and III; cf. *The Will to Power*, 4, 55 (*Werke*, III, 852-856).
13. See the very important aphorism on method and interpretation in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, II, 12 (*Werke*, II, 817).
14. "What is dawning is the opposition of the world we revere and the world we live and are. So we can abolish either our reverence or ourselves." *Op. cit.*, *Werke* (Grossoktavausgabe).
15. See, e.g., Robert D'Amico, "Desire and the Commodity Form," *Telos*, no. 35, Spring, 1978. D'Amico surveys recent contributions to this discussion.
16. The Nietzschean formulation asks about the "value of truth" with respect to different kinds of life. "The question is to what extent it is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivating." *Beyond Good and Evil*, 1, 4 (*Werke*, II, 567, 569).
17. I will avoid considering Heidegger's claim that Nietzsche was the last metaphysician, a claim made in his essay "Who is Nietzsche's Zarathustra?" and elsewhere. In addition to the difficulties caused by the special status Nietzsche occupies in Heidegger's thought as a whole, such consideration depends heavily upon Heidegger's view of history as the history of Being, and takes its significance from this context. Suffice it to say that in many respects Heidegger does not think through Nietzsche's thoughts on history. On this issue see especially Bernd Magnus, *Heidegger's Metahistory of Philosophy: Amor Fati, Being and Truth*, The Hague:

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Martinus Nijhoff, 1970. See also Richard Howey, *Heidegger and Jaspers on Nietzsche*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973; Ruediger Grimm, *Nietzsche's Theory of Knowledge*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977, pp. 61-65; and Strong, p. 233.

18. See e.g., *The Birth of Tragedy*, 16 (*Werke*, I, 87-93).
19. See, e.g., Nietzsche's self-criticism in the 1886 Preface, 6, to *The Birth of Tragedy* (*Werke*, I, 16-7) and *Ecce Homo*, "The Birth of Tragedy," 1 (*Werke*, II, 1109-10).
20. *On Genealogy of Morals* could not have been written at this time, for example. The intelligibility of this work no longer requires the genetic-Hegelian approach of *The Birth of Tragedy* nor does the metaphysics of the will appear as in earlier works.
21. Jacques Derrida has coined a word for the idea of energy in time: he calls it *différance*. Nietzsche's approach to metaphysics seems to have been crucial to Derrida's innovative formulations. See *Speech and Phenomena*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973, pp. 129-160.
22. It is possible to arrive at this interpretation of the significance of Socrates by reading the section "The Problem of Socrates" in *Twilight of the Idols* with *On the Genealogy of Morals* in mind. That this reading is warranted is clearly suggested by sections 5-9 of "The Problem of Socrates."
23. "Could it be," Nietzsche asks with respect to Socrates, "that wisdom appears on earth as a raven, inspired by a little whiff of carrion?" *Twilight of the Idols*, "The Problem of Socrates," 1 (*Werke*, II, 951). "And might one not add," Nietzsche writes with respect to later moral concepts, "that, fundamentally, this world has never since lost a certain odor of blood and torture? (Not even in good old Kant: the categorical imperative smells of cruelty)." *On the Genealogy of Morals*, II, 6 (*Werke*, II, 806). "Nothing has been more dearly purchased than the minute portion of human reason and feeling of freedom which now constitutes pride." *The Dawn*, 18 (*Werke*, I, 1027). Ironically, Dannhauser believes Nietzsche's praise of the sense of smell, which Nietzsche thought of in terms of the "sniffing out" of violence in sterilized language categories, indicates that he values subhuman ways of assessing things over human ways! (p. 224)
24. *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III, 27 (*Werke*, II, 898-9). In an article entitled "Psychoanalysis, Evolution and the End of Metaphysics," Stan Spyros Draenos examines the inversion of metaphysics into the self in relation to Freud and Darwin. *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, vol. 2, no. 2, Spring-Summer 1978. Nietzsche could be thought of as the philosophical self-consciousness of this inversion.
25. *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III, 27 (*Werke*, II, 899).
26. Nietzsche writes the following in the *The Gay Science*: "'Is it true that God is everywhere?' a girl asked her mother; 'I think that's indecent' — a hint for philosophers!" Preface, 4 (*Werke*, II, 15).
27. Strong seems to have picked up a case of Hegel-phobia from Deleuze, to whom Strong is indebted in many respects. For Deleuze, as for many of the contributors to Allison's collection, Hegel is merely the paradigm case of identity theory. Nietzsche certainly did not regard Hegel in this one-sided manner. See, e.g., *The Dawn*, Preface, 3 (*Werke*, I, 1014); *The Gay Science*, 357 (*Werke*, II, 226).
28. On this, see Erica Sherover's excellent article: "Nietzsche: On Yea and Nay Saying," *Journal of Existentialism*, V, Summer 1965, pp. 423-426.



## CUTTING PLATO DOWN TO SIZE?

*Eugene Kamenka*

Ellen Meiksins Wood and Neal Wood, *Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in Social Context*, Blackwell's Classical Studies, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978, pp. x + 275.

The relationship between Marxism and philosophy has never been a happy one. Neither has it been notably fruitful. There have been first-rate Marxist economists (including Marx himself), economic historians, historians and political journalists. There have been good social and political theorists inspired by Marx: Tönnies, Weber and Schumpeter are outstanding examples. But there is no first-rate Marxist philosopher; indeed there is hardly even a significant one. Marx's "science of society" — theoretically and historically insightful but incomplete and inconsistent — was gradually elaborated by inferior thinkers (Engels, Plekhanov, Lenin and Deborin) into a universal theory of being and becoming, of society and nature, culminating in the "official" dialectical and historical materialism elevated into a state philosophy by Stalin. The result was a vulgarisation of both Marxism and philosophy — as well as of social theory — which pretended to solve problems by re-stating them, and which relied on straw men, on misleading selection and on falsification of texts. It killed the philosophical enterprise by mechanically awarding marks for being on the right side, by always subordinating arguments to conclusions, philosophical thought to partisanship. It could silence opposition only through repression and ubiquitous censorship; it could not successfully impress, and has not successfully impressed, in a climate of free discussion and uncensored access to knowledge.

Since 1948, there has been a slow, fitful and still shockingly restricted development of Soviet and Soviet-bloc philosophy toward some kind of intellectual respectability. Furthered, of course, by de-Stalinisation, it began in the last years of Stalin with his dawning recognition of new technical, professional requirements in connection with physics and the making of science into a productive (and military) force. It involved ultimately the *rejection* of Zhdanovism, of the belief that philosophers (and people) were to be judged in terms of their class origin or simply reduced to being friends or enemies of the working class, of "democracy" and "progress." It got its first fillip from

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Stalin's "discovery" (or proclamation) of the relative independence of ideology, coupled with a new insistence, in the last years of his rule, that language and then logic were not class-based, but served and reflected objective laws and interests of a whole society. De-Stalinisation and gradual professionalisation of academic work made possible, and indeed, required, the recognition that a philosopher's work might pull in different directions, and not be mechanically classifiable as *either* materialist *or* idealist, conservative or progressive, and that classes and interests might themselves be complex. If Soviet intellectual life in these areas is still crude, the reason lies in the political requirements and fears of those who rule, rather than govern, the Soviet Union.

There is a widespread belief that the revival of Western Marxism associated with the rise of the New Left, and of polycentric and Euro-Communism, has freed Marxism of the rigidities, stupidities and anti-intellectualism of Soviet Marxism and, perhaps, of revolutionary Communism generally. Certainly, there has been in the West a more critical working over of Marx's own thought and of the systems and general propositions erected in his name. But the results, in philosophy and political theory, have not been impressive, in spite of the unstable and short-lived enthusiasms for Korsch and Lukács, Gramsci and Marcuse, Garaudy and Althusser, Colletti and Timpanaro. At most, these thinkers are admirable only in contrast with official Soviet philosophy or with the narrow and limited professionalism, the lack of general knowledge, general culture and general ideas, of many Anglo-Saxon intellectuals. Their work is fundamentally eclectic, the work of civilised men struggling in and only sometimes out of straight jackets. All too frequently they revert to crude Marxism when faced by crucial, disturbing implications of their departure from "orthodoxy" and of their recognition of complexity. Such reversions are introduced, by long-standing Marxist tradition, with the phrase "but in the last analysis" and usually mark the triumph of philosophical dogma and political longing over knowledge and common sense.

Marx himself, in his scientific attitudes, interests and intellectual performance, was a far greater thinker. Essentially he was one of the great Victorians, philosophically trained and with a Hegelian eye for logical connections, distinctions and contradictions. He had no doubt that the three "intensive" philosophers were Aristotle, Spinoza and Hegel; he was interested neither in their class origins nor in demonstrating their class bias. When he reduced Hegel's philosophy to its "material" base he did so in a spirit quite different from Zhdanov's or Stalin's or that of the book under review: he traced it to the general social situation in Germany, to the impotence of the German bourgeoisie coupled with its desire to ape the French model; he saw its belief in the Spirit as a compensatory fantasy, not as a bourgeois tactic. He never thought that Hegel's political philosophy was the most interesting or fruitful

part of that philosopher's work, or that Hegel's logic, his perception of philosophical problems, his advance beyond Spinoza and Kant, were to be understood in terms of his political convictions. Nor did he ever treat political philosophy, *e.g.*, Hobbes or even Locke, as simply reflecting narrow class interest. As we all know, Marx read (and praised) Shakespeare and Homer in preference to Balzac, and Balzac in preference to Zola: the consciously "partisan" he usually found shallow. Marx, in brief, had a mind and he recognised the possession of a mind in others. He thought Weitling an idiot, though Weitling "cared" about "the people" much more than Marx did. There was nothing Marx hated more than unhistorical sentimentality or abstract elevation of "the people" as such. Mao may have said that history was made by the people, Marx did not. History for him was made by those who grasped and developed new productive forces, who attained consciousness of themselves as a class with a historic role, who were fertilised by the lightning of thought. The crude theory of ideologies sketched in the *German Ideology* and the *Communist Manifesto*, enthusiastically seized on by second-rate Marxists and unprincipled political propagandists, does no justice to Marx's much more complex and intelligent view of history. Marx would not have talked of Socrates defending, or betraying, his class, and discussion of Socrates' social origins would have seemed to him politically and philosophically a monstrous and dangerous irrelevancy, appropriate only when dealing with third-rate minds. No doubt Marx himself was in a sensitive position on this score, but that was not his only or his main motivation. He knew a philosopher when he read one.

The 1960's, as we have mentioned, saw a striking revival, or intensification, of serious Marx scholarship, comparatively critical Marxist discussion, and pseudo-Marxist political activism, all of them penetrating into Western universities. With Marx scholarship now having largely exhausted its materials, and activism on the wane, there has been growing interest among Marxists and pseudo-Marxists in tackling in a Marxist way disciplines that Marxists have long neglected or failed to catch up with: anthropology, classics, law, academic political theory, *etc.* The merit of much of this work in English-speaking lands lies in the fact that its authors are professionally trained in their disciplines, aware of their complexity and of recent discoveries and developments, and conscious of the datedness of many traditional Marxist beliefs and pronouncements. (Ellen Meiksins Wood, for instance, knows far too much about Athens to believe that it is well or even correctly described as a "slave-owning society" — slaves in Athens, she argues, freed citizens *for* rather than *from* productive labour, often worked side by side with free labourers or their masters and could and did fill managerial positions; the fundamental conflict and economic division in Athens was not between slaves and free men.) The defect of much of this work, on the other hand, lies in the surprisingly inadequate grasp of Marxism and earlier Marxist work displayed by these newer academics. They are

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prone to reinterpret Marxism, unconsciously and inconsistently, in terms of current anti-intellectual subjectivism; to embrace unhistorical partisanship as "equality" and "love of the people"; and to combine this with crude Marxist beliefs that sensitive and intelligent thinkers in the Marxist-Leninist world have long (privately) abandoned as intellectually naive, manifestly morally and politically dangerous. Much of this new generation — which has no memory of Zhdanov and no real feeling for economic scarcity — is more at home with the postures of subjective class hostility and class identification than with deeper Marxian analysis of economics or history. Unconsciously, they revert to what Eastern Marxists are seeking to leave behind. They think in terms of "confrontations" and not of "crises" (with the concern which that term betrays for a wider whole); they focus on aggregates of individuals and not on great historic forces and traditions, or on class ideologies rather than technology and economico-political structures.

*Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory* illustrates rather well the typical merits and shortcomings of this new Anglo-Saxon academic Marxism venturing into "traditional academic" preserves. The product of collaboration between Ellen Meiksins Wood and Neal Wood of York University, Toronto, it is clearly and professionally written; it shows a certain respect for scholarship, acquaintance with classical studies (if not really with philosophy) and a reasonable prudence in making general assertions — contrasting most favourably, in this respect, with the sort of things that younger "academic" Marxists are writing about law, theory of the State or "bourgeois economics." It covers, in general terms, a good deal of ground, but always as part of "exposing" what it takes to be aristocratic or pro-aristocratic bias and anti-democratic myths, promulgated by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle themselves and by those who, following Hegel, admire "their" pseudo-polis and "their" transcendental idealism. While the book's main theme is surprisingly simple and in some ways simple-minded, and its sub-themes never complex or subtle, it is a book that does proceed by way of rational argument rather than strident assertion, even if some of those arguments are expressed in language that is heavily loaded, and even if the arguments themselves are slanted and logically suspect. What the book fails to reveal is any sense of intellectual independence, difficulty or puzzlement, any *problems*, or any concrete appreciation whatever of what makes Socrates, Plato and Aristotle great. Socrates, we are told in revealing subheadings to the main chapters, is "the Saint of Counter-Revolution," Plato the "Architect of the Anti-Polis" and Aristotle the "Tactician of Conservatism." Even if all this were true it would be monumentally uninteresting for grappling with the significant questions in political theory and for any appreciation of what is so remarkably penetrating, thought-provoking, important and alive, so "classical" in the best sense of the word, about the work of these thinkers. For in each case, we treasure them not

for their conclusions but for their arguments, for their capacity to state issues and to see what they involve, to have insights, see important distinctions and lay bare the *logic* of argument. It is appreciation of this that the Woods simply lack, or omit from their book. They concede the greatness, at least verbally, but they are not interested in it. The "Socratics," as they call them, are on the wrong side; they give aid and comfort to the enemy, they elevate values and life-styles not open to those who labour, and they are therefore necessarily anti-democratic. The Woods' phraseology and yardstick for all the serious points they make are those of the (Zhdanovist) class war. "Deep-rooted hatred of democracy," opposing the "shared values" of Athenian democracy — those are the crimes of the Socratics. "The trial and execution of Socrates and the indictment against Aristotle cannot be excused," the Woods conclude in a jointly-written chapter (p. 261), "but they can be understood." To make us "understand" that trial, and the aid and comfort that the Socratics have given to reactionaries of all subsequent ages, is the main point of the book. The scholarship, the interest in ancient political theory is subordinate, for political theory is seen, fundamentally, as ideology, as a weapon in the class war. *Classical Ideology and Ancient Political Theory* will not help make the proletariat heir to all previous civilisation; on the contrary, it will encourage that "crude communism" which Marx denounced for seeking to cut away distinctions of culture and talent, *etc.*, for seeking to abolish all that which it could not make the object of universal appropriation.

The main point and theme of *Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory*, then, is that the classics which help comprise the very foundation of political theory must be viewed as "basically" ideological; they must be rigorously related to and understood through their social context. The political ideas and philosophical thought of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle defended and justified the values and way of life of a declining and decaying landed aristocracy in opposition to the "true" heritage that Athens has left us — the democratic polis of craftsmen, traders and labourers. Of course, the Woods concede, the Socratics recognised and condemned aristocratic degeneration, but they hoped to re-vitalise the outlook and conduct of the nobility and to create a polis that would stem the levelling tide of democracy, mob tyranny and vulgarity. The theme, of course, is pursued systematically and in detail. Neal Wood, in an opening chapter, moves from the true general proposition that theorising is not neutral, disinterested or divorced from its social context to the conclusion that it is to be understood through that social context and that political theory is "essentially ideological" (p. 6) — a conclusion that does not follow and is not true. Ellen Wood moves on to discuss the nature of the polis, treating the aristocratic polis as an association against a subjected producing class and making some sensible remarks about class and status in Greek society. The three central chapters of the book deal in sequence with Socrates (Neal Wood),

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Plato (Ellen Wood) and Aristotle (Neal Wood), devoting some space to their life, outlook and associations and then discussing in some detail their fundamental philosophical and political principles — always as reflections of the outlook and demands of the aristocracy. A jointly-written conclusion sums up the Woods' view that Socratic philosophy opposes "the shared values of the Athenian community" (p. 260) and therefore does not provide a standard for judging Athenian practice. The so-called mob was neither idle nor corrupt; the real polis has left us a great democratic legacy.

Soviet students used to emerge from university philosophy lectures, and many still do, with the belief that Socrates was just a teacher of rich men's sons, that Plato wanted society ruled by an elite of "guardians" and was therefore not to be taken seriously, and that Aristotle was a typical philosopher of slave-owning society, who believed that slaves actually had different blood temperature from that of free men. The Woods are, of course, much more detailed in their presentation of the many perfectly obvious connections between aristocratic ideology and the thought of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. But like the Soviet discussion, their treatment seems to me heavily dependent on selective data — and on the use of straw men who allegedly believe the Socratics to be totally disinterested witnesses and theorists. Furthermore, the Woods claim an originality of perspective which seems to me simply false: the general points they make are not denied by any competent student of the classics or political philosophy — they are taken for granted, but treated as subordinate in the serious philosophical appreciation of Socrates, Aristotle and Plato. The Woods themselves, as the conclusion ultimately reveals, vacillate between using their class interpretation as a way of discrediting the philosophical importance of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle and as a way of discrediting their importance as historical witnesses to Athenian reality. The Woods' own portrayal of that reality is certainly as partisan as any of the Socratics', though it provides a useful counter-picture. But their claim to be making an important contribution to the study of great texts in political theory is false. In so far as the book attempts to do that, it comes at the problem in the wrong way and shows an inadequate grasp of both Marxist and non-Marxist discussion of serious political philosophy.

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## CAMUS IN THE UNDERWORLD

David Cook

Memory is not what we remember, but that which remembers us.

Octavio Paz, *Eagle or Sun*

Herbert R. Lottman, *Albert Camus: A Biography*, Garden City: Doubleday, 1979, pp. xii + 753.

The biographer must begin his or her task under the searing vision of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*; under the injunction to "Hear me. For I am such and such a person. Above all, do not mistake me for someone else." For Nietzsche knew the funeral rites that negate lives, transforming them into the accomplished facts of the past as witnesses to history, to psychology, to God and to biography itself.<sup>1</sup> Above all each trying to forget the "testimony" that removes the veil of otherness, of strangeness to make "one become what one is."

It is this testimony that is so lacking in the modern period as René Char reminded France in his World War II resistance journal which he later dedicated to Albert Camus. "Our inheritance was left to us by no testament."<sup>2</sup> The "heroes" who in former times were the authors of the deed which created the testimony now go unrecognized. As Char says of his own journal it "might well have belonged to no one."<sup>3</sup> This anonymity forces the biographer back into our inheritance; to the world of Homer where the nature of this testimony becomes apparent. It will be recalled that Odysseus travelled wearing the mask of "nobody" as he states in his encounter with Polyphemus, the Cyclops, or as his arrival in the palace of Alcinous, king of the Phoenicians, demonstrates.<sup>4</sup> Yet the mask is transcended at the Phoenician court where Odysseus still unrecognized hears his own story and is moved to tears. For that fleeting moment at the hands of an unwitting biographer the testimony that René Char envisages becomes apparent. Odysseus is given renewed life, for the recounting of his story brings him to state his name which then sends him again on his way to Ithaca.<sup>5</sup>

Ithaca stands as the central symbol in Camus' work for a life beyond the "underworld" where Camus felt events of the modern world had consigned

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us.<sup>6</sup> Hence the task of re-imagining the voyage to Ithaca while entering the labyrinth of political action. This adventure is the theme of Camus' principal theoretical work *The Rebel*. *The Rebel* is itself a reflection of the problems of the *Iliad*, of power and its transcendence, directed, as Camus informs us, towards the choice of Ithaca. "We shall choose Ithaca, the faithful land, frugal and audacious thought, lucid action, and the generosity of the man who understands."<sup>7</sup> We also know that Camus, like Odysseus, began his voyage as unrecognized, or, to use Camus' own phrases, as an outsider or one who is in exile. And from the compendium of Camus' characters it is clear that this unrecognized is that of the modern world: of the petty official Grand from *The Plague*, or of the clerk Meursault in *The Outsider*. As Camus often pointed out, it is here that one finds heroes if one cares to look.

Now we have the framework to approach Nietzsche's injunction. The biographer must tell the story of Camus' voyage to Ithaca cognizant of Camus' awareness that he was travelling unknown in a world without epic heroes. The guide one finds along the path is in the first instance the record of Camus' life; that constant din of facts which, to anticipate my comments on the biography before us, is splendidly laid open by Lottman. But of more importance, beyond this existential white noise, are Camus' own testimonials: his essays, his plays, his short stories and his novels. These works rise above the all-consuming facts that feed — to quote William Blake — the "printing house in hell," carrying with them the forgetfulness necessary to escape the underworld, and to "become what one is" at the hands of the imaginative biographer.

Lottman's biography of Camus begins at the correct point — with Camus' own words from his *Notebooks*: "A première vue la vie de l'homme est plus intéressante que ses oeuvres. Elle fait un tout obstiné et tendu. L'unité d'esprit y règne. Il y a un souffle unique à travers toutes ces années. Le roman, c'est lui. A revoir évidemment."<sup>8</sup>

It is my contention that Lottman's failure as a biographer is evident in his misunderstanding of the last sentence in the above quotation that Camus virtually takes for granted. The literary texts are central to the life of a writer, but their centrality is only evident if they are re-read. One must see again the novels and plays not as attempts at autobiography through a "fictional screen" as Lottman suggests (p. 23). Rather the texts should illuminate the praxis of life.

Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus* notes that one knows nothing of an actor's life if one sees him or her only on the stage. Yet after seeing many performances there is a sense for the audience that the actor is in part the character portrayed.

It is certain that apparently, though I have seen the same actor a hundred times, I shall not for that reason know him any better personally. Yet if I add up the heroes he has



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personified and if I say that I know him a little better at the hundredth character counted off, this will be felt to contain an element of truth. For this apparent paradox is also an apologue. There is a moral to it. It teaches that a man defines himself by his make-believe as well as by his sincere impulses.<sup>9</sup>

Lottman in contrast gives the reader many detailed accounts of Camus' off-stage life. Yet to this reader Albert Camus begins to recede as the biography continues yielding in the end not to the artist but to his shadow.

Though Lottman makes modest claims for his work, it is impossible to write a biography without an interpretation of that life. Lottman views Camus' life from the perspective of the past. Lottman is a "passéiste," seeing Camus' career as trapped within the situation of his Algerian upbringing, and as inevitably turning back towards this experience in his later life to re-work out his "family dramas." "His last novel [The First Man] would have explored [his family's specific dramas] more deeply, and art might then have given his Belcourt childhood a form which would have allowed the author to put it out of his mind" (p. 19). Putting aside the naive cathartic view of literature expressed by Lottman in the above quotation this view of Camus' life tends toward raising Camus to the unchanging heights of, in this case, the tragic myth. While Lottman avoids the worst aspects of critics such as Albert Maquet who also treat Camus' life and work as a case of arrested development,<sup>10</sup> Lottman's rejection of historical change blunts any critical insight that his subjectivism might have.

Nevertheless, within the limits of Lottman's theoretical perspective his biography does provide a valuable contribution to the understanding of Albert Camus. The work traces the events of Camus' life in chronological order divided into five periods, beginning with his upbringing in Algeria which is described for the first time in great detail. Lottman then turns, in the second period, to Camus' activities in the War years leading to his growing fame in France as an author at Gallimard — which comprises the third period. The fourth period of Camus' life concerns the years of sickness and despondency as Camus' fame grew, culminating in the Nobel Prize. Finally, in the last period, Lottman suggests that Camus was embarking again with confidence on his work at the time of his death. Lottman draws together a massive amount of information in this study, most of which was generally known, but which Lottman has expanded. Outside of this valuable service of collecting known facts, Lottman discovers new facts in three important areas: Camus' ancestry, his political activities in Algeria and his final works left unfinished at his death. It is unfortunate that in each case the significance of these new facts escapes Lottman.

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At the outset of the study Lottman quite legitimately focuses on Camus' ancestry. The question of his origins is of prime importance, for it is often an area virtually unknown and yet one which will never be adequately discovered. Prior to Lottman's exacting fact finding, it was the accepted belief that Camus' paternal grandfather came from Alsace or Lorraine whereas the file demonstrates that the "first recorded Camus" lived in Bordeaux and emigrated to Algeria a generation before the conventional date used in Camus scholarship. A similar confusion exists with Camus' paternal grandmother whose ancestry leads back to the Ardèche region in the south of France.

Lottman uses this new fact as the core around which he interprets Camus' as yet unpublished, incomplete last novel *The First Man*. There is no attempt to see through Camus' ancestry the development of Camus' life from a psychological vantage<sup>11</sup> nor from the vantage of the history of French colonialism,<sup>12</sup> nor from the intellectual perspective employed in this review. One is grateful for what Lottman tells us of this last novel, yet the fact that it treats of an Algerian setting similar to Camus' childhood home is not sufficient reason to call it "a growing up novel," nor is it sufficient to make the assumption that "*The First Man*, then, was the first generation French Algerian" (pp. 6 - 7). It is incumbent on the biographer to listen to the author. Camus always played with a number of titles for his works before choosing one. In this case the manuscript was entitled "The First Man" but, as Lottman tells us, Camus thought of calling this book "Adam" (p. 8). If the novel takes the reader back to Camus' origins it does so not only in the physical sense, but also in the intellectual sense. The origins of the Western tradition in the classical past and in the Christian myth were ultimately of greater importance to Camus than his family dramas. Camus' involvement with the Christian myth is evident in his earliest writings such as in the 1933 fragment "Dialogue de Dieu avec son Ame,"<sup>13</sup> as well as a few years later in his thesis prepared for the Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures under the title "Métaphysique Chrétienne et Néoplatonisme."<sup>14</sup> What form this involvement took is rarely even hinted at by Lottman despite the fact that the question of Camus' religious views is the subject of much of the secondary literature.

The secondary literature is itself marred by a similarly narrow, but opposing, perspective. Of the studies focusing on Camus' "religious" thought the most complete is James Woelfel's study *Camus: A Theological Perspective*.<sup>15</sup> Yet even this work treats Camus' relation to Christianity while excluding his central concern with the non-religious symbolized by Ithaca. As a systematic examination of the early works demonstrates, the two universes were not unrelated for Camus.<sup>16</sup> The dominance of the Lord over the sinner was analogous in structure for Camus to the master-slave relation of the secular world. These two perspectives lead in Camus' later work to his concept of action.

Lottman's failure to appreciate Camus' intellectual life directs his biography

towards the fragmentation typical of a newspaper. Stories appear side by side without any apparent connection. A specific example, the most insightful instance of his investigative reporting, concerns Camus' early political activity, and his relation with the communist party. Camus' activity in this sphere remains a mystery for Lottman as he did not appreciate the growing entanglement in Camus' mind amongst concerns that eventually became rebellion; specifically his rejection of Christian metaphysics as a metaphysics of the master-slave, his desire for a practical end to colonial exploitation, and his interest in the role of art as a critical tool and guide. Within the context of these, Lottman's description of Camus' trial and expulsion from the Algerian Communist Party (PCA) leads to much greater understanding of Camus' later positions.<sup>17</sup>

Camus had been recruited by the party to an "intellectual cell" and had led the party's cultural activities through the Maison de Culture, a front organization, and his Théâtre du Travail (pp. 149-50). He was also given the task of "recruitment in Arab circles" (p. 149). Here one has all the elements necessary to sketch Camus' expulsion. The events preceding Camus' trial begin with the Stalin-Laval pact in May 1935. This set in motion a series of gradual splits in the anti-colonial alignment of the left movements in Algeria. What is often not stressed in descriptions of this period of Camus' activity is the significance of the very marked gap between the official communist position which was indirectly supportive of France and hence of colonialism, and the increased activity of Moslem nationalists. Camus, by supporting Messali Hadj's Etoile Nord-Africaine or Messali's later Parti du Peuple Algérien, was challenging the PCA's rather uncomfortable rejection of Messali. Even Camus' support of the mild electoral reforms of the Blum-Violette bill was viewed suspiciously, as a result of Camus' rejection of the communist's alliance with the Radical Socialist Party (p. 156). The result was his expulsion by the PCA. There are two important considerations arising from Camus' relation to the PCA.

The first relates to the controversy that has surrounded Connor Cruise O'Brien's accusation in his *Albert Camus* that Camus held a colonial attitude toward Moslem culture, and that he implicitly supported the "myth of French Algeria."<sup>18</sup> Camus has been defended by Germaine Brée in her *Camus and Sartre: Crisis and Commitment*<sup>19</sup> to which one could add additional facts from Lottman indicating that at the very least O'Brien underestimated Camus' contact with and support of the Arabs.<sup>20</sup> Camus never denied that his own cultural background was French. The knowledge that his ancestors arrived in Algeria at the beginning of the nineteenth century would only have strengthened his resolve.

The second consideration helps bring into focus the later attack in *The Rebel* on communist movements. The general consensus, which is starkly expressed in the celebrated article by Francis Jeanson in the *Les Temps Modernes* review<sup>21</sup> of

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*The Rebel*, is that Camus was narrowly anti-communist. Camus' response to this charge provoked Sartre who entered the debate which ended, as is well known, in the split between them. In retrospect, with the advantage of the further information that Lottman provides, it is clear that Camus' attitude to communism evolved out of his early political activity, and his early intellectual development. The rejection of Camus by the PCA was a rejection of the activities he was engaged in: on the one hand, the fight against colonialism; and on the other hand, the form of cultural activity expressed most directly in his theatre work. This led Camus to a view of history markedly different from Sartre's. Camus saw political action as involving the rejection of absolutist claims which he associated with both Christianity and the communism as he experienced it, and which brought to the fore the importance of art and literature in providing the metaphysical basis for action. The structure of *The Rebel* reflects this twin concern of a critique of the political thought which legitimized revolutionary action, the so-called "historical rebellion," and the critique of metaphysical rebellion which accompanied historical rebellion as expressed through literature. It is one of the greatest disappointments of Lottman's book that his description of the debate with Sartre (chap. 37), as well as the earlier encounters with Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Arthur Koestler (pp. 405, 440), are both fragmentary and devoid of theoretical understanding.

These debates were important in light of the rediscovery of Hegel through Alexandre Kojève's lectures<sup>22</sup> or as Camus experienced it through Jean Hypolite's *The Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of the Spirit*, and the subsequent impact of the Stalinist trials and labour camps in the Soviet Union. Camus' early discovery of this negative side of communism went unrecognized, yet this experience placed him in many ways in advance of the editors of *Les Temps Modernes* whose own questioning and rejection came later. Yet Camus' experience of communism did not lead him to jettison the centrality of overthrowing the master-slave relation. This is an area which calls for a subsequent examination of the theoretical issues involved, for few if any critics have seriously regarded Camus' views on the master-slave relation.

Lottman's approach to *The Rebel* curiously turns Camus' involvement with the central problems of politics into an involvement solely with himself: "In every way, *L'Homme révolté* was a personal statement, despite its disguise as a treatise of political philosophy ... " (p. 49). Lottman here deprives Camus of substance almost completely. While the political philosophy expressed in *The Rebel* is not in the end without its flaws<sup>23</sup> it was central to Camus' life. It is precisely through this understanding that the disguise is removed. Regrettably Camus' literary work is also deprived of substance by Lottman. For example, *The Plague* is turned into a reflection of Camus' exile from his Algerian friends (p. 279).<sup>24</sup> There is a similarity here between the attitudes behind the quarrels that ended so bitterly for Camus and Lottman's attitude. Each of the actors in the drama seems not to be able to take what Camus says seriously. The outsider

wore the mask given to him by society, a mask that only occasionally was Albert Camus.

Thus, there is a certain irony in considering the final projects on the theme of nemesis that Lottman informs us Camus was planning. The approach Camus took to this project gives the reader a more precise understanding of how he re-interpreted his past than does the approach implicit in Lottman's interpretation of *The First Man* referred to earlier. In a report of a conversation with Jean Grenier, Camus' old teacher, Lottman informs us that the theme of the projected "Le Mythe de Némésis" would return to treat the question of "Christianity and Hellenism" (p. 492). This is precisely the theme of Camus' Diplôme. Further on Lottman states the following facts. "There were six detached sheets of aphorisms on buff paper with the title 'Pour Némésis,' a reference to the long planned book-length essay ... notes for what Camus called 'my return to pre-Socratism' i.e., intuitive poetry, a fusion between poetry and philosophy" (p. 657).

The beginnings to which Camus was returning were the beginnings of Western tradition. The movement back towards that "fusion of poetry and philosophy" of the pre-Socratics was surely back to the Homeric pursuit of Ithaca. This journey was interrupted, though not without leaving us a few final signs as to its direction. In the most moving part of Lottman's biography we learn of the circumstances surrounding Camus' fatal car accident. One fact stands out which is in some sense Camus' last testament. In the wreckage was found Camus' briefcase containing the incomplete draft of *The First Man*, a copy of Shakespeare's *Othello*, and one of Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*. The imaginative eye must surely see in the blending of Shakespeare's powerful unmasking of Iago with Nietzsche's "gay science" — itself the poetic philosophy of the "south"<sup>25</sup> — the path towards nemesis, that last form of justice which Camus sought. Here we see the continuation of Camus' final published works, especially the short story "The Renegade" in *The Exile and the Kingdom* and the novel *The Fall* where the master-slave dialectic founders in a duplicity that is at the core of Christian and political use of guilt for Camus. The characters in both *The Fall* and in "The Renegade" suffer from the negation at the core of society which renders them "nameless." It is, of course, only speculation as to whether *The First Man* would for Camus honour Adam's task in Genesis of giving names to God's creatures.

Camus returned to the themes he considered as a young man. Lottman's final words are directed to the most elegant of these themes; the ruins at Tipasa. But Camus understood — Lottman does not — that the ruins are never the same upon each visit. Camus wrote two essays concerning Tipasa — in 1936 and 1952.<sup>26</sup> Each has its own wisdom. Camus notes that Sisyphus, having enjoyed a chance to return to earth, desired to escape the underworld.<sup>27</sup> Camus, if given a similar chance, would return again to Tipasa. It is there that

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Camus "becomes what he is" amongst the Phoenician ruins that serve as his memorial — and as a reminder of Odysseus' encounter at the court on his way home. The biographer must bring Camus again to this place. To do so one must know the meaning of such returns. Regrettably, Lottman leaves Camus in the underworld.

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### Notes

1. See Jean Genet's *Funeral Rites*, trans. Bernard Frechtman, New York: Castle Books, 1969. Genet attempts to avoid the loss of the memory of those who fought in the resistance — a theme that he shares in common with Camus and René Char.
2. René Char, *Hypnos Waking*, Random House: N.Y., 1956, pp. 108-109. Hannah Arendt quotes this aphorism in her preface to *Between Past and Future*, New York: Viking, 1968, p. 3. I have employed Arendt's translation here. The importance of René Char to Camus' life is correctly emphasized by Lottman — an importance which almost all other critics have failed to recognize.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
4. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1972. Horkheimer and Adorno point out that "both the hero and Nobody are possible connotations of the name Udeis" that Odysseus gives to Polyphemus in book 9 of *The Odyssey*, (p. 60).
5. The failure to recognize, or to state, one's name is an important theme in Camus' writing. See for example "The Misunderstanding" in *Caligula and Three Other Plays*, New York: Vintage, 1958, where the son's inability to be recognized by his family after a long absence ends in his murder.
6. See for example Camus' short story "Prometheus in the Underworld," in the collection *Summer*, published in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, New York: Vintage Books, 1970.
7. Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, trans. A. Bower, New York: Vintage Books, 1956, p. 306.
8. Lottman, p. vi. Lottman leaves the quote untranslated. The Justin O'Brien translation is as follows: "At first sight a man's life is more interesting than his works. It constitutes an obstinate, taut whole. Unity of mind dominates. There is a single inspiration through all those years. He is the novel. To be rewritten obviously." *Notebooks 1942-1951*, New York: The Modern Library, 1965, pp. 14-15. The last sentence is more appropriately translated: "To be re-read obviously."
9. *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien, New York: Vintage Books, 1955, p. 9.
10. See Albert Maquet, Albert Camus: *The Invincible Summer*, London: John Calder, 1958.
11. Lottman even seems unaware of any of the literature in this area. See for example the summary of the psychological literature found in Donald Lazere's *The Unique Creation of Albert Camus*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973.

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12. Cf. Connor Cruise O'Brien, *Albert Camus*, London: Fontana, 1970 and related remarks in the body of my text.
13. Collected by Paul Viallaneix in *Cahiers II: Le premier Camus suivi d'Ecrits de jeunesse d'Albert Camus*, Paris: Gallimard, 1973, pp. 235-239.
14. Camus' *Diplôme* is reprinted in the second volume of the Pléiade collection of his work entitled *Essais*, Paris: Gallimard, 1965.
15. James Woelfel, *Camus: A Theological Perspective*, New York: Abingdon Press, 1975.
16. See the unpublished doctoral thesis by David Cook entitled "The Political Thought of Albert Camus," University of Toronto, 1978.
17. Critics have generally dealt inaccurately with the question of whether Camus resigned from the PCA and when this occurred. Critical inaccuracy stems in part from Jean Grenier's account in his *Albert Camus: Souvenirs*, Paris: Gallimard, 1968. The fact that Grenier, Camus' former teacher and friend, did not know of the events surrounding Camus' expulsion indicates that Camus valued highly his private life. Lottman shows no interest in speculating on the privateness, yet it clearly indicates that some caution must be employed in relying as heavily as Lottman does on personal interviews.
18. Cruise O'Brien, p. 14.
19. New York: Delta Books, 1972.
20. See Lottman, pp. 567-577 for a discussion of Camus contact with the FLN. On p. 591 Lottman gives a brief description of Camus' meeting with Mohamed Lebjaoui who was for a period at the head of the FLN. Finally Lottman provides some details of Camus' later interventions with the French government on behalf of individuals such as Amar Ouzegane. Many of these interventions were made without any publicity (p. 693). The reader might also have expected a discussion of Camus' resistance activities in this context. Lottman provides one, but does not add anything significant to our knowledge of Camus' activities.
21. Francis Jeanson, "Albert Camus ou l'âme révoltée," *Les Temps Modernes*, #79 mai, 1952.
22. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, New York: Basic Books, 1964.
23. See Cook.
24. The reader of Lottman's chapter 20, entitled "*La Peste*," will undoubtedly note that the chapter has little to do with the novel. The few comments that appear of importance are found in the next chapter. This kind of confusion is found throughout the book, perhaps indicating the chapter headings were an afterthought.
25. See Walter Kaufmann's introduction to his translation of Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*, New York: Vintage, 1974, p. 6, where Kaufmann interprets the meaning of the title in terms of the contrast of the artistic philosopher of the "south" with the heavier German scholars of the "north." It is clear that Camus' own thought followed Nietzsche's in this vein.
26. The essays are reprinted in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*.
27. "[Sisyphus] obtained from Pluto permission to return to earth in order to chastise his wife. But when he had seen again the face of this world, enjoyed water, and sun, warm stones and the sea, he no longer wanted to go back to the infernal darkness." *The Myth of Sisyphus*, pp. 88-89.

## THE PROPHECY OF GEORGE GRANT

*John Badertscher*

George Parkin Grant, *English-Speaking Justice*, Sackville: Mount Allison University, 1974, pps. 112.

*English-Speaking Justice* continues George Grant's critique of liberalism. This critique views liberalism as a political philosophy within the context of technological society: "Over the last centuries, the most influential people in the English-speaking world have generally taken as their dominant form of self-definition a sustaining faith in a necessary interdependence between the developments of technological science and political liberalism" (pp. 2-3).

This faith has been supported by the evidence of history. English ideas and institutions have, generally speaking, nurtured political liberty. The English-speaking peoples have been able to convince themselves that their technology and their liberty went hand-in-hand. This conviction was reinforced by relative domestic stability and the growth of a great empire, founded by the British and inherited by the Americans. Because they believed that technology and liberty were linked, the leaders of the empire could feel that its spread would eventually be justified not only by material benefits to those being encompassed by it, but also by the political liberty that was surely to follow.

Grant wants us to give the truth in this understanding of modern history its due. There is something deserving of our respect in the degree of political liberty which has been developed and sustained in the successive heartlands of this empire. However, he also wants us to note that the liberalism expressed in English ideas and institutions is of only one variety. "Liberalism in its generic form is surely something that all decent men accept as good — 'conservatives' included" (p. 4). Grant wishes to distinguish English liberalism from at least two other ways of thinking about freedom. First, there is the classical tradition of Western political thought, with its roots in the Bible and Greek philosophy. This tradition, Grant holds, has its finest articulation in Plato's *Republic*. One purpose of *English-Speaking Justice*, and indeed of much of Grant's writing, is to persuade us to be open to this wisdom in our own day. Those, like Karl Popper, who would deny that this tradition holds political liberty as one of the central human goods receive some of Grant's sharpest barbs. Further, in our time freedom has come to be understood increasingly as an absolute human



good. This tendency has been thought through more thoroughly on the Continent than in the English-speaking world and most obviously by Marx and Nietzsche. Their influence — and that of others — has brought about intemperate and destructive politics. Grant reminds us that English-speaking liberalism has been largely immune from these misfortunes, and for that we should be grateful. This reminder is Grant's second purpose. The price of this, however, has been a shallowness in English liberalism — a failure to think seriously about the relationship between technology and justice. To warn us of the future to which this shallowness opens us is Grant's primary purpose.

Grant brings us, in his introduction, into the presence of some big questions. Looking at the modern crisis of liberalism he asks, "What were the modern assumptions which at one and the same time exalted human freedom and encouraged that cybernetic mastery which now threatens freedom?" (p. 10) Looking back to the theoretical roots of English liberalism he asks, "was the affirmation by those founders that justice is based on contract ever sufficient to support a politics of consent and justice?" (pp. 12-13) The book proceeds to suggest answers, but only at the cost of raising even more questions.

The answer Grant gives to the latter question appears in part II, the longest section of the book. It appears at first to be merely(!) an extensive review of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*. It becomes clear, however, that Grant wants us not only to see the inadequacies of this most impressive monument to English-speaking liberalism, but also to trace its deficiencies to problems inherent in the thought of Locke and Kant, Rawls's mentors. It is an ambitious and brilliantly executed project. Rawls himself is dispatched with relative ease. In fact, even a reading of the footnotes to this chapter will make it difficult for the reader to continue to be impressed by the book with which the current generation of philosophical ethicists seems, for the most part, to be enthralled. Grant's intention, however, is not to make light of Rawls, but to ponder his work as a particularly clear expression of the dominant morality.

The structure of his analysis is simple. Rawls is compared first with Locke, then with Kant. Rawls's intentions having been clarified through an analysis of both the continuities and discontinuities with his mentors, the critique is then brought to completion. Rawls stands in the English contractarian tradition of which Locke was a principal architect. In Rawls, as in Locke, justice cannot be based on some knowledge of man's highest good, for such knowledge is not to be had with certainty. In the face of such agnosticism, justice is grounded in the social contract. In Locke, however, the basis of this contract is the supposition that in the state of Nature — the way things are apart from the contract — life is far poorer. Therefore, it is mutually advantageous to enter into and abide by the contract. As in Locke, the ethical agent in Rawls's analysis is an adult calculator of interest. Rawls, however, being a modern philosopher who is aware of the "naturalistic fallacy," cannot ground his imperative on any

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supposed knowledge of the way things are. Therefore, he introduces in its place the concept of the "original position," a concept completely abstracted from any particular time, place or circumstances.

The awareness of the "naturalistic fallacy," the radical distinction between empirical knowledge and moral reasoning, can be traced to Kant, the Continental philosopher most influential on modern English-speaking philosophy. Rawls describes his theory as "Kantian," and Grant is willing to concede that there is a strong resemblance between Rawls's understanding of justice as fairness and Kant's categorical imperative. Grant, however, insists that Rawls's appropriation of Kant is one-sided and distorted. For Kant, morality is the one fact of reason. For Rawls, there are no "facts" of reason, for reason is wholly instrumental. The entire metaphysical dimension of Kant is ignored, making nonsense of Rawls's use of the term "person" to account for the dignity of the individual.

Having shed all traces of the ontology or metaphysics of his mentors, except for the mysterious recourse to the concept of "person," Rawls offers a notion of justice which shines forth as a contractarian liberalism purged of any remnants of the classical tradition in which justice is understood ontologically, as that for which man is fitted. Rawls's principles call for a unity of individual liberty with an increasingly realised substantive equality, overcoming the arbitrary deficiencies of nature and the historically accidental inequalities of society. As Grant puts it, Rawls has articulated "American progressivist common sense" (p. 42). Grant wants us to note, however, that this philosophy makes sense only when abstracted from the realities of the social order. These realities include the power of private and public corporations, modern warfare and imperialism. When we attempt to think of this abstract liberalism together with these technological realities, fundamental questions emerge. Can the content of justice be derived from the calculation of self-interest? When what Rawls calls the "primary goods" (Grant refers to them as "the cozy pleasures") are the only self-evident goods, what sort of regime will seem most appropriate to their pursuit? Finally: "Is justice pursued because of convenience, even when the calculation is in terms of an account of self-interest reached in abstraction from any knowledge of the way things are as whole? Is such justification of justice able to support the pursuit of liberty and equality at a time when the conveniences of technology do not seem to favour them?" (p. 50) By the time Grant has led us to these questions, they have become nearly rhetorical.

Even if one considers that liberalism seemed self-evidently valid through its connection with an expanding empire and several generations of relative domestic tranquility, one wonders how it is that contractual liberalism, so painfully lacking in adequate foundations, has been sustained as the dominant morality of the English-speaking world. If the account of justice is so inadequate in liberal thought, to what can one attribute the potency of

English-speaking justice? Grant replies: "This can only be comprehended in terms of the intimate and yet ambiguous co-penetration between contractual liberalism and Protestantism in the minds of generations of our people" (pp. 61-2). The story of this co-penetration, as told by Grant, takes shape as follows.

In England, Calvinist individualism was readily blended with capitalism, and contractualism provided both a political and philosophical expression of that blending. Further, the positivism of the Calvinist approach to divine revelation blended just as easily with the forms of thought in modern science. In the United States, where Protestantism was even more unflinching and less thoughtful in its struggle with the wilderness, the blending was even more thorough. The liberalism of the secular realms depended on this Protestantism for its "moral bite" (p. 65), but the blending process altered both ingredients. The deeper the co-penetration, the more Protestantism became limited to secularized forms, and the less it could contribute toward sustaining a sense of justice as more than convenience.

Protestantism was thus finally laid to rest as a shaper of public life, but not before it had bequeathed to our culture an understanding of both God and man in terms of will. Freedom thereby came to be understood as autonomy; this understanding is both the gift and the nemesis of Calvinism. It was in this climate that Kant found his way into the hearts of English-speaking intellectuals. "He offered them a Protestantism purified of superstitions and open to progress" (p. 70). Thus, Grant argues, the memory of the eternal ground of justice preserved by the Protestant interpretation of Biblical religion kept alive an openness to the claims of justice in a contractarian social order until it too was absorbed by the emerging technological ethos. Even then, Kantian thought helped delay the raising of unanswerable questions about contradictions between technology and justice, as Nietzsche has shown.

Grant concludes: "This combination of the public successes of liberalism with these memories and hopes inhibited the thought which asks if justice is more than contractually founded, and whether it can be sustained in the world if it be considered simply a chosen convenience. The very decency and confidence of English-speaking politics was related to the absence of philosophy" (pp. 72-3). The delay could not last forever. In the final part of the book Grant lays before us the issue in which liberalism "raises a cup of poison" (p. 75) to its own lips. The issue is abortion law, especially as it can be seen in the *Roe vs. Wade* decision of the United States Supreme Court. "In that decision one can hear what is being spoken about justice in such modern liberalism more clearly than in academic books which can be so construed as to skim questions when the theory cuts" (p. 74).

Liberalism, we may recall, claims no knowledge of any good higher than the individual's calculation of self-interest. In *Roe vs. Wade*, however, the majority opinion does introduce ontological considerations. That is, the judges make a

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distinction between members of the same species. The interests of one — an adult calculator — are to be protected by law; the interests of another — a fetus — are not. By making this distinction, the court exposes the contradiction in the dominant morality, a contradiction between justice and convenience. If rights are reduced to the convenience of calculators, and the human species is simply a historical (thus contingent) concept, why should we be just?

From this point, Grant's analysis runs swiftly to its conclusion. The contradiction is not only in the English-speaking world; it permeates Western civilisation. The content of justice for us has been based on an understanding of what man is fitted for. That content, as well as its form, is being challenged by a technological society which tells us that whatever is — including mankind — is ruled by necessity and chance. From within the framework of modern thought, a matrix of contractual liberalism and technological instrumentalism, we simply are not able to think justice together with the truths that have arisen through technology. They cannot be understood as part of the same whole. Nietzsche, who did think through the contradictions of our world, told us that God is dead and that reality is historical. Integrity, in this situation, is to be sought in the exercise of will.

Grant's penultimate conclusion is startling. The English-speaking world still has a heritage of constitutional government, he reminds us, and it protects us against ideological folly. Further, North American pluralism continues to provide fertile ground for religious revivals. No matter how attenuated the faith which they nurture, some memory of the eternal ground of justice will be thereby supported. Liberalism, in other words, is in some ways the best political philosophy available. Criticism of it should be articulated prudently.

In any case, however, justice is bound to decline. The majority will trust technology for the "primary goods," and will prefer equality in these to justice in any other sense. In the resulting regime there will be inequality of liberty for the weak — those less able to calculate. Further, justice will have less and less to do with the character of persons. The widening rift between the inward and the outward life will sink both religion and politics deeper into what others have called privatization. The nature and reality of justice will tend to become increasingly dark to us. The English-speaking people in this situation have the practical advantage of "the old and settled legal institutions which still bring forth loyalty from many of the best practical people" (p 95). Compounding matters further is our tradition of contempt for our philosophical heritage, and for thought itself. For this reason we are ill-equipped and unlikely to lighten the darkness which is now descending.

A question which needs to be raised about this book is suggested by an apparent inconsistency of language in the concluding paragraphs. Grant has been leading us to see contractual liberalism as a political philosophy which claims to unite the substance of justice with the pursuit of technological

progress, but which is finally inadequate to that task. In his concluding three paragraphs, Grant says three things about the relationship between justice and technology. First, there is the call to those who still somehow know that justice is what we are fitted for "to understand how justice can be thought together with what has been discovered of truth in the coming to be of technology" (p. 92). However, a great darkness surrounds in this situation, since the account of justice to which Plato's *Republic* and the Christian Gospels bear witness "cannot be thought in unity with what is given in modern science concerning necessity and chance" (pp. 93-94, emphasis mine). Only a few sentences later, however, the heart of that darkness is that "this account *has not* been thought in unity with the greatest theoretical enterprises of the modern world" (p. 94, emphasis mine). Now the first of these two claims would appear to be the stronger. Yet, Grant has convinced me that the latter is the case — and his own writing is one of the reasons I doubt the former.

Is Grant simply inconsistent, weaseling out of a too harsh conclusion by covering it with a milder one? Or is he confused in his purpose, having come to realize that the truth he set out to tell us is one which ought not to be told? My own judgement would be that the inconsistency is only apparent, a consequence of the prophetic character of his writing. If justice and technology *have not* been thought together, who can say with conviction that they *can* be? Yet Grant's prophecy (since real prophecy is always somewhat ecstatic) may apply to his own thinking as well. Perhaps the hidden consistency in the penultimate paragraph lies behind Grant's assumption that Plato's *Republic* is the most adequate philosophical exposition of the Biblical account of justice. Perhaps the Platonizing of the Christian tradition, which partially subverted even the attempt of St. Thomas Aquinas to do theology in an Aristotelian key, is part of that which makes the present intellectual task appear impossible.

One can agree with Grant in concluding: "It is folly simply to return to the ancient account of justice as if the discoveries of the modern science of nature had not been made. It is folly to take the ancient account of justice as simply of antiquarian interest, because without any knowledge of justice as what we are fitted for, we will move into the future with a 'justice' which is terrifying in its potentialities for mad inhumanity of action" (p. 94). One can even agree that the *Republic* is the most "beautiful" expression of that ancient account, without agreeing that it is the truest or most illuminating in our present darkness. For example, Hans-Georg Gadamer has argued that Aristotle can help contemporary hermeneutics surmount the impasses of historicism. Perhaps the more pluralistic account of justice given in the *Nichomachean Ethics* and the *Politics* would prove fruitful if more seriously considered.

Further, the clarity of Aristotle's distinction between the theoretical and practical sciences might make the modern task more manageable than it appears to Grant. He remarks, in the same penultimate paragraph, that, "For

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those of us who are lucky enough to know that we have been told that justice is what we are fitted for, this is not a practical darkness, but simply a theoretical one" (pp. 94-95). It is hard to understand what Grant might mean by this, unless he is thinking of justice as only a matter of the inner life. For to know what justice is, is not yet to do it. If Grant is right about the public realm being pre-empted by the language of liberalism, and I believe he is, then the doing of justice will involve a reopening of the public realm to the language of justice. Until we find a way to do this, our darkness will surely be a practical one. On this point the account of Hannah Arendt, who argued in *The Human Condition* that our modern incapacity is primarily a failure of our power of action as the Greeks understood that power, is more penetrating if not more reassuring than that of Grant. A recovery of the Aristotelian sense of the practical (which is definitely not the same as the modern use of the term "praxis") commends itself as a step toward the reopening of the public realm.

In *Lament for a Nation*, Grant argued that Canadian nationalism is impossible in the North American empire. A paradoxical result of the book was a revival of Canadian nationalism. It is fascinating to see the possibility of equally surprising results coming from *English-Speaking Justice*. For, although the circulation will be far smaller, the searching is far deeper and the prophecy is far darker than in the earlier book. However, if justice truly is what we are fitted for, if it really does have a grounding in the way things are, then we may reasonably hope that Grant's message will receive the hearing it deserves.

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## EDMUND BURKE AND THE CONSERVATIVE MIND

*Rod Preece*

*Issac Kramnick, The Rage of Edmund Burke: Portrait of an Ambivalent Conservative*, New York: Basic Books, 1977, pp. xii + 225.

Were Edmund Burke alive today he would, as he was wont to do in his lifetime, sue for libel. Accused by Isaac Kramnick of homosexuality, anality and a general obsession with excessive sexuality Burke would have his learned impeacher duly chastised and compelled to recant before the court. The damages awarded, however, might well be less than the recompense demanded.

What Kramnick brings to his compelling but ultimately unconvincing study of Burke, and what has been sorely lacking in the accounts of a number of contemporary commentators, is a profound and perceptive awareness of the social and political reality of late eighteenth-century England. Thus a delusive air of legitimacy and discernment is infused into Kramnick's story.

It would be unwarrantable to suggest that Kramnick's study was devoid of merit. Indeed, some of the work constitutes, as is boldly claimed on the dustcover, "a necessary and important corrective to the simplistic Burke who has been served up to us in recent decades." However, the "new Burke" who emerges is not, as Kramnick would have us believe, "a much more interesting and important historical figure than the defender of the faith so venerated by generations of conservatives." The uncouth fraud who is the subject of Kramnick's biography palls against the literary and philosophical giant of the traditional conservative portrait. Nonetheless, Kramnick does perform an invaluable service in demonstrating that the *Inquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* should be treated as an integral and not extrinsic piece of Burkean writing, that there are good grounds (as I have long suspected) for regarding the *Vindication of Natural Society* as written in earnest rather than as a clever piece of irony, and that the bourgeois aspects of Burkean thought are central to the theme (although this is far from as novel an idea as Kramnick supposes).

The thrust of Kramnick's carefully argued and meticulously documented study concerns Burke's alleged aberrant sexual tendencies and their influence on the development of his philosophy. The evidence offered is less than indisputable, as Kramnick recognizes. Moreover, and this Kramnick does not seem to recognize, if one were convinced by the evidence of Burke's deviance

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this would constitute inadequate ground for assuming the deviance to be the cause of the ideas held; and even if one were to accept such causal relationship this would have no bearing on any question of the validity or the value of Burke's reasoning. Kramnick's psychologistic arguments lead to all the obvious errors of relativism. Secondly, Kramnick announces that, "No longer the dogmatic ideologue that conventional wisdom portrays, Burke emerges a figure of uncertainty and ambivalence. No longer the conservative prophet, Burke emerges the ambivalent radical." One may well doubt the accuracy of what Kramnick considers the traditional portrait of Edmund Burke. Is it really true that Copeland or Kirk, Cobban or Canavan, have viewed Burke as a dogmatic ideologue? More importantly, uncertainty and ambivalence are not antithetical to conservatism but constitute its very essence — but more of that later. Conservatism is not the defence of the aristocratic past, as Kramnick avers, but is the preservation of the most orderly, disciplined and manly elements of what the past is becoming. Kramnick's "startling revelations" constitute no sound reason for deposing Burke as the legitimate fount of this conservative philosophy. Thirdly, Kramnick maintains a contradiction between the "natural law" Burke and the Burke of "barter," "prudence" and "expedience." I shall attempt to show that, despite the long-thought connection between objectivism and dogmatism, there is ample accommodation between the Burke of "compromise" and the Burke of the objective moral code.

What, then, of the relevance to Burke's ideas of the alleged anality? Kramnick lumps together Luther, Swift and Pope, indeed all who belong to what he calls the "Christian humanists," among the deviant; and we are expected to recognize the relationship between the deviance and the ideas. Yet it takes only a moment's reflection to appreciate that whatever the truth of Kramnick's allegations concerning the deviance there is no necessary relationship between the "psychological causes" of an idea and its validity. To quote one of the many who have demonstrated the poverty of relativist thinking, Michael Oakeshott informs us caustically that, "When a geneticist tells us that 'all social behaviour and historical events are the inescapable consequences of the genetic individuality of the persons concerned' we have no difficulty in recognizing this theorem as a brilliant illumination of the writings of Aristotle, the fall of Constantinople, the deliberations of the House of Commons on Home Rule for Ireland and the death of Barbarossa; but his brilliance is, perhaps, somewhat dimmed when it becomes clear that he can have nothing more revealing to say about his science of genetics than that it is also *all* done by genes, and that this theorem is itself his genes speaking." It is, of course, a small step to substitute Oakeshott's quip about the view of the geneticist with a similar remark about Freudian psychoanalysts. It is a no greater step to inquire what peculiar characteristics of Kramnick's own psyche account for his interest in the alleged homosexuality and anality of Burke.



It is unlikely that Kramnick is unaware of the relativist fallacy. We can thus only assume that Kramnick regards conservative philosophy as itself an aberration unworthy of serious study in its own right. But if that is true one wonders why one should take Kramnick seriously, for it is one of the (frequent but not necessary) limitations of a study undertaken by a scholar with no sympathy for his subject that the values, complexities and subtleties of the subject matter receive short shrift. Of course Kramnick may wish to evade such a criticism by claiming that it is not ideas in general which are subject to psychoanalytic explanation (for, if they are, both psychoanalysis in general and Kramnick's theory of Burke in particular are immediately explained away as the result of Freud's and Kramnick's personalities) but only certain ideas of certain persons. However, if that is so, Kramnick is required to tell us what differentiates Burke and his ambivalence from Kramnick and his derogations and from Freud and his psychoanalysis. Naturally, Kramnick fails to offer any such explanation. In fact, the only explanation which appears feasible is that Burke is in some manner a deviant while Kramnick and Freud are in some manner normal — and that healthy ideas derive from normal personalities while sick ideas derive from deviant personalities.

Paradoxically, such a conclusion accords more comfortably with what is usually considered conservative rather than with radical thinking, and is incompatible with current liberal sexual mores. If unhealthy ideas are the necessary consequence of homosexual behaviour then, so the logical implications are, it would seem prudent to pursue social policies which effectively deter such behaviour. Thus the outlawing of homosexuality would seem to constitute necessary social policy if a healthy society is to be pursued. This is not a necessary part of the conservative attitude, but it is a corollary of Kramnick's version of radical relativism.

Professor Kramnick explains the "anal rage" of Burke by referring to his "preoccupation with the Jacobins as demonic" and then telling us that "the devil has about him unmistakable anal overtones". A "long repressed oedipal conquest", Kramnick claims, is relived in Burke's denunciation of Hastings who "personified for Burke the consequences of unleashed and unrepressed sexuality". Such statements abound throughout Kramnick's study. Their purpose is to demonstrate that Burke's political philosophy arose from his alleged ambivalent sexuality. Thus is "explained" the constant tension between his radical and conservative, bourgeois and aristocratic, capitalist and feudal, conceptions. Hence, for Kramnick, Burke "The Prophet of Conservatism" is the "Mythic Burke."

Why should it be thought inconsistent to rail against the aristocracy in one breath and against the bourgeois dissenters in another? Why should one not accept a voluntarist solution for one problem and propose a statist answer to another without being deemed capricious? This surely reflects no more than the

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oft commented conservative pragmatism — the belief that it is not possible to express appropriate policy principles in simple aphorisms because the appropriate paths to be pursued will alter as the circumstances change. Kramnick is right to note the ambivalence in Burke's thought, but he serves only to confuse when he explains it away in a relativist manner. In fact, ambivalence, involving a pragmatic skepticism about rationalist proposals and the recognition that the world is offers more complexity than man's mind is capable of regulating, is central to conservative thought.

It does not follow, however, that contradictions in Burke's writings are somehow eliminated by the recognition of this ambivalence. It would be just as gross an error to excuse those contradictions as a consequence of a philosophy of ambivalence as it is to explain them away as the consequence of sexual deformity. That there are contradictions in Burke was ably demonstrated by Frank O'Gorman in his *Edmund Burke: His Political Philosophy* (London: 1973); Burke's own defence of his consistency in his *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* falters in the face of incontrovertible evidence. That there are two Burkes is well-founded, but there is, nonetheless, no doubt which is the "real" Burke — the mature Burke whom Burke himself describes in the *Appeal*. That Burke did not always remain consistent should not surprise us. I find it difficult to recollect a conservative thinker who did not express radical sympathies in his youth — and even occasionally in his maturity; Mallet du Pan, Görres and Disraeli immediately come to mind. As often as not, conservative thought is derived from the recognition of the rationalist errors of one's youth. Was it not Disraeli who asserted that if you are not a socialist by the time you are twenty you have no heart, and if you are not a tory by the time you are thirty you have no head? Which of us would care to have his sexuality determined by his philosophical consistency? No, conservative ambivalence is not a product of deviant sexuality but arises from that subtle understanding of the necessity of expedience and pragmatism if the enormities of rationalism, utopianism and dogmatic socialism are to be avoided.

When Kramnick writes of "the eternal longing of the conservative for the elimination of rational thought from politics" he commits the common error of confusing irrationalism with the belief that abstract thought based on idle speculation is unlikely to produce satisfactory policies. It is not reason, not "rational thought," which the conservative rejects but grandiose schemes of ambitious reform derived from utopian thinking. He does not oppose reform: but he requires reform to be conducted with a delicate touch. Through experience he recognizes that many well-intentioned policies designed to remedy real grievances and proven abuses not only fail to improve the situation but succeed only in making it worse — one must, as Burke says, "know how much of an evil ought to be tolerated, lest by attempting a degree of purity impractical" one succeeds only in producing "new corruptions." The con-

servative insists on an unbroken continuity with the past because traditional institutions are likely to contain a wisdom which individual rationality may be inadequate to discern, especially in relation to the fulfilment of presently satisfied needs which may become thwarted through radical change — "all that wise men ever aim at," says Burke with even more caution than customary, "is to keep things from coming to the worst." The principle of aristocracy is not revered for itself — and hence a deviation from that principle is not necessarily a contradiction, or even an ambivalence — it is merely the necessary brake on the excesses of the principles of the bourgeoisie.

The conservative rejects the prevailing naivety that problems must have solutions; he rejects the conception that if only we try hard enough and long enough the world's ills can be cured. Moreover, he recognizes the potentially grave harm in trying too much. A moral question turns out to be a moral dilemma for we are frequently required to choose between evil and evil — "We balance inconvenience," Burke says. Indeed, the principle of politics is the principle of ambivalence: "The evils latent in the most promising contrivances are provided for as they arise. One advantage is as little sacrificed to another. We compensate, we reconcile, we balance." And we go on compensating, reconciling and balancing in the knowledge that there are no permanent solutions and the dangers of destruction are as great as the promises of amelioration, that every good we seek contains the seeds of its own negation. The conservative is apprehensive of the women's liberation movement, not because he considers women inferior, nor because he believes they are usurping rights traditionally ascribed to men, but because he foresees in the changes envisaged insecurities and derogations of rights greater than those presently experienced. If we double the number of persons attempting to procure the relatively small number of "interesting" or "important" occupational appointments then we concomitantly double the amount of alienation through the necessary increase in those who fail to fulfil their ambitions. The radical recognizes only the potential for self-fulfilment whereas what is necessary is to maintain not only the contradiction (belonging) along with self-fulfilment but also to minimize self-debasement. The question is, as Burke says, one of "composition" of "the various anomalies and contending principles that are found in the minds and affairs of man."

The conservative is also mistrustful of the changes to the family portended by the successes of modern feminism. Since children will be reared differently — either more by fathers than presently or outside the home — the conservative believes that there is considerable likelihood that they will be reared worse. Such thinking is easily derided as reactionary, as mere prejudice, as the conservative inhibition to countenance necessary change. Yet the conservative will respond that if the change is necessary, if it can be shown to be desirable in itself *and* unlikely to entail telling disadvantages, he will welcome it. Other-

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wise, he will object to the change not because tradition so ordains but because through tradition, through lengthy experience, appropriate and effective rules are learned and followed, and thereby man's potential both for corruption and unwitting error is curbed. New methods, new circumstances, require new rules — and when rules are unhallowed and the appropriate rules unknown the avarice, corruption and ignorance of man come to the fore. Before man's sense of justice can determine the right rules and the least oppressive means of enforcing them — and that is a complicated matter of relevant experience rather than *a priori* speculation — before custom assures convenience and habit ensures compliance, injustice will be rampant. However, the conservative also recognizes that previous role satisfactions have been diminished as a result both of economic and educational changes, and that it is necessary to adjust the norms to conform to the new reality. Experience must teach him now to accept the equality of women. The conservative remains wary of expecting much increased benefit from that new reality.

When C.B. Macpherson describes Burke as merely a theorist of hierarchy and class subordination (and thus receives Kramnick's approval) he fails to recognize that Burke has already thought beyond the constraints of the class-conscious paradigm. Burke recognizes the problem of oppression when he asserts that, "we must have ranks and distinctions and magistracy in the state, notwithstanding their manifest tendency to encourage avarice and ambition." It is a pressing problem requiring constant attention, not an ephemeral phenomenon to be conjured away by radical legerdemain. Burke recognizes, what the radical manifesto does not: that it is always inadequate to proclaim an injustice, an oppression, or a vice to be remedied, unless one can concomitantly recommend a solution which not only corrects the evil in question but entails no greater evils of its own. This the radical singularly fails to do. He amply demonstrates the errors of the past and present, castigating all before him — but has nothing but the results of idle speculation to offer in their stead. As Burke says, "a clamour made merely for the purpose of rendering the people discontented with their situation, without an endeavour to give them a practical remedy, is indeed one of the worst acts of sedition."

Ambivalence is not an aberrance of conservatism but a part of its very nature; it is as central to conservative thought as is the dialectic to Marxism. The conservative is ambivalent about liberalism; he subscribes to the Kantian conception of liberty whereby man has the freedom to choose what is right, not the freedom to do whatever he desires. He is ambivalent about order because he reveres liberty; thus it is ordered liberty — Burke's "manly, moral, regulated liberty" — which the conservative has constantly sought. He is ambivalent about the proper functions of the state, the amount of interference appropriate to the economy, the extent of permissible reform. This ambivalence arises neither from cynicism nor from despair but from a particular

form of skepticism for which there is no adequate term in the English language. Yet the conservative's ambivalence — his uncertainty, his skepticism, his reluctance to espouse rationalism — does not lead to ethical relativism. It involves a conception of man as properly educated to the sterner virtues — those "virtues which restrain the appetite" and which Burke adumbrates as "constancy, gravity, magnanimity, fortitude, fidelity and firmness" which are closely allied to the "disagreeable quality" of "obstinacy"; while man may not be an entirely rational creature it is necessary to his manhood that we treat him in a disciplined manner as though he were. Yet while rejecting relativism, the conservative conception of ethics does not *necessarily* — and should not *in fact* — lead to ethical dogmatism. Burke's ethical objectivism and his moderation — his sense of compromise, prudence, pragmatism, barter and expedience — are, quite contrary to Kramnick's assertions, essentially compatible.

When Max Weber recognized that "maxims are in eternal conflict" and that man lives his life through a "motley of irreconcilably antagonistic values" he concluded that these are conflicts "which cannot be resolved by ethics alone" and that there are no good grounds for choosing one value over another. Burke is with Weber up to the last step — and he sympathizes even there but believes that the difficulty of making a *right* choice in the complex circumstances of political reality is no interference with the objectivity of the values in conflict. Weber concluded that there were no objective values and that therefore moderation must become the appropriate principle of politics. However, if one concludes with Burke that the antagonistic values in constant conflict — Burke's "contending principles" — are objective but contradictory, one is led to the same Weberian conclusions. Thus one may overcome the danger endemic to objectivist views of ethics that dogmatism and intolerance will predominate in the pursuit of the one true goal. Yet one must be careful not to conclude that tolerance itself becomes an overriding principle, for, as Burke pointed out, there is a point at which "forbearance ceases to be a virtue". It is only sound judgement based on experience rather than formal and abstract rules which allows one to know when that point is reached.

The criterion of a *sound judgement* is the practical one of *does it in fact lead to the consequences foreseen for it?* Now it is, of course, easy to castigate such thinking as being "Machiavellian," as amounting to "the ends justify the means." Yet the philosophical conservative is well aware that the "means" of any one question are likely to be the "ends" of some other equally important question. That sound judgement is the one that most effectively synthesizes to the degree possible "the various anomalies and contending principles." There are neither facile nor complex rules to be trotted out to cover their application.

If values are objective but contradictory — if one should be appropriately ambivalent about some of them, as Burke was — then "moderation" — Burke's "compromise", "barter", "prudence" and "expedience" — becomes the

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appropriate guiding principle because we otherwise cause too much harm in attempting to achieve too much of one objective good at the expense of some other objective good. The contradictions among values arise in part from the contradictory nature of the needs to be fulfilled. Thus, if the need to belong goes unsatisfied in society then the appropriate policies will be directed toward the fulfilment of that need, but in the process such policies will hinder the fulfilment of the need for self-realization. Policies, then, must never go too far in the fulfilment of any need, for they will result in making it very difficult to fulfil the contradictory need. When, however, our policies have served to give the members some significant sense of belonging, but thereby have diminished their individuality, it will be appropriate to institute policies which encourage self-realization but which will thereby diminish the sense of belonging. Thus the appropriate policies will change as one need becomes more fulfilled and another need is thereby hindered from fulfilment. This is the essential element of the conservative's reluctance to spell out principles as aphoristic abstractions; it is the essence of his sense of pragmatism.

Prudence is essential not through ignorance of appropriate ends but because whatever we do in politics to improve matters in one respect is likely to make them somewhat worse in others. To provide for the hungry, to institute welfare programmes, will succeed also in diminishing the self-reliance, even the dignity, of those who only receive. Encouraging self-reliance, however, may also serve to diminish commitment to the public good. To pursue the organic community will hinder individual development; to encourage individual expression will ultimately harm the identity of the whole. Compromise and prudence should be the guiding principles of political action not because we lack good grounds for choosing our values, but because the achievement of any one objective value is likely to interfere with the achievement of some other. Hence the requirement is for balance, not among the competing interests of society, as the brokerage theorists assert, but among the competing values.

Provocative, entertaining and perceptive as Isaac Kramnick's curious book may be, it would be preferable if it were neither the first nor the last book on Burke that the student of political thought be asked to read. The lively, perverted and sometimes witty character to whom Professor Kramnick has introduced us may be worthy of further study, but that character is not Edmund Burke. The politics of ambivalence is not reducible to sexual deviation. It is the wisdom of conservative philosophical insight. Kramnick has led us astray. To understand the real Burke is to understand the fount of conservative wisdom. To do that we need to recognize both that the English-speaking conservatism which Burke initiated is not the defence of an aristocratic past but the preservation of the most orderly, disciplined and manly elements of what the past is becoming, and that "compromise," "expedience," "barter" and "prudence" are the means of synthesizing the "various anomalies and con-

*ROD PREECE*

tending principles" which confound the political practitioner. "Compromise," "expedience," "barter" and "prudence" are not merely the necessary but the honourable principles of politics.

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## THE DISUNITY OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

*Richard Vernon*

"What is the 'Marxist sense' of the unity of theory and practice?" Professor Stanley asks in his generous review of my *Commitment and Change*.<sup>1</sup> I admire the skeptical spirit in which this question is raised, and confess that I have no ready answer. Some of the principal candidates, however, would appear to be the following: (1) a view that the tasks once ascribed to theory must be taken up by practice (*i.e.*, *change* not *interpretation* will liberate us); (2) a view that the conclusions of theory coincide with the practical demands of a movement (*i.e.*, its particular needs and interests match and embody the universal requirements of philosophy); (3) a view that theory ought to reach practical conclusions (*i.e.*, it is idle if it fails to connect with the real situations and problems of its day); (4) a view that theory does embody "practical"<sup>2</sup> interests, implicitly taking a stand on political matters by virtue of the assumptions which it makes and the categories which it adopts, whether it seeks to do so or not; (5) a view that practice proves or disproves the truth of theoretical speculation ("Man must prove the truth ... of his thinking in practice"); (6) a view that practical effectiveness *constitutes* the truth of theory; (7) a view that theory and practice ought to interact, each continually enriching the other; (8) a view that the same people ought to theorize and practice (*i.e.*, no division of manual and intellectual labour). None of these senses of the phrase is logically related to any other, *i.e.*, one can accept or reject any one without being committed to the acceptance or rejection of any of the rest, though some may be hard to square with others. Not surprisingly, then, the question of Sorel's relation to Marx (and Marxism) on this topic is one of great complexity.

There may be something to be said for beginning with the quite elementary manner in which Sorel introduces the topic in his earliest writings, drawing not at all upon Marx (or Hegel) but upon the ancient question of the philosopher's relation to the city. In *Le Procès de Socrate* (1889) Sorel makes the following rather heavy-handed remark:

The future was bleak, and it was clear that long wars were to be expected. The city was poor, and had to appeal to the heroic feelings of all those peasants, coal-merchants and garlic-growers who knew only one thing about philosophy: that their fathers had beaten the Persians, and had won supremacy at sea.<sup>3</sup>



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What is philosophy to the coal-merchants and garlic-growers? Nothing at all, Sorel says, and Socrates (to judge from Plato's *Crito*) would surely have agreed. The city's unity is constituted not by the True and the Good but by images and memories of a gratifying kind: "our fathers beat the Persians." Seventeen years later, the following passage appears in Sorel's most notorious book, *Réflexions sur la violence*:

We might be lead to ask, in fact, whether our official socialists, with their passion for discipline and their boundless faith in the genius of leaders, are not the most authentic heirs of the royal armies, while the anarchists and the advocates of a general strike are not those who today represent the spirit of the revolutionary warriors who so thoroughly thrashed the fine armies of the coalition, against all the rules of war.<sup>4</sup>

Now why should a theorist of revolutionary syndicalism, who believed in the strictest class division and thus in the invalidity of *civisme*, have introduced such an appeal to the heroes of Fleurus (who, after all, gave their lives for a cause which Sorel despised)? Because "what our fathers did," in beating the Persians or the Austrians in so exemplary a fashion, enters fundamentally into the scheme of things that we admire, and we can be induced only with great difficulty, if at all, to engage in something for which our memories have not prepared us. What can be *done*, then, is limited by the array of images which can be diffused sufficiently to win consent to a project.

Here we may have an explanation for that asymmetry of theory and practice which, in my view, runs throughout Sorel's thinking, and, arguably, supplies its principal dynamic. Once again, *Le Procès de Socrate* is helpful:

Only very rarely do the men of science engage in active politics. Remarkably enough, they are all the more cautious the more bold and radical they are in their doctrines. Generally speaking, the men who resort to violence are rather weak in theory.<sup>5</sup>

And once again, there is a passage in *Réflexions sur la violence* which interestingly recalls this earlier remark. Sorel says of the syndicalist militants:

These men may be wrong about any number of political, economic or moral questions; but their testimony is decisive, sovereign, and beyond correction when it is a

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matter of discovering the pictures [*représentations*] which most powerfully move them and their comrades, which are able, in the highest degree, to fuse with their conception of socialism, and thanks to which their reason, their hopes, and their perception of particular facts seem to form a single indivisible unity.<sup>6</sup>

Sorel's new approval of the men of violence, then, does not in the least diminish his old conviction that they are "weak in theory." Their views are unreliable guides to truth in "political, economic and moral" questions. Yet the "men of science," who separate fact from hope and thus might answer those questions better, are nevertheless incompetent in the realm of action, for their knowledge gives them no clue as to what is effective as, so to speak, *opinion*. The passage from *Réflexions* amplifies this argument in a most relevant way; in practical thinking, as Sorel says, reason, hope and perception are fused in a self-sustaining unity which is therefore closed to criticism or doubt. This is, of course, the "indivisibility" and "irrefutability" of myth, a doctrine for which Sorel is so famous; and like Plato's even more famous myth in the *Republic*, it springs from the proposition that what is true will not secure consent by virtue, simply, of being true.

Now in the militant's mind as Sorel describes it there is indeed a unity of *thought* and practice, his "representations" of the world being tied essentially to his "hopes" of changing it. If we are tempted to call such thought "theory," that is, I think, only because it often draws, in varying degrees, upon elaborate theoretical constructs such as, in this case, those of Marx. But all this amounts to is the uncontentious point that the vocabulary and conceptual apparatus of theory may sometimes enter the realm of practical thought (which is a far cry indeed from claiming that they can themselves constitute what Sorel, like Cardinal Newman, called "principles of action");<sup>7</sup> and there is a good reason for preserving the distinction of words. Precisely because there is a unity of *thought* and action, there is, in Sorel's view, a disunity of *theory* and practice; for "thought" thus understood is constitutive of the social world, forming the means by which groups identify and differentiate themselves, while theory is required to be explanatory of the complex and evolving relations of the social world thus constituted. As we have seen, Sorel distinguishes between the success of a belief in constituting social life and its success in explaining it, and there might in fact be logical difficulties in claiming that a belief did both (for if it *was* the object of enquiry, could it also explain that object?).

A pragmatist might resolve, or, more correctly perhaps, dispense with such difficulties by redefining explanatory success as practical success, so that the truth of a belief became identical with its effectiveness in inducing desired

effects. But whatever the merits of such a proposal, it does not appear to have been Sorel's. He emphatically separates out three kinds of questions: (1) the truth of a belief as a claim about the world, (2) the current opinion about its truth,<sup>8</sup> and (3) the historical consequences of this opinion's being held. With regard to (1) and (2), he insists that the question of truth must be *set aside* by the historian or sociologist of opinion (and *not*, therefore, identified with opinion) — "for example, in the history of the order founded by St. Francis of Assisi, what does the exact and scientific nature of his stigmata matter? What interests the philosopher is the idea that contemporaries held about it."<sup>9</sup> With regard to (2) and (3), the whole of Sorel's treatment of history is shot through with his assumption that the course of events departs sharply from the images of change formed beforehand by the actor, and in *Réflexions sur la violence* he systematically undertakes to display the projected consequences of the myth of the general strike (and of other strategies) by means of criteria (elsewhere termed "rules of prudence")<sup>10</sup> which are wholly independent of the content of the myth itself.

Nor do I think Russell's suggestion<sup>11</sup> that what Marx imagined as a unity of theory and practice qualifies as pragmatist should pass without some comment. Broadly following Kolakowski's fine essay on this topic,<sup>12</sup> one might briefly describe Marx's position as follows: since the reality in which we live is made by men, collectively and historically, there is the most intimate relation between what we believe and what is, for what we believe enters into the constitution of what is (and, of course, *vice versa*). Yet what is collectively and historically generated by men serves as a test of what individual men, or groups of men believe. The institutions and practices which we confront are not independent of the beliefs which we hold, and in that respect the conformity of a belief with factual reality is no genuinely independent test of the ontological truth of that belief (*e.g.*, the laws of political economy, despite their success, are in the last resort only conventional); yet the world thus constructed serves as an independent check upon the beliefs which particular men or groups of men may form. To ask, then, whether what is real is or is not given is to ask a very misleading question; for it is given with respect to our attitudes to it or our desire to change it, but not with respect to a fictitious "Man," for we do not inhabit an Aristotelian "nature" but a constructed world, albeit one that we have not (as yet) constructed with full consciousness of what we are doing. What significantly distinguishes such a view from (what I take to be) James's pragmatism is that while it may admit practice as a *test* of truth it permits the *criterion* of truth to remain distinct from practical effectiveness, as the world of social relations, though ultimately constructed indeed by men, nevertheless has objective features, limits or tendencies to which our beliefs may be said to correspond or not.<sup>13</sup>

If James sought to collapse the (theoretical) criterion of explanatory truth

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into the (practical) criterion of effectiveness, Marx imagined, rather, a unifying of the two, a situation, that is, in which theory and practice, both retaining their essential properties as distinguishable modes or categories of experience, nevertheless eventually meet in a revolutionary proletariat equipped with the practical means of effecting change and theoretical knowledge of the processes and ends of history. And it was here, I have suggested, that Sorel would not follow Marx (without however for that reason adopting a Jamesian solution); for he did not believe that the socialist revolutionaries understood what they were doing any more fully than the bourgeois revolutionaries had done,<sup>14</sup> and he thus retained theoretical reflection as a category not only distinct from practice but also separate from it.

Professor Stanley suggests a most illuminating parallel between Sorel's view of natural science and his approach to social science, a fuller examination of which would, I willingly admit, allow a more adequate picture of the relation between theory and practice than I have offered. But perhaps there are some contrasts to be made too. Something like a unity of theory and practice holds, arguably, in physics as Sorel views it, for he regards theoretical constructs as simply coextensive with the relations brought into being by human work. As a socialist theoretician, however, Sorel in effect refuses to admit such coextensiveness, by distinguishing sharply between the manner in which beliefs are held by those who act and the standpoint of the theorist in relation to them; for the theorist of the myth "*knows it to be myth*,"<sup>15</sup> whereas the actors (or at any rate most of the actors) cannot view it in this way, or else it would lose its force and thus also lose its mythic status. To put it differently, Sorel does not treat the myth as a scientific hypothesis but as a *fact* about which we may form hypotheses as to its relation to other facts, and in that respect he retains a clear distinction between practical conviction and scientific prediction. Rather than displaying any thesis about the continuity of the natural and social sciences, Sorel's argument significantly anticipates the views of later theorists who have pointed to the disanalogy between the two. There are, as Peter Winch (notably) has argued, *two* sets of "rules" with which the sociologist must come to terms, those of the social actors whose thought and behaviour he is explaining, and those of sociological theory itself, a situation which has no parallel in physics:<sup>16</sup> and just such a thesis is fundamental to *Réflexions sur la violence*, where Sorel takes issue at such length with socialist theoreticians who are unable, it seems, to grasp that those about whom they theorize have thoughts of their own, and cannot be captured by the tidy constructs of the socio-scientific mind. These constructs, he insists, must take as given a realm of practical thought,<sup>17</sup> for social life has an experienced reality of its own which the theorist cannot simply override in giving order to the data which confront him; the data are already ordered by thought.

Professor Stanley's suggestion that the problem which Sorel thus confronted

parallels the "uncertainty principle" in physics is quite brilliant, and points towards a most valuable area of enquiry. It does occur to me to wonder, though, whether this parallel can do justice to the fact that the uncertainty principle is *internal* to physical theory,<sup>18</sup> while the questions which plagued Sorel concern the relation between theory and something external to it. This consideration, more tentatively, might conceivably cast some doubt of a general kind upon the thesis that science provides a very strict model for the unity of theory and practice:<sup>19</sup> for the uniting of the two clearly presupposes their initial separability, and where is this line of demarcation in physics? The testing of a theory by experimentation or other means is not a uniting of theory with anything else, but a requirement internal to theory. And anyway, is the supposed analogy between scientific experimentation and political practice even plausible? An experiment requires that the most demanding conditions should be sought for the testing of a hypothesis, while a political actor (revolutionary or otherwise) who followed this rule would be irresponsible to the point of sheer lunacy.

I have tried to keep this response brief and have left untouched many of the intriguing questions that Professor Stanley raises. Nor have I said how much I appreciate the enormous care which Professor Stanley has taken in reading my book; but an adequate expression of my gratitude would make altogether unreasonable demands upon this journal's space.

#### Notes

1. John L. Stanley, "Sorel and the Social Uncertainty Principle," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. 3, No. 3, (1979), 87.
2. I shall not return to this point, as it seems to me to confuse the question of theory and practice with the distinct question of objectivity. Clearly, a theory can be non-objective without being *practical*.
3. *Le Procès de Socrate*, Paris, 1889, pp. 238-9. One may be reminded of the editors' remarks about the "indifference of the surrounding population" in the *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (1977), v.
4. *Réflexions sur la violence*, 7th edition, Paris, 1930, p. 376.
5. *Le Procès de Socrate*, p. 204; cf. Marcuse's "Ethics and Revolution" in Edward Kent, ed., *Revolution and the Rule of Law*, Englewood Cliffs, 1977, p. 49.
6. *Réflexions sur la violence*, p. 181.
7. "Preface for Merlino," translated in my *Commitment and Change*, Toronto, 1978, 85. Cf. J.H. Newman, "Secular Knowledge not a Principle of Action," in *Newman: Prose and Poetry*, G. Tillotson, ed., Cambridge (Mass.), 1957, pp. 100-3. For Sorel's respect for Newman, see *Réflexions sur la violence*, pp. 10-11, 45. In some ways Newman would provide a better point of reference than Marx in interpreting Sorel's view of practice, but that is another story.

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8. *Le Procès de Socrate*, p. 120.
  9. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
  10. "Preface for Pelloutier," translated in *Commitment and Change*, p. 94.
  11. "Sorel and the Social Uncertainty Principle," p. 92.
  12. Leszek Kolakowski, "Karl Marx and the Classical Definition of Truth," in *Toward a Marxist Humanism*, New York, 1968, pp. 38-66.
  13. As indeed any notion of "true" or "false" consciousness would seem to require. I am uncertain about the relation between the theme of "false consciousness" in Stanley's essay and the pragmatism which he also stresses: Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, review of Richard J. Bernstein's *Praxis and Action*, *Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 25, 1972, p. 741.
  14. See the essay translated in *Commitment and Change*, "On the Barbarism of Revolution," especially p. 115.
  15. *Réflexions sur la violence*, p. 220. This passage is, however, far from clear, and may be read in a sense as being as favourable to Stanley's interpretation as to mine. I do maintain, though, that my reading of it is more consistent with what Sorel does in *Réflexions*.
  16. Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*, London, 1958, p. 87.
  17. That Sorel was indeed often critical of what people thought ("Sorel and the Social Uncertainty Principle," p. 86) does not in my view make him a theorist of false consciousness, for one can criticize as a *moraliste*, as I believe he did, without invoking the criterion of truth, as I believe he explicitly declined to do.
  18. Cf. Mary Hesse, "Models Versus Paradigms in the Natural Sciences," in Lyndhurst Collins, ed., *The Use of Models in the Social Sciences*, Boulder (Colorado), 1976, p. 13.
  19. See for example Edward Andrew, "A Note on the Unity of Theory and Practice in Marx and Nietzsche," *Political Theory*, Vol. 3, 1975, pp. 305-16.
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## BOURGEOIS MARXISM

*Ben Agger*

I found Andrew Wernick's response to my articles in the *CJPST* interesting because it leaves so much about his own position and proclivities unsaid. I will investigate these here, in defense of my non-Leninist approach to issues of radical change. I find many of his comments on my work tinged with the corruption of intellectual elitism and what I call philosophical Leninism. As a result, I can not pretend patience with a position which I find all too reminiscent of much of bourgeois academia, with its aversion to the unity of theory and praxis and its enthronement of "scholarship" as a way of avoiding the recognition of its own corruption by power. If much of what follows seems intemperate, it is because I believe that Leninism, whether in philosophical or political form, should be seen for what it is, the will to power cloaked in a perverted reading of Marxian objectivism. Let me address Wernick section-by-section, for the sake of clarity.

### The Frankfurt Question

"Goes quite overboard." A prototypical bourgeois Marxist response to an alarming truth. On reflection, I did not go far enough in sublating/negating the Frankfurt theorists (including most of Marcuse, although I still read *An Essay on Liberation* as the most important work of Marxism since Lukács). Adorno's and Horkheimer's only "practical" significance has been to fuel the alienated intellectual labour of later generations of academic Marxists, like Wernick. Adorno failed not because he was pessimistic but because he pretended to serve the cause of emancipation by writing books like *Negative Dialectics*. I was also trapped before by the hermeneutics of critical theory, but today it strikes me as needlessly reactionary to retreat to the Frankfurt theory except as an exercise in intellectual history. This intellectual history does not preserve the ideal of liberation via the cultivation of some obscure theoretical lexicon but merely amuses those disenchanted young leftists who have not yet joined the Red Brigades. Both traditions are authoritarian because they pretend

**Editor's Note:** For the above articles by Prof. Agger see the *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 3-34 and Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 47-57. For Prof. Wernick's response see the *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 107-117.

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to know the unspeakable, which can only be communicated through the private language of critical theory or with machine-guns and grenades.

Curiously, Wernick wants to defend Adorno and Horkheimer against my interpretive mistreatment. This might seem hard to square with his thinly veiled Leninism, but it is not difficult to explain. Both Adorno and Lenin felt that they had grasped objective truth, which was somehow the preserve of a small coterie of thinkers/theorists. Adorno is a philosophical Leninist. Wernick favours Adorno because he steps back from the fray; he favors Lenin because he stands above the proletariat, knowing what must be done. The essence of bourgeois Marxism is this anti-socialist elitism, dressed up, in the case of Adorno, as philosophical profundity necessary to keep an ineffable truth alive; in the case of Lenin, as strategic profundity required to lead an atheoretical proletariat.

Wernick suggests that "it is a crude misconception to suppose that the Frankfurt School intended its critique of ideology to stir people into action, let alone *en masse*." Though I'm undoubtedly going overboard again, let me simply say that this is *precisely* why the Frankfurt people were bourgeois Marxists, they did *not* try to stir people into action, nor did they revise the theory of class struggle to fit new historical realities. Instead, they enshrined the so-called autonomy of theory as an ingenuous way of justifying their own disengaged philosophizing.

As for Wernick's apparently serious claim that critical theory has "been remarkably successful in the practical goal it ... set itself," namely to survive fascism and to keep alive the dream of freedom, I would guess, at the risk of overstating it, that critical theory has served to influence perhaps 5000 academic leftists. Critical theory is virtually dead in Europe, but in North America it is just beginning to arrive as a normal slot in the academic social science curriculum. To think that a single soul was rescued from the aura of the death camps by reading Adorno shows pitiable naivete.

Finally, Wernick says that I ignore Adorno's and Horkheimer's interests in psychology. My position is merely that they read Freud as the prescient prophet of a totally administered, de-erotized society, in which repression has become overbearingly heavy, while Marcuse reads Freud as pointing to a libidinal core of revolt. The difference between Adorno and Marcuse is that Marcuse believes that surplus repression can be lessened.

### Descent into Pragmatism

I do not reject "the possibility of objective knowledge." I say, following Lukács, Korsch, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, *et al.*, that there is a subject-object dialectic; objective knowledge is always partly self-knowledge. Wernick inclines to a Leninist reflection-theory, as later remarks will indicate.



Wernick basically ignores my argument that critical theory failed because it endorsed the thesis of declining subjectivity. My two articles attempt to revive a concept of radical subjectivity which can be the starting point for democratic class struggle. Wernick ignores the problem of subjectivity (and he ignores Marcuse's work in the 1960's) because the introduction of a radical subjectivity would derail Wernick's patent Leninism and it would ground what he terms my "epistemological democracy" and thus undercut vanguardism both on the level of epistemology and politics. I find it very curious that Wernick does not take seriously my analysis of the split between Adorno/Horkheimer and Marcuse over the issue of subjectivity. Wernick smirks that I am "remarkably silent about the extent to which Marcuse ... himself shared Horkheimer's and Adorno's pessimism about the capacity of contemporary individuals to withstand corporatist and consumerist integration." I do, however, note that Marcuse, before *An Essay on Liberation*, and especially in *One-Dimensional Man*, endorsed the declining subjectivity-thesis; my point is that there are two Marcuses, the Frankfurt Marcuse and the Freudian Marcuse who developed the concept of the "new sensibility" on which I build. I take it that Wernick ignored all of this in my article because he had access only to the censored version.

I do *not* say that there is an "objective truth to human nature"; I say that there *is* a human nature, a human essence, humanness. The epistemological question of how best to know human nature does not directly concern me here.

I also do not eschew "theory" if that means, with Wernick, reading society towards the end of deciding how to change it. However my point in the first article was that Marx did not rationalistically "think up" the working class but rather discovered it before his eyes. His dialectical methodology moved between the objective pre-existence of class struggle and the necessity of subjective class consciousness.

### The Fate of Intellectual Culture

This is where Wernick really lives, in "intellectual culture." Only a bourgeois Marxist would accuse my position of being "over-politicized."

Yes, I am a "populist," willing to risk (if not succumb to) "anti-intellectualism" in the interests of destroying the division of labour and its attendant ideology of professionalism. Wernick is obviously pro-intellectual in the same sense Lenin was. He knows objective reality, he engages in "cold, detached" "rational calculation" to manipulate the proletariat. I am more worried about "dictatorship *over* the proletariat" than about slipping too far into North American populism with its non-authoritarian resonances. A bourgeois Marxist believes in:

- (a) objectivism

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- (b) cool, detached rational calculation designed to transmit a "correct" reading of objective reality to a pliant, theoretically backward proletariat
- (c) the autonomy of theory and of "specialized intellectual culture"
- (d) the division of labor, both in the revolutionary movement and in society before *and* after the revolution.

Wernick raises the question (in defense of Adorno and Horkheimer): is intellectual conservatism such a bad thing? For a "Marxist" in a bourgeois society, no, indeed, intellectual conservatism, couched in serious "Marxist scholarship," is a viable *raison d'être*. Wernick is really no Marxist at all but a bourgeois intellectual who sees the world in terms of facts and values, truth and ideology, knowing and doing. He does not know the fire of the dialectic nor the human meaning of socialism; his Marxism is a set of cold, calculating formulae for conquering state power and then for legislating an objective truth. Short of being a modern Bolshevik, Wernick remains ensconced within the academic role — a world in which rational calculation results not in the Siberian camps but in the authoritarianism of left-wing "scholarship."

This kind of scholarship — and this is the main point of my second article on the dialectical sensibility — pretends to be radical when in fact it is deeply conservative (and not in the redeeming sense of offering a creative re-appropriation and transformation of the past but in elevating death over life, the past over the present). It seems to me that this sort of Marxian scholarship violates one of Marx's most interesting and oft-neglected canons of socialist freedom, that the past would no longer dominate the present. Marxian scholarship of the kind Wernick advocates treats the words of the past as inviolable guide-posts on the route towards future truths. I believe that this is deeply un-Marxist, un-socialist, inhuman. A Marxist must himself contribute to loosening the bonds of the past by joining theory and praxis in the context of his own life; Wernick utterly skirts the issue of the socialist transformation of lived experience because, for him, the issue of socialist transformation involves purely structuralist considerations.

Lenin erred because he did not think about how he could relate socialist theory and liberatory praxis in his own life; all of his political sins can be traced to his elitism. Marxian scholarship is the philosophical sublimation of Leninism, as I noted above with respect to Adorno. Marxian scholars like Wernick believe that they can arrive at important truths by reading society objectively, failing to see that Marxian truth is not epistemological but practical — that the truth of Marxism is socialism. Socialism is not purely a reality "out there," it is also an interior reality, captured in the way we treat our loved ones, our children, our friends, our work, our play. I said above that I believe that Marcuse's *An Essay on Liberation* is the most important statement

since Lukács. This is because Marcuse is one of the only Marxists (along with Sartre and Merleau-Ponty) to seriously write about the relationship between the individual and class struggle, while in the process sketching what I call a socialist general will which is the zero-point of non-dominating authority and a non-alienating division of labour. In the *Essay on Liberation* Marcuse argues that the struggling individual is the foundation of all class struggle. He does not reduce socialist transformation to "mere thought" but argues that the only way to achieve a humane socialism is to build upon the infrastructure of the new sensibility.

My articles were initial attempts to sketch possible mediations between this kind of personal sensibility and new forms of class radicalism. Wernick completely misses this point because he does not know what it means to achieve liberation simultaneously on the levels of the sensibility and the collective. Wernick thinks about strategy only in terms of the mechanics of class struggle and not *also* in terms of the necessary emancipatory individuation of this class struggle on the level of lived experience — necessary if the class struggle is to avoid a Leninist resolution. His bourgeois Marxism is precisely what I was attacking in "Dialectical Sensibility II," where my *bête noir* was the kind of Marxist who engages in the affirmative culture of the surrounding society all the while parading his sober commitment to socialist objectivity.

Unfortunately, that kind of Marxism will never create the broad socialist-populist ideology required to motivate the North American working class. The only hope is to show factory and office workers that their incipient populist critique of centralist bigness and of the authoritarian co-ordination of labour is the foundation of a full-fledged non-authoritarian socialism. I talk about expert/non-expert dualisms because I believe that the average American worker can understand non-authoritarian socialism not in terms of the abstractions of *Capital* (at least not initially) but in terms of struggles for control of the workplace and in terms of a deep-seated resentment of the rigid division of labour. My so-called epistemological democracy is not an end point but a starting point, a way of thinking through mediations between the non-authoritarian North American experience (articulated as populism) and full-blown non-authoritarian socialism.

Coming from the tradition of Lukács' Hegelian Marxism, I contend that Marxists should be devising new forms of ideological mobilization and not trying, scientistically, to describe the precise contours of objective capitalist reality. My hope is that dialectical sensibility, rooted in epistemological democracy, can be the starting point for a North American Marxism which builds upon the cultural and ideological formation of radical populism. Marxism is the practice of theory, not simply a theory which recommends a practice which stands apart from the theory, as bourgeois Marxists falsely believe. I differ from Wernick precisely where he divests what he calls "ob-

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jective knowledge" of its constitutive linkages with a dynamic subjectivity. Wernick's objectivism is a convenient excuse for continuing to sanction, albeit from within Marxism itself, the domination of the past over the present, and as a consequence, specialist intellectuals over the masses.

Wernick is especially pernicious when he says that dialectical sensibility will lead to Maoist barbarism (if that is what it is). He seems convinced that the proletariat needs socialist philosophers and intellectuals to preserve a rarified "truth"; that, on their own, workers would refuse the rationalism which Wernick so naively ascribes to European bourgeois culture. My position, however, tending towards a Gramsci-like populism here, is that workers possess a kind of lived rationality which will allow them to engage in precisely that multi-dimensional role-playing and merging of mental and manual labor that Marx urged (and not only in his "early" works, as Wernick, in his Althusserian fashion, avers).

Wernick says that I "situate [myself] within the utopian project so dear to the early Marx." What am I utopian about? Amazingly, Wernick finds "utopian" and "irresponsible" my "position that the intelligentsia ultimately has no right to exist as a separate social stratum," either now or in the future. He is correct in his reading of my position. The intelligentsia in the bourgeois sense has no right to exist as a class apart. (Wernick here borrows from Mannheim and Habermas in positing some kind of rationalistic intelligentsia as an agency of vanguardist social reform.) Socialist intellectuality will surely be of the kind that Marx indicated in his metaphor of the free-wheeling fisherman-hunter-critic, able to move among roles without gaining the life long imprint of any one role. Wernick says that this is "early Marx." It is all of Marx and it is Western Marxism, too, in the styles of Lukács, Sartre, Gramsci and Marcuse.

Does he deny the vision of non-alienated work, of self-creative praxis, rooted both in mind and body projects? When I say intellectuality in the second article, I mean any praxis which involves thought (are there any which do not?). A philosophical Leninist would conveniently say that the workers need "truth from without" — the basic axiomatic difference between Marx (early and late) and Lenin.

Wernick is a bourgeois Marxist because he believes in a "specialized intellectual culture" — a thoroughly revealing term — which is merely philosophical vanguardism justified on the grounds of revolutionary and cultural necessity. Yes, the mental-manual division of labour is "necessarily oppressive and hierarchical." I am a Marxist and I believe that unless we get rid of specialized intellectual culture today (along with the host of other alienated narrow roles we inhabit) the socialist future will be as fully authoritarian as the present. If Wernick does not believe this, he utterly misses the dialectic between the transformation of sensibility and the transformation of class structure, the most crucial aspect of Lukács' Hegelian Marxism and Marcuse's

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Freudian Marxism. Again, what Wernick wants is to chase down socialist "truth," being a specialized "intellectual," while others do the dirty work. He is fundamentally afraid that socialism would liberate him, too.

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### Books Received/Livres reçus

- The Economics of David Ricardo*, Samuel Hollander, University of Toronto Press, cloth \$45.00, pp. xiv, 759.
- Economy, Class and Social Reality: Issues in Contemporary Canadian Society*, John Allan Fry editor, Butterworths, paper \$12.95, pp. 459.
- The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory*, Richard J. Bernstein, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, cloth \$24.50, pp. xxiv, 286.
- Citizen Politicians Canada: Party Officials in a Democratic Society*, Allan Kornberg, Joel Smith, Harold D. Clarke, Carolina Academic Press, cloth \$15.95, paper \$8.95, pp. 243.
- The Dangers of Nuclear War*, Franklyn Griffiths and John C. Polanyi editors, University of Toronto Press, cloth \$15.00, paper \$5.95, pp. xiii, 197.
- Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, Jean Laplanche, Johns Hopkins University Press, cloth \$10.00, pp. 147.
- Doctrine and Ethos in the Labour Party*, H.M. Drucker, Allen and Unwin, cloth \$17.50, paper \$7.50, pp. viii, 134.
- Theories of Property: Aristotle to the Present*, Anthony Parel and Thomas Flanagan editors, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, paper \$7.00, pp. viii, 395.
- The Moral Meaning of Revolution*, Jon P. Gunnemann, Yale University Press, cloth \$15.00, pp. xi, 277.
- The Union Nationale*, Herbert F. Quinn, University of Toronto Press, cloth \$22.50, paper \$8.95, pp. xiii, 342.
- Economic Growth and Neighborhood Discontent: System Bias in the Urban Renewal Program of Atlanta*, Clarence N. Stone, University of North Carolina Press, cloth \$14.00, pp. xv, 256.
- Politics and Letters: Interviews with the New Left Review*, Raymond Williams, New Left Books, cloth \$27.50, pp. 444.
- Limits of the Welfare State: Critical Views on Post-War Sweden*, John Allan Fry editor, Saxon House, cloth \$24.00, pp. vi, 234.

## BOOKS RECEIVED

- Underdevelopment and Social Movements in Atlantic Canada*, Robert J. Brym and R. James Sacouman, New Hogtown Press, paper \$8.50, pp. 249.
- Utopian Thought in the Western World*, Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, Harvard University Press, cloth \$25.00, pp. 896.
- Quebec and the Parti Québécois*, A Synthesis Publication, pp. 76.
- Powers, Possessions and Freedom: Essays in honour of C.B. Macpherson*, Alkis Kontos editor, University of Toronto Press, cloth \$15.00, pp. 178.
- Decadence and Objectivity: Ideals for Work in the Post-Consumer Society*, Lawrence Haworth, University of Toronto Press, paper \$6.50, pp. 169.
- Bringing the Left Back Home: A Critique of American Social Criticism*, Gary Thom, Yale University Press, cloth \$17.50, pp. x, 303.
- Philosophers Look at Canadian Confederation*, Stanley G. French editor, The Canadian Philosophical Association, Montreal, pp. 407.
- The Roots of Disunity: A Look at Canadian Political Culture*, David Bell and Lorne Tepperman, McClelland and Stewart, paper \$8.95, pp. ix, 262.
- Media, Politics and Culture: A Socialist View*, Carl Gardner editor, Macmillan, paper \$13.95, pp. vii, 197.
- The Obstacle Race*, Germaine Greer, Secker and Warburg, cloth \$32.95, pp. 373.
- Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Dick Hebdige, Methuen, paper \$9.25, pp. 195.
- The Sexism of Social and Political Theory*, Lorenn M.G. Clark and Lynda Lange editors, University of Toronto Press, cloth \$15.00, paper \$5.00, pp. 141.
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