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# social & political thought

Volume 22

Winter 2013

## Interview

Howard Caygill

*Author of On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance*

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Revisiting 'La Question': A Political-Phenomenological Critique  
of Merleau-Ponty's Assessment of Algerian Decolonization

*Dan Wood*

Nietzsche and Weber on Personality and Democracy

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The Impossibility of Post-Metaphysical Politics:  
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# studies in social and political thought

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## Design and Typesetting

Simon Mussell

*Studies in Social and Political Thought*  
Centre for Social and Political Thought  
School of History, Art History and Philosophy  
University of Sussex  
Falmer, Brighton BN1 9QN

Contact: [sspt@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:sspt@sussex.ac.uk)

[www.sussex.ac.uk/cspt/sspt](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/cspt/sspt)  
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**Howard Caygill**

**Author of *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance***

interviewed by Alastair Gray and Phillip Homburg

6<sup>th</sup> December 2013

**Alastair Gray:** Professor Caygill, thank you very much for coming to Sussex today. We wanted to just start with a general question: why did you decide to write about resistance now?

**Howard Caygill:** The book had a very strange genesis. It emerged from within the margins of other works, but at no point did I set out to write on resistance. Rather, it gained a momentum of its own from seminars on resistance I gave at Goldsmiths and Paris VIII. As Benjamin would say, it was written with the left hand. Obviously, there were some occasions or events that made me think that it should be written. I was interested in global events such as the Arab Spring and Occupy. There were also more local incidents such as the student protests and the accompanying surprise at the tactics of containment and the violence used by the police. I was surprised by the surprise expressed at these tactics. Because of this I felt that it would be interesting to look at the problem of resistance and its relationship to the question of domination. This accounts for the pragmatic details in the book of how, on the one hand, the police and the army execute domination and, on the other hand, how particular acts of resistance are carried out.

**AG:** Do you think there is an important difference between resistance and revolt? And how might resistance differ from protest, if at all?

**HC:** One of the objectives of this work was to try and free resistance—along with concepts that I think cluster around resistance like revolt and defiance—from the problematic of freedom and revolution. I wanted to look at resistance as a form of politics that is perhaps older than the politics of autonomy and freedom that was inaugurated by Rousseau and pursued by Kant and Hegel. This allows us to view resistance as a form of politics that accompanies the politics of freedom and revolution, but also remains distinct from that political project. There is, then, a cluster of terms that could be considered together such as defiance, revolt, protest and resistance.

However, what struck me in the course of my work was that in many ways these expressions of defiance, which would probably be the more generic concept for me, all had something pre-political about them. That defiance is not motivated politically; it doesn't necessarily lead to political expression. Rather, defiance is something that can take place on many levels. While resistance can take place at the political level, as for example when resistance and defiance are tied with revolutionary or emancipatory political projects. However, it also has some other qualities that make it pre-political. What I mean is that defiance is closer to violence than to speech and politics.

**AG:** You worked on Levinas before in your book *Levinas and the Political* and Levinas appears again in *On Resistance*. Do you think that we can take a particular political incident or event, perhaps a contemporary event, and interpret that in Levinasian terms? And if so, how might that change or even benefit our understanding of this event?

**HC:** When I wrote the Levinas book the original title, which was subsequently rejected, was *Levinas and Clausewitz*. From the very start I wanted to say that Levinas was a thinker of war and violence. There had been a certain sentimental interpretation of Levinas: a sentimental understanding of the face of the other that, for me, ultimately led to a soft ethics and a lack of political gravity. In contrast to the ethical reading, I wanted to show that—not only in his prison notebooks which are very sharply political but in *Totality and Infinity* most of all—Levinas is concerned with the question of war and with the question of violence. I am not sure that I did such a good job of it in *Levinas and the Political*, so that's why there is a section in *On Resistance* where I try again. *Totality and Infinity* is about war and Levinas's relationship to war is not a sentimental one—it's Clausewitzian. He says, very strikingly, that war is necessary and in some cases beneficial. What this means in terms of political judgement, or Levinasian political judgement, can be quite disturbing. I have, for example, always been disturbed by his judgement around the massacres in [Sabra and] Shatila. Levinas' response in the broadcast on the Monday, immediately after the murder in the camps, was distant to say the least. He showed no empathy for the victims. Even when pushed to make a comment about how the Palestinian is clearly the other of the Israeli Jew, he had almost no response. Rather, what he offered was an acknowledgement that there are enemies and if there is an enemy there has to be war. So I think if you had to apply this form of judgement to contemporary events, I think a Levinasian political judgement similar to those of *Totality and Infinity*, similar to events like Shatila, wouldn't be recognised as Levinasian. There is such a dominant

understanding of Levinas as an exclusively ethical thinker that his very hard political realism is not recognised as being characteristic of his thought. This is a pity, since in the end the grandeur of Levinas' thought is the way his ethics and political realism come together.

**Phillip Homburg:** Just returning to Clausewitz for a moment, I found this novel reading of Clausewitz as a Kantian very interesting. This would appear to connect *On Resistance* to a Kantian red thread that runs throughout your work. Could you say a little bit about how your reading of Clausewitz came about and how it's related to your project generally?

**HC:** Well, Clausewitz has been on my mind for a very long time. I was writing on Clausewitz in the early nineties and have continued to work on him ever since. When I first read Clausewitz it was according to the standard view of him as a theorist of war. He was a contemporary of Hegel who even died, I think within a few miles of Hegel, in the same cholera epidemic. Allegedly they never met, even though they both lived in Berlin. There is just an echo of a meeting where they played cards together at a soirée. However, I began to get the idea that there was something more interesting going on when I read Clausewitz' aesthetic work, particularly his readings of Kant and the concept of genius. This seemed to be a reading of the concept of genius in terms of originality that didn't really fit with the dominant reading in the beginning of the nineteenth century. When I traced it back a little further, I discovered that Clausewitz had been taught by [Johann Gottfried] Kiesewetter at the military academy in Berlin. For anyone that works on Kant, the name Kiesewetter is an immediate alarm bell because he was, perhaps, Kant's closest disciple. His book on Kant was approved and allegedly corrected by Kant in the early 1790's. To have been Kant's student at the end of the eighteenth century meant that, through Kiesewetter, Clausewitz was the closest to Kant of that whole generation of German philosophers. So in a sense he was the real Kantian while Schelling, Fichte, and Hegel were all far more distant. What also made Kiesewetter very different from other readers of Kant, something that emerges in his 1791 work on Kant, *Outline of a Pure General Logic according to Kantian Principles*, is that he is interested above all in the modal category of actuality. This is something that is very striking in Kiesewetter's reading and it's something that becomes striking as well in Kant's late work in the 1790's. For example, Kant begins to emphasise actuality in the *Opus Postumum*. What this means for Kiesewetter is that the modal category of actuality has priority over that of possibility, with the consequent relegation of the centrality of the Kantian idea of freedom. What emerges is a philosophy of action that is not rooted

in freedom. It is this conception of actuality and action that guides Clausewitz's philosophy of war. He is not particularly interested in freedom. Rather, he says that we do not find ourselves in situations of possibility or choice, but in situations of actuality characterised by enmity and chance. In such a situation, all our actions can do is somehow negotiate between those two threats to our security.

**PH:** So the Clausewitzian realism is perhaps a strange form of Kantianism?

**HC:** Except that instead of realism it's Clausewitzian actuality and he's making use of that concept of actuality in a very interesting way in emphasising chance and enmity over choice and possibility.

**PH:** Both in *On Resistance* in the figure of Clausewitz, and in your reading of Walter Benjamin's non-Hegelian form of speculative experience, you emphasise a counter tradition of Kantianism that is in a sense resistant to Hegelian idealism. Is your own thought characterised by this form of resistance?

**HC:** Yes, at least I would like it to be. What you are identifying is there in any post-Kantian thought. So in *On Resistance* the first mentions of Hegel address the logic of essence and "Force and Understanding" section on the *Phenomenology*. Basically the argument is that even in Hegel there is an exit from Kant's thought. It is an exit that I also see in Walter Benjamin's development of a speculative philosophy that does not accept the critical strictures that confine knowledge to spatio-temporal appearances. This is something that I find in Kant as well in the *Opus Postumum*. There, Kant becomes his own radical margin by basically arguing for the primacy of reason over even intuition and perception.

**PH:** I found your reading of Marx contra Nietzsche interesting. I see some Benjaminian aspects in your reading of Marx that asserts that novel political forms can spring up from within the context of resistance. I am wondering if maybe that is historically specific to Marx's time or is that something you can generalise to the Occupy and Spring movements that it might be possible to say that at this point or some point in the future that it has been subsumed, but maybe they also point to the emergence of a new form of resistance.

**HC:** Yes, and also that these examples of resistance open up a retrospective glance on other activities of resistance as well. The Marx and Nietzsche analysis is very important in the book for me because they share a critical



relationship to Clausewitz. I also want to show that *ressentiment* and a politics of *ressentiment* is something that is continuously shifting in both of their works. There are certain moments in Marx's *Civil War in France* texts, for example, where there is extreme socialist *ressentiment*. There are, then, other moments in Marx's work where *ressentiment* falls away and is replaced by extraordinary affirmative and futural thinking. Similarly in Nietzsche, at the very moment that he is criticising the slave revolt of morals in the *Genealogy of Morals* he is actually succumbing to *ressentiment* as well. It is at this point that Marx returns. By bringing them together it becomes clear that it is very hard to sustain a position that does not result in a form of *ressentiment*. It is hard to sustain a politics of affirmation. It was also very striking how both Marx and Nietzsche were looking at the experience of the Commune and saying that the experience of the Commune changes our understanding of what came before. In both cases, early Christianity and opposition to the empire, an understanding of resistance is not only crucial for a self-understanding of the present, but also for an understanding of the past.

I think this characteristic is something that happens in resistance more generally. One part of the book of which I am particularly fond is the discussion of the Greenham Common resistance. This part of the book was very much motivated by the anti-fascist and anti-Nazi lineage of the Greenham women, but also by the difference between their practice of occupation and the more recent experiences of Occupy. The Greenham women, particularly at Yellow Gate, considered their struggle to be something that might take decades. When they were evicted, and sometimes they would be evicted several times a day, they would infallibly return. This was a continuous, disciplined resistance that lasted for almost two decades. In light of this, it seemed to me as if the contemporary resistances and occupations gave up too quickly. It struck me that the lesson left by the Greenham women had been forgotten or had not been heard. Somehow the dissatisfaction around Occupy then made it possible to go back and try to listen to that lesson again.

In general, I find that there is another point that continues to worry me about the resistance book: it sets off from or departs from the premise that there cannot be a concept of resistance. As soon as resistance becomes conceptualised then it somehow loses its resistance. Therefore, rather than a concept of resistance, what there could be is an archive of resistances from which a Benjaminian constellation could emerge. So, for me, there is something characteristic of resistance that means that each particular act of resistance is always going to be part of a network or constellation- what Clausewitz called the capacity to resist. So as soon as you think of one resistance then all the other ones appear.

**PH:** It changes our understanding retroactively?

**HC:** Retroactively and hopefully perspectively as well.

**PH:** Your book seems to be telling maybe a different story in the wake of the financial crisis in some quarters to theories of structure that emphasise the pervasive power of social domination, capitalist form of subsumption and real abstraction. From the perspective of this standpoint the form of domination could be said to totally determine the structure of resistance itself. Is there a way to account for that from within your account of resistance?

**HC:** It seemed to me that even in excellent work, whose radical credentials can't really be questioned, there nevertheless remained an over-investment in the concept of domination. This is something that became clearer to me as I was working through the book and it's why the book's subtitle is "A philosophy of defiance". The problem is, as I see it, that domination is considered to be the default position that we have in all senses to resist. Domination is what must be resisted and this means that domination is presupposed. I saw this particularly in the work of Arendt. She begins with total domination and leaves us with a problem: how can there be resistance if we are in a situation of *total* domination? Similarly, Gregoire Chamayou's *The Manhunt Doctrine* begins from the standpoint of domination in spite of its impeccably critical account of domination, particularly racial domination in the United States, it remains fundamentally invested in domination. It sets out from the standpoint of the lynchers rather than the resisters. A pattern seems to emerge here that can be seen again, for example, in David Graeber's *Debt* with its close attention to patterns and methods of domination. There are moments when resistance is described, but resistance or defiance is not considered to be the default position or point of departure. My interest in Italian Marxism and the autonomist movement—Tronti in the 60's and 70's—helped me understand that, in fact, domination does not necessarily possess the initiative, to use Clausewitzian language; what comes first is the threat of defiance. First of all there is defiance, and then domination tries to meet that defiance or to anticipate it and strategically meet it in advance. What I want to ask is: what happens when we try to start thinking from the default position of defiance rather than domination? So, first of all there is defiance and it is domination that needs to be explained. This leads to another aspect of the book in which I try to argue for the power of strategic thinking. Basically, what Clausewitz tells us is to work with strategy rather than logic. What is most important for Clausewitz when reasoning

strategically is to secure the initiative, always to make the first move.

**PH:** This is Debord as well?

**HC:** Yes, Debord was an excellent Clausewitzian. But, to return to the initiative, it seemed to me as if there was a tradition of political theory that was based on surrendering the initiative. In succumbing to the fascination of domination we lose the strategic initiative. A final side of that, something that struck me throughout the work, is there was nothing that angered domination or the state more than subalterns reasoning strategically. Strategy is felt to be reserved for the side of domination, so strategically reasoned defiance is a very disturbing and unwanted phenomenon. It has to be dealt with by draconian conspiracy laws.

**PH:** In light of awarding the Gillian Rose memorial prize, do you have any reflections on Gillian Rose in relationship to the contemporary profile of critical theory and did she make a significant contribution to the reception of critical theory while at Sussex University.

**HC:** I think she certainly did, but within a very complicated context. It is very encouraging to see a rediscovery of her Adorno and Hegel books. With those books she gave a different understanding of a critical philosophy, either from a more Hegelian-Marxist position, which was also very powerful here at that time, and also from the more French oriented Lacanian and deconstruction forms of critical thinking...

**PH:** What would be referred to as continental philosophy?

**HC:** Yes. So I think she made a very particular contribution. I think another aspect of her contribution was the quality of her scholarship. That she really insisted on very high quality research and very sophisticated forms of expression of that research. I think that was something that irritated a lot of her readers, but nevertheless also inspired many others.

**PH & AG:** Thank you very much!

**Howard Caygill** ([H.Caygill@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:H.Caygill@kingston.ac.uk)) is professor of Modern European Philosophy at Kingston University London. As well as *On Resistance*, he is the author of works such as *Levinas and the Political* and *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*, among others.

**Phillip Homburg (R.Homburg@sussex.ac.uk)** is a DPhil student in Social and Political Thought at the University of Sussex. His research examines the problem of materialism in Karl Marx and Walter Benjamin.

**Alastair Gray (arg25@sussex.ac.uk)** is a DPhil student in Social and Political Thought at the University of Sussex. His research focuses on the possibility of using the practice of parrhesia to develop a means of self-critical resistance.

# Revisiting *La Question*: A Political-Phenomenological Critique of Merleau-Ponty's Assessment of Algerian Decolonization

by Dan Wood

"We know that it is not a question of punishing or re-educating certain individuals and that the Algerian war cannot be humanised. Torture is imposed by the circumstances and required by racial hatred; in some ways it is the essence of the conflict and expresses its deepest truth."

-Jean-Paul Sartre (Alleg, 2006: xlili-xliv)

During the Algerian Revolution, the routine use of techniques of torture by the French military was euphemistically referred to as '*la question*'. This equivocal denomination highlights a variety of the aspects central to colonial torture. For instance, as a mechanism of the French colonial state, torture serves as a form of questioning, a trial or interrogation that pries into an embodied subject so as to extract the knowledge presumed necessary to maintain or enhance the power relations of said state. Naming torture 'the question' in this sense discloses the state's acquisition of knowledge by means of methodical violence. Secondly, the reference to torture as 'the question' by those of *la métropole* also evinces its variegated senses as an issue for public debate, as in "I find torture questionable", "torture is *the* question pertinent to French honor", or "since we cannot know whether 'it' occurs, the matter must not be discussed, *c'est hors de question*". Finally, the collective reference to torture as 'the question' complicates its rationalized and regular use in Algeria as 'the answer' to the war of decolonization. So, to revisit this question in fact means to open a host of questions that involve state violence, 'intelligence gathering', colonialism, and the link between embodied subjectivities and the body politic.

This essay engages these intersecting networks by first locating their emergence in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's views on French colonialism in general with special attention to Algeria in particular. The first section problematizes and criticizes the positions held in his 1958 interview *On Madagascar*. The second section complicates his stances concerning the

Algerian Revolution by means of a delimited *political* phenomenology of a case which he had read: Henri Alleg's famous text, banned by the Fourth Republic yet widely circulated underground, *La Question*. Here, a phenomenology of the spatial and temporal dimensions of Alleg's torture offers the form of rationality necessary to understand his existential situation, set against the background of the instances of this colonial state's spatial and temporal politics. The final section attempts to constructively resolve the political incongruities between the first and second sections by highlighting the dimensions of subjection and subversiveness within political subjectivity of 1957-8 Algeria. In other words, and in agreement with Nick Crossley (1994: 195), "Merleau-Ponty was able to lay the philosophical basis for developing this political phenomenology but...he did not provide the concrete analysis that he recommended that we conduct". By utilizing aspects of Merleau-Ponty's perceptual phenomenology in the construction of a concrete political phenomenology of Alleg's torture, the inadequacies of the former's political moderacy concerning colonialism come to the fore, and the notions—which Merleau-Ponty incompletely signals—of subjection and subversiveness are able to claim a much more significant role in politico-existential subjectivity.

### **A Philosopher of (Colonial) Ambiguity**

If, in regard to the Algerian Revolution, figures such as Frantz Fanon, Simone de Beauvoir and Daniel Guérin represent the political left, with a Governor General and anthropologist such as Jacques Soustelle on the right, then one should place Merleau-Ponty among the political moderates<sup>1</sup>. A cursory reading of his views on colonialism in general and Algeria in particular might lead one to mistakenly place him among those of the French left. For instance, in the opening chapter of *Humanism and Terror*, he equates the lynching of African-Americans in the USA and the murder of a native of Indo-china or Algeria as being of the same ethical gravity (Merleau-Ponty, 2000: 1). And, in an interview the year before his death, he mentions the Algerian War amid the "particular combination of Nietzschean, Husserlian, and Weberian pessimism" (Coole, 2008: 84) that typifies his political works. He speaks of the war's revival of passions and of problems of employment, national ambition, incessant counter-subversion, population control, and the need to begin politics and philosophy anew (Merleau-Ponty, 2007: 13). The frequent references to modern society as an abyss and to persons or parties as completely devoid of new ideas *seem* to lend his views on colonialism the condemnatory fervor often found in the writings of the era's leftist intellectuals. This can be seen at work in his criticism of Francois Mauriac in

the 1947 text *On Indo-China*. Here he reproaches Mauriac for exhibiting the political nominalism of French public life, for not being able to engage imaginatively with the thoughts of others, and for succumbing to that abstract morality which remains incomplete insofar as it fails to define a policy. Yet Merleau-Ponty himself not only engages in a polemic with Mauriac which proves much more fervid than his passing, partial criticisms of France's exploitation of the Vietnamese, but he also does not offer any concrete policies, thereby succumbing to his own (rather sardonic) remarks. Such general comments, which emerge within an atmosphere of harsh, pessimistic critique, could easily lead one to understand Merleau-Ponty's views on colonialism as emerging from a leftist, albeit calculative and policy-driven, orientation. Despite appearances, however, to place him among the French left would be mistaken.

Just as *Phenomenology of Perception* constantly navigates between what Merleau-Ponty considers the extremes of empiricism and intellectualism, realism and idealism, so too do his political works seek to carve a path between communism and anti-communism, between empty, abstract moralizations of politics and hypnotic ascriptions to a single party, and between "ultra-objective and ultra-subjective attitudes" (Merleau-Ponty, 1969: 252). Insofar as he attempts to think outside these binaries, whether contrived by others or himself, he admirably seeks to avoid divergent ideological bandwagons. Yet, while a phenomenology of perception may successfully unite extreme subjectivism and objectivism, it remains unclear as to why one should necessarily seek middle routes between opposed political worldviews. For example, while one may try to reach a universal position laterally, through an "incessant testing of the self through the other person and the other person through the self" (*ibid.*: 120), this does not guarantee that all parties concerned are involved, that such testing avoids over-determination via power relations and prejudices, or that either position proves even partially adequate or conducive to the common good. The 'give-and-take' testing between moderate Algerian nationalist groups prior to the emergence of a dominant FLN and the French government provides a perfect example of such problems. Not only were the slight capitulations by each side not equal to total Algerian self-determination, but these androcratic "dialogues"<sup>2</sup> were also wrought with inconspicuous ploys. In other words, Merleau-Ponty does not provide a convincing argument for how and why his political moderacy could sufficiently respond to – and not merely prolong and repeat – French colonial politics.

The inadequacies of seeking a moderating middle ground between colonial Algeria and the violent French state come to the fore in three relevant texts from 1958: *On Madagascar, May 13, 1958* and *Tomorrow...* While

the latter two in some ways recount “that final fortnight of May 1958 [which] remains one of the most extraordinary and melodramatic interludes, intoxicated and intoxicating, that the modern European mind can recall, the work of the *romancier* rather than of the historian” (Horne, 1978: 273), the interview *On Madagascar* best exemplifies Merleau-Ponty’s highly problematic views on French colonialism. As with the interview concerning Indo-China, this interview covers much more than the title suggests. Its more palatable moments focus on the shortcomings of reading the histories of various colonies through the imposition of simplistic Marxist stages of development. Merleau-Ponty criticizes those who, disillusioned with the USSR, have transferred or projected their revolutionary sentiments, passions, and empty negations onto the colonies. He notes, “That many Madagascans, above all in Tananarive, have had enough of French rule is one thing. That this foretells the accelerated growth of the proletariat in the Marxist sense is another” (Merleau-Ponty, 1969: 330). He makes such a statement in the context of a critique of what he considers the mere moral radicalism of the non-Communist left, though he does not specify whether this refers to the left of Algeria, Madagascar, or only France. This suspicion of the left as simply morally radical, compounded by his personal disenchantment with Communism, in part explains his cautious moderacy in regard to decolonization. The interview also alludes to his aversion to repression and highlights an attempt to be attuned to the empirical data concerning world poverty.

Unfortunately, these positive aspects slip into the background of this interview’s more startling claims, which can be problematized under three themes: denial, paternalism, and Eurocentrism. In regard to the first theme, Merleau-Ponty problematically distinguishes, by means of an all-too-discontinuous history, the colonialism of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries from that of 1958:

Colonialism, whatever the assumption, is three-fourths finished. When the Europeans deported fifteen million African Negroes to America, when they dealt with the herds of the Argentine pampas as fat-and-hide quarries, when they developed itinerant sugar-cane growing in Brazil which left the soil exhausted and (with the contribution of tropical erosion) turned the country into a desert, or when French administration in Africa was still dominated by the great companies, there was colonialism (*ibid.*: 332).

Here he attempts to distance contemporary France from previous forms of



colonial brutality, and episodes such as the French military's raping of women among piles of corpses or the adornment of the ears of slain non-combatants as jewelry come to mind (Lazreg, 1994: 43). Merleau-Ponty seems to imply that Africa no longer remains significantly dominated by either French administration or capitalism. But in the case of Algeria, a small handful of French *pied-noirs* continually expropriated land, resources, and labor from 1830 onward, which Merleau-Ponty must have known given his suggestion of the implementation, by France, of a "handout economy" in the colonies (1969: 335). In his inability to admit the continued dominance of "great companies", such as those wineries owned by settlers, he not only ignores the fact that in Algeria "one-half of the peasantry was already landless by 1919" (Knauss, 1987: 59), but he also turns a blind eye to the continued exportation, penetration, and institutionalization of French industrial capitalism. In other words, here he distances himself further from even the humanist elements of Marxism and the necessary critique of the constitutive role of capital in French colonialism.

His self-distantiation from Marxist critique and humanism continues when he states, "I am confirming the fact that this relation between Algeria and France has nothing to do with colonialism... We can no longer say that the system is *made* for exploitation; there is no longer, as it used to be called, any 'colony of exploitation'" (1969: 332-3). Here his denial reaches new heights. The history of the French colonization of Algeria can be precisely charted as the latter's destruction and reconstruction for the sake of the exploitation of its land (one million of the most arable hectares by 1890), resources, and cheap labor (Jackson, 1977: 6-7). The meticulously planned urban transformations of Algiers; the establishment of resettlement camps; the underemployment and underpayment of now landless persons; the militarization of Algerian civil society; and the French paratroopers' encircling of the Algiers' Casbah with barbed wire the year prior to this interview each negate Merleau-Ponty's rationalizations (see Çelik, 1997 and Lazreg, 2008: 34-60). How a professor concerned with contemporary politics and political philosophy could deny this ongoing colonial ransacking so soon after the Battle of Algiers remains a problem in its own right. In the context of arguing for the impracticality of an exodus of whites from the colonies he states, "You will see in a book Ballandier published, *Le Tiers Monde*, that since the law of August, 1946, French public investments in the countries south of the Sahara come to about a billion dollars, as much in ten years as during the previous forty years—the equivalent, it has been said, of an African Marshall Plan" (Merleau-Ponty, 1969: 332). Does this serve to imply that the investment of such sums correlates with a colony's 'development'? Large investments from French capitalists to colonial capitalists only exacerbates

exploitation and the gap between the colonizers and the colonized, hence the constant movements for national liberation. That Merleau-Ponty can grasp that “during this time 400,000 Algerian workers are working in France and feeding two million Algerians in Algeria itself” (*ibid.*: 332), and yet not note its inherently detrimental and colonial dimensions characterizes his diagnosis of Franco-Algerian relations as one beleaguered by denial. In many ways his comments exemplify “the personal and political amnesic space occupied by Algeria in the French collective psyche” (Lazreg, 2008: 113).

Subtle forms of paternalism also beset *On Madagascar*. Such paternalism can be seen at work in the attempt to explain global social ills:

All this and the decline of customary structures (in a word, what Germaine Tillion calls the ‘*clochardisation*’ of three-quarters of the underdeveloped populations), and finally, progress in information and political consciousness amply explain the uprising of underdeveloped countries. The little that the colonizing countries have done for them (in Algeria in 1954, 95% of the men were illiterate in French) has hastened rather than retarded it (Merleau-Ponty, 1969: 333).

This statement betrays Merleau-Ponty’s ascription to the myth that ‘uprisings’ result on the one hand from the becoming-vagrant (*clochardisation*) of “underdeveloped” populations, and on the other hand from a progress in information and consciousness (toward whom or what?). But the population’s economic destitution itself, and not the benevolent sharing of ‘progress’, remains the French colonial state’s primary gift to its colonies. To interpret nationalist uprisings, coalitions, and organization as based primarily on “underdevelopment”, resentment of foreign administrators (“it is natural that they impute their suffering to it”, he writes), or on progress in information denies the real, intelligent, and collective agency of anticolonial resistance (*ibid.*: 334). Furthermore, the possibly well-intentioned implication that knowledge of French corresponds with a nation’s development belies another paternalistic dimension to this interview. After stating that he does not want “Algeria, Black Africa, and Madagascar to become independent countries without delay” (*ibid.*: 334), because they supposedly are not ready, Merleau-Ponty comments on a quote by a French administrator: “One of them said to me: ‘We are teaching them to do without us.’ He was right. That is indeed the mission of French administrators under an internally autonomous régime” (*ibid.*: 335). Yet these peoples thrived prior to French colonization. The notion that each must learn from the French to ‘do without France’ not only presupposes that each does not already have such a capacity,<sup>3</sup> but also succinctly encapsulates the time

period's paternalistic dialectic: in order to gain independence from France one must remain dependent upon France. While Merleau-Ponty correctly hints that returning to a pre-colonial society is impossible, he nevertheless fails to grasp that education, like religion and economics, can create forms of dependency that only reinforce the dynamics of classical colonialism in a new context.

The dialectic of paternalism at work in *On Madagascar* as well as much French public opinion of the era signals the difficulties of overcoming deeply sedimented Franco- and Eurocentrism. Its residues can be seen in many of the foregoing quotes, but it arises most poignantly in response to the interview's final prodding,

—You seem to believe that our values, the values of Western civilizations, are superior to those of the underdeveloped countries.

—Certainly not in respect to their moral value, and even less to their superior beauty, but, how shall I put it, in respect to their *historical* value. In landing at Orly in the morning twilight, after a month in Madagascar, how amazing it is to see so many roads, so many objects, so much patience, labor, knowledge; to make out in the switching on of lights so many individuals arising in the morning. This great feverish and crushing arrangement of what is called developed humanity is, after all, what will one day enable all men [*sic*] on earth to eat (*ibid.*: 336).

While hoping to dissociate himself from moral and aesthetic Eurocentrism, Merleau-Ponty admits to privileging the West's 'historical value'. Though the meaning of these terms remains ambiguous, they receive some elucidation in the lines that follow. Upon returning from Madagascar, he marvels at the results of French capitalism as if each reenacted the myth of primitive accumulation: the patience and labor of those who arise in the morning admirably produce objects (presumably commodities), lights, roads, and knowledge with "feverish and crushing arrangement". Oddly, on just returning from Madagascar, he does not realize the extent to which such a capitalist machine does not in fact enable all persons to subsist, but rather *itself feeds* largely upon the quasi-subsistence of its own colonies. That the French colonial state may one day allow other nations to eat not only betrays a marked Eurocentrism, but also the continuation of the false generosity characteristic of those colonial systems which *are indeed made* for – and have no other *raison d'être* than – exploitation.

*On Madagascar* also begins to address one of the most nefarious of

colonial problems, *la question*, or torture. In claiming to see only partial truths, Merleau-Ponty describes himself as unconditionally opposed to the practice and claims great admiration for the honor and courage of Henri Alleg, tortured by the French military in Algiers. However, as typifies his political moderacy, he qualifies the implications of this unconditional opposition, "But to me it seems impossible to deduce an Algerian policy from this judgment about torture. It does not suffice to know what one thinks of torture to know what one thinks of Algeria. Politics is not the contrary of morality, but it is never reduced to morality" (*ibid.*: 328). One might venture that Machiavelli's influence is at work here, since according to Merleau-Ponty he helps to describe "that knot of collective life in which pure morality can be cruel and pure politics requires something like morality" (*ibid.*: 211). But as in the harangue against Mauriac, Merleau-Ponty does not shed light on what such a policy might look like, or how it might be implemented. He also neglects to explain why a French *policy-based* approach to Algerian colonial violence would prove to be the most likely to bring about a real resolution, especially in light of the failed bills, *loi-cadres*, and moderate 'reforms' of the few years preceding this interview. The conversation then shifts to a critique of the non-Communist Left, and he thereby passes too quickly over one of the most significant philosophical and political questions of the time.

But despite these myriad shortcomings or misdiagnoses, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of embodied existence can in fact aid in understanding the experience of torture. His analyses of various perceptual pathologies in *Phenomenology of Perception*, for example, provide a helpful methodological clue on the way to constructing a regional and political phenomenology. That is, just as an analysis of the figure of Schneider set against the background of empiricist and intellectualist hypotheses concerning him provides corrective insights regarding everyday waking perception (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 118ff), so too does an analysis of Alleg's experience of torture set against its colonial "*Stimmung* of violence" (Merleau-Ponty, 2000: xvii) offer insights into political subjectivity within the context of Algerian colonialism<sup>4</sup>. However, from the point of view of a phenomenology of perception alone, Schneider's pathologies are 'his', they take on a dimension of *Jemeinigkeit*. A *political* phenomenology, on the other hand, recognizes their existence as a moment of state violence: Schneider's perceptual pathologies are as much a moment of state violence (World War I) as of his personal existence – his morbid motility arises from a morbid polity. In other words, the pathologies of the colonial state often inscribe themselves on the lived experiences of everyday perception. It is for this reason that a properly political phenomenology of the spatial and temporal

elements of Alleg's torture must place his experience against the background of the colonial state. Such a juxtaposition provides an existential counterexample to Merleau-Ponty's political moderacy concerning Algeria.

### **A Political Phenomenology of Alleg's Tortured Spatiality and Temporality**

This political phenomenology of Alleg's torture only partially adumbrates those patterns, structures, techniques, and intentions that make up the intersection of his experience with the time's political situation. Yet although it cannot be comprehensive, one value of such a phenomenology lies in its ability to mediate Alleg's experience in a non-reifying manner. Unlike empirical psychology, a political phenomenology of Alleg's lived experience does not – as do the colonial state's doctors who test, observe, and drug him with pentothal – provide objective knowledge of Alleg *qua* thing. In such pretensions to bracket the political in diagnoses of states of consciousness and physiological auscultations, colonial psychological observation not only treats lived perception as a thing, but in this situation it doubly reifies Alleg in utilizing its power and knowledge to assist in colonial state violence. In briefly sketching a political phenomenology of tortured spatiality and temporality, that is, by showing and describing the overlap of these dimensions of lived subjectivity and tactical subjection, one reaches, as Sartre says, in *some* ways the essence of the conflict and its deepest truth (Alleg, 2006: xliv).

Alleg's ordeal opens with French paratroopers tearing him from a familiar and everyday milieu, the dwelling of his friend Maurice Audin. This arrest marks the end of his typical manner of lived spatiality, in which he could move about in relative freedom and comfort while being at home in his circumspective involvements. The first strike of state violence disrupts Alleg's context within which signs and things ready-to-hand could present themselves with familiarity to his average, everyday perception. When the paratroopers transport Alleg to a *Centre de Tri*, the diremption of his average spatial *sens* is exacerbated by the prison's unfamiliarity: "The bars in the reinforced concrete stuck out here and there from the masonry; the staircase did not have a balustrade; from the grey ceilings hung the wires of an unfinished electrical installation" (*ibid.*: 39). Despite being thrown into a novel and architecturally dysfunctional environment, Alleg retains the perceptual capacity to take in his surroundings and adjust himself, relatively speaking, to the new situation. At this stage, his perceptive grasp on the world still opens onto "a 'field of presence' in the broad sense, extending in two dimensions: the here-there dimension and the past-present-future

dimension" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 309). Yet since state violence does not cease with this spatial relocation, neither do those alterations in Alleg's embodied and existential spatiality.

After Alleg undergoes and suffers various excruciating forms of torture, in which the immediacy of pain is excessively given, such trauma sediments into his lived experience of space. For instance, after being given pentothal, or 'truth serum', the interrogation conducted by the doctor gives rise to rapidly successive loci: "A thousand pictures came into my befuddled mind: I was in the street, in an apartment, in a square and always with this 'Marcel' who was pursuing me and plying me with questions" (Alleg, 2006: 75). Primordially and antepredicatively, Alleg does not travel from place to place due to a failure of attention, nor does his rapid shift of locales result from misinformed judgments. He does not so much correct illusions in the moment via reflection and deliberation; rather, he perceptually enters these sites with the coaxing suggestions of Marcel, occasionally and half-consciously returning to the darkened room: "This pentothal fantasy took on the reality of flesh and blood" (*ibid.*: 75). In the residual freedom that Alleg maintains, he pinches his own flesh so as to differentiate his incarnate presence in the interrogation room from his movements within urban Algiers. So, in order to maintain some degree of resistance to the cunning of the Other and in order to remain anchored to that space inhabited prior to his psychophysiological changes, Alleg creates a loop of 'feeling himself feeling himself'. As Merleau-Ponty notes, "My body is wherever there is something to be done" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 291). By pinching himself, Alleg reserves a space of incarnate autonomy that cannot be fully torn away by the Other. Said otherwise, in 'feeling himself feeling himself', Alleg's "Je peux" (Merleau-Ponty, 2010: 820) retains both its ipseity (*Je*) and its power (*pouvoir*) over and against the Other's attempt at excavating true propositions.

In being both thrown into an unfamiliar environment and psychophysiologicaly abused, Alleg's existential spatiality undergoes a double torsion from his everyday being-in-the-world. Yet such diremption cannot be understood by means of phenomenology alone, since such spaces are saturated with the repressive intentions of the colonial state. The milieu of fear, dread, and terror (cf. Heidegger, 2008: §30) produced by professional torturers, paratroopers, and generals serves, often much more so than the average prison, to form passive and disoriented knowledge-producing subjects. Such an *Umwelt* does not simply constitute a new site to which one can adapt through pre-reflective readjustment, by asking for directions, or by glancing around for signs. Instead, the *Umwelt* of torture spaces (such as the *Centre de Tri* and *les Centres d'Hébergement*) manifests the strategies of

disorientation and dehumanization that are built into its very walls (Lazreg, 2008: 46). For instance, many Algerian torture spaces had toilets that faced one another in order to aggravate detainees' shame (*ibid.*: 126). Like the dialectic between 'good torturer/bad torturer' deployed to coercively retrieve information, the environment of the torture camp likewise dislocates the tortured subject from normal patterns of lived perception. As Marnia Lazreg observes,

The torture situation is not summed up by a torturer and his victim thrown together in a room with a few instruments. It is a structured environment with a texture of its own, a configuration of meanings, a logic and a rationale without which physical, let alone, psychic, pain is incomprehensible and ineffective. In the social situation of torture, memory, identity, and culture weave a network of ideas and perceptions, experiences and ideals that define a genuine battle between two embodied realities: in this case, colonial France with its unbounded power and mythologies, and colonized Algeria, with its claim to a full share of humanity (*ibid.*: 6)<sup>5</sup>.

Other tactical utilizations of space are also evidenced by the barbed wire hidden in Alleg's bed and the frequent changes from darkness to light—a purposefully crafted *chiaroscuro* of disciplinary power (see Alleg, 2006: 42, 67, 89).

In many ways the extremeness of Alleg's being-torn from everyday spatiality can be situated within Franco-Algerian spatial politics in general. Uprooting, moving, and reorganizing of population segments (e.g. into *bidonvilles* and *camps de regroupement*) constituted a major tactic of French troops in Algeria from 1830 onward. The *colons* and administrators, who both exoticized and demonized the autochthonous peoples, succeeded in depopulating the urban poor through the demolition and reconstruction of various edifices. Spaces for arterial roads were cleared in order to attract the wealthy bourgeoisie and to allow for the efficient circulation of commerce (Çelik, 1997: 35-6). Though such urban planning typically involved racist and capitalist intentions, such tactics take on an increased austerity with the colony's near-total militarization. As General Jacques Massu, whose aide-de-camp interrogated Alleg, once stated, "Algiers will be surrounded, divided into compartments, strictly controlled" (Djiar, 2009: 197). Thus, in both colonial Algeria in general and in the situation of Alleg's torture, the French state makes use of and benefits from restructuring spaces and from disrupting the existential spatiality of subalterns and suspected dissidents.

Just as Alleg's initial arrest leads to a variety of ruptures of his lived space, so too does it significantly alter his temporal world. In recounting his ordeal, he begins, "It was four o'clock in the afternoon of Wednesday, June 12<sup>th</sup> when Lieutenant Cha – of the Paratroops, accompanied by one of his men and a policeman, arrived at Audin's house to arrest me" (Alleg, 2006: 37). He recalls with precision the day, month, and time of his arrest, and retains the event of Audin's arrest the previous day freshly within his temporal horizon. No doubt his present, circumspective dealings within his friend's house as well as those plans, projects, and anticipations for the evening and coming week grind to a halt upon his understanding that he had fallen into a trap. Alleg's temporal involvement and comportment do not alter due to conspicuousness, obtrusiveness, or obstinacy (cf. Heidegger, 2008: §16); rather, a violent, sudden, and new relation of *Mitsein* occurs here-and-now, which tears him from his average temporality. That is, since "time is not a line, but a network of intentionalities" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 484), the physical intrusion of Others into Alleg's milieu, as well as his new imaginative prospectings of future sufferings, displace and reorient his average and lived intentional/temporal network.

After tearing Alleg from his everyday temporality, his torturers aggravate this first dislocation by means of corporeal tears, "Suddenly, I felt as if a savage beast had torn the flesh from my body" (Alleg, 2006: 45). Such excessive pain begins to destroy his temporal, intentional threads within this torture space by means of gratuitous damage to his flesh. No transcendental ego perdures throughout this torture by either actively or passively constituting time. Rather, Alleg begins to lose all sense of time precisely because the corporeal schema is the foundation of lived space and time (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 191). He notes that "the session went on interminably", and "I must have fallen asleep suddenly, because, when I saw them again, I had the impression that only an instant had passed. And at this point, I lost all idea of time" (Alleg, 2006: 45, 56). Because lived time exists for an ecstatic subject, for one who can measure duration, set forth predictions, and reflect on the past, the breakdown of Alleg's embodied subjectivity corresponds to the loss of all temporal *sens*. The violation of his flesh produces a sort of eternity or atemporality wherein his bodily accumulation of trauma overwhelms average forms of retention and protention. Here torture and the saturated immanence of pain not only seem to transport him outside of time, but the repetition of such methods upon his flesh sediment into an ambiguous, extended present, with "the prospect of death always in front of me" (*ibid.*: 93). Multiple sessions eventually break down his ability to distinguish between minutes, hours, and days (*ibid.*: 62, 68).



In the tactical dismantling of Alleg's lived temporality, those Others who weigh upon him do so both from their own relative freedom and from the bidding of the colonial state. Since "it is through temporality that there can be, without contradiction, ipseity, significance, and reason" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 495), by removing Alleg from his existential temporality, the torturers and the state (attempt to fully) undo his self, the meaning of his existence, and his ability to think clearly and rationally. Put otherwise, his torturers wrench and aggravate precisely those forms of being most constitutive of *Dasein*: being-in, care, being-toward-death, and temporality. These unreflective torturers are in many ways the ideal citizens of this colonial state. They laugh and joke in camaraderie, *jouissance*, and idle talk with one another; seek knowledge by all means necessary; obey their superiors without question; prevent presumed enemies from maintaining significant human agency; are adaptable to and able to create new spaces of control; and learn to lose themselves in the nation's work and mythology. Unlike the archival historians of former French monarchs, whose task was to justify the supposed lineage of the sovereign's authority (Foucault, 2003: 115-40), torturers in colonial Algeria justify the state's sovereignty by 'questioning' the archives of (supposed) enemies' memories. And, their attempt to do so by means of detemporalizing Alleg's intentional grasp on the world serves as one special case of Franco-Algerian politics of time.

Contrary to Alleg who has been made to lose his lived, temporal *sens*, the state maintains a monopoly on time: "'We have time,' said the major. 'They're all like that at the beginning. We'll take a month, two months, or three months, but he'll talk'" (Alleg, 2006: 69). As in General Massu's quashing of the FLN-led strike during the Battle of Algiers, thereby forcefully reinstating colonial labor time, the commandant here in this prison controls the economy of time – a time from which Alleg has been existentially removed. To the state-socialized torturers, Alleg is merely an expendable "customer" (*ibid.*: 40) whose quasi-temporality only has meaning insofar as it can produce true sentences. "You're a dead man living on borrowed time", a torturer reminds Alleg (*ibid.*: 46). In other words, and like the labor time of the colonized proletariat, his existence while incarcerated remains entirely contingent upon the state's management of his time. As Antonio Negri (1991: xxiii) once wrote, "prison, with its daily rhythm, with its transfers and with the defense, does not leave any time; prison dissolves time: This is the principal form of punishment in capitalist society". Thus, in a sense, those moments of brief respite during and in between torture sessions lend/rent time to Alleg in expectation of his compensatory production of that knowledge required by the state. Such an understanding of the colonial politics of time helps elucidate Fanon's polyvalent claim that "*le colon fait*

*l'histoire et sait qu'il la fait*" (2002: 53). The *colon* makes history not only in the sense of writing the 'winner's history' of colonialism, or by 'making it into the history books', but by quite literally giving form to the temporal events of Franco-Algerian history. The *colon* attempts to serve as *the* conduit of history, directing it along the predestined path of the *mission civilisatrice*.

A more comprehensive political phenomenology of Alleg's torture might examine: the elements of sexuality and virility that so often characterize torture in general (see Lazreg, 2008: 123-30); the significance of gestures, speech, expressions, and idle talk within torture spaces; threats to the cares and concerns of the tortured; the intentionalities involved in the management of (mis)trust; the possibilities of encountering the Other *qua* Other; the flesh in pain; and so forth. Each of these could in turn be placed against the cultural, political, social, and economic milieux of French colonialism. But each of these components of a broader political phenomenology of Alleg's torture in some way require attention to the manner in which the spatiality and temporality of his existential 'field of presence' change over the course of his torture. It is for this reason that these two key dimensions have been analyzed here.

### Subjectivity, Subjection, and Subversiveness

The foregoing section, by making use of phenomenological claims likely to be accepted by Merleau-Ponty, and by briefly contextualizing such claims within their political background, has revisited a complicated instance of political subjectivity that Merleau-Ponty too quickly passes over. The dislocation and reconstructing of Alleg's existential spatiotemporality counters Merleau-Ponty's denial of the exploitative basis of French colonialism. Not only is the end (in the sense of goal and condition of cessation) of Alleg's torture predicated upon the state's forceful extraction of knowledge, but such state repression also characterizes the militarized civil society of 1957-8 Algeria in general. Moreover, Alleg's torture reveals the sinister, *de facto* manner in which the violent liberal state – which Merleau-Ponty at times openly despises – enacts "education" and the idea of an "incessant testing of the self through the other person and the other person through the self" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 120). To this point Alleg reminds his intended audience: "This 'Centre de Tri' was not only a place of torture for Algerians, but a school of perversion for young Frenchmen" (2006: 82). Finally, the state's recurrent torture (in Algeria and Paris) of its own citizens as well as those denied full political membership contradicts Merleau-Ponty's views that France will play a significant part in the "development" of its colonies. Indeed, a political phenomenology of Alleg's

torture raises the question of whether the term 'development' actually names any real processes in the context of the colonial politics of space and time, or whether it instead functions as an unnoticed euphemism that justifies the status quo.

Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the incarnate dimension of subjectivity as the basis of existential spatiotemporality, as well as the inseparability of this embodiedness from politics, culture, and history seems correct (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 198n18). He also properly lambasts those false virtues of the violent, aggressive liberal state. However, these two elements of his works do not always interpenetrate in the way one might hope, thereby at times missing important dynamics of politico-existential subjectivity. The analysis of the spatiotemporal dimensions of Alleg's torture attempted to fill this lacuna, and it remains to elaborate more explicitly those elements of colonial subjectivity that this case brings to the fore, namely, subjection and subversiveness.

*Phenomenology of Perception* too infrequently highlights the manners in which subjectivity undergoes socio-historical construction, encounters violent resistance, or emerges within various matrices of power relations. The 'normal' subject encounters the world in its various unities and encounters being in a poetic way, already meaningful in its plenitude. This subject is first and foremost an 'I can' and not an 'I cannot', though the former remains conditioned: "All that we are, we are on the basis of a *de facto* situation which we appropriate to ourselves and which we ceaselessly transform by a sort of *escape* which is never an unconditioned freedom" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 198). Yet Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on one's situatedness and being conditioned remain somewhat peripheral qualifications of the 'I can', and while he mentions the overlap of nature and culture, the overdetermining power of the latter often remains neglected. Neither concept captures the violent subjection of colonized peoples by their colonizers. For instance, the repressive colonial state forms subjects precisely by attempting to dictate and inculcate the "cannot" within those whom it considers "*sous-hommes*" (Lazreg, 2008: 62, 214). As the political phenomenology of Alleg's lived experience has shown, torture consists in the attempt to 'put down' and to 'throw underneath'. At the state's behest, his torturers attempt to mold him into a non-human "confessing animal" (Foucault, 1990: 59), exhibited by addressing him as a rat and pig. And like a newly transformed Kafkan insect, the pressures of capitalism and his new 'boss' impinge upon his spatiotemporal metamorphoses. Yet, the one subjected to torture is not 'thrown underneath' an object or a monarch, which serve as the typical correlates of subjectivity in modern epistemology and political philosophy. Rather, the torturer, the capitalist, and the colonial

administrator attempt to throw the subject beneath the minimal threshold of human existence. Through forms of subjection, and due to the immediate or long-term benefits derived therefrom, each repeatedly attempts to construct the *sous-homme/sous-femme* and the subaltern.

But just as Alleg avoids capitulation to his torturers' demands and escapes the *Centre de Tri*, so too do social groups that the (neo)colonial state intends to convert to *sous-hommes/sous-femmes* retain the collective, agential capacity to overturn such subjection—to subvert it. The subject *qua* subaltern's capacity for subversion emerges from her 'I can' but is not reducible to it. This subversiveness, more complex than affects of *ressentiment*, consists of an embodied intentionality directed against those social, economic, cultural, and religious realities of the body politic by which a subject is 'cast down' and prevented from flourishing. The mobilized intentionality of subversiveness *may*, but need not, involve Fanonian and Sartrean cathartic violence as a way to overthrow those techniques and modes by and to which one is subjected, yet as a form of practical, embodied intentionality, it actively seeks multiple routes in order to abolish forms of subjection. That is, subversiveness imagines, acts against, deliberates on, and judges different forms of subjection in a variety of ways. As a way of being-in-the-colonial-world that is neither simply reactionary nor an unalterable state, embodied subversive intentionality consists in striving to reinstate that threshold of dignified human existence below which the (neo)colonial state attempts to subjugate those colonized. Subversiveness in this sense – the active and intentional undercutting of modes of subjection – does not merely constitute the poisonous and "sole essence of today's [1958] history, the 'metaphysic' of phenomena" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 342), but rather seeks the equalization of the social and economic playing field of spatial and temporal politics. Aside from the lived realities of subjection, it is a fuller understanding of the productive, liberating, and positive potential of subversiveness that Merleau-Ponty ultimately neglects through pessimistic detours, overemphasis on the efficacy of colonial policies, and political moderation.

**Dan Wood (dwood6@villanova.edu)** is a doctoral student in philosophy at Villanova University. His research primarily focuses on the intersection of political philosophies and movements of decolonization.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Aside from the famous text, *Les damnés de la terre*, see *Toward the African Revolution* (1967) and *A Dying Colonialism* (1965) for Fanon's political and

psychosociological diagnoses of the Algerian colonial situation; see Khanna, 2008: 79-91 for a brief history of Simone de Beauvoir's role in the collaborative defense of Djamila Boupacha; for more on the lesser-known figure of anarchist Daniel Guérin see Porter, 2011: 108-19; and for historical background on Jacques Soustelle see Le Sueur, 2003: 106-9.

<sup>2</sup> The domination of official discussion between Algerian nationalist men/elites and men of the French/ *pied noir* administration often covered over the real political, military, and grassroots work and contributions of Algerian women, for example. See the interviews collected in Amrane-Minne, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> The possibility and actuality of such commensality and effective organization among the Malagasy, without the oversight of French administration, receives clear and detailed articulation in portions of Graeber's anarchist anthropology, 2007: 157-298.

<sup>4</sup> Torture as an element in the resistance to the terrorism of the (neo)colonial state and the systematic torture wrought by this same state are two separate phenomena. Only the latter concerns me here.

<sup>5</sup> She makes a further relevant claim on p.118: "The geography of torture settings and chambers reflected the professional soldier's convoluted perception of his job. Soldiers doing intelligence do torture. They do not fight in the mountains, tracking down guerillas; they fight in the recesses of urban and rural spaces, extracting every bit of information possible to consign to files, usually kept in a space adjoining the torture site."

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# Nietzsche and Weber on Personality and Democracy

by Zeynep Talay

## Abstract

Nietzsche and Weber investigate modernity from the point of view of the fate of the individual. While Nietzsche asks whether it is possible to breed a human being capable of self-overcoming and self-mastery, Weber generalizes this theme and turns it into a research question: what type of human being will be forged in the future? Both thinkers doubted whether democratic political cultures could produce autonomous individuals, though Weber did suggest that a measure of autonomy – and personality – might be possible through devotion to one's vocation and to 'the demands of the day'. Weber wrote against the background of Nietzsche's thoughts about personality, but here I suggest that he did not develop them. They remain an important challenge, and later thinkers – including political scientists and political sociologists – have been reluctant to take it up.

## Introduction

In 1992, Tracy Strong wrote that 'the Weber of Parsons and Shils is no longer with us... instead, we have a more Nietzschean Weber' (Strong, 1992: 9). That more Nietzschean Weber is one who investigates modernity not from the point of view of social order, but from that of the fate of the individual. At the center of Nietzsche's work is a conception of self, grounded in a critical account of Cartesianism, in particular of the relationship between selfhood, rationality, and morality. The central issue for Nietzsche is whether it is possible, within a modern society, to breed a type of human being with a capacity for what he calls self-overcoming and self-mastery. Weber's notion of personality, and of a character forged through some sort of struggle, is similar to Nietzsche's notion of self-mastery, and he too asks about what type of human being will be forged in the future. Both thinkers were at least



ambivalent about the capacity of democratic political cultures to produce individuals who were autonomous in this sense, who were not merely able to reason for themselves or understand categorical imperatives but also able to shape themselves. However, one difference between them is that Weber often states that autonomy can only be expressed and fostered through devotion to one's work, a position we may extend to the claim that some sort of determinate, and possibly quite limited, activity is central to the development of the personality.

In the first section of this article I address the centrality of Nietzsche for Weber's notion of personality, but in the second I will suggest that Weber's thoughts about personality and democracy remained undeveloped (in some ways less developed than Tocqueville's), and that this represented a challenge for later thinkers. I conclude that this challenge was taken up only fitfully by political scientists and political sociologists, and that the questions that Nietzsche and Weber posed remain with us.

### **Personality and Autonomy: Kant, Nietzsche, Weber**

In *Human, All too Human*, Nietzsche writes:

*The fable of intelligible freedom. . . . Now one finally discovers that this nature [of man] cannot be responsible, since it is completely a necessary consequence and is assembled from the elements and influences of past and present things; consequently one is not responsible for anything, not for his nature, nor his motives, nor his actions, nor his actions nor for his effects. Thereby one achieves the knowledge that the history of moral sensations is the history of an error, the error of responsibility which rests on the error of freedom of the will (Nietzsche, 1996: 39).*

The target of this passage is Kant. In *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant argues that the moral law is something that all rational creatures accept as an ultimate fact of experience. He also suggests that moral obligation has a twofold character: on the one hand, it is the most familiar experience of the common man; on the other, it is the uncanniest of all experiences. Obligation is both insistent and inescapable, a task that we are called to that distinguishes it from every determination of desire that issues from self-love. Obligation calls us to the 'intelligible' or 'noumenal' order. The moral law must be expressed as a categorical imperative; it commands us unconditionally.

At the same time, in the decision to obey or disobey we discover the

possibility of our freedom. 'What else, then, can the freedom of the will be but autonomy, i.e. the property of the will to be a law to itself?' (Kant, 1959: 65; 446) Autonomous individuals act as both 'sovereigns' and 'subjects' if they obey the very law that they promulgate to themselves. The autonomous will does not submit to anything beyond itself, such as desire or appetite, which is dependent for its fulfillment on external objects. The heteronomous will, on the other hand, is a will that allows itself to be governed by some pre-established principle. Briefly, in the second critique, Kant argues that heteronomous principle cannot serve as the proper basis for morality; morality presupposes autonomy.

Nietzsche comments on Kant's concept of autonomy in *The Gay Science*:

What? You admire the categorical imperative within you? The 'firmness' of your so-called moral judgment? This 'unconditional' feeling that 'here everyone must judge as I do?' Rather admire your *selfishness* at this point. And the blindness, pettiness, and frugality of your selfishness. For it is selfish to experience one's own judgment as a universal law; and this selfishness is blind, petty and frugal because it betrays that you have not discovered yourself nor created for yourself an ideal of your own, your very own - for that could never be somebody else's and much less that of all, all! (Nietzsche, 1974: 265)

As a philosopher of autonomy himself, Nietzsche had an intermittent dialogue with Kant, and in some ways attempted to finish or even correct the project that Kant began. Nietzsche argues that on the one hand, Kant appreciates sovereignty and makes it the focus of his philosophical project, but on the other, betrays sovereignty by conflating it with the simple fulfillment of our rational nature. Kant destroys sovereignty by subsuming it under the 'universal' principles of reason – in other words, by conceptualizing it – and imprisoning the individual through the rule of an impersonal law. For Nietzsche, reason can never be used to determine the nature of individual sovereignty, about which there can be no systematic doctrine; on the contrary, sovereignty is simply the commandment one has over oneself.

One consequence of this view is that Nietzsche attempts to rescue the individual from the institutions and values that constrain him. He tries to do so by writing the history of culture in such a way as to imply that, although he is the product of culture – which might be thought to be as constraining as any impersonal law – the sovereign individual is not

responsible to any tribunal, only to himself. This means that, in contrast to Kant, Nietzsche concerns himself with the problem that we know as 'art of living'. His sovereign individual will be one who affirms life, who creates new meaning in place of the old, who says: 'we are responsible to ourselves for our own existence; consequently we want to be the true helmsman of this existence and refuse to allow our existence to resemble a mindless act of chance' (Nietzsche, 1986: 128).

Max Weber's encounter with Kant has a similar flavor to Nietzsche's, although here one should add that his notion of personality belongs within an entire German tradition of thinking about personality. Weber draws on the Kantian distinction between the realm of freedom and the realm of nature. Now, this distinction is crucial since, for Weber, freedom resides in a situation where the decision for an action is based on the actor's own choices not being disturbed by 'external constraints or irresistible affect'. In that sense, the essence of personality resides in a consistent relationship with ultimate values, and in the ability to translate these into purposive-rational action. As Goldman put it, 'ultimate values, an inner relation to these values, constant will, and rational action are thus hallmarks of personality' (Goldman, 1988: 142). Weber lays out a Kantian version of the personality that is opposed to nature or natural determination. What is beyond nature is not the moral law but values. Values are neither inside nor outside us. They are independent of individuals, and yet, we have some kind of relation to them. The question is, what?

Like Nietzsche, Weber thinks that reason can provide a guide neither to morality nor to personality. A person may devote themselves entirely to the pursuit of goodness without being able to justify doing so. This makes it difficult for people to maintain a distance between their inner life and the routine demands of modern social life; there do not seem to be any standards against which to judge that life, and so the individual must make considerable efforts to create his or her own meanings. He says that personality entails a constant and intrinsic relation to certain ultimate values and meanings of life but does not specify what the content of these values of meanings might be.

This emphasis on ultimate meanings places Weber closer to Kant than to Nietzsche (it is just one respect in which he is a neo-Kantian; in fact he refers to Kant in *The Protestant Ethic*, where he notes that Kant was strongly influenced by Pietism and that 'many of his ideas are strongly connected to ideas of ascetic Protestantism' (Goldman, 1988: 121)). Although Weber agrees with Nietzsche that the self must look beyond reason for its centre of gravity, he does so in a way that implies that the experience of finding it will have affinities with faith. In the *Protestant Ethic* Weber gives an historical

account of the relationship between the idea of shaping of the self and the Calvinist ethos realized in calling, and in so doing somewhat steps out of the shadow of Nietzsche and moves closer to Kantian concerns.

One indicator of this is the central role played by duty in Weber's work, albeit that here he quotes an exemplary saying not of Kant but of Goethe:

How can one get to know oneself? Through contemplation never, but certainly through action. Try to do your duty, and you know immediately what is in you. But what is your duty? The demand of the day (Quoted in Goldman, 1988: 129).

Why does Weber insist on the importance of duty? What is the demand of the day?

Strangely enough, in order to answer these questions we can turn to Nietzsche again. At the beginning of the second essay of *On the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche introduces his striking figure the 'sovereign individual', claiming that finally 'the tree actually bears fruit, where society and its morality of custom finally reveal what they were simply *the means to*: we then find the *sovereign individual* as the ripest fruit on its tree, like only to itself, having freed itself from the morality of custom, an autonomous, suprahistorical individual.' Towards the end of *Genealogy* he writes:

This man of the future will redeem us, not just from the ideal held up till now, but also from those things *which had to arise from it*, from the great nausea, the will to nothingness, from nihilism, that stroke of midday and of great decision that makes the will free again, which gives earth its purpose and man his hope again, this Antichrist and anti-nihilist, this conqueror of God and of nothingness – *he must come one day* (Nietzsche, 1967: 71).

Nietzsche is fascinated by the idea that after a long and painful process humanity, at last, will have the fruits, and that we – the moderns – are in a transitional period.<sup>1</sup> Even though it is true that Nietzsche regards culture as a 'tyranny against nature', he also believes that there is a selective object of culture whose function is to form a man capable of promising and thus of making use of the future, a free and powerful man who is active. Modern culture has produced Napoleon, Goethe... and even Nietzsche himself. And Weber's own analysis of the self achieved through Protestant discipline concludes that 'the personality thus constructed transformed and fortified

the self of the believer and made the new self capable of initiative, innovation, and strength of an unusual kind' (Goldman, 1988: 4).

However, unlike Nietzsche, Weber does not refer to a future that will come one day, nor does he think that we are in a transitional period. While Weber agrees with Nietzsche in ignoring the 'fact that science – that is, the techniques of mastering life based on science – has been celebrated with naïve optimism as the way to *happiness*' (Weber, 1989:17), he is even more critical of the modern anti-scientific prophets in the Germany of his time. Modern rationality – of science, of organization and so on – is here to stay. This, and perhaps only this, is the meaning of his asides about the iron cage. Similarly in 'Science as a Vocation' he states that 'there are in principle no *mysterious, incalculable* powers at work, but rather that one can in principle master everything through *calculation*. But that means the disenchantment of the world' (Weber, 1989: 17). Although this seems to imply a kind of pessimism on Weber's part, I will claim that Weber is no less optimistic than Nietzsche about the future, despite the fact that he suggests no final message about how we should conduct our lives. For just like Nietzsche, Weber is occupied with the question of 'What sort of man will inhabit the future?'

In 'Science as a Vocation', after a long account of the external conditions of an academic occupation in the context of the increasing bureaucratization of the university, Weber finally turns to the expectations of the audience: 'But I believe that you really wish to hear about something else – the inner vocation for science' (Weber, 1989: 8). As Wilhelm Hennis states, the lecture is basically to do with the question of 'who has personality within science?' (Hennis, 1987: 71) And Weber gives the answer: 'Personality is only possessed in the realm of science by the man who serves only the *needs of his subject*', adding immediately that 'this is true not only in science' (Weber, 1989: 11). The lecture 'Politics as a Vocation' has the same pattern. Weber devotes a considerable space to the definition of the state, of politics, the distinction between living *off* and *for* politics and a comparative study of political parties or groups at different times. Finally he comes to the point: 'Now then, what inner enjoyments can this career offer and what personal conditions are presupposed for one who enters this avenue?' (Weber, 2001: 114). Of the three conditions – passion, a sense of proportion and a sense of responsibility – passion is the most peculiar, because by it Weber means 'matter-of-factness', or devotion to a cause: 'devotion to politics if it is not to be frivolous intellectual play but rather genuinely human conduct, can be born and nourished from passion alone' (Weber, 2001: 114). This quite sober definition of passion is a clue to the difference between Weber and Nietzsche.

For instance, although the passion of the scientist devoted to truth has played a major role in the ongoing disenchantment of the world, although

science is no longer regarded as a way to true being or to true nature or to the true God, and although science cannot address the question of value, it can still play an important ethical role in human life, namely, to provide *clarity* concerning 'ultimate' problems (Weber, 1989: 25). By the same token, although the bureaucratization of political life and the disenchantment of cultural life constrain individual freedom, unlike Nietzsche, who sees the end product of culture – the *sovereign individual* as the ripest fruit on its tree – as a new beginning, Weber insists on the idea that we have to embrace our condition of being thrown into the world as it is, that the requirements of modern society – the ultimate rationalization and bureaucratization – are unavoidable; he says, furthermore, that in thus meeting 'the demands of the day' we can still preserve a sense of individuality or 'personality'.

In both lectures Weber insists on the idea that to be a personality you have to devote yourself to something higher – it might be scientific truth, it might be a cause, or it might be a profession defined in terms of a certain value. But there is more to this idea of personality – and this idea of ethics – than devotion to a profession. Weber is not defining professional ethics, but saying something about human relations in general. This is expressed in the famous and, as we will see later, puzzling final sentence of 'Science as a Vocation': 'We should go to our work and do justice to the demands of the day both in human and professional terms. But that is plain and simple, if everybody finds and obeys the demon which holds the threads of *his* life' (Weber, 1989: 31).

This phrase is an indication that, following Kant, Weber is concerned with the individual's capacity for consistency of conduct. According to Weber one can achieve this consistency by simply doing one's duty blindly – obeying the rules of a profession – or one can do something with passion and commitment. In the former case there is no personality, for one interprets 'the demands of the day' to mean that one should merely adapt oneself to reality, whereas for Weber, personality implies 'an unfettered self which tries to assert its individuality by affirming certain constant values in the face of the impersonal forces which increasingly dominate the modern world' (Schroeder, 1991: 62).

However, it is not clear how much space Weber thinks that the modern world provides for such a personality. The phrase 'unfettered self' is in fact a little misleading, because as Hennis insisted, a key dimension of Weber's empirical work is the relationship between personality and life orders. That is why even in the vocation lectures Weber devotes considerable space to the external conditions of science and politics. The main question for Weber is what kind of 'personality' can inhabit different life spheres or the future:

What becomes of the person who enters such an order, or is caught up in the 'power' of one - whether this is a matter of free choice, or whether the person is born into it, as in family, status, linguistic community, state and religion? What 'fate' do these orders dictate, reveal or refuse to the persons placed in their by conditions of time and place? (Hennis, 1987: 72)

It is true that, as Nietzsche also claimed, different life-spheres involve 'a demand, type, form, a variety of impositions.' However, rather than oppose this through the appeal to a creative or imaginative or assertive individuality, Weber asks whether these life-spheres may 'open-up possibilities for future conduct, a formative tendency for 'personality' (Hennis, 1987: 72). Hennis thinks that this is related to 'Tocqueville's analysis of the moral consequences of the transition from *ancient regime* of personal servitude to the individualistic epoch of unfettered equality' (Hennis, 1987: 75). Indeed, this may explain Weber's own interest in agrarian social structure and rural labour organization. The question he puts to them is: do the new modes of organization, the new life orders being formed in the present, make the formation of 'personalities' more or less likely? For instance, Weber states that in the West, wage labour:

... is considered to some extent to be a neighbourly act of helping out... these people distinguish the concept of labour from that of duty or obligation. Here individualism in labour organization finds its most extreme form... He labours perhaps because he actually has to, but in his mind it is because he likes to. He is not familiar with the kind of labour that we know from the east, this rigid, obligatory form of labour that yokes the whole life together (Quoted in Hennis, 1987: 75).

In the end, Weber does not give a systematic analysis of different social orders and their relation to 'personality' or of what type of man can inhabit the future. Instead he left a series of challenges that later social and political science was invited to take up. The question that I would like to ask now is, to what extent have these challenges been addressed?

### **'Making Democracy Work'**

Weber's friend Robert Michels said that all forms of political organization will eventually develop into oligarchies. The iron law of oligarchy is just the

sort of statement that threatens to close off discussion of the Weberian question: what is the relationship between personality and life order in different spheres, in particular, the political sphere? This latter question was not answered systematically by Weber himself, and has remained an implicit challenge to political science. Seymour Martin Lipset and Robert Putnam, for instance, are concerned with these issues in their accounts of sustainable democracy. It should be said though that whereas for Weber the question was: 'do current institutional structures – democratic or not - encourage the development of personalities?', for them the question was: 'do the personality structures of modern democratic citizens support the maintenance of a particular political system, democracy?' As Sven Eliaeson puts it, Weber's 'completely secularized views of politics left no room for a metaphysics of "democratic spirit", and thus he saw no necessary connection between democracy and freedom and/or equality' (Eliaeson, 1998: 48). As has been said, if Weber believed this he was echoing, albeit weakly, a Nietzschean idea:

The democratic movement is not merely a form assumed by political organization in decay, but also a form assumed by man in decay, that is to say in diminishment, in the process of becoming mediocre and losing his value (Nietzsche, 1966: 117).

With a similar approach Weber focuses on 'the growth of rational discipline which is manifest in the bureaucratization which accompanies the rise of mass democracy' (Owen, 1991: 80). This thought hovered over his writings on parliament and government in Germany, where parliament is to be judged not in terms of the quality of its legislation but as an arena for testing the personalities of political leaders.

For both thinkers their doubts about democracy are reflected in their remarks on socialism. While Nietzsche suggests that socialism 'expressly aspires to the annihilation of the individual, who appears to it like an unauthorized luxury of nature destined to be improved in a useful *organ of the community*' (Quoted in Owen, 1991: 81), Weber claims that 'socialism would abolish the possibility of individual autonomy and self-expression through the construction of a totally bureaucratic order in which the individual is reduced to an instrument of the state' (Owen, 1991: 81). Neither Nietzsche nor Weber lived to witness the rise of not one but two totalitarian systems, or the war between them and its consequences; had they done so the themes of freedom, strong personalities would surely have been just as prominent in their work if not more so.



## Postwar Political Science

Can the same be said of political scientists and political sociologists who did witness it? After World War II both disciplines established a fairly close link between democracy and freedom on the one hand, and between totalitarianism and a lack of freedom on the other. The types of freedom that democracy was thought consistent with were the liberal freedoms of a deontological or utilitarian sort. The effect of this was that Nietzschean and Weberian doubts about democracy's capacity to breed autonomous personalities were marginalized; if they were entertained at all it was in philosophy, critical theory, some versions of sociology (notably in theories of mass society), and literature. The empirical study of political parties, trade unions or professional organizations rather steered clear of them.

Take, for instance, Seymour Martin Lipset. Lipset did witness World War II and its consequences, and as a result a central theme of his work was the sustainability of political democracy. In one study he focused on the ITU (International Typographical Union) and the emergence of a large socialist party, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in Canada, but he did so partly in order to see whether Michels was right about the iron law of oligarchy. Contrary to Michels, Lipset came to the optimistic conclusion that ITU was 'a large trade union which governed itself through an elaborate democratic political system' (Buxton, 1985: 212-13).

This looks like a dry statement of a value-neutral scholar; but as a graduate student, Lipset had already agonized over Weberian questions about the ethics of a scientist, and the dilemma of reconciling his political commitment with the objective scientific research. As a young political scientist, he wanted to give 'personality' to what he was doing. He came to the conclusion that if one can manage to keep conclusions separate from political biases, one can still be loyal to Weberian strictures, starting the study with questions that are based on one's own values, but keeping it objective and value-free, allowing one to come to objective conclusions. Having faced these ethical questions, later Lipset claims that the task of political sociologist is to be concerned with cleavages as well as consensus, and to provide political leaders with empirical knowledge and thereby contribute to the effectiveness of the democratic system. He thought that too many political sociologists focused either on cleavage or on consensus and thus contributed to the perpetuation of ideology. A stable democratic system requires both consensus and cleavage (Buxton, 1985: 228). It also presupposes a situation where 'all major political parties include supporters from many segments of the population'. The question for Lipset then is not 'what makes personality possible?' but 'what makes democracy work?', with the question of

personality being thought to <sup>take care of itself</sup> or be irrelevant. Lipset makes the Tocquevillian argument that participation in any form of organized activity has the effect of stimulating political participation (Lipset, 1956: 43-56).

Such activity increases the possibility that individuals will become acquainted with other politically active individuals or with information which will make the political process more meaningful to them (Lipset, 1956: 47).

This was written thirty years before the theme of 'civil society' became so popular among intellectuals.

One piece of empirical research that helped in its popularization was Robert Putnam's *Making Democracy Work*, an endorsement-with-evidence of Lipset's statement. By focusing on the efficiency of the regional governments that were elected in the early 1970s in Italy, Putnam explores 'why norms and networks of civic engagements powerfully affect the prospects for effective, responsive government and why civic traditions are so stable over long periods' (Putnam 1992: 16). He claims that membership in voluntary organizations such as labour unions, guilds, and even bird-watching clubs and the like promote a sense of community, and in a nation with a strong sense of civic community, a tolerance toward diversity and high level of mutual trust are more possible. A strong civil society promotes social connectedness and integration, and a corresponding set of attitudes and habits; there is a strong link between voluntary cooperation and social capital in the form of norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement. Social capital refers to 'features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions' (Putnam 1992: 167). At the other end of the spectrum, 'where norms and networks of civic engagement are lacking, the outlook for collective action appears bleak' (Putnam 1992: 183). 'The harmonies of a choral society illustrate how voluntary collaboration can create value that no individual, no matter how wealthy, no matter how wily, could produce alone. In the civic community associations proliferate, memberships overlap, and participation spills into multiple arenas of community life. The social contract that sustains such collaboration in the civic community is not legal but moral' (Putnam 1992: 183).

Since Putnam's work a whole wave of studies have appeared, conducted in a similar spirit and formulating questions in the same sort of language. Tusalem's study of NGOs in 'transitional societies' is just one:

Associations may contribute to institutional conditions and

venues that support, express, actualize individual and political autonomy as well as transform autonomous judgments into collective decisions (Tusalem, 2007: 361).

Tusalem states that states with a strong civil society promote the pluralism of their societal groups and this approach leads NGOs to experience both vertical and horizontal growth. These states support the idea that there should be NGOs in the regions, provinces, and municipalities, since their expansion is good for democracy. It is compatible with the sustainability of democracy because, by bringing citizens together, NGOs create a space where people can discuss the strengths and shortcomings of local and national governments. 'In the end, states with very dense and diffused NGOs are better geared to make effective demands on the polity as a whole' (Tusalem, 2007: 379).

Trust, norms, networks, social capital, social contract, efficiency, this is the (increasingly popular) language of a political science that has left Nietzschean and Weberian questions, and the deep brooding that gave rise to them, a long way behind. Its questions are different: how can civic engagement be fostered? How do civil society organizations contribute to better policy-making? How can individuals' demands on the polity be met? On the question of how individual people can face up to the demands of the day, this work is largely silent.

## Conclusion

Both Weber and Nietzsche investigate modernity from the perspective of individual freedom and one of the central issues for both thinkers is whether it is possible to breed a type of human capable of self-mastery. Even though Weber's notion of giving personality to one's character is similar to Nietzsche's notion of self-mastery, Weber insists on the idea that autonomy expresses itself in devotion to the demands of one's work. That is what the vocation lectures are about. Postwar political scientists such as Lipset and Putnam have interpreted this, if they have interpreted it at all, to mean that there is no contradiction between personal autonomy and political participation, and that democracy allows people to be 'devoted to a cause' in many different ways, some of them apparently quite minor or local. In some ways their work is a critique of Weber, whose own situation left him free to ask profound existential dilemmas and to be ambivalent or even hostile towards democracy. But in other respects the work of Putnam et al is another example of the neglect of Weber, and for that matter Nietzsche, by political scientists. The sharp questions they posed about modernity,

autonomy and personality continue to cast their shadows, or ought to. And it probably should remain an open question whether belonging to a bird-watching club or a choir is quite what Weber had in mind when he said that we should meet the demands of the day and devote ourselves to something with passion.

**Zeynep Talay (talayzey@yahoo.com)** did her doctoral studies in Philosophy at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. Before her PhD she gained an MA in Philosophy at the University of Warwick in England.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche presents the following historical sequence: 1) a pre-moral (*vormoralische*) period in which the value or disvalue of an action was derived from its consequences; 2) a moral period which shifts from assessing consequences to assessing 'intentions' and which involves the first attempts at self-knowledge; 3) an 'extra-moral' (*aussermoralische*) period which is a threshold upon which we 'immoralists' stand and in which we believe that morality in the traditional sense, the morality of intentions, was a prejudice. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (New York: Vintage, 1966), p.32.

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# The Impossibility of Post-Metaphysical Politics: Ontology and Thought in Rorty, Heidegger, and Marcuse

by Clayton Chin

## I. Introduction

What is the nature of politics after metaphysics? More precisely, following the critique of foundations, what is the connection between philosophical analysis and politics? Can the former truly be free of metaphysical assumptions in its analysis of the latter? Can politics actually be post- (i.e. free of) metaphysics? Richard Rorty answers these two latter questions in the affirmative. For him, philosophy in general and politics specifically can, and should, be post-metaphysical. They can entirely elude the question of foundations through a pragmatic disposition, on the one hand, and a liberal politics, on the other. This is a philosophy and politics without foundations, the desire for them, or the need to interrogate them. Through a critical analysis of Rorty's position, informed largely by the work of Martin Heidegger and Herbert Marcuse, this article argues for the necessity of thinking metaphysics for politics; that it is necessary, contra Rorty, to ask metaphysical and ontological questions in relation to politics. It argues that the rejection of ontological thought constricts the range of political thought. A certain set of philosophical decisions can narrow the universe of political thinking. The purpose here is not to re-establish philosophy as a foundation, but only to emphasize the effects of ontological assumptions within the realm of politics. Certain philosophical positions do have intuitive connections to certain political ones. Such an illustration should indicate the critical necessity of broad philosophical questioning for politics; essentially, that in order to have a critical perspective on political questions, we must be able to consider the terrain as a whole and the extent of its universe of thought (insofar as that is possible).

Rorty's post-metaphysical rejection of the use of philosophy and ontology for politics places freedom in opposition to truth. For him, freedom is only possible in the absence of a concept of truth. In opposition to this position, freedom requires truth. It requires a distinction between what has been revealed and what has been hidden (even if the latter does not have

epistemological or ontological priority over the former). It is only with such a distinction that philosophy can stand back and consider the scope of political thinking and its adequacy. It is thus essential for the very project of critique. In this manner, the inadequacy of Rorty's post-metaphysical constriction of philosophy and politics will be illustrated through Heidegger's framing of the question of Being, his attempt to think modernity in general, and Marcuse's extension of these themes to a wide critique of the thought and behavior of advanced technological society. These two thinkers demonstrate the necessity of thinking metaphysics and ontology after the critique of foundations.<sup>1</sup> The absence of such a thinking, as Rorty illustrates, gelds our critical capacities and constricts our enquiry to the present universe of options.

## II. Political Philosophy After Metaphysics

Both a clarification of terms and a general understanding of the status of the debate regarding politics and metaphysics are necessary here. What 'metaphysics' is and means is essential to the determination of whether there is an 'after-metaphysics.' Within much of contemporary philosophical discourse, the term *metaphysical* usually denotes a question of status. A philosophy is metaphysical if it ascribes to itself some foundation it cannot actually justify. Such foundations usually rest upon a myriad of problematic assumptions not susceptible to proofs. Thus, the debate about politics after metaphysics has often been dominated by an attempt to establish a different sort of relation to these grounds. Recently, these discussions have been dominated by 'post-foundational' and 'weak-ontological' approaches that identify their origins in the critiques of metaphysics inaugurated by Nietzsche and Heidegger (among others) and continued by the more recent movement of 'post-structuralism' (Marchart 2007; White 2000). These positions hold that we must develop alternative theoretical justifications for our analyses (as well as alternative analyses), as they no longer stand upon firm epistemological (or ontological) grounds. However, while these perspectives often offer insightful critiques into foundationalist claims and original identifications of the persistence of such grounds in self-declared 'foundationless' philosophies, they are often purposively vague about the exact status of their analyses and the origin of their criticisms. In a sense, they lack an explicit account of truth from which they can gain critical purchase.

In opposition, Habermas has articulated a different account of the problematic of politics and metaphysics. In *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, Habermas argues that philosophy since Hegel has been grappling with how

to be post-metaphysical. It is important to understand that metaphysics, for Habermas, is a totalizing and systematic philosophical idealism. Thus, his definition goes beyond a mere concern with foundations to include the issues of identity thinking, idealism, consciousness as the basis of philosophy, and the strong concept of theory. In contrast, post-metaphysical thought is characterized by procedural rationality, situated reason, the linguistic turn, and a deflation of the primacy of theory over practice. It is with the first of this latter list that this article is concerned. 'Totalizing thinking that aims at the one and the whole was rendered dubious by a *new type of procedural rationality*' drawn from the empirical sciences (Habermas 1992, p.33). Metaphysical thinking depended on an intrinsically rational world, while post-metaphysical thinking constricts that to the rationality of approaches and procedures. Now, 'what counts as rational is solving problems successfully through procedurally suitable dealings with reality' (Habermas 1992, p.35). Importantly, one of the key consequences of the proceduralization of reason is the disappearance of the appearance-essence distinction. In the absence of a totality, the question of essence recedes. Instead, with the post-metaphysical, there is a methodological division between the natural and human sciences that stresses a distinction between outside and inside perspectives respectively (i.e. natural scientists are always outside their object of study whereas human scientists are always, to a degree, participants). The result is a firm distinction between empirical (procedural) and hermeneutic (humanist) methods respectively (Habermas 1992, p.36).

In this manner, Habermas participates in and signals one of the key developments of philosophical thought in the post-metaphysical period; a development Richard J. Bernstein refers to as 'The Pragmatic Turn.' Both Habermas and pragmatism attempt to combine a critique of metaphysical thought (which involves a shift to procedural rationality) with a continued endorsement of the project of modernity (the primacy of human aims). They acknowledge the contingency of modernity and yet argue for it nonetheless. For Bernstein, pragmatism's anti-Cartesianism (i.e. its opposition to the subject-object divide and other Cartesian dualisms) places it within, rather than opposed to, the twentieth century's post-metaphysical trajectory. Further, there has been a major pragmatic turn in both Anglo-American and post-war German thought. These movements are linked by desire for a, 'nonfoundational, self-corrective conception of human inquiry' combined with a humanist disposition (Bernstein 2010, p.x). The argument here is that Rorty is one possible (extreme) consequence of this logic.<sup>2</sup> He turns post-metaphysical critiques against themselves to render impossible even the communicative rationality that undergirds Habermas's system. Instead, he



argues that the procedural and humanist projects must be united within one pragmatic post-metaphysical disposition that entirely rejects both claims to foundations and articulations of the nature of the world. Similarly to those above, Rorty reads metaphysics solely as the question of the authority of claims. In contrast, the work of Heidegger and Marcuse offers another way to think politics after metaphysics. The former famously defined metaphysics as the forgetting of being. Ontology, rejected under Rorty's post-metaphysical disposition, is a necessary corrective to this forgetting. Further, it necessitates both the essence-appearance distinction rejected in post-metaphysical thought and a relation to the concept of truth. What follows is a critical confrontation with Rorty's philosophy and politics. From the positions of Heidegger and Marcuse this article illustrates the political necessity of thinking metaphysics and ontology outside the question of foundations in opposition to the dominant trends within our supposedly post-metaphysical era.

### III. Rorty and The Freedom of Post-Metaphysical Philosophy

Presently, there is a clear and discernible concern about the status and capacity of philosophy to engage in political analysis. Rorty on the one hand and Heidegger and Marcuse on the other represent two approaches to this question of the nature of politics and philosophy after metaphysics. For Rorty, in the wake of metaphysics, philosophy can only be conversational and politics instrumental. A pragmatic division of labour between these two spheres and their respective methods characterize his work. He is emphatic that after metaphysics, after the loss of foundations for philosophical knowledge, philosophy can have no critical or constructive role in politics. Rather, it can only engage itself (as one participant) in the general cultural conversation about what ends orient politics. The source of this problematic position is Rorty's critique of epistemology and ontology in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. The instrumental and hermeneutic pragmatism developed there characterizes his work in general. Further, it is this critique and reconstruction of philosophy that excludes philosophy and ontology from politics. Rorty attempts to re-situate the place of freedom within human thought. He seeks to free human enquiry and aims by removing both from any structure of authority (even correspondence to a reality). Here, human culture is free insofar as it is uninhibited by anything outside of itself. In this manner, Rorty hopes to move beyond metaphysics by circumscribing philosophy and ontology in favor of politics.

One of the principle questions of Rorty's work is, 'what, if anything, philosophy is good for' following the critique of metaphysics (Rorty 1999a,

p.11). However, in order to understand his answer to this question (i.e. his post-metaphysical philosophy) it is necessary to engage in his critique of the notion of foundations within philosophy. Analytic philosophy, epistemology and the philosophies of language and mind set the boundaries of Rorty's early work. They are the context of his anti-metaphysical critique of epistemology and his fundamental turn against ontology. Briefly, he rejects the possibility of an essential connection between language and world that could be grounded in some way and deflates the philosophical and ontological significance of our diverse linguistic practices. In *PMN*, it is clear that Rorty's opposition to epistemology (and ontology) is based on his reading of them as privileged frameworks philosophy assumes to cast itself as arbiter of all human culture. Both of these fields are based upon the assumption of a neutral level of reality and the idea that the mind is capable of mirroring (corresponding to) that reality under certain conditions. The dualism of mind and world (or language and world) stands behind philosophy giving it the task of guaranteeing the authority of our representations of that world. It is specifically assumptions (authority and the neutral framework) that Rorty critically engages. In fact, he reads the history of philosophy through this concern. For him, Western philosophy has been engaged in a two thousand year quest for certainty. This is the desire for a constraint, a framework external to ourselves, that compels us toward certain beliefs and thus is the measure of our knowledge. However, for Rorty, while the world causally acts on us, justification (and authority) is always a social matter. Thus, his critique (*epistemological behaviourism*) is behavioural. It is based on how justification actually operates within human, social communities. His understanding is a form of holism that results from the basic assumption that 'justification is not a matter of a special relation between ideas (or words) and objects, but of conversation, of social practice' (Rorty 2009, p.170). The premise of this argument is that human knowledge can be understood by the social justification of belief. Consequently, there is no *need* to see it as accuracy of representation. For Rorty, in the absence of representation (the attempt to mirror nature) and the resulting attempt to ground knowledge, the whole premise of a metadiscourse capable of arbitrating the knowledge claims of all human practices falls away. Epistemological behaviourism destroys the quest for certainty.

The distinctiveness of this rejection of epistemology and ontology is its status. This is not an ontological claim about the nature of truth in reality. Rather, it is a claim about the limits of philosophy in relation to knowledge and truth and it is a refusal to attempt a type of explanation; one that judges the absolute reliability of human claims. Causal reports of the world and its events and conceptual breakdowns of the structure of the mind, neither of

which are to be rejected here, are only problematic if they are taken as necessary premises for grounded knowledge. 'Behaviourism in epistemology is a matter not of metaphysical parsimony, but of whether authority can attach to assertions by virtue of relations of "acquaintance" between persons and, for example, thoughts, impressions, universals, and propositions' (Rorty 2009, p.177). Rorty's concern here is with the authority we attach to knowledge claims, not with the intrinsic structure of reality. This is a post-metaphysical critique of metaphysics. It does not attempt to philosophically invalidate the foundation of knowledge by piercing some veil to a more primordial level; it sociologically and behaviorally challenges the project at the level of the actual justification within social groups. It satisfies Habermas's criteria for post-metaphysical thought addressed above. In Rorty, for the understanding of justification as social practice no languages are necessary and all authority is socially derived. Consequently, coherence within a language becomes essential, as now the question is how beliefs engage with each other rather than with the world, and enquiry becomes reformist and gradual; 'criticism of one's culture can only ever be piecemeal and partial -- never "by reference to eternal standards"' (Rorty 2009, p.179). All claims become open to challenge and yet we lack the resources for revolutionary shifts as we can only ever judge an assertion against those already accepted. Total critique and penetrating beneath the common-sense world of the everyday become impossible. Instead, Rorty advocates a type of instrumentalism based on the scientific method. He approvingly quotes Wilfred Sellars to the effect that, 'science is rational not because it has a *foundation*, but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put *any* claim in jeopardy, though not *all* at once' (Rorty 2009, pp.180–1).

In light of this critique and understanding of vocabularies, Rorty offers a two-part model for future enquiry. Adopting Thomas Kuhn's distinction between normal and revolutionary science, Rorty emphasizes that human enquiry and justification are characterized by normal and abnormal periods. Within normalcy, the standards of justification are fairly stable. Enquiry is the gradual solving of problems and the elaboration of the given paradigm. In abnormal periods, the paradigm itself is in question and alternative models may be contenders for a new set of questions. In light of these two contending moments of enquiry, normal and abnormal (stable and revolutionary), Rorty offers instrumentalism and hermeneutics respectively as methods for thought. He draws on Dewey's instrumentalism and its attempt to offer a non-metaphysical and pragmatic disposition out of the human situation. Dewey theorizes the scientific method as a formalization of our basic existential reaction to the world. For him, humans are fundamentally problem-solving organisms in an environment. This

anthropological conception instrumentalizes the world. It emphasizes the interaction between organism and environment for the purpose of control. Humans actively modify the world in order to understand its relations. We experiment, we change something, in order to learn how to replicate desirable results and solve contextual problems. Enquiry is the schematization of these relations oriented at their control for human ends (Dewey 2008). Dewey is the archetypal modern thinker for Rorty. He advocates control without enchantment, enquiry without an external authority. Here the only constriction is human desires and aims as there is no attempt to correspond to a god, intrinsic human nature, rationality, or reality. For him, in its absence of metaphysics, this is the freest form of human enquiry, where humanity is only subject to its collective desires.

Hermeneutics is paired with instrumentalism for even greater freedom. Whereas within normal enquiry instrumentalism is the best means of problem-solving, the hermeneutic disposition allows for revolutionary shifts in thought in abnormal moments. It is structured as an open space of discourse without any assumptions about neutrality or the criteria of a valid argument. It is thus non-metaphysical as it is both unconcerned with and unaffected by anything external. Rather, hermeneutics is the task of finding new ways of speaking that allow us to do new things (Rorty 2009, p.359). In this, it is specifically conversational for Rorty. It is about a perpetual free space without preconception or design. Its purpose is to suggest the continuance and proliferation of this conversation, not its restriction. Rorty wants more abnormal discourse, not the static state of the dominance of one set of rules in one paradigm (Rorty 2009, p.377). With this purpose, hermeneutics is intended to have a freeing function. For Rorty, the epistemological and ontological projects are inherently oppressive. They 'reduce freedom to nature, choice to knowledge' (Rorty 2009, p.384). In opposition, instrumentalism and hermeneutics free our thought and communities, allowing us both to solve present problems in a piecemeal and experimental manner, and shift the entire basis of thought when necessary, without the oppressive need to correspond to some external force.<sup>3</sup>

Rorty's critique of the correspondence model of epistemology (and implicit critique of ontology) is part of his general critique of metaphysics.<sup>4</sup> Here, the latter is the attempt to find foundations for both our knowledge of the world (epistemology) and our fundamental characterizations of reality and Being (ontology). Both are manifestations of the demand for certainty in our relations with the world. Further, this desire is always a desire for the authority of an external compulsion that forces humanity to know the world truly.<sup>5</sup> In opposition, Rorty offers a post-metaphysical critique explicitly designed to avoid both this demand and its attempted foundations. Thus,

his sociological and behavioural understanding of justification, paired with his pragmatic (i.e. instrumental and hermeneutic) approach to enquiry, attempts to operate solely on the level of human practice. There is no attempt to penetrate to another level or logic. Fundamental to Rorty's opposition to metaphysics is a rejection of the appearance-reality distinction. For him, this distinction necessitates a metaphysical desire for foundations, a desire which places us under a nonhuman authority that compromises the free self-direction of our culture (Rorty 1999b, p.24).<sup>6</sup> How he replaces this distinction and the political consequences of this will be addressed later. Presently, it is necessary to engage with Heidegger's critique of metaphysics and Marcuse's analysis of advanced technological society for an alternative understanding of philosophy after metaphysics and its relation to the question of human freedom.

#### **IV. Heidegger and Marcuse: Thinking the Scope of Thought**

Heidegger and Marcuse's<sup>7</sup> philosophies provide the resources to challenge both post-metaphysical thought in general and Rorty's particular brand thereof. Where Rorty premises his solution to the problem of thought after metaphysics with a rejection of ontology, these two thinkers make ontological thought (and a consideration of "metaphysical" questions) a necessary prelude to both a critique of metaphysics and any consideration of the subsequent nature of philosophy and politics.<sup>8</sup> Specifically, in conceiving of metaphysics as a wider dynamic (beyond the issue of foundations) of the forgetting of Being and historicizing that problematic into an epochal history of Being, Heidegger provides a critical capacity to engage with the present. He inaugurates a way to both critically engage with modernity and to conceive of freedom. Marcuse extends this analysis to a specific critique of the particular nature of domination in advanced technological society. Together, they allow us to reveal the implicit connection between Rorty's pragmatic philosophy and his particular theorization of post-metaphysical liberalism. Further, they illustrate that, rather than freeing thought from external non-human authorities, Rorty's post-metaphysical philosophy and politics circumscribe our critical capacities and relegate us to the present manner of thinking.

While Rorty and Heidegger share a critique of the foundationalism of the Western epistemological tradition, for Heidegger, foundationalism is only one form of a larger dynamic of metaphysics within Western thought. Metaphysics is the forgetting, eclipse, and abandonment of Being and its question within Western philosophy. It is the concealment of humanity's necessary relation to the revealing of Being. Defining it in this manner, rather

than as solely an issue of foundations, makes ontology necessary rather than metaphysical (in Heidegger's sense). Further, beyond necessity the question of Being is also primary. As the primordial question for philosophy,<sup>9</sup> it structures what real philosophy consists of and is thus a normative benchmark for philosophical enquiry. All real philosophical questioning is ontological; it approaches, without actually answering (as this would be a covering-over), and circles around the question of Being. The ability to stand back and question the entirety of Being is the unique and necessary role of humanity (Heidegger 2000, p.7). But what can this questioning achieve? For Heidegger, as it is outside the everyday practical realm of use, ontological questioning is disruptive. It shatters the unity of the everyday and pulls us out of the established order of beings (temporally and spatially). Thus, in order to question, we must confront Being in general. What this gives us is a different perspective on that realm; for Heidegger, a true and essential perspective (Heidegger 2000, pp.11–2). Rorty's pragmatism includes an orientation of instrumentalism. The imperative is not to know the world, with certainty, but to control it. For Heidegger, we must reject both the epistemological and instrumental approaches. Instead we must orient ourselves to the essence of Being. Essence denotes the ontological dimension to something; the aspect of a thing that covers its relation to Being in general. Thus, to question something, or Being in general, is to question it apart from its mode of revealing within a specific determination of Being (Beistegui 1998, pp.9, 37). Consequently, Heidegger retains a distinction between 'the true' and 'the correct'. True here is not the correspondence model of knowledge that Rorty rejects, but the essence of a thing, its ontological dimension. In contrast, the correct is the revealed nature of a thing within the dominant interpretation of Being. Thus, within modernity, science and technology may be correct but they are never true (Heidegger 1977, pp.4–6; Beistegui 1998, pp.141–2).

This theorization of ontology leads to a distinct approach to politics. Rather than addressing specific political issues, Heidegger is concerned with the site of politics and its ontological determination, the *polis*. For him, the *polis* (or the *political*) is the site of history, of the collective determination of Being. It is the site where epochs emerge; where humanity as Dasein, in its unique role, unconceals and conceals Being. To translate *polis* as state, or to name the state (or the interstate system) as the primary site of politics, is to understand politics from within a specific determination of Being (the modern). In contrast, the *polis* is the site of humanity's historico-ontological dwelling. It is the site where our collective relation to Being arises. It is in this sense that the essence of the *polis* is in an essential relation with the unconcealment of beings. It presents the frame in which we understand

beings as a whole (Heidegger 2000, p.162; Beistegui 1998, chap.5). What Heidegger indicates here is the social aspect to our determination of Being. What ontology offers is the ability to think the extent of this universe, its limitations and tendencies. In this manner, he offers us a much-needed counterweight to the dominance of social categories in our thinking that Rorty (“correctly”) theorizes.

In “The Question Concerning Technology” Heidegger offers a critical analysis of modernity’s fundamental determination of Being. To do this, he enquires into the essence of technology, which is, famously, nothing technological. In opposition to the instrumental and anthropological views, technology is not about contrivance or instruments. Rather, the essence of technology is that it is the archetypal form of revealing in modernity. As the very mode of disclosure within modernity, technology stands behind specific forms of knowledge as the basic relation to Being. Further, there are two main aspects to this relation, an attitude/orientation and a mode of disclosure, challenging-forth and standing-reserve respectively. As the posture modern technology adopts with respect to the world, challenging-forth demands nature supply energy to be extracted and stored. The earth is thus set upon in a ‘setting-to-order’ intended to unlock, expose and transform through the regulation and organization of its elements. This challenging revealing, for Heidegger, reveals the world as standing-reserve, as everywhere ordered to stand-by. Consequently, Being as a whole appears to us as a ready resource to be organized and utilized. In this manner, technology is a demand and a revealing. It is a ‘challenging claim which gathers man thither to order the self-revealing as standing-reserve’ and Heidegger names this form of revealing, *Enframing* (Heidegger 1977, p.19).

In *One-Dimensional Man* Marcuse extends this analysis of modernity in a philosophical and political critique of contemporary Western industrial societies that links the question of ontology to the particular nature of domination therein.<sup>10</sup> His concerns are specifically ontological, in that he is considering whole frameworks for thought and understandings of reality; however, he also asks how this changes specific forms of knowledge within the world. He considers epistemology ontologically (rather than merely socially). Knowledge necessarily assumes a structure to totality of the world and so must be ontological. Being concerned with the structure, rather than the content of knowing, he sees knowledge as a way of being in the world (Feenberg 2005, p.66). For Marcuse, knowledge in advanced technological society is dominated by specific developments in the scientific method. Operationalism in the physical and behaviourism in the social sciences are the two parts of a ‘total empiricism’ that governs thought. Concepts, ideas and forms of critique that cannot be represented within these modes are

*eliminated* in favour of these empirical accounts. All forms of thought which 'transcend' these terms, merely in the sense of employing criteria outside of their universe of discourse, are excluded as "metaphysical."<sup>11</sup> Further, the functional and behavioural approaches particularize critique and prevent the development and application of total criticisms. All grievances are atomized and particularized and dealt with in a piecemeal fashion by the present set of institutions. Empirical and reformist thought take a general critique of a system and translate it into a specific grievance in a specific social context. They turn social critique into a problem to be solved. Thus, the dominance of this scientific and technological rationality, 'serves to coordinate ideas and goals with those exacted by the prevailing system, and to repel those which are irreconcilable with the system' (Marcuse 1969, p.28). Operationalism here comes to serve as a process of containment. Through particularization all events and ideas are reduced to the given universe of facts and thought.

Thus emerges a pattern of *one-dimensional thought and behaviour* in which ideas, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe. They are redefined by the rationality of the given system and its quantitative extension (Marcuse 1969, p.27).

Technological and empirical rationality are thus, contra Rorty, political in character. Their basic empiricism has the political function of restricting thought to the present universe and reinforcing the given set of relations.

For Heidegger, such an exclusion of the ontological has fundamental effects for human freedom. The essential danger of *Enframing*<sup>12</sup> is not its specific determination of Being, which is also dangerous, but in its relation to the question of Being in general, questioning, and revealing. *Enframing* conceals its own particularity. It denies that it itself is a specific determination of Being. As a result, it not only drives out every other possibility of revealing, 'but it conceals revealing itself and with it That wherein unconcealment, i.e., truth, comes to pass' (Heidegger 1977, p.27). Through the rejection of metaphysics, *Enframing* denies and obscures the ontological question (and relation of truth). Like Rorty, it denies the necessity of this question and cloaks its own determination in a neutrality that excludes all others. Consequently, Heidegger redefines freedom in opposition to Rorty's specifically anti-ontological and anti-authoritative hermeneutic of freedom. For him, freedom is unconnected to will or choice. Rather, freedom, in its essence, is related to the necessary revealing of Being. It is a happening of



revealing, a moment for the true. For Heidegger, we are unfree when we are forced to forget the question of Being in general and the manner in which it allows us to break out of our current mode of thought. As such, 'Freedom is that which conceals in a way that opens to light, in whose clearing there shimmers that veil that covers what comes to presence of all truth and *lets the veil appear as what veils*' (Heidegger 1977, p.25 - my emphasis). Freedom gives us the experience of and chance to critique the dominant determination of Being and its circumscription of potential thought. It allows us to (however fleetingly and insufficiently) step outside of the current range of thinking. Thus, contra Rorty, for Heidegger, true (and essential) freedom requires the question of Being. Pragmatism, instrumentalism and hermeneutics, cannot provide this freedom and perspective. Where Rorty saw ontology as a limitation on the free expression of human desires, Heidegger saw it as a necessary medium one must pass through for freedom (ontological and political).

Marcuse extends this analysis in his notion of the 'universe of thought.' What this idea demonstrates is the intuitive and conceptual connections between philosophical/ontological decisions and a circumscribed political universe. A particular determination of Being can limit the scope of thinking and consequently engender more pervasive and subtle forms of social control through the restriction of emancipatory discourses and thought. For Marcuse, technological rationality circumscribes the universe of thinking. In the aforementioned dominance of empirical thought and its exclusion of alternative modes, society is characterized by a flattening out of the distinction between the *given* and the *possible*. The loss of this distinction prevents abstract critical thought; the ability to critique the present from outside the boundaries that it itself sets to thinking. Marcuse's critique of the one-dimensional nature of modern technological society is that it explicitly lacks and prohibits a dimension of thought that transcends the given universe. Operationalism, behaviouralism, and empiricism are the dominant and exclusive rationales in our present society. Like Heidegger, he brings this back to essence. While agreeing that classical conceptions of essence are problematic, for Marcuse, modernity's complete rejection of essence goes too far. Post-metaphysical thought only manages to avoid classical essentialism with a total rejection of metaphysical questions (questions concerning the nature of reality/being) that ends up, 'treating the logic of technology as an ontological principle' (Feenberg 2005, p.17). This is the veiling of the veil; the positing of a non-ontological perspective that does depend on a given set of ontological assumptions. This perspective frees us from essentialism while confining us within a one-dimensional thinking that, without a concept of essence (a notion of inherent potentiality), cannot offer

truly critical perspectives for social critique. In contrast it can only offer piecemeal and marginal reforms that do not challenge the whole. In Rorty's parlance, modernity locks itself within normal enquiry. The hermeneutics he desires now appears as fantasy, as the means for total questioning is precluded by the dominance of the instrumentalism of modern normal enquiry. For Marcuse, real critical thought requires an appearance-reality distinction.<sup>13</sup> Without it, the ontological frame of modernity cannot be identified and the present world and its scope of thinking cannot be negated. A necessary qualification is that present appearance is not eschewed in favour of eternal reality. Rather, the present constriction of human potentiality is critiqued in favour of greater conceptions of human freedom. 'Now essence and appearance, "is" and "ought," confront each other in the conflict between actual forces and capabilities in the society' (Marcuse 1969, p.118).<sup>14</sup> Here Marcuse concretizes ontological critique and politicizes the distinction between the given and the possible. He turns these philosophical distinctions into means to exceed current thinking to greater freedom. Consequently, he mandates a totalizing form of criticism that begins with ontology. Only abstract conceptual thought can break free of the established universe. It is specifically science's concreteness that prevents it from surpassing the functional perspective. This is the

inherent limit of the established science and scientific method, by virtue of which they extend, rationalize and insure the prevailing *Lebenswelt* without altering its existential structure – that is *without envisaging a qualitatively new mode of "seeing"* and qualitatively new relations between men and between man and nature (Marcuse 1969, p.135).

In opposition, Marcuse and Heidegger emphasize the need for the ontological concept of truth. A distinction between the correct and the true allows for critique that pushes past appearance to some hidden dynamic. Empirical experience, while correct, still conceals like a veil. As a result, real freedom can only be understood as a multidimensionality of thought that can break through this whole (universe of thought) to something else in order to question the very basis of the political system that whole reinforces.

## V. Rorty's Politics: Liberalism and the Circumscription of Critique

What are the implications of this critique for Rorty's avocation of a procedural and minimalist form of liberal democracy? Overtly, Rorty rejects any philosophical basis to his liberalism. For him, philosophy (and

ontology), along with morality and religion, are what should be excluded from politics. Instead, politics, as where people with different conceptions of reality and the good meet, should seek to exclude as much substantive content from itself as possible. The uniqueness of liberal democracy is found in its provision of a free space for that to occur. Its procedures, like the methods/dispositions of instrumentalism and hermeneutics, allow for the gradual development of a social consensus on how to address any problem. Rorty is adamant that politics in general and liberalism specifically, require no philosophical justification. Further, in the absence of providing grounds, he sees no other role for philosophy outside of participation in a cultural conversation. Rather, liberal-democratic culture provides the *ultimate context* for all political discussion. It deflects questions of non-practical and nonprocedural natures and aims for the most compromise in areas of tension. Rorty emphasizes that under his understanding of liberalism, practical political questions are paramount in a 'priority of democracy to philosophy' (Rorty 1991c, p.175; Rorty 1998). In spite of his claim to such an a-philosophical (minimalist) liberalism, it is clear that his philosophical rejection of metaphysics is equally operative in his politics. The same pragmatic disposition of instrumentalism and hermeneutics exists. Liberalism is the political manifestation of pragmatism for him. At times he does seem to acknowledge this arguing that his pragmatism beyond method, his gentle and cautious linguistic reformism, is the best support for anti-ideological liberalism (Rorty 1991b, pp.75–6). That pragmatism justifies the rejection of metaphysical discussions within politics and supports the reformist disposition necessary to Rorty's liberalism. Equally, liberalism provides the right political culture for free (instrumental and hermeneutic) enquiry. It reinforces the right disposition toward thought: reformist, piecemeal, anti-metaphysical and anti-authoritarian (regarding foundations). Pragmatism and liberalism mutually support each other. It is in this sense that he can tacitly support both the end of history (political) and the end of philosophy (philosophical) narratives.

Contra Rorty, it is clear that the same constraint on thought identified above in his philosophy operates in his liberal politics. Politics as a process of piecemeal liberal reform explicitly prevents the type of total criticisms and critical thought intended to step outside of the given paradigm of political thinking. Rather, his theory seems explicitly designed to lock thought within current liberal social norms. In the interests of brevity, two examples will suffice. First, in the absence of total critique, for Rorty, our relations with other cultures can only be ethnocentric. While he is clear that this does not mean the jingoistic application of our social criteria to all others, he emphasizes that liberalism's virtue is its "unique" ability to imaginatively

incorporate other groups into the liberal framework. Case by case in a gradual fashion, we can translate others into our own sphere through the connections that exists between cultures. The result, for Rorty, is a multifaceted, 'bazaar surrounded by lots and lots of exclusive private clubs' (Rorty 1991a, p.209). Cultures maintain their distinctiveness in private while in public they participate in the common pragmatism of liberal proceduralism. However, the permissiveness of this acceptance is illusory. On one level Rorty locks individual cultural groups (which are never as simple as the individuated islands he assumes) within their current modes of thought, while on another, he prevents those groups from bringing their alternative universes of thinking to politics. Essentially, he fundamentally protects modern *Enframing* and its procedural form of liberalism. Second, this is redoubled in Rorty's circumscription of theoretical (hermeneutic) thought to the private sphere. For him, a liberal society requires that radical and innovative thinking (i.e. thought outside of the present universe) must remain private. It must be separated from the dominant mode of thinking and its manifestation in the present set of institutions (Rorty 1989, chap.4). This public-private divide is the epitome of the evisceration of critical thinking. In contrast, Heidegger and Marcuse emphasize the philosophical and political need to think outside of the dominant empirical discourse and its limitations. Fundamental to this is a perspective that allows us to step outside of our current assumptions at their widest and most abstract level. These thinkers understand that liberalism's particular danger is its subtle prevention of fundamental change. It conceals its own particularity in a supposed post-metaphysical lack of foundations that, rather than freeing humanity, pushes us further and deeper into our current (and inevitably flawed) set of assumptions. For Heidegger and Marcuse, there are always further dimensions of freedom and further philosophical and political upheavals necessary to achieve them.

## VI. Conclusion

The significance of Rorty's work is that he provides a philosophical articulation of one of the dominant assumptions of contemporary "post-metaphysical" intellectual culture; that, in the absence of grounds to thought, we can no longer ask (non-scientific) questions about the nature of reality. However, the flaw of Rorty's thinking of metaphysics is its singular focus on the issue of foundations and authority. Foundationalism in metaphysics is problematic. In discussing the fundamental nature of reality and being, political philosophy cannot absolutely ground its reflections. However, the questions metaphysics and ontology ask are not necessarily connected to the

approach it takes. There are resources in Heidegger and Marcuse that illustrate how a different orientation to these questions is possible and how they do have great philosophical and political relevance. These questions allow us to both question our assumptions at their broadest and understand the frame and context of our political thought and the manner in which that frame may obscure present forms of domination and control. Beyond this, post-metaphysical thought wrongly assumes a disconnect between philosophy and politics. Once again, Rorty is emblematic. However, while his philosophy does not *necessarily* connect to his politics, there is a clear incidental connection between his particular form of pragmatism and his equally idiosyncratic form of liberalism. Rorty's philosophical division of labour between instrumentalism and hermeneutics carries over into his politics in an insistence that the liberal-democratic method of reformism (procedural instrumentalism) is best paired with an open culture that allows for imaginative (hermeneutic) and unrestricted public discourse about the ends we put that political method to. However, his public-private divide, as well as his ethnocentrism, compromises this by circumscribing radical thought. The former privatizes and depoliticizes it, while the latter establishes the present community and its standards as the bounds of the possible political universe. In the end, his position on metaphysics doesn't determine his politics, but it does highlight the way in which a position on metaphysics can circumscribe thinking. The danger of a post-metaphysics, a philosophy beyond, free of, and thus ignorant of metaphysical concerns, is that it fails to see the contingent bounds it has set to thought. It compromises a critical perspective on itself; one that can have real effects on politics. In post-metaphysically rejecting such questions, Rorty locks us within our social and political present. In seeking to master the moment (in instrumental reason) he constricts us to it. In opposition, Heidegger and Marcuse demonstrate how philosophy and ontology can offer a framework for critique even after metaphysics.

**Clayton Chin (C.Chin@qmul.ac.uk)** is a recent PhD graduate and Temporary Lecturer at Queen Mary, University of London. His research is primarily concerned with critical political methodologies in democratic thought and the potentiality of pragmatism therein.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> As will be discussed subsequently, part of the issue here between Heidegger and Rorty is a different understanding of what constitutes metaphysics.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to qualify that the reading below is only one possible account of Rorty's work. Even though he is the critical object here, this article does not hope to establish the single definitive account of Rorty. Rather, he is employed to make a larger point about the necessity of ontological reflection in politics. Consequently, only a particular section and period of his work is employed. For interesting work coming out of the pragmatic tradition exploring other readings of Rorty that seemingly elude some of the issues here, see: (Koopman 2013; Koopman 2009; Koopman 2006; Voparil 2005; Bacon 2006).

<sup>3</sup> This emphasis on freedom continues throughout Rorty's work. For example, see: (Rorty 1989, p.xiii). Here, Rorty replaces a desire for truth with one for greater freedom.

<sup>4</sup> For Rorty, the modern epistemological movement within philosophy replaces ancient and medieval metaphysics without fundamentally changing its project. See: (Rorty 2009, p.134).

<sup>5</sup> Additionally, he often characterizes metaphysics as the desire to move beyond time and place. It is the demand for a level of decontextualization that would enable philosophy to think irrespective of context (i.e. universally)(Rorty 1989, p.xiii).

<sup>6</sup> In fact, much of Rorty's rhetoric regarding the weakness of ontology and the Continental tradition is that it repeats this distinction. It is dependent on the Platonic logic of a deeper reality which can be unmasked. See: (Rorty 1996, p.14).

<sup>7</sup> The following argument makes use of very particular aspects of each of these thinkers' work. Rather than attempting to remain faithful to their respective projects, it draws on each for a critique of Rorty and post-metaphysical thought. Neither receives an adequate treatment within the confines allotted and in bringing them together in this manner, some amount of necessary violence is done to both.

<sup>8</sup> While fundamental to Marcuse's early attempt at the phenomenological Marxism, Heidegger's influence on Marcuse following the former's embrace of National Socialism is the subject of much debate (including some by Marcuse himself). For a view that draws these thinkers closer, see: (Feenberg 2005, p.49,85; Ambroiet 2004). For a dissenting opinion, see: (Ambroiet 2004).

<sup>9</sup> For Heidegger, the question of knowledge always occurs within a given determination of Being and so epistemology as a question follows ontology (Feenberg 2005, p.54). In a sense, this prioritization is no less problematic than Rorty's prioritization of the social. Any hierarchy among different levels of enquiry is fraught with difficulties as all mutually depend and interact in complex manners. In spite of this, the use of Heidegger's theorization here is not subject to this potential problem. Even if the question of Being is not primary, it can still be both relevant and necessary. A given determination of Being can affect and limit other areas of thinking even if it does not stand at the top of a philosophical pyramid.

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that the account of Marcuse offered here is indebted to Andrew Feenberg's reconciliation of Marcuse with some aspects of Heidegger's thought. See: (Feenberg 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Rorty's rejection of ontology would seem to be an almost perfect example of such an exclusion.

<sup>12</sup> I do not mean to equate Heidegger's description of *Enframing* with Marcuse's critique of advanced technological society. Rather, I am only using each account to illustrate how the circumscription of thought (specifically ontological) has fundamental effects for human freedom.

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that the rejection of this distinction is one of the key moments of modern philosophy for Rorty. It is when metaphysics is eclipsed and human aims and desires can come to the forefront.

<sup>14</sup> As this indicates, Marcuse is not advocating a return to a pre-modern form of essence and the appearance-reality distinction. He is emphatic that both must be historicized and concretized. Whether he is successful in this is beyond the purview of this article (Feenberg 2005, pp.17-8).

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# Between Libertarianism and Authoritarianism: Friedrich Nietzsche's Conception of Democracy in *Human All Too Human*

by Pepijn Corduwener

## Introduction

In the public imagination Friedrich Nietzsche's political thought will probably always remain linked to Nazism. In his philosophical works, Nietzsche came up with concepts such as the "master race" and "*Übermensch*", and he frequently turned against the notion of equality. These themes were exploited and abused by the Nazis in order to lend their regime philosophical legitimacy (Fulbrook 2004). Since 1945 scholars have done much to rehabilitate Nietzsche's thought and study his political views in a new light. The question of how to interpret Nietzsche's critique of democracy has stood at the forefront of the scholarly debate. The leading question has been to what extent Nietzsche's views can be considered democratic.

This essay will engage with this debate on the political views of Nietzsche. First of all, the main arguments put forward in the scholarly debate will be outlined and analysed. Particularly, this study will focus on the democratic and conservative interpretations of his work, as well as the highly debated matter of the prominence of politics in Nietzsche's philosophical outlook as a whole. The essay will then move on to a concise overview of the political circumstances during Nietzsche's lifetime. This will assist in visualising the democratic conditions of his age and contextualise his political views more clearly.

Thirdly, the essay will engage with Nietzsche's own philosophical writings on democracy and politics. The focus of this essay will lie with *Human All Too Human*, which has been chosen for several reasons. Only recently, the first major study of *Human All Too Human* has been published, but this was almost exclusively concerned with science and culture (Cohen, 2010). *Human all too Human* has not received the attention that many of Nietzsche's other works have received, (Franco, 2007) even though it was written 'at a critical juncture of Nietzsche's life' (Cohen, 2010: 18). Secondly, *Human All Too Human* can be considered a turning point in Nietzsche's work. Nietzsche's biographer Rüdiger Safranski even argued that the period

during which Nietzsche wrote *Human All Too Human* was 'a crucial period of transition' for the philosopher (Safranski, 2002: 157). In these years, Nietzsche would untie some of the bonds that he had established in his youth. Of course, there was the break between Nietzsche and Richard Wagner, the composer that had such a profound influence on Nietzsche's *Weltanschauung* in his early years. But from the perspective of Nietzsche's political philosophy, the period of *Human All Too Human* also signified an important development. Nietzsche came of age politically and the period was the watershed moment between his royalism and patriotism of the 1860s and his criticism of Bismarck's Germany in the 1880s (Ansell-Pearson, 1994: 24-26). Finally, politics is given an extensive treatment in the book, which gives us valuable insights in to the political views of Nietzsche.

In the conclusion, I will return to the main question of the democratic convictions of Nietzsche and his political views will be briefly compared with other political thinkers.

### **The Scholarly Debate on Nietzsche's Democratic Convictions**

The scholar who probably deserves most credit for 'rehabilitating' Nietzsche after 1945 is Walter Kaufmann. Kaufmann demonstrated that the wrong interpretation by Nietzsche's sister Elisabeth Förster Nietzsche has had a significant impact on the misinterpretation of his political views. Kaufmann devotes a significant part of his classic study *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* to proving her wrong. By quoting extensively from private letters in which Nietzsche's views on Jews, nationalism and the state come to the forefront, Kaufmann concludes that Nietzsche had an 'uncompromising attitude towards proto-Nazism' (Kaufmann, 1974: 45).

In showing Nietzsche's distance from Nazism, Kaufmann emphasises that Nietzsche had an aversion towards politics and the state in general. He even argues that 'the state is the devil of Nietzsche's ethics', since it moulds men into conformity (Kaufmann, 1974:145). Conformity was the exact opposite of the way in which Nietzsche envisioned modern human beings, since his ideal was human self-realisation. According to Kaufmann, Nietzsche consequently opposed an 'overestimation of the political', since political systems of any kind could prevent this self-realisation. Kaufmann even goes as far as to state that 'the *leitmotif* of Nietzsche's life and thought was the theme of the antipolitical individual who seeks self-perfection in the modern world' (Kaufmann, 1974:418).

Although several scholars acknowledge Kaufmann's accomplishments in discrediting Nazi-interpretations of Nietzsche, his works have themselves led to a rich debate on the true nature of Nietzsche's

political views. As we have seen, Kaufmann stripped Nietzsche's philosophy of any political message: the essence of Nietzsche's philosophy was antipolitical. This view has been questioned by many Nietzsche-scholars who have endeavoured to demonstrate that Nietzsche's philosophy certainly had political elements, or even that politics are absolutely central to any understanding of Nietzsche (Okonta, 1992).

More important for our research, however, is the fact that the debate on the political views of Nietzsche as a result of the legacy of Kaufmann has largely been determined by the question of how to interpret Nietzsche's vision on democracy. The continuum in this debate runs from scholars who 'domesticate' Nietzsche by interpreting him as a democrat, to scholars who have criticised those efforts and place emphasis on his anti-democratic, 'aristocratic' views.

There are three main proponents of the 'democratic' interpretation of Nietzsche: Lawrence Hatab, David Owen and Mark Warren. Hatab can be considered the most radical of the three, since he posits that 'democracy and Nietzsche coexist and even imply each other' (Hatab, 1998: 19). According to Hatab, and at this point he is in accordance with the consensus on Nietzsche, Nietzsche's primary target was egalitarianism, which would lead to decadence and stands in opposition to human self-realisation. In order to prove Nietzsche's democratic convictions, however, Hatab needs to redefine democracy. In most political theory equality is the core component of democracy, but Hatab questions this and postulates that 'democracy can be separated from egalitarianism'. This separation between democracy and equality paves the way for a reconciliation of Nietzsche and democracy. Democracy in a Nietzschean sense is an agonistic democracy in which the defining element of democracy is the existence of opposing political views. The contest between various groups in a democracy is something Nietzsche would have approved of, since he questioned the existence of an absolute truth and argued that self-realisation could only take effect when liberties were met with resistance. Thus, in the end, Hatab not so much democratises Nietzsche, as makes democracy more Nietzschean and states that 'as long as opportunities are open, meritocracy is not undemocratic' (Hatab: 2002: 140). While this clearly goes against the grain of most political theory on democracy, Hatab could also be accused of not distinguishing clearly enough between liberalism and democracy.

Owen seems to grapple with similar difficulties when he argues that Nietzsche's perception of democracy is 'compatible with perfectionist theorists of democracy' (Owen, 2002: 121). His argument bears resemblance to Hatab's. Nietzsche feared that the levelling effects of democracy would destroy opportunities of human excellence and cultural progress. However, according to Owen, these fears were groundless, since democracy demands

political virtues that Nietzsche would have praised highly, such as an 'independence of mind'. In the contest between citizens, individuals can actualise their potentials in a democratic setting and become sovereign individuals according to the Nietzschean Ideal.

Warren has also been criticised for 'domesticating' Nietzsche and placing too much emphasis on the believed democratic visions of the philosopher (Warren, 1999). In his major work *Nietzsche and Political Thought* he argues that Nietzsche has a positive political vision that 'includes the values of individuation, communal intersubjectivity, egalitarianism and pluralism' (Warren, 1994: 247). He furthermore states that Nietzsche's understanding of the concept of power should not solely be understood from a political perspective, but in relation to Nietzsche's views on nihilism that had supposedly pervaded Europe in his day (Warren, 1985: 189). Power did not necessarily have a political connotation and thus does not necessarily lead to political oppression, since 'the truth cannot be imposed politically' (Warren, 1994: 201).

But does this make Nietzsche democratic? Several authors who take the political dimension of Nietzsche's thought into account doubt this. Keith Ansell-Pearson argues that Nietzsche's political views are best captured under the name of 'aristocratic liberalism', with which Ansell-Pearson endeavours to encapsulate both the anti-egalitarian and the self-liberating elements of Nietzsche's thought (Ansell-Pearson, 1994: 5). He moreover demonstrates that Nietzsche's political views did not develop overnight, but were the outcome of a long evolutionary process. Only in the 1880s did he become a staunch critic of modern German politics, particularly of what he regarded as the *Reich's* philistinism and nationalism.

Nietzsche challenges the post-Enlightenment consensus in important respects. According to Ansell-Pearson, his aristocratism revives an older version of politics which rejects Rousseauian social contract politics. Freedom clearly takes preference over equality for Nietzsche, and this freedom should first and foremost be equated with action. Ansell-Pearson argues that this aesthetic conception of politics retrieves an Ancient conception of politics (*ibid*: 44).

For Ruth Abbey and Frederick Appel this aristocratic conception of Nietzsche is still too close to standard western political thought (Abbey and Appel, 1999). They concede that the levelling effects of democracy were Nietzsche's primary concern, since they erode 'the socio-political conditions for the flourishing of human greatness' but this does not mean this was democracy's only weakness (*ibid*: 124). According to Abbey and Appel, democracy and Nietzsche are each other's antagonists: 'Democrats have to believe that Nietzsche is wrong' (*ibid*: 125).

Abbey and Appel had developed this thesis earlier and more

sophisticatedly in their essay *Nietzsche and the Will to Politics* (Abbey and Appel, 1998). Here they stated that Nietzsche was not an antipolitical author, but that he did attack the modern state. Like Ansell-Pearson, Abbey and Appel argue that politics is art for Nietzsche and that this art is practiced by the new class of philosopher rulers that all share a certain creative activity. Democracy's problem is that it is dominated by the 'herd' which has no ability to rule. Nietzsche envisioned a 'grander conception of politics' in which the art of commanding and dominating is no longer disapproved of. For Abbey and Appel, Nietzsche's conception of power does clearly have a political dimension. Power should lie in the hands of those who are most able to command and be used to advance human greatness, not with the masses and be used to pursue the happiness of the greatest number.

Finally, Herman Siemens draws our attention to another side of the Nietzsche-democracy debate. Siemens outlines that modern liberal democracy is characterised by the efforts to create consensus and security (Siemens, 2006). Nietzsche questions this perception of modern politics since he has a different, non-liberal view on freedom. Most democratic liberals believe in the importance of the lack of negative freedoms, i.e. freedom from restraint. For Nietzsche, on the other hand, restraint and the resulting conflict were key necessities for freedom. Nietzsche argues for the 'transformation of destructive conflict in productive conflict, not in conformity' (*ibid.*: 442). This leads Siemens to conclude that Nietzsche had a positive conception of freedom. He believed in a freedom of doing, a freedom of action, that could only result from conflict. Whereas liberal democracy is built on the absence of that conflict and sees freedom mainly as a free conscience and a free will.

As we can see, there are many different views on the question as to what extent Nietzsche's philosophy can be described as democratic. It appears problematic to describe Nietzsche as a committed democrat. Hatab, who endeavours to present him in this light, is forced to strip democracy of the notion of equality, while political thought since the Enlightenment has been preoccupied with uniting equality and liberty without doing harm to either one. Nietzsche's political views lend themselves well for ambivalent and ambiguous interpretations, as became clear when we looked at the notion of conflict. The importance of human conflict for Nietzsche can be interpreted both as an argument for his democratic views – since democracy is about conflicting arguments in the political debate – or against the democratic interpretation, since it would undermine the notion on equality. A major consideration when assessing Nietzsche's views on democracy, is the fact that his views developed significantly over time. Many authors who have been discussed are engaged with each other in a scholarly debate, but treat Nietzsche's work as homogeneous and therefore attack each other with

quotes from different works of different times.

### **Nietzsche and Democracy in *Human All Too Human***

European politics in the nineteenth century were characterised by tremendous change and upheaval. The French Revolution had for the first time in history brought the long propagated ideas of political participation of the masses and equality before the law into practice. In the aftermath of the French Revolution, Europe struggled to 'rebuild viable political systems in the face of hatred, jealousies, fears of further upheaval, hopes of new revolutionary triumphs and divided loyalties between rival authorities and ideologies' (Thombs, 2000: 13). The period was characterised by the growth of democratic institutions and bureaucracy, and the gradual expansion of constitutional forms of government all over continental Europe: 'constitutions, parliament and party politics became the norm' (*ibid.*, 32). Two of the main issues over which conflicts were fought were religion and the role of the state. The state 'increasingly impinged on everyday life' in this era (*ibid.*, 15). Religion did not disappear from public life in the nineteenth century, as is often thought, but was problematized. Most intellectuals strived to replace this loss of a moral frame of reference with a secular substitute for religion, often found in science. Both the role of the state and the role of religion figured prominently in Nietzsche's view on politics in *Human All Too Human*.

It was these two concepts that were at the forefront of German politics in Nietzsche's early years. Otto von Bismarck, chancellor of Prussia and instigator of the German unification process of the late 1860s, played such a key role in German politics in those days that his style is often referred to as Bonapartism, or he is even referred to as a 'quasi-dictator' (Feuchtwanger, 2002: 181). As Ansell-Pearson notes, Bismarck determined the world in which Nietzsche lived to a large extent (Ansell-Pearson, 1994: 23-24). The chancellor rose to power when Nietzsche was just seventeen and would remain chancellor for the rest of Nietzsche's sane life. Nietzsche is sometimes thought to have had his 'gaze fixed on Bismarck for two decades' (Schieder, 1963: 321), and he indeed mentions him in *Human All Too Human* (2005: 450).

In the 1860s, Nietzsche's appreciation of Bismarck was not solely negative. Nietzsche was a 'regular' national liberal and was directly involved in political campaigning in 1866. However, Nietzsche's hopes that the German Unification would bring a spiritual renewal of Germany, were proven futile. Germany also fell victim to 'a culture of progress' in which material development was conceived as moral progress. Nietzsche viewed this in anguish and his political philosophy seemed inspired by this

egalitarianism and philistinism in his native Germany.

*Human All Too Human* signified the opening of a new phase in Nietzsche's thought. It is often regarded as the first work of the 'middle-period' of Nietzsche's work, which found a closure in the *Gay Science* (Ansell-Pearson, 2006: 153). In this period, Nietzsche endeavoured to overcome idealism and metaphysics. It was consequently marked by his attempt to become a 'free spirit', which should be interpreted as a process of self-liberation in both the tradition of the Enlightenment and the empirical sense (Hill, 2007: 37). Additionally, the middle period was marked by a change in style. *Human All Too Human* is written in an aphoristic style, which 'enabled [Nietzsche] to see things from many different angles and to approach topics from several different directions at once' (Ansell-Pearson and Large, 2006: 154). The work consists of nine chapters, each devoted to a particular topic. In the eighth chapter, Nietzsche is exclusively concerned with questions on democracy and the changing face of politics in his day. Three themes in particular run like a red thread through this chapter: the question of human equality, the changing character of the state and the separation of politics from morality.

As has been outlined above, Nietzsche feared the egalitarianism of the modern age. It is this loathing for the modern attempts to foster equality that pervades through all of his writings on the state in *Human All Too Human*. It is perhaps best captured by an aphorism from the chapter 'Man in Society' in the same work: 'The craving for equality can be expressed either by the wish to draw all others to one's level [...] or by the wish to draw oneself up with everyone else' (2005: 300 (all numbers refer to aphorisms in this work unless stated otherwise)). It may be clear that Nietzsche feared that the first kind of equality was stronger and more present in society than the latter: 'The humanity of famous intellectuals consists in losing the argument when dealing with the nonfamous' (328). Nietzsche despised the equalisation of all individuals the most, since it would stand in the way of human greatness. In *Human All Too Human* the seeds of later human division seem already planted (e.g. 367). Nietzsche questions the consensus that all men are born equal. On the contrary, the humanist notion of equality is something that is created by men. Demands for equal justice for all are thus not fair, since Nietzsche asks rhetorically: 'If one shows the beast bloody pieces of meat close by, and then draws them away until it finally roars, do you think this roar means justice?' (451).

As we have seen, Nietzsche's age was increasingly democratic. The old social order was melting away (443). This did not necessarily mean that politics was liberal democratic in our contemporary meaning, but it did entail that notions of human equality were taken increasingly into



consideration and that the modern state with large bureaucracies and a secular character came into being. Nietzsche saw this egalitarianism as a threat to the advance of higher culture. He therefore envisioned a division of society into two 'castes'. The subordinated caste had to perform 'forced labour' and would thus give the ruling class the opportunity to proceed on the road to self-liberalisation and high culture (439). This is clearly antihumanist, since Nietzsche also believed that the working caste was less able of human emotions and would consequently suffer less in bad circumstances (462).

Nietzsche fears for the loss of individuality as a result of this process of ever-increasing equality. He notes that both the major political movements of his time, the socialist and the nationalist, did not value the individual who excels (480). He approvingly cites Voltaire, who stated that 'Once the populace begins to reason, all is lost' (438). Nietzsche, believed that the modern man, liberated from his *selbverschuldeten Unmündigkeit* (self-imposed immaturity) would want everyone to look more alike: 'if the business of all politics is to make life tolerable for the greatest number, this greatest number may also determine what they understand by a tolerable life' (438). Obviously, Nietzsche doubted their abilities to determine what a tolerable life should be, but he was particularly anxious that they would 'demand *everything* should become politics in their sense and that *everyone* should live according to their standards' (438, italics in original).

Modern society represented the opposite of those two castes: like Adorno and Horkheimer would see after him, Nietzsche already noticed that modern men tried to make everyone more similar. He demonstrated that this could have far-reaching consequences for the way our society was organised. On the one hand, this would enhance the opportunities of political leaders to make use of the masses. The majority of the people are, according to Nietzsche, gullible and weak. Their weakness can become a tool in the hands of leaders (447-448). Statesmen who have disdain for the people and who dare to subordinate the masses now have a chance to become very effective (458). Due to the equalisation of the modern democratic age 'it is easy to give the recipe for what the masses call a great man' (460). If they look up to someone, it will be someone who shares their bad habits and characteristics, but who has a stronger will.

That is of course, *if* they look up to someone in reverence, since in a modern democratic age this rarely occurs (461). Nietzsche realises in *Human All Too Human* that he was living only at the dawn of the democratic age and that many of its ideals – such as equality, the political emancipation of the masses and division of church and state – would turn out differently, and worse, than was expected in his day. Since the people have learnt that

absolute truth does not exist and that all men are equal, they would cease to believe in absolute authority. Subordination to any order will therefore become implausible (441). Furthermore, the relationship between government and people has evolved from a compromise between the two into a more equal one in which the government is an organ of the people. This exemplary change will have a severe effect on all human relations and again this will lead to a situation in which all hierarchical relations are condemned and transformed into egalitarian ones (450).

This change of human relations, and the changing character between citizens and the state, has far reaching consequences. In order to sketch the future development of modern democracy, Nietzsche brings religion into play. In the past, he argued, religion was able to give the state a certain halo and thus provide it with legitimacy (472). Written at the height of the Bismarckian *Kulturkampf*, Nietzsche argued that religion would calm the masses. Democratic states, however, will be secular states and thus breed a population that is hostile to the state. This not only counts for the religious part of the population, but in the long run for atheists as well. Since the state has lost moral religious legitimacy, the people will lose respect for its laws and this will ultimately lead to the abolition of the concept of the state: 'The sovereignty of the people, seen closely, serves to scare off even the last trace of magic and superstition contained in these feelings; modern democracy is the historical form of the *decline of the state*' (439, italics in original).

Nietzsche's views on democracy are thus clear: it will lead to philistinism, demagogic leaders, the rule of the herds and anarchism. He did not look favourably upon the politics of his day and scholarly comments about his disdain for politics are certainly understandable in this light. However, it seems that the study of the topic is important to him, since it enables us to come to an understanding of the failures of modern society and explains to us something about why modern humans strive to make everything more equal. It is for this reason that Nietzsche passionately argued in favour of 'room outside politics' (439) and believed that 'culture is at its highest when politics are weak' (465).

### **Conclusion: Nietzsche's Critique of Democracy in Comparison with Other Thinkers**

This concluding section will first try to synthesise the political views of *Human All Too Human* and engage with the question of to what extent his views can be considered democratic. Secondly, these views will be briefly compared with other political philosophers and the common ground between Nietzsche on the one hand, and John Stuart Mill, Alexis de

Tocqueville, Plato and Machiavelli will be highlighted.

In light of the scholarly debate on the supposed democratic beliefs of Nietzsche, this analysis of *Human All Too Human* had endeavoured to demonstrate that Nietzsche cannot easily be labelled a democratic philosopher. First of all, Nietzsche attacks the notion of equality that underpins all democratic political philosophy. He believes that this equality will necessarily entail a process of levelling in a cultural sense and a declining possibility for human self realisation. Equally important, it would also undermine all notions of authority and have a devastating effect on hierarchical human relations. Nietzsche also noted that democratisation was closely linked to secularisation, which would necessarily open up the question of the legitimacy of governmental authority. Lastly, Nietzsche did not believe in the inherent goodness of human beings like democrats usually do and he sees the limits that political change can have on human life (463).

There are several Nietzschean concepts put forward in *Human All Too Human* that can be linked to other political philosophers. An obvious comparison can be made with Plato's *Politeia*. Plato described the ideal state in a series of dialogues. He argues against 'imperfect societies' such as oligarchy and tyranny as well as against democracy. Like Nietzsche, Plato was anxious that democracy would eventually lead to anarchy. Moreover, it treated 'all men as equal, whether they are equal or not' (Plato, 1987: 557c). Nietzsche envisioned a idle caste that would subordinate the working class, whilst Plato's Ideal State was ruled by a caste of 'guardians' or Philosopher Kings, who are 'high spirited', have 'the disposition of a philosopher' and a 'real love of knowledge' (*ibid*: 375d). Nevertheless, there are several striking differences between Nietzsche and Plato in this respect. For Plato, for instance, the guardians ruled the Ideal State, but for Nietzsche his 'free spirits' who constitute the 'idle caste' should not be involved in politics too much, but rather be concerned with cultural advancement.

There is also an interesting comparison to be made between Nietzsche and Machiavelli. In his most famous work *Il Principe*, Machiavelli also attempted, like Nietzsche, to separate politics from morality. They share a cynical conception of power and of the credulity of the populace. A new ruler can be cruel, the Florentine argued for instance, since as long as he inflicts all the damage at one time, the people will be fooled easily and forget about it (Machiavelli, 1961: 39-40). The book is essentially about the best ways in which rulers can establish and maintain their legitimacy and in this respect is similar to Nietzsche when he writes about how one can be seen as a great man by the masses. However, although they both play with the moral issues of politics, Machiavelli seems to have had political success in mind and a pragmatic conception of political power, whereas Nietzsche was writing in

an age in which this was no longer viable and politics was caught up in great ideas and 'isms'.

For more fruitful comparisons and a better appreciation of Nietzsche's political views we should perhaps turn our attention to other modern political thinkers. Mill's *On Liberty* touches upon many of the issues that Nietzsche had in mind when writing *Human All Too Human*. Both were concerned with the diminished opportunities for human self-realisation in modern democratic society that strived at increasing equality. Mill argued that 'society itself has become the tyrant, over the separate individuals that compose it' (Mill, 1989: 8). Additionally, he demonstrated that the egalitarianism that prevailed in modern life would become so strong that it would silence dissident opinions and thus stand in the way of human excellence. Mill's critique of democracy bears resemblance to Nietzsche's, when he argues that 'No government by a democracy [...] ever did or could arise above mediocrity, except in so far as the sovereign Many have let themselves be guided by the counsels and influence of a more highly gifted and instructed One or Few' (Mill, 1989: 66). Nevertheless, there are also serious differences between the two authors. Mill placed severe limits on individual freedom, for example, when he said that no one should become a 'nuisance' to other people and his humanism would have stood in the way of the caste system that Nietzsche envisioned.

Finally, Nietzsche's political thought could be evaluated in contrast to that of Tocqueville. For instance, both were concerned with the link between religion and state legitimacy (e.g. Tocqueville, 1998: 328). Also, both sensed that democracy would run the risk of equalising everyone and thus mute potentially excellent individuals. They feared what Tocqueville called the 'tyranny of the majority' and outlined that democracy could lead to democratic despotism, since the masses are naturally inclined towards political apathy. But also with Tocqueville, like with Mill, Plato and Machiavelli, there are serious differences in their appreciation and understanding of democracy. Despite being a critic of democracy's pitfalls and weaknesses, Tocqueville can, in the end, be considered a democrat, albeit one of a special kind.

The same cannot easily be said for Nietzsche. Nietzsche was not a democrat. But this conclusion has shown that in order to come closer to an understanding of Nietzsche's political philosophy, drawing comparisons with other thinkers can be a fertile ground for new insights. Friedrich Nietzsche showed himself to be one of democracy's most intriguing critics and in *Human All Too Human* outlined democracies shortcomings. On the other hand, these comparisons have shown that Nietzsche did not stand alone in his evaluations and that there is no reason for disregarding his

criticisms. On the contrary, they can make us think again about the society and political system we live in and dare us to seek new ways of strengthening this system.

**Pepijn Corduener (P.Corduener@uu.nl)** is a junior lecturer and PhD Candidate at the Department of History and Art History at Utrecht University. His research project examines critics of democracy in Western Europe since 1945 in a comparative perspective.

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# Reviews

## *Untimely Affects: Gilles Deleuze and an Ethics of Cinema*

by Nadine Boljkovac

Edinburgh University Press, 2013, hbk £65 (ISBN 9780748646449), 208pp.

by Sophie Fuggle

Claims to urgency should always be viewed with deep suspicion. Particularly, when it comes to discussion of dead thinkers, in this case, Gilles Deleuze, and films made in the aftermath of WWII, here the post-apocalyptic cinema of Chris Marker and Alain Resnais. Consequently, the suggestions that this project is 'urgent' which appear on the back cover as well as in the book itself should ring alarm bells. What kind of new insight into cinema and its possibilities for ethical existence and radical reconfiguration of our perception and experience of time are we being promised here? In *Untimely Affects*, Nadine Boljkovac sets herself an ambitious, highly risky and ultimately impossible task. The paragraphs which follow constitute an attempt to articulate these three aspects of Boljkovac's project before suggesting how the text is paradigmatic of contemporary Deleuze studies.

Firstly, the book is ambitious in its claims to provide an analysis of Marker and Resnais via a theoretical framework based on a series of Deleuzian concepts – 'becoming imperceptible,' the 'crystal image,' 'plane of immanence' and 'schizoanalysis' to name but a few. Each of these concepts and terms require careful unpacking and definition if the reader, whether familiar with Deleuze and Guattari or not, is to fully grasp the ways in which Boljkovac seeks to employ these for her own analysis. Each of these concepts and terms could also, and indeed often do, constitute entire commentaries of their own. Unfortunately, such depth and clarity is predominantly lacking here, substituted by excessive quotation from and parroting of Deleuze's oeuvre in its entirety. While this is testimony to Boljkovac's wide reading, less might have perhaps been more. One notable example is the way in which the term 'schizoanalysis,' is introduced to the reader as a counterpoint to Freudian psychoanalysis. Readers are told that: 'Deleuze and Guattari propose a *schizoanalysis*. Such an active, inherently ethical and affirmative approach counters death with life and art as it discovers possibilities for survival and creation beyond inertia's threat via victimization and its potential propensity towards infectious impotence.' While this sounds very exciting, the reader is left completely in the dark as to what schizoanalysis actually consists of and how it goes about discovering these 'possibilities for survival and creation.' How, then, is the reader able to adequately assess the



validity of this concept for Boljkovac's study of Marker and Resnais?

Secondly, it is highly risky to attempt a 'Deleuzian' project which, in the absence of providing clear and in-depth analysis of certain concepts and methodologies, seeks to imitate a Deleuzian lexicon. While Boljkovac avoids the most obvious cliché of describing her writing as 'rhizomatic', she is nevertheless dependent on a mode of writing and argument which not only ties itself in knots but, in doing so, leaves itself open to self-parody. For example, to describe the book as composed of chapters in terms of chapters which 'generate a series of repetitions themselves' seems a justification for a lack of structure and argument. Similarly, the author claims the book is obsessed with the 'making perceptible of the imperceptible'. What does this really mean? At the end of the text I am none the wiser and forced to conclude that this really functions as a justification for writing that is self-indulgent and tediously enigmatic. It is a brave writer indeed who in declaring she is fascinated with 'the untranslatable difference' might leave the reader wondering whether this is more a case of an 'unreadable' one? In all fairness, Boljkovac does seem attentive to the various pitfalls involved in writing on film particularly the irreducibility of sound and image to textual commentary and the risk of over-describing or over-theorizing yet she simultaneously attempts and fails at both. On occasion we are given a romantic list of adjectives describing Resnais and Marker's film-making techniques or a flowery description of a particular scene. The rest of the time, we are confronted with a list of citations from Deleuze, sewn together with a bunch of conjunctions and prepositions.

Ultimately, Boljkovac's project is an impossible one precisely because it fails to move beyond the self-referential, narcissistic Deleuze-speak which has become standard fare in the humanities today. Somewhat ironically, it is this contagious discourse which most aptly embodies the participation in the 'control societies' of late capitalism. Foucault's statement that the last century would be Deleuzian is only now achieving its fullest, most bitterly ironic apotheosis. It seems to me, therefore, that a more urgent task than the one proposed by the book, would be to think through the conditions of possibility which allow this current burgeoning field of abstract, apolitical (what Sokal and Bricmont long ago called 'fashionable') nonsense at a moment when the arts and humanities are struggling to legitimize themselves. There are some excellent scholars engaging with Deleuze both coherently and politically – Claire Colebrook, Nick Thoburn to name a couple - but unfortunately there is also a glut of bad Deleuzians trapped in a game of smoke and mirrors, the mutual applauding of an emperor's new clothes.

This is not to preclude the possibility of using Deleuze's work on cinema to continue to think about the moving image. However, what

Boljkovac seems deeply unaware of is that, it is nothing new to read films like those made by Marker and Resnais in this way. While these films are still very powerful in the affects they produce upon audiences, I wonder to what extent such audiences are already framed within a certain academic, intellectual context composed of those actively seeking out a certain canon in order to affirm existing readings and discourses on cinema, affect and ethics. And I am puzzled by the claims made that watching such films produce a different, even radical mode of ethical engagement in their viewers. How? This may have been what Marker and Resnais were striving for but they have long been staples of the average film studies undergrad course and standard retrospectives trotted out year in year out at the local art-house cinemas. Why hasn't there been any sustained reflection on the impact of such canonization on cinematic effect and affect? To what extent do the layers and layers of theory and discourse produced on their work along with that of Godard, Truffaut and Varda paralyse rather than engender the possibility of an ethics of cinema?

The genuinely interesting parts of the book occur when Boljkovac allows herself the space to speak instead of reverting to Deleuze and his existing commentators. I was most impressed by the tantalizingly brief and infrequent yet nonetheless conceptually developed references to Roland Barthes' notion of the punctum. Boljkovac seems to be on to something here which, this reader hopes, might be developed more fully elsewhere perhaps free of Deleuzian interference.

**Sophie Fuggle** ([sophie.fuggle@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:sophie.fuggle@ntu.ac.uk)) is a lecturer in French Studies at Nottingham Trent University and is the author of *Foucault/Paul: Subjects of Power* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

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*Marx and Alienation: Essays on Hegelian Themes*

by Sean Sayers

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, hbk £58 (ISBN 978-0-230-27654-3), 208pp.

by Tom Bunyard

Sean Sayers is currently Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Kent, and much of his past research has focussed on Marx's debts to Hegel. This present book is a further contribution in that regard, as it consists of a collection of essays that seek to demonstrate the import of a Hegelian conception of alienation to Marx's work. Each essay offers a response to a specific problem or topic within Marxian scholarship. To some extent, their content and arrangement separates the book into two parts: the first five essays demonstrate that the concept of alienation affords an objective critique of concrete social relations; the remaining four build on that contention whilst exploring some of Marx's sparse and often enigmatic remarks on communist society.

Sayers argues that the theme of alienation runs throughout Marx's work. This obliges him to draw heavily on Marx's early writing, where alienation is most explicitly discussed. The homologies and correspondences between those early statements and aspects of Hegel's own work are then highlighted, and the resultant conjunction is used to interpret Marx's later claims. Certainly, such an approach might invite objections: after all, the term 'alienation' falls from use in Marx's later texts, and although the famed Althusserian break<sup>1</sup> was ultimately discounted even by Althusser himself (as Sayers acknowledges: 2011, p.xi), Marx's use of Hegel nonetheless differs and develops throughout his life. Sayers' reading is however generally persuasive, and he succeeds in demonstrating that a conception of alienation is readily discernible throughout Marx's writings.

The latter point does however rest on an important qualification. Alienation, as Sayers makes clear in his first chapter, should not be reductively identified with subjective malaise and disaffection, but should instead be understood as pertaining to Marx's descriptions of an economic system that has become independent and hostile towards its own producers. In brief, the rationale behind this claim rests on the concept's Hegelian roots, which entail a notion of developmental self-estrangement; attending to that basis thus renders the concept capable of denoting conditions of otherness and separation that can afford progress through their supersession. Sayers ultimately casts the social relations that compose capitalist society in this

same light. As the critique and immanent overcoming of those relations is obviously central to Marx's thought, Sayers is thus able to argue that the respectively a-Hegelian and anti-Hegelian rejections of alienation that have been advanced from analytic and continental quarters do 'violence' to some of the most central themes within Marx's work (Sayers 2011, p.x-xi).

Sayers' book displays obvious scholarship and affords genuine insight. The latter can be surprising: one perhaps wouldn't have expected Hegel's *Aesthetics* to afford the clearest illustration of the concept of alienation's Hegelian roots. It is also admirably clear throughout, despite the baroque nature of some of its subject matter. Yet despite that clarity, there is a sense in which some of the book's most important contentions are not foregrounded quite as obviously as they might be. On one level, Marx's extreme proximity to Hegel within Sayers' reading provokes questions that merit, as we will see below, rather more developed answers than they ultimately receive; on a more holistic level, there is also a sense in which the general claim sketched above remains a little too implicit, and becomes buried beneath the details of the essays. This perhaps reflects the fact that the book was originally intended to function as a single work. In his introduction, and by way of a swipe at the 'seriously distorting' influence that quantitative evaluation has exerted upon British academia, Sayers explains that the essays began life as discrete papers, and that he intended to write them up as a book; he was however obliged to publish them in their present form due to the time-pressures imposed by the R.E.F. (Sayers 2011, p.xiii). The essays are however in no way hurried or unfinished, and the book's second half, which discusses the nature of Marx's views on communism, seems particularly successful. One is however conscious when reading them that a deeper and more cohesive argument runs through them as a whole, and that it warranted fuller expression.

As noted, that deeper claim amounts to the contention that the concept of alienation affords an objective critique of capitalist social relations: a point that the book demonstrates cumulatively, by bringing the concept to bear upon individual topics such as work, property, the division of labour, freedom, collectivity, and so on. Sayers' presentation of this view does however possess seemingly problematic dimensions, largely as a result of the broad schema of historical progression that he connects to it. Sayers by no means simply links Hegel's historical 'theodicy' (Hegel 2004, p.15) to Marx's own views on history (Sayers 2011, p.85), as he tempers his claims with the contention that Marx's account is neither 'idealist' nor 'teleological' (Sayers 2011, p.xi). These qualifications are however undermined by the degree to which his emphasis on the Hegelian dimensions of Marx's work leads, at times, to a blurring of the distinctions between the two figures. This

problem is fostered by Sayers' occasional use of phrases that evoke moments of completion, finality and full expression, and which thus contrast with his rather cursory indications that this developmental schema implies an open future.<sup>2</sup> The non-teleological nature of this view of history thus becomes partially occluded at times. For example, the creation of an alien, hostile and seemingly autonomous economic system is consistently described throughout the book as a historical necessity, insofar as 'human development occurs only in and through it' (Sayers 2011, p.13); yet the crucial qualification that this is only an immanent and historically *relative* necessity, the resolution of which would only be 'progressive' *vis à vis* 'previous conditions' (Sayers 2011, p.94), is not foregrounded as clearly as it might be.

Nor does this account of historical progression pay a great deal of attention to the political failings of the so-called workers' states. Granted, the issue is potentially vast, and could be seen to fall beyond the book's remit. Yet given that so much attention is paid here to reconstructing Marx's vision of communism, at least some critical commentary on the supposition that the state will conveniently wither away would not have been out of place (Sayers simply notes that 'quite the reverse' took place in the Soviet Union (Sayers 2011, p.123)).

This brings us to the following observation. Lefebvre once remarked, partly in reaction to the Soviet rejection of Hegel, that 'we cannot confine the use of the concept of alienation to bourgeois societies' (Lefebvre 1968, p.16). In his view, its genuinely radical content lies in its potential opposition to all forms of dogmatism and domination. Although Lefebvre's version of the concept differs from Sayers' own, as it pertains primarily to subjectivity, Sayers' concern with detached and independent social power potentially lends his claims to the adoption of a similar stance. If that is indeed the case, then it would seem to render it all the more important to consider how the concept of alienation might be used as a critical tool for evaluating not only modern capitalist society, but perhaps also the prescriptions and attempts that have been made towards its supersession. Such a discussion is in fact made all the more desirable by the book's emphasis on work, and indeed by its discussion of the need for a form of wage labour within the initial stages of a communist future ('Everyone who can will have to work for wages', Sayers 2011, p.119). Communist production, we are told, will require 'people to direct and lead, to manage and command complex productive and economic activities' (Sayers 2011, p.135) within a system of production in which individuals are allocated their 'portion of the common lot' (Sayers 2011, p.126). Unfortunately, the possibility that this too might lend itself to the generation of an economic system that stands over and above its producers is not fully explored;<sup>3</sup> instead, the merits of such a society seem

to rest, in overly Hegelian fashion, on the contention that it would provide the fullest and most satisfactory actualisation of a human essence identified with work (Sayers 2011, pp.15-6).

Sayers' book seems intended to function primarily as a scholarly reconstruction and discussion of key aspects of Marx's use of Hegel, and in many respects it excels in that regard; critically addressing or developing Marx's views is perhaps a secondary project. The book does nonetheless differ markedly from the more radical and extreme positions that have been developed by drawing on Marx's early comments on alienation (Debord and the Situationists are perhaps obvious examples here, as they took Marx's early remarks on labour to denote not economic work *per se*, but rather a far broader notion of formative, self-determinate activity; a position that Sayers in fact comes close to at times).<sup>4</sup> In fact, despite its insights, it can seem a little traditional in some respects; particularly if its 'historicist' approach to a Hegelian Marx is viewed alongside the current 'systematic' interest (to borrow Arthur's useful shorthand)<sup>5</sup> in reading *Capital's* account of value through Hegel's *Logic*.<sup>6</sup> Such approaches have the virtue of addressing capital as a general social form. Yet the nature of Sayers' interpretation of alienation perhaps renders it relevant to such concerns: for what we are ultimately presented with here is a reading capable of using the concept of alienation to address, in a detailed and sophisticated manner, an entire set of social relations, and indeed in a manner that can be seen to imply the critique of any other mode of subordination to alienated forms of power. In consequence, this is an interesting book: it affords genuine insight, and should be recommended to anyone interested in the Hegelian dimensions of Marx's work.

**Tom Bunyard (tombunyard@gmail.com)** works at the University of Brighton, Goldsmiths, and at the University of Arts, London. He is currently completing a book manuscript on the Hegelian and existential aspects of the theoretical work of Guy Debord and the Situationist International.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See in particular Althusser 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Whilst describing Soviet views on industry in an appendix, but whilst nonetheless rehearsing many of the book's central claims, Sayers refers to the contention that industrial work was held to afford the 'highest development', the 'fullest expression' and the 'greatest fulfilment' of 'human productive activity' (Sayers 2011, p.177). When advancing his own views,

Sayers implies that the concept of alienation, and indeed the developmental schema that he attaches to it, entails an open future that cannot be reduced to industrial society: Marxism's 'underlying philosophy', he writes, 'suggests that industry is not the highest development of our creative and productive powers. It points to higher forms of labour, beyond industry...' (Sayers 2011, p.47).

<sup>3</sup> As the Endnotes group put it, whilst discussing contemporary approaches to Marx's value theory: 'if value and capital constitute a forceful, totalising form of socialisation that shapes every aspect of life, their overcoming is not a matter of the mere replacement of market mechanisms through a state manipulation or workers' self-management of these forms, but demands a radical transformation of every sphere of life' (Endnotes 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, Sayers' claims do come close to implying something similar at points: the claim that 'a fuller and higher form of freedom is realised when we produce ... as an end in itself', and that this amounts to 'the truly free creation of art' (Sayers 2011, p.23), perhaps lends itself to the Situationists' concern with the realisation of art in lived praxis.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur makes a useful distinction between 'historicist' approaches to a Hegelian Marx, which tend to use Hegel to consider Marx's comments on labour, subjectivity and history, and 'systematic' attempts to study the manner in which Hegelian logic informs the articulation of value in *Capital* (Arthur 2005, pp.3-4).

<sup>6</sup> We are certainly a long way here from Postone's peculiarly Hegelian re-introduction of the Althusserian break. On Postone's reading, the self-movement of Hegelian 'reason' inadvertently echoes that of capital; in identifying that movement with the human subject, Postone claims, the young Marx thus essentialised aspects of the social order that he sought to supersede. The later Marx is held to have rectified that problem when drawing on Hegel to analyse the operation of value (Postone 1996, p.78).

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*Francois Laruelle's Philosophies of Difference:  
A Critical Introduction and Guide*

by Rocco Gangle

Edinburgh University Press, 2013, pbk £19.99 (ISBN 978-0748668137), 216pp.

by Liam Jones

Interest in the work of the French philosopher Francois Laruelle has in the English-speaking world hastily increased in recent years with several translations of his work already published (*Future Christ: A Lesson in Heresy*, Continuum 2010, *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy*, Univocal 2012, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, Bloomsbury 2013) and more still forthcoming. Rocco Gangle is the translator of the book *Philosophies of Difference* (2011), to which he now provides an introduction and guide. Laruelle's project of non-philosophy is dense and not immediately easily accessible. What this review hopes to do is to firstly look at how the guide is structured and written. Following from this it will become obvious what is most helpful about Gangle's book, and how it presents Laruelle's work to both those familiar with it and first time readers.

The most important concept in Laruelle's work is 'non-philosophy.' Philosophy, Laruelle holds, is grounded on a certain decision – a decision that must necessarily remain prior to all thought it inaugurates, and thus cannot itself be understood by this thought. Non-philosophy, then, is the field of thought that concerns such a decision.

The introduction is made up of three parts and this review will look at these individually. Firstly, Gangle hopes to situate Laruelle within the context of contemporary thought. Drawing from this context, Gangle goes on to point out how Laruelle's early thought up to *Philosophies of Difference* is influenced by the key debates of his time, namely between Kantianism and phenomenology (2013:8). By taking this step the reader is given an idea of the intellectual milieu from which Laruelle's work begins to emerge, and is able to observe influences that sometimes are hidden in Laruelle's idiosyncratic writing.

Throughout the guide the reader is informed on how *Philosophies of Difference* fits in with earlier texts by Laruelle, and how particular thinkers have influenced and shaped his thought. Speaking of Nietzsche, Gangle states "without referring to his own earlier work explicitly, Laruelle nonetheless draws upon detailed analyses and applications of Nietzsche throughout the books from the period he now calls Philosophy I" (2013: 62). The same can be said for Heidegger's influence, who Gangle believes to be a major factor in the genesis of non-philosophy. Precisely, it is Heideggerean

Finitude that “already leads in the direction of the key insight that underwrites non-philosophy” (2013:91). Each chapter attempts such an explication of the thought of Nietzsche, Deleuze, Heidegger, or Derrida, all the while referring them back to Laruelle’s reading or reworking of them, each time showing Laruelle’s innovation.

In this guide we are given some instructions on how Gangle feels *Philosophies of Difference* should be read. He believes that Laruelle’s text is doubled, both in its writing and the way it must be read. This begs the question of what he means by a doubled text, and what techniques are at play for Laruelle’s text to take on a doubled image?

To answer that question, we might look at Gangle’s suggestion of how *not* to read *Philosophies of Difference*. In Gangle’s opinion Laruelle’s work does not consist of a series of critical readings that would amount to a straightforward project of destruction. According to Gangle, Laruelle does not set himself up to judge the internal consistency or philosophical acumen of his interlocutors. What is at stake is not the claim whether or not Nietzsche, Heidegger, Deleuze or Derrida’s works can be defended, but to uncover the underlying structure of these various presentations of Difference. In this sense, Gangle sees Laruelle’s intent as quite generous, and not destructive at all (2013: 49). However, Gangle does go on to note how this is ultimately to critique and move beyond Difference.

Positioning Laruelle and *Philosophies of Difference* does not only serve to highlight Laruelle’s influences and predecessors. It also shows the relation of non-philosophy to philosophy. This is not an easy task, and interpretations of Laruelle have differed in respect to where he stands against philosophy. Non-philosophy is not simply a meta-philosophy, a philosophizing about philosophy. Instead, Gangle demonstrates that the project of non-philosophy is prior to philosophical thought. He says, “[non-philosophy] thus works to generalize thinking as such outside of philosophy’s own circumscription of itself as distinct from and reflectively dominant with respect to other modes of thought and experience” (2013: 6). Non-philosophy is thus paradoxically *causa sui* as well as being highly contextual; perhaps it could be described as a necessary condition of possibility, inextricably bound to a contingent history of thought. Such a concept of non-philosophy, furthermore, warrants Laruelle’s methodology: Laruelle takes the material given by philosophy and uses it as an object of thought in order to expose its underlying structure.

The question must then be asked why Difference, twentieth century philosophy’s innovation par excellence, is important for Laruelle. There are a number of reasons for this. Gangle purports there are three theses at the core of *Philosophies of Difference* but what is important here is thesis two. This

states that “the structuring of philosophy through Difference is not only limited to the contemporary epoch of philosophy stretching roughly from Nietzsche to Derrida, but in fact expresses an invariant core of Western philosophy as such” (2013:29). It is here that the unchanging core of Western philosophy, a certain generalizing becomes visible. This generalization is what defines non-philosophy, and “makes clear that the ‘non-’ of non-philosophy expresses nothing negative but is rather a positive generalization of philosophical modes of thought” (2013:51). The generalizing at work in Laruelle is not necessarily a glossing of the theories being analyzed. What Laruelle attempts is not to dissolve any differences within the philosophies of Difference; they are still what Gangle calls “autonomous realities that remain theoretically underdetermined except in so far as they satisfy certain structural requirements” (2013:51).

As Gangle goes on to explain that Difference is a problem as it is what differentiates non-philosophy from standard philosophy. “Philosophy and non-philosophy are both modes of thought, yet while philosophy thinks according to difference [...] non-philosophy thinks according to the One or in-One” (34). Not only situates this critique of difference philosophy within non-philosophy, but it also explains the relationship between non-philosophy and science. Laruelle calls his project a science of philosophy, but this can seem ambiguous. Non-philosophy is precisely a scientific mode of thought because “science does not aim at determining itself with respect to the real, but allows itself to be determined by the Real” (Gangle, 2013:46). Non-philosophy is formulated in such a way that it is determined by the Real, as vision-in-One, whereas philosophy aims to determine the Real through its doubling.

Philosophy as immanence, as opposed to its metaphysical onto-theological variant is the aim of philosophies of Difference. Gangle believes “one of the strengths of Laruelle’s reading of Difference is to have shown how the ‘logic’ of Difference is able to accomplish this in various ways without thereby contradicting itself [...] What this means is that Difference is able to attain the status itself” (2013: 149-150). How philosophy and non-philosophy differ is posed in this problem of immanence, of thoughts relations to the One. The philosophies of Difference at hand use the One, but do not think the One. In other words “Difference needs self-relation in order to function, but it cannot remain Difference without conceiving such self-relation as Differential” (2013: 150). Moreover, the philosophers of Difference “cannot help but reinstate subtle variants on the form of metaphysical dualism” (2013: 150). Thus, the break with metaphysics that Heidegger proposes has not occurred but has changed into a more nuanced guise. It is in his final chapter that Gangle gives us the totality of the problems of

Difference and where they will lead to in non-philosophy.

The problem of Laruelle's work is in the claim that a general Difference would envelop all of philosophy "to the extent that philosophy uses its difference and relation (transcendence and immanence) with respect to the Real as leverage for thinking the Real" (2013: 152). It thus comes down to how thought relates to the Real, whether it is a part of it or something entirely distinct. For Laruelle this is called "empirico-transcendental parallelism" (2013: 152). There is a split between the empirical world and the *a priori* that governs the history of Western philosophy. Gangle succinctly clarifies Laruelle's position here: "This general correlative structure becomes for Laruelle the core thesis of philosophy as such [...], namely the 'position' (Greek thesis) of a decisional stance with respect to the Real: *the Real may/must be decided by thought*" (2013: 153). By underlining what philosophy's position is vis-a-vis the Real Gangle is able to explain to the reader what non-philosophy means by the Real and how this differs from philosophy. Gangle is at pains to describe what Laruelle means when he speaks of the One or Real. In the end it is reduced to the relationality of the One and the Multiple. Whereas Difference thinks the multiple as "relational singularities or deposited remainders of processes of individuation" Laruelle attempts to "think immediately from the 'side' of the pre-manifest and pre-relational term" (2013: 157).

There are three things that Gangle's introduction to *Philosophies of Difference* does well. Firstly, in providing a context and situating non-philosophy both theoretically and historically the reader is given an entry point into Laruelle's work. Beyond this, avenues opened by *Philosophies of Difference* and developed later in Laruelle's project are brought to the fore. Gangle is able to unpack loaded terms that may at first seem familiar but are nonetheless estranged from their traditional usage. While doing this he is able to clarify the myriad of steps Laruelle takes towards his critique of Difference. As an introduction it works for readers coming to Laruelle for the first time. But also gives crucial new insights for those already familiar with Laruelle and non-philosophy.

**Liam Jones** finished his MA at the University of Liverpool last year, and is currently an independent researcher. His interests include contemporary continental thought, including Speculative Realism, and has written on the work of Francois Laruelle and Catherine Malabou.

***Diary of an Escape***

by Antonio Negri (trans. Ed Emery)

Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010, pbk \$19.95 (ISBN: 978-0745644264), 252pp.

***Reading Negri: Marxism in the Age of Empire***

edited by Pierre Lamarche, Max Rosenkrantz, and David Sherman

Chicago: Open Court, 2011, pbk \$39.95 (ISBN: 978-0812696554), 288pp.

***Antonio Negri: Modernity and the Multitude***

by Timothy S. Murphy

Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012, pbk \$24.95 (ISBN: 978-074564205), 224pp.

by Andrew Ryder

Over a decade ago, Anglophone engagement with Antonio Negri intensified with the publication of his collaborative work with Michael Hardt, beginning with *Empire*. As a result, discussions have tended to focus on this surprise best-seller, with the wider context of the development of his thought over the past half-century inadequately explored. As Negri's earlier work has received increasing attention, the time is ripe for a deeper exploration of his contributions to philosophy and to Marxist theory. This re-assessment is greatly facilitated by the recent appearance of a translation of Negri's diaries of imprisonment, from his crucial period in the mid-1980s, as well as two new studies of the entire scope of his work and its reception.

Much of the popular fascination with Negri might be owed to his long ordeal in prison, which seems to guarantee the status of his thought as dangerous to the capitalist state. This experience has produced an extraordinary document, Negri's journals of 1983: *Diary of an Escape*. The book records Negri's experience in his fifth year of incarceration for alleged involvement with the Red Brigades, and his election to Parliament, which led to his immunity from prosecution and consequent release. First published in French translation in 1985 and in its Italian original the following year, it has only appeared in English in 2010. A fascinating snapshot of Negri's feelings and thoughts just after *The Savage Anomaly* and prior to his collaboration with Félix Guattari, *Communists Like Us*, the work has a unique place in his oeuvre owing to its unusually personal and affective quality. While many of Negri's avowed predecessors also experienced lengthy periods of confinement for their actions (including Niccolò Machiavelli and Antonio Gramsci), it is rare for a thinker of Negri's magnitude to have produced lengthy and candid reflections on his situation. In this sense, it is comparable to Jean-Paul Sartre's *War Diaries* and Louis

Althusser's *The Future Lasts Forever*, two works produced under very different circumstances that are nonetheless similar in containing a diverse blend of notes on the philosophical tradition, juxtaposed with rather unfiltered emotional self-expression.

In particular, the work strikes the reader with Negri's intense feelings of frustration, rage, and pain. This is in stark contrast to the impression of many readers of the later Negri's collaborations with Hardt, who have at times accused him of a facile over-optimism. Negri also takes note of his reading habits and impressions, which are diverse and include names that seem remote from his usual problematic, such as Friedrich Hölderlin, Franz Kafka, Martin Heidegger, Jean Starobinski, René Girard, and Peter Sloterdijk, in addition to more expected figures like Benedict de Spinoza, Giacomo Leopardi and Gilles Deleuze (2010: 2, 8, 11, 19, 154, 190, 207, 214-215, 219). Negri also makes brief references to other art forms that he enjoys: He quotes from the Jamaican dub poet Linton Kwesi Johnson, whose reflections on oppression inspire him, and says that he identifies with the replicants hunted down by bounty hunters in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (2010: 209).

Negri writes a great deal about the *anni di piombo*, the Years of Lead for which he was held responsible and imprisoned. On one hand, he diagnoses certain destructive phenomena as unavoidable symptoms of the growing self-consciousness of a new working class:

It is impossible to deny that the diffuse violence of the movement in these years was a necessary process of self-identification and affirmation of a new and powerful productive subject, born out of the decline of the centrality of the factory and exposed to the massive pressure of the economic crisis (2010: 44).

On the other, he is sharply critical of opportunist and conspiratorial plans of violent revolution. He dissociates his viewpoint from terrorism and emphasizes political mass struggle over a false military approach (2010: 83). He argues that a perception of civil war between right and left is a simulation, related to the postmodern spectacle he characterizes as the essence of his own legal prosecution. In contrast to this, he insists on trauma and affect as opposed to this mediation: "The wound burns and recalls me to reality. This is the critique of postmodernity: a philosophy, a conception of the world which does not know pain—and therefore an illusion" (2010: 87-88). His writings are intensely affect-laden, mainly with rage and bitterness (2010: 99, 101). These emotions are eventually replaced by growing hope and enthusiasm, and eventual joy at the birth of his child (2010: 189,

244). The reader's satisfaction at this resolution must be attenuated, however, by the knowledge that Negri was imprisoned again on the same charge in 1997, when he was then held for an additional six years.

While an intriguing historical document of the struggles of a particular militant during Italy's rightward shift in the 1980s, this book is also quite relevant to contemporary struggles worldwide. I could not help but be reminded of the prisoners' hunger strikes across Palestine, as well as in the state of Georgia, in summer of 2012. In addition to his personal suffering and hatred for his persecutors (who he describes as monsters worthy of Georg Grosz or Luis Buñuel), Negri also writes of a broader struggle, particularly against potentially eternal "preventive detention" (2010: 128, 100). This is particularly significant to contemporary resistance to indefinite detention practiced by Israel and by the United States in the past decade. Surprisingly, Negri writes of the need to establish absolute solidarity among prisoners, even including right-wing nationalists, the "so-called (one-time) fascists" who he describes as "simply a product of the blocked system of Italian politics." After having "lived the experiences of liberation that prison imposes," their reintegration into political negotiation becomes a necessity (2010: 136). While bound to be controversial, this demand seems relevant to the contemporary struggles on behalf of imprisoned Islamists who might conventionally be categorized as belonging to the far right.

A new volume edited by Pierre Lamarche, Max Rosenkrantz, and David Sherman collects various essays on elements and effects of Negri's work, in terms of its own context in Italian autonomist Marxism, the history of philosophy, and such apparently heterogeneous figures as Georges Bataille, Rosalind Krauss, and Michael Taussig (2011: 2). The anthology is divided into distinct sections on context and dialogue; Marx; Spinoza; and new possibilities in aesthetic theory and posthumanism. Steve Wright's discussion of the initial context of *operaismo* in the development of Negri's thought, through the writings of Guido Bianchini, Luciano Ferrari Bravo, and Primo Moroni, is especially illuminating (2011: 21-55). The essays are not shy about criticisms or controversies inspired by Negri's work, in particular regarding the dispensability of value theory to contemporary Marxism (2011: 158-159). George C. Caffentzis contributes the two most combative pieces, which dispute the veracity of Negri's allegiance to Marx and to Spinoza (2011: 101-126, 193-213). The latter essay's historicizing of Spinoza does not so much falsify Negri's reading as it demonstrates its creative aspect, emphasizing the most dissonant elements of Spinoza's system in order to construct something new.

Timothy S. Murphy's study, *Antonio Negri: Modernity and the Multitude*, provides a more unified and coherent approach to the entirety of

Negri's thought, from his early affinity with left-Catholicism and Hegelian critical theory to his works in collaboration with Hardt and Félix Guattari. He is especially attentive to Negri's navigation of French anti-humanist discourse and championing of an alternative humanism rooted in the Renaissance, and the associated notion of two modernities: "one constituent and dynamic and the other constituted and static" (2012: 14-24). Murphy articulates different moments in Negri's thought in order to demonstrate his reactivation of a second, materialist modernity, begun by Machiavelli, Spinoza and Marx, that contests the mainstream metaphysics inaugurated by René Descartes and G.W.F. Hegel (2012: 26, 62). Murphy is also especially strong in providing an account of Negri's transitional period, in which he absorbs the insights of post-structuralism, especially Deleuze and Michel Foucault. Murphy argues that this is accomplished by means of an unlikely conversation with and re-reading of Spinoza, Leopardi, and the Biblical Job (2012: 118). In particular, Murphy provides a succinct and persuasive account of Leopardi's thought, suggesting that Negri was able to find in his poetry innovations analogous to those associated with Nietzsche by French thinkers of the 1960s (2012: 135). Murphy's comprehensive and readable study is likely to stand as the standard monograph on Negri's work for some time to come.

**Andrew Ryder (aryder779@gmail.com)** is Postdoctoral Associate of the Department of French and Italian at the University of Pittsburgh. He has written numerous articles on Continental philosophy, modern literature, and Marxism. He is presently finishing a book manuscript, titled *Irreducible Excess: Politics, Sexuality, and Materialism*.



*Difficult Atheism: Post-Theological Thinking in Alain Badiou,  
Jean-Luc Nancy and Quentin Meillassoux*

by Christopher Watkin

Edinburgh University Press 2013, pbk £24.99 (ISBN: 9780748677269),  
296pp.

by Arthur Willemse

The thesis of the death of God, articulated in the works of Nietzsche, Hegel and Pascal (“Great Pan is dead”, *Pensées* 694), is one of the most important guiding threads of twentieth century philosophy. To a decisive extent, it has informed the removal of the question of being from the discipline of traditional metaphysics, and its displacement into fundamental ontology (Heidegger), existentialist thought (Sartre), and hermeneutics (Ricoeur). Furthermore, over the course of the last century the death of God has proved to be insufficient as a cornerstone for atheist philosophy. Indeed, the death of God appears to be his masterstroke, as it removes God from the jurisdiction of the philosophers without relinquishing one bit of his own significance. The wake of the thesis of the death of God is examined in the context of contemporary French philosophy in Christopher Watkin’s *Difficult Atheism*.

Representing three very different philosophical attitudes, the works of Watkin’s subjects Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy and Quentin Meillassoux provide a kaleidoscope of responses to those earlier, insufficient attempts at atheist thought. As Watkin explains, either the death of God lead to thought that tacitly involved the organization typical of theology – we find such mimicry exposed in Heidegger’s analysis of onto-theology in metaphysics or in Carl Schmitt’s political theology – or, more sophisticatedly, the strategy employed is *ascetic*, and simply refuses and does without any concept that would once again allow for it to be contaminated with theism. Both strategies are insufficient and this is why Watkin is able to identify in contemporary thought, in the works of the authors mentioned, more radical attempts at ‘doing away with God’ (rather than a ‘doing without God’). Indeed, at stake is an attitude of atheism that is far more aggressive than perhaps one is accustomed to. Readers of twentieth century philosophy (of Heidegger, Wittgenstein or Derrida) will not find the caution and deference that it displayed when religion was at stake. Before, perhaps, the outrageous thing to do was to warn *against* claims of the end of religion. At present this is no longer the case. Before presenting Watkin’s argument in greater detail, we should be mindful that the philosophical opponent in this case is not religion, religious faith or the phenomenon of religious life, but theology and theism.

Watkin carefully unpacks the merits and problems with each approach. With regards to Alain Badiou, his charge is directed at philosophy's timid sense of its own historicity. His attack on the privilege given to finitude opens up the possibility for philosophy to once again claim infinity in a way that makes it a contestant to religion and theism. We should bear in mind that Badiou, an expert on Marxism, is not unconcerned with history. Quite to the contrary, Badiou thinks of truth as historically situated, or conversely, of history as organized around a true event. If mathematics can address the true substance of metaphysics – being itself as the multiple – then the transcendental notion of the One is excluded from the outset. Yet there are hints of theological remnants in Badiou's thought, particularly in the event and the faithfulness towards it that is constitutive of the subject.

Jean-Luc Nancy, in turn, appears to be more attuned to the demands that partaking in a discourse can make: philosophy and theology are brother and sister, and one is not rid of the other so easily, least of all by declaring oneself to be. A close friend and colleague of Derrida's, Nancy's own strategy is that of deconstruction. So, whereas Badiou rejects the constraint of historicity that philosophy has laid on itself, Nancy affirms the historical feature of thought. The attempt at deconstructing Christianity perhaps runs against the limits of what deconstruction ordinarily means: if such deconstruction would be possible at all, nothing of Christianity is expelled in the process. Yet Nancy would have it that Christianity itself is a moment within the deconstruction of Christianity; a movement towards a potential more profound than the obvious religious stakes that are its currency. Nancy means, then, that Christianity itself partakes in its deconstruction, is interested in its own undoing. This deconstruction is a work of retrieval, a *Wiederholung* in Heidegger's sense of the word, tracing back Christianity to its origin. Watkin clearly juxtaposes Badiou and Nancy by way of how their respective vantage points are characterized as claimant with regards to the infinite or immersed within the finite. As Watkin goes on, he explores how these terms are ways of debating the death of God from either the atheist or the theist perspective, and thus ultimately, how the dichotomy maintains its steadfast view on the question of the existence of God. Therefore neither thought can claim to be without God, so another possibility is introduced.

Quentin Meillassoux's work has affinities with both Badiou and Nancy, yet Watkin explains how his argument is entirely his own. In his *Après la finitude* and the papers surrounding it that Watkin has had access to, Meillassoux does not associate infinity or the finite with theism or atheism, but rather takes philosophical repossession of the entire notion of God. This appears to be a move quite similar to the deconstruction of Nancy's, but with a twist: rather than deconstruct with a view to an origin that might be

reanimated, Meillassoux displaces the thought of God such that it becomes inconspicuously available to philosophy.

This book expertly explains an area of contemporary thought that is of the greatest interest. For the question concerned is not of religion or its legitimacy, but of the way philosophy organizes and anchors itself. Philosophy as first philosophy has always held a stake on the first principle. This means that philosophy maintains a crucial connection with theology. How to do without this connection, as arguably it must, is the crucial question articulated in *Difficult Atheism*. Watkin's decision to quote from original French texts is understandable, but he is not consistent in this regard as he refers to the English translation of *Être et l'événement*. Nor is it clear why, for instance, Nietzsche is quoted in English in the main text. Consistency should overrule the particular interest in French thought. Regardless, this is only a small blemish on an excellent and highly instructive work in contemporary thought.

**Arthur Willemse (A.Willemse@sussex.ac.uk)** is a PhD-candidate and associate tutor in Philosophy at the University of Sussex, as well as Reviews-editor for SSPT. At present he is writing a thesis on the messianic motif in the works of Agamben and Derrida.

*Psychoanalysis is an Antiphilosophy*

by Justin Clemens

Edinburgh University Press, pbk £24.99 (ISBN: 9780748685776), 200pp.

by Maximiliano Cosentino

Justin Clemens is a Senior Lecturer at the School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne. He has written and co-edited major collections in the fields of psychoanalysis, philosophy and art.

In *Psychoanalysis is an Antiphilosophy*, Clemens discusses the difficult relationship between philosophy and psychoanalysis by re-examining key psychoanalytic concepts such as sexuality, melancholy, slavery, torture and the master-signifier. These research interests can be placed within contemporary French debates on the *topos* of psychoanalysis *qua* the reverse of normal philosophical order and as the subversion of the traditional ontological speech.

A paradigmatic case of the tension between philosophical and psychoanalytic discourse, is, for example, Lacan's *Seminar XX Encore* in which he mocks at Parmenidean philosophy and its identification between being, thinking and saying. This identification hides the lack of a metalanguage, as Lacan puts it :

"I am going to say -that is my function- I am going to say once again -because I repeat myself- something that I say, which is enunciated as follows, 'There's no such thing as a metalanguage'.

When I say that, it apparently means -no language of being. But is there being? As I pointed out last time, what I say there isn't. Being is, as they say, and nonbeing is not. There is or there isn't. Being is merely presumed in certain words -'individual', for instance, and 'substance'. In my view, it is but a fact of what is said (un fait de dit)" (Lacan 1998: 118).

This Lacanian gesture transforms ontic speech in the *logos* or signifier commoner. The ontology, science historically ranked as first science, acted isolating being and giving it a privileged status. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the signifier is imperative and is what commands. This sovereignty of the signifier, which produces the speech on being as its effect leads, in contemporary French thought, to exegesis of psychoanalysis as the Other of philosophical speech. Thus, Cassin has identified psychoanalytic status as a logology that shares features of affiliation with the sophistic

movement – the paradigmatic reverse of philosophy since Plato-. Badiou, meanwhile, has coined the term antiphilosophy to illuminate the relationship between psychoanalysis and philosophy. For Badiou, the antiphilosophy is generally defined by the subordination of the philosophical categories to language, the dismissal of the claims of philosophy to attain truth and a system, the evidence of a will to power in all philosophical programs and the affirmation of an ethic that is beyond the usual philosophical order constraints.

In this book, Clemens echoes Badiou's concept of antiphilosophy and extends its use in an original and fruitful way. For Clemens, asserting that psychoanalysis is an antiphilosophy is to say that it has a special relationship with science and literature. Both, philosophy and psychoanalysis are speeches that are closely linked with science and philosophy. However, while philosophy interrupts literature with science, psychoanalysis breaks into science with literature. This is expressed by Clemens in two propositions that act as key principle for understanding psychoanalysis as an antiphilosophy. First, if psychoanalysis is in love with literature, literature is not in love with psychoanalysis (Clemens 2013: 10). Second, psychoanalysis would love to be a science in love with the literary (Clemens 2013: 11). These two propositions together serve as a guide to explore Clemens' book.

In the first chapter, *Listening or Dispensing? Sigmund Freud on Drugs*, Clemens shows, in an innovative way, that the germ of psychoanalysis as an antiphilosophy is in the very origins of Freudian discovery. After Freud's clinical and personal experimentation with cocaine failed, he had to make use of literary elements to account for the unsaid and the unutterable in the complicity between slavery-addiction and sexuality-alienation. Freud breaks into science with literature under the rubric of love.

The status of love in psychoanalysis is analyzed by Clemens in the book's next chapter *Love as Ontology; or, Psychoanalysis against Philosophy*. From Freud to Lacan, psychoanalysis has refused ontology, as a matter of philosophers, and instead has established love as ethics, particularly, transference love. Being the battlefield of the therapeutic process, transference is the encounter of two bodies that at the same time they generate a world, they destroy it by the successive phantasmagoric dismissals. Love is the vehicle for a semblance of knowledge, a half-said truth that appears in the context of the transference and suspends any sense of existence.

Nevertheless, from a Lacanian perspective, the psychoanalytic subject is a slave not only of love, but, fundamentally, of the encounter between the body and its language. Slavery of the subject to the signifier is analyzed by

Clemens in *Revolution or Subversion? Jacques Lacan on Slavery* in relation to philosophy. The Lacanian antiphilosophical position is consumed in an attack on Hegel's philosophy and the ideal of establishing an absolute knowledge. Psychoanalysis is a rebellious speech that takes sides with the slave, the speaking subject, against the master-speech expressed in philosophy's will to totalitarian control.

In the preceding chapters, Clemens argued in favor of the emergence of psychoanalysis as an antiphilosophy: slavery as a result of the encounter between the body and language, the ambivalence of love as an element that mediates, obscures and transforms the relationship between slavery and sex and, finally, the development of an ethics of poetic invention. In the fourth chapter, *Messianism or Melancholia? Giorgio Agamben on Inaction*, Clemens examines the philosopher Giorgio Agamben's encounter with psychoanalysis in his mature work and centers his attention in the concept of disavowal and its link with melancholy. Clemens argues that Agamben in *Stanzas* takes a turn into antiphilosophy by criticizing and going back to Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia* in order to develop a connection not mentioned yet between disavowal and melancholy. The psychological operation of disavowal, in Freudian psychoanalysis, has been traditionally associated with perversion in the simultaneous rejection and acceptance of the idea of castration. As Agamben puts it: "the fetish confronts us with the paradox of an unattainable object that satisfies a human need precisely through its being unattainable ( ... ) the presence of an absence" (Agamben 1993 :33) However, the primordial contribution of Agamben, by Clemens, is to show how the re-appropriation of the supposedly lost object is not the goal of the melancholic project, but, rather, is to create a loss for the non-existent in order to raise it to the status of an absence. At this point, the perverse and the melancholic disavowal come into play to create *ex nihilo* an absent presence.

In the next chapter, *The Slave, The Fable*, Clemens centers the discussion again on slavery, but from a political perspective. To conduct its analysis, Clemens focuses on Greek literature, particularly, in the fables of Aesop and its relation to philosophical discourse. A slave-speech, the Aesopic fable would be at the origin of two specific ways of Socratic discourse: the *epagoge* and *elenchos*. The Socratic mission, carried out with the resources of the Aesopic fable, transfigures the political divisions between masters and slaves to turn it into a system of masters and disciples. But, while the art of Aesop is living-in- servitude, Socrates' art is dying-in-mastery. At this point, Clemens gets psychoanalysis close to the Aesopic fable as both are directed against the pretensions of philosophical mastery, subordinating philosophy to the fables of the unconscious.

The previous chapter ends with the assertion that psychoanalysis is the contemporary discourse that affirms the discourse of slaves, against absolute authority. Aesop, the slave whose speech appears when is extracted by legal torture, is the figure that allows Clemens, in the next chapter, to reflect on the role of torture in the formation and maintenance of democratic politics. *Torture, Psychoanalysis and Beyond* opens with the question, "What could psychoanalytic theory say of torture in democratic societies?" Clemens' answer is that both, torture and psychoanalysis, are dealing with the intersection of language and the body. His diagnosis of the situation is alarming: if democracy is defined as the repression of torture to enable free speech, that feature is essentially lost. Contemporary torture in post-democratic societies no longer tries to extract a speech from a body, but, rather, to separate the speech from the body. This separation attacks the very conditions of possibility of psychoanalysis as a practice that is held in the encounter of bodies and their languages.

In this political context, Clemens poses the question of what becomes of psychoanalysis when its very foundation in the slave animal which is tortured by signifier can no longer be assured. Afterwards, he dedicates the last chapter of his book, *Man is Swarm Animal*, to make a radical revision of psychoanalysis from within psychoanalysis itself. Clemens takes Lacan's pun: "S1, *l'essaim*, S-one, the swarm", to try to respond to the new situation in which psychoanalytic practice is inserted. First, he makes an aetiology of the "puncept" in the German language (*Schwärmerei*) traversing intellectuals as diverse as Martin Luther, Lessing, Kant, Hölderlin, Herder, Schelling and Freud in order to show its late appearance in the Lacanian oeuvre, specifically, in *Seminar XVII*. Clemens argues that the political conditions (May '68), socio-economic situation (family, law and work crisis), institutional situation (the introduction of Lacanian theory in the university), theoretical situation (Lacan's discontent with his previous formulations on the nature of language, the post-structuralist criticism of Derrida and Deleuze to Lacanian work), therapeutics and technology situation (the development of genetics and new forms of communication) functioned as a catalyst for the emergence of the concept of swarm as an attempt to respond the challenges of his time. Clemens exegetical suggestion is that Lacan sees the master signifier, S1, as a swarm. The privileged place of the father and the phallus is now replaced for a grouping of *traits unaires* that constitute the S1 as one-multiple.

Clemens' book concludes beautifully with the statement that psychoanalysis is an antiphilosophy insofar as it takes love as an index of a subject's slavery to a master - an ideal, a trait, a swarm-, and an attempt to use that love against itself in order to suspend the role of master and allows

the emergence of the subject. Science, literature and love against servitude, torture and love, that is, Clemens states in the last lines of his book, psychoanalysis as an antiphilosophy.

To sum up, *Psychoanalysis is an Antiphilosophy* is a stimulating book, provocative and original in its theoretical proposals. The novel articulation of fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis like sexuality, torture, slavery, love, opens new researching paths in this essentially tense relationship between philosophical and psychoanalytical discourse. *Psychoanalysis is an Antiphilosophy* is a book which aims at a specialized audience for its conceptual density and the specificity of its subject matter. Nevertheless, it can be enjoyed by those interested in Lacanian psychoanalysis, continental philosophy, French intellectual debates, contemporary politics and cultural criticisms.

**Maximiliano Cosentino (maximiliano.cosentino@gmail.com)** is a graduate student in Psychology and an undergraduate student in Philosophy at Buenos Aires University. Currently he is completing a Masters in Psychoanalysis. His thesis is on Lacan's concept of desire and love. Other interests includes greek and french philosophy and literature.

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