THEORIZING THE GOOD SOCIETY: HERMENEUTIC, NORMATIVE AND EMPIRICAL DISCOURSES

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Abstract: This paper examines two fundamentally different ways that recent philosophical thinkers have theorized the good society and demonstrates that each tradition has engaged in revisionist efforts that brings it toward its rival tradition. Rawls and Habermas represent the "base" of this contemporary effort, establishing neo-Kantian positions in the sixties and seventies that represent an initial effort at theorizing the good society in terms of an historically unsituated, free floating universalism. The contemporary versions of the hermeneutic, communtarian approaches emerge in response, with thinkers like Walzer, Boltanski and Thevenot, Taylor, and Young arguing for the situated self, community based standards, cultural specificity, and relativism. It is demonstrated, however, that within each of these works there is a decisive space that is, or must be, given to some more universalizing sphere of justice. Responding to this possibility, against these communitarian and hermeneutic approaches, there developed internal revisions of the neo-Kantian, externalist approach, beginning with the large shift manifest in the Rawls of *Political Liberalism.* Similar changes are demonstrated in the works of thinkers like Benhabib, Honneth, and even in Habermas himself. Just as the communitarians move back, with difficulty, toward universalism, so do these universalists seek to move back, with difficulty, to particularism. In the concluding section of this paper, I argue that if we look empirically at the actual nature of the discourses about the good society that circulate in Western societies, we will see both of these discourses, the universalist and the particular, acting side by side. I try to explain how they actual intertwine in a systematic way, as what I call a "binary discourse of civil society."

Résumé: Ce document examine deux manières fondamentalement différentes que les philosophes d'aujourd'hui utilisent pour élaborer des théories sur la société idéale. Ce document démontre aussi que chaque tradition a adopté des vues révisionnistes qui la rapproche de sa rivale traditionnelle. Rawls et Habermans représentent la base de cet effort contemporain qui a jeté les assises des positions néo-kantiennes dans les années soixante et soixante-dix, marquant un premier effort de théories sur la société idéale dans le cadre d'un universalisme libre et non situé dans l'histoire. Des versions contemporaines de cette démarche herméneutique et communautarienne surgissent alors avec des penseurs tels que Walzer, Boltanski et Thevenot, de même que Taylor et Young qui défendent le soi localisé, les normes axées sur les collectivités, la spécificité culturelle et le relativisme. On prouve par ailleurs que dans chacun de ces travaux, il existe un espace décisif qui doit, ou devrait, être laissé à une justice plus universelle. Réagissant à cette possibilité, à l'encontre des démarches communautariennes et herméneutiques, des révisions internes de la démarche externaliste néo-kantienne sont apparues en commençant par le manifeste radical du *Libéralisme politique* (*Political Liberalism*) de Rawls. Des changements semblables apparaissent dans les travaux de penseurs tels que Benhabib, Honneth et même de Habermas lui-même. Tout comme les communautariens réintègrent — bien qu'avec difficulté — l'universalisme, les universalistes réintègrent — aussi avec difficulté — le particularisme. En conclusion, je défends que si nous examinons de façon empirique la nature réelle des discours sur la société idéale telle que nous la diffusons dans les sociétés occidentales, nous constaterons que ces deux démarches, soit l'universalisme et le particularisme, existent côte à côte. J'explique comment ils s'entrelacent systématiquement en une société que j'appelle « société civile à discours binaire ».

Everywhere we look today, certainly in philosophy and even in a great deal of social science, we see a decided turn to ethical and moral concerns, not only as an empirical object but as a practical goal towards which empirical and theoretical investigations aim. It has not always been so. In the two decades after World War II, it was widely believed that morality — "value orientation" in Weber's influential formulation — did not need to, and should not be allowed to, play a direct role in social science or even in much of philosophy.

In social science, it seemed possible to uphold this position because the moral seemed imminent to the progressively unfolding historical progress that functionalists called modernization and Marxists called socialism or the welfare state. In the decades preceding the Second World War, of course, this optimism would have seemed totally absurd. In the unstable and threatening time between the two world wars, philosophers and sociological theorists struggled to expand their understandings of action and order so that notions of moral responsibility could become more central and the relation of theorizing to political action more concrete. One sees this not only in Dewey's reformist pragmatism but in Parsons' neo-Kantian efforts to restore agency to action theory, and also in the later Wittgenstein's intensely ethical exploration of a subjective yet public understanding of linguistic action. In the immediate postwar period, by contrast, the big political questions briefly seemed to have been settled and moral frameworks were put aside. Earlier modes of theorizing were transformed from moral into technical inquiries, into "ordinary

language" investigations of how words and sentences mean (the Wittgenstein tradition), into symbolic interactionist studies of the natural history of social movements and socialization (the Dewey tradition), into quasi-behaviorist approaches that likened societies to mechanical systems (the Parsons tradition).

The turbulence and social struggles for and against the project of the postwar welfare state — what in America was called the "great society" — which broke out in the middle and late 1960s, stimulated an extraordinary renewal of philosophy and social science with an ethical intent, a renewal that has continued to gain momentum to this day.

From our contemporary perspective, it is clear that the philosophical thinkers who most importantly articulated this first wave of social activism were John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas. Social and cultural protests during the decades of the sixties and seventies retained a great deal of the optimism and self-confidence of the earlier postwar years. Fuelled by what seemed to be an unflagging fund of irrepressible social idealism, movements against war and for civil rights appealed to reason and justice and radiated a manifest faith in the transparency of dialogue and the attractions of expanded solidarity. In the third section of this essay, I will reconstruct this appeal in empirical terms as the "discourse of liberty." The *early* Rawls (1971) created a theory of justice predicated on just such a notion of transcendent justice; his theory suggested that citizens can and will ignore the particularities of their own position and assume a selfless orientation reflecting the solidarity of society at large. With his post-Marxist critical theory, the *middle* Habermas (1984) certainly created a different kind of neo-Kantianism, but his insistence on the "ideal speech situation" not as a counterfactual but as a pragmatic prod to communicative agreement and understanding certainly suggested the same utopian appeal to reason, and reasonableness, as Rawls.

I will return to a more systematic discussion of this neo-Kantian exploration of ethical and democratic discourse, and its contradictory re-consideration, in the second section of this paper. Here I refer to it only as prologue. That its relatively short-lived hegemony soon gave way to theories with a more ethical and hermeneutical intent says little about its validity in a moral sense. It is more suggestive about its verisimilitude in an empirical sense, an issue I will take up in section three, below.

Hermeneutical Discourses about the Ethical Society

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, it became overwhelmingly evident that the unabashed and optimistic utopianism of the first wave of postwar social movements had run into a stonewall of social reaction. This blockage generated "realism" in some intellectuals, while for others hopelessness and despair. One theoretical manifestation of these reactions was the world-weary but also

sometimes nihilistic theory of postmodernism. Those who remained committed to the moral project of creating an ethical society, however, found a different way to react. These thinkers responded to the frustration of imminent rationality not by accepting or espousing irrationality but by grounding their claims for a better life in less universal and far-reaching, more culturally delimited historical specific domains.

It is in the latter sense that I would understand the outpouring of neo-Aristotelian, neo-Hegelian, Pragmatic, communitarian, and generally herme-neutically-oriented forms of ethical theorizing that have emerged over the last two decades. Certainly these developments are part of the interpretive turn represented in the social sciences by thinkers like Geertz. But whereas this new hermeneutically-oriented social science advocates value relativism and deconstruction — what Geertz calls "anti-anti-relativism" — philosophical thinkers like Alistair MacIntyre, Richard Rorty, Michael Walzer, and Charles Taylor very explicitly have related their interpretive programs to the task of creating a better life.

As the great public movements for a rational society disappeared or became transformed, these thinkers developed a kind of minimalist moral program, one that suggested the difficulty of transcending society as it was actually lived. Some of these new hermeneutic philosophers — those like MacIntyre, whom Seyla Benhabib (1992a: 23–67) calls the integrationists — gave up on the modernist project and rationality altogether, harkening back to the supposedly more virtuous societies of earlier days, societies in which the good life and the just life were, as for Aristotle, one and the same. Yet, for most of the new hermeneutic philosophers, justice in its democratic and post-Kantian sense continues to be a normative goal. While their work has eschewed the great universalizing public spaces that fascinate Rawls and Habermas, they have sought to infuse the micro-spaces of delimited insti-tutional domains, of concrete interactions, and of particular religious, civilizational, and national cultures with an ethical, normative light. Emphasiz-ing the partiality, particularity, and historical boundedness of the lifeworlds of actually existing empirical societies, these thinkers have pointed less to "justice" in the totalizing, critical, and neo-Kantian sense than to the importance of pluralism, tolerance, and simple human recognition.

Walzer and the Problem of Overlapping Spheres of Justification

In a series of books and articles that suggest, more than those of any other hermeneuticist, the outlines of a general, if not systematic theory, Walzer sharply rejects the possibility he calls "abstract equality" (see Walzer, 1984, 1987, 1999). He suggests that societies are divided into different spheres that organize interaction in entirely different ways, place emphasize on radically

different kinds of goods, and imply fundamentally incompatible moral criteria for how these goods should be distributed fairly. There are many "spheres of justice," not an overarching standard of justice in some higher sense. Indeed, a moral society would be one in which imperialism between independent spheres has ceased to exist. Domination will cease when the criteria that are legitimate in one sphere, e.g., the economic, stop imposing themselves on another, e.g., the political, the familial, the communal. Social critics, Walzer suggests, will fail if they try to appeal to moral criteria that are not imminent in a particular society's particular cultural spheres.

In their more sociological treatise, *De la justification*, Boltanski and Thevenot develop an approach very similar to Walzer's, although they emphasize discourse and argument more than institutional life, are more pragmatist in their orientation and more empirical and universalist in their aims (Boltanski and Thevenot, 1991). Identifying five *regimes de la grandeur* — the economic, administrative, domestic, transcendent, and that of the general will — these French theorists not only reconstruct the normative criteria in each sphere but demonstrate how these criteria are displayed in the argumentational strategies that actors employ as they jockey for successful position. The aim of such arguments, Boltanski and Thevenot suggest, is to be successful in claiming the relevance of one regime of grandeur instead of another. There are no objective criteria of differentiation; it is the successful mobilization of argumentative resources that allows an aggrieved group of workers, for example, to legitimately invoke the general will as the relevant criterion instead of the efficiency standards of laissez-faire. Over-reaching, however, is as much a problem for Boltanski/Thevenot as for Walzer. Compromise between regime interests, not conflicts between them, is the process they describe at greatest length, and, much like Walzer, they seem to suggest that the differentiation between moral criteria and institutional life must be kept permanently intact.

Walzer and his French counterparts seem to succeed in formulating an empirical approach to the concrete and partial worlds of everyday life — what Hegel called the ethical sphere — that is moral at the same time. The pluralist societies they describe are humane and tolerant ones. They would be, that is, if they actually existed. Two questions present themselves. Do societies actually exist in these empirical forms, and are there moral reasons why they should or should not? While it is vitally important to draw attention to the multiple criteria for justice evoked in differentiated societies, the fact of pluralism does not mean that these criteria do not, or should, interpenetrate with each other. My own empirical investigations have suggested, to the contrary, that insofar as protests against injustice become social movements that focus widespread attention, they move beyond the boundaries of their particular spheres and enter into a realm that signifies "society" not only in

an institutional sense but in a broader and more far-reaching moral sense as well (Alexander, 1996). Precisely because it reaches wider in an institutional moral sense, this realm is presumed by actors to possess the capacity to control other spheres. Indeed, they try to move their protests into this sphere in order to force actors and institutions in the particular realm that "unjustly" treated them to conform to a more universal, or civil, will.

In cultural or hermeneutic terms, one can observe this translation from specific spheres to the civil realm by the symbolic iteration, across spheres and across societies, of references to qualities like "rationality," "autonomy," "solidarity," and "rights," references that form the building blocks of what I will later (see Part III, below) call the discourse of civil society. In structural or sociological terms, one can observe this transformation in repeated demands that the communicative and regulative institutions of civil society — for example, the mass news media and the legal system — be allowed to penetrate and restructure the partially shielded and private arenas of various lifeworlds, whether familial, academic, religious, economic, ethnic, or administrative.

It is only in terms of such cultural and institutional "over-reaching" that we can understand what the centuries old effort to expand citizenship means. Certainly, compromise has been much more empirically frequent than revolution, and it helps generate the tolerance that generally is preferable on moral grounds. But compromise is not an adjudication between separated interests, a kind of arithmetic, additive, and parsing process. It involves a process whereby contending parties recognize themselves in, and are recognized by, what Adam Smith called the "impartial spectator," a third party to dialogic interactions representing an idealized civil society, the proverbial public good. To be recognized in this way requires reaching outside of the normative claims, interactional practices, and institutional sanctions of particular, partial spheres; only by doing so can a movement, individual, or cause make claims upon a world, the civil or public one, that claims to be more encompassing. The empirical frequency of this over-reaching process points to the existence, not for a priori but for contingent, historical, and sociological reasons, of a broadly encompassing civil society.

Taylor and the Problem of Common Authenticity

The empirical frequency of such demands for interpersonal recognition, and their quintessentially modern implications of democracy, individuality, and participation points to the ethical discourse of Charles Taylor, the other major voice in the revival of hermeneutical philosophy in the progressive mode. As an interpreter and contemporary disciple of Hegel, Taylor has from the beginning of his career been an outspoken critic of rationalism, formalism, and objectivism, whether in what he has called "sterile" social science or in neo-Kantian philosophy (see Taylor, 1975, 1985). He has demanded that new at-

tention be paid, not to the moral in Kant's sense, but to the ethical, which, following Hegel, he links to the aesthetic domain of actually existing social life. What is significant and particularly intriguing about Taylor's ethical argument, however, is that, while eschewing the Kantian moral world in an epistemological sense, his own moral compass is unreservedly and persuasively "modernist." It is democratic, participatory, egalitarian, and committed to individualism. Thus, while rejecting the attempt to ground these universalist criteria in a Kantian a priori, in his extraordinary hermeneutical reconstruction of the modern identity, *Sources of the Self*, Taylor (1990) reconstructs an overarching Western tradition that is anti-traditionalist in the extreme. Embracing an historically unprecedented sense of inwardness and subjectivity, Western culture, according to Taylor, had allowed radical reflexivity and individuality in a moral, cognitive, and expressive sense. Indeed, by the mid-twentieth century, Taylor (1991) suggests, there had developed a powerful "ethic of authenticity" which makes self-recognition and recognition of others' selves the principal objects public life.

Taylor seems to have turned a neat trick, folding a substantive commitment to modernism into a formal, philosophical commitment to hermeneutics and the concrete ethical world. It seems to me, however, that this trick is too neat. How relative are the various and diverse lifeworlds of ethical life, if the same unfettered, authentic, and reflexive "self" has emerged as the preeminent social value throughout Western civilization and, increasingly, outside it? Does this not suggest that in democratic, quasi-democratic, and modernizing societies there develops an overarching, highly universalist, relatively homogeneous social-cum-value sphere espousing "civil" kinds of goals? If so, can this not be conceived of as a moral sphere continuously penetrating and affecting, if not regulating, local ethical life?

Perhaps in response to this very possibility, since the publication of *Sources* Taylor has become increasingly sharp in his criticisms of the objectivising, rationalistic currents of modernity, which he associates with figures like Locke and Kant. In *Sources*, Taylor argued that modernity rests on multiple and conflicting conceptions of rationality; in his most recent writing, by contrast, he has increasingly defined true, authentic individuality in an expressive and aesthetic rather than cognitivist and moral manner. He has suggested, moreover, that there is a kind of developmental tendency in contemporary political life — the historical emergence of the politics of difference — which supports this philosophical claim: "The politics of difference grows organically out of the politics of universal dignity through one of those shifts with which we are long familiar, where a new understanding of the human social condition imparts a radically new meaning to an old principle" (Taylor, 1995: 234). Rejecting reflexivity in its rational and universalist forms for expressivism, a mode of individualism which depends on the emotional and aesthetic communication of inner uniqueness and uniqueness, Taylor

(1995: 229) follows Herder in suggesting that this contemporary ethic must be extended from individuals as such to cultural groups and communities.

In abandoning the emphasis on abstract, commonly held, human rights for the "politics of difference," however, Taylor contravenes the moral and cognitive streams of the universalizing language of individuality he earlier described. These moral and cognitive dimensions rest on assumptions of impersonality and objectivity that, in his earlier and more complex understanding (see, e.g., his discussion of Locke in *Sources*), Taylor acknowledged as constituting individualism's other face. In fact, the conviction that a neutral and universal social sphere does exist — the civic sphere of the impartial spectator which I referred to above — has forcefully developed right alongside contemporary concerns for authenticity and individuality. Indeed, as I have suggested in my earlier discussion of the pluralist position, and will try to demonstrate further in my analysis of radical feminism below, if the politics of difference is to be a moral and not merely an empirical (or ethical) discourse, it must be forcefully informed by just such a language of shared civil solidarity. Taylor has convincingly demonstrated that the contemporary cult of authenticity has produced a new "ethic of recognition," and that the politics of difference is organized around it. This ethic can become a moral one, however, only when, paradoxically, the recognition of difference is informed by the recognition of a fundamentally human similarity.

In examining these hermeneutical arguments for what I have called the minimalist program of justice, I have suggested that they ignore the moral importance of the cultural discourse and institutional matrices of civil society. It might be said, in fact, that Walzer and Taylor, and Boltanski and Thevenot as well, can theorize tolerance, participation, individuality, and equality only because, while denying the validity of neo-Kantian ideas philosophically, they assume the empirical existence of social institutions that correspond to them. When different empirical assumptions are made, the vulnerabilities in their theoretical position much more clearly stand out. When the structure of contemporary society is conceived in an anti-democratic way, for example, it becomes obvious that there is no coherent relation between the politics of difference, differentiated ethical standards, and justice in a moral sense.

Young and the Problem of Grounding Respect for Differences

This philosophical vulnerability is exhibited in Iris Young's *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990).[2] Perhaps the most influential feminist version

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2   All of the following quotes are from Young (1990). In what follows, I am drawing from Alexander 1998.

of the radically anti-Kantian position, Young makes no empirical assumptions about the democratic nature of contemporary society. To the contrary, as a feminist personally involved in the new social movements of the 1970s and 80's, Young sees neither solidarity nor rationality in modern societies. She describes modern democracies as composed of segmented and divergent social "groups." Not only are these groups defined by particularistic, primary identities — she mentions age, sex, race, ethnicity, gender, and religion — but they are always and inevitably organized in a hierarchical way. The result is a society in which "social relations are tightly defined by domination and oppression" (32–33). The groups that compose such a system engage in endless and mortal conflict with each other, with the sole aim of enlarging the field for the expression of their identity interests.

Because this empirical description of contemporary social organization is so contrary to the empirical assumptions informing pluralist hermeneutics, the anti-democratic possibilities in the philosophical rejection of what Young calls "civic impartiality" argument become starkly apparent. The notion of an impartial "public" sphere, Young asserts, simply "masks the ways in which the particular perspectives of dominant groups claim universality," and, indeed, actually "helps justify hierarchical decision-making structures." The most powerful among these structures is the modern state (107), whose discourse of universal reason — free and equal citizenship for all — provides a formally abstract but morally empty (100) legitimation for its anti-democratic strategy of excluding politically and humiliating emotionally the members of groups that are neither Christian, male, nor white (110).

With the hope for neutral territory and common understanding ruled out on empirical grounds, the philosophical difficulties of the differentialist argument for justice become clear. Young must, and does, argue that justice can only be achieved by giving full expression, not to solidarity, but to particularity and difference. "The good society," she writes, "does not eliminate or transcend group difference" (163). To the contrary, "group differentiation is both an inevitable and a desirable aspect of modern social processes." For this reason, justice "requires not the melting away of differences, but institutions that promote reproduction of and respect for group differences without oppression" (47). Young argues that recent social movements should be seen in just this way. She reads multiculturalism as emphasizing difference and particularity exclusively.

Like the pluralist hermeneutical approaches I examined above, Young's argument for a better society suffers from an inability to explain why differentiated moral criteria will foster positive rather than negative recognition, an inability which follows from the failure to theorize a broader social sphere of civil solidarity. Young asserts that demands for the recognition of particularity, of difference, will result not simply in the "reproduction" of difference

but in greater respect for them. Yet she never tries to defend this proposition empirically, and cannot do so theoretically. Instead, she continually conflates activists' assertions of the validity of difference with the achievement of a newly positive social attitude of respect.

- "By *asserting* a positive meaning for their own identity, oppressed groups seek to seize the power of naming difference itself ... Difference now *comes to mean* not otherness, exclusive opposition, but specificity, variation, heterogeneity." (171, italics added)
- "*Asserting* the value and specificity of the culture and attributes of oppressed groups ... *results in* a relativizing of the dominant culture." (166, italics added)
- "When feminists *assert* the validity of feminine sensitivity ... when gays *describe* the prejudice of heterosexuals as homophobic and their own sexuality as positive ... when Blacks *affirm* a distinct Afro-American tradition, then the dominant culture *is forced to discover itself* for the first time as specific [and] it becomes increasingly difficult for dominant groups to parade their norms as neutral ... and to construct values and behavior of the oppressed as deviant, perverted, or inferior." (166, italics added)

These claims, however, seems at once sentimental and naive. Young defends such propositions on the grounds that she is offering a dialogic, "deliberative" approach to the achievement of justice: "A selfish person who refused to listen to the expression of the needs of others will not himself be listened to" (106). But isn't "selfishness" — the self-orientation produced by xenophobic, group-limited perception — exactly what Young herself has identified as a defining characteristic of contemporary social life? When socially margin-alized and culturally polluted groups make claims for recognition and respect, how will they change the minds of the dominant groups who have made them so? Is assertive argument sufficient to itself?

As I have suggested earlier, what matters is not the simple communication of positive self-identities, much less the mere act of deliberating about difference. It is, rather, the construction of the social context within which claims for recognition are made that determines whether the negative under-standing of social differences — "stereotyping" in an earlier vocabulary — can be ameliorated or reversed. As Dilthey and Wittgenstein have taught us, statements about ourselves and others are interpreted and understood only in reference to a background of tacit assumptions. Speakers need to know what "language game" they are involved in before they can properly interpret actions and statements made by the players. If we have different conceptions of the game, we will interpret the same statement differently; for all intents and purposes, we may as well be playing a different game. In contemporary societies, I have contended here, the game is public life, and the rules for this

game are established by the culture, institutions, psychology, and interactional structures of civic society.

"We should seek public fairness," Young asserts, "in a context of heterogeneity and partial discourse" (112). Indeed we should! But the mere factual existence of heterogeneity, or plurality, will never, in itself, produce the kind of mutual recognition that she seeks. It is existent shared social understandings, as articulated in the complex and interlarded relations of civil life, that valorize representations of heterogeneity in positive and negative ways. Young implicitly acknowledges this all important fact when she contrasts mere interest group pluralism, which in her view does "not require justifying one's interests as right, or [as] compatible with social justice" (190), with what she prefers to see as the close relationship of justice, or rightness, with the politics of difference. "A heterogeneous public," she claims, is after all "a public, where participants *discuss together* the issues before them and come to a decision according to principles of justice" (ibid., italics in the original). If the recognition of difference is to be connected to justice, in other words, we are back to the notion of an overarching "civic impartiality" from which Young, as well as the more pluralist hermeneuticists, has tried so determinedly to escape.

Normative Discourses about the Moral Society

The hermeneutical approaches to philosophizing justice have established the importance of community life, the separateness of social spheres, the historical uniqueness of identities, and the plurality of claims for recognition. What I have tried to suggest in my critical review of these minimalist programs, however, is that in order to theorize the achievement of morality and justice in these differentiated lifeworlds it is necessary to attend to processes that go beyond particular spheres and assert universal claims that circumscribe them. It is by this very assertion of precedence, I have suggested, that the grounding for assertions of recognition is achieved. I have shown, indeed, that insofar as hermeneutical approaches continue to express progressive moral and political aspirations, their theorizing actually points beyond the minimalist program toward neo-Kantian domains. This repeated if contradictory and only implicit turning-back-to-universalism forces us ineluctably to return to a critical examination of the neo-Kantian tradition. The critical question is this: Does a universalizing civil sphere, and its claims to reason, have to rest upon an ahistorical, undifferentiated, homogeneous, and a priori understanding of universalism and rationality, as the hermeneutic critics of the Kantian tradition have claimed?

In order to answer this question, one must exam the revisionist efforts that critical neo-Kantians have made in response to the objections raised against

them by the post-seventies minimalist program. The great achievement of these efforts is that, by implicating abstract appeals to reason inside of historical, interpretive communities, these revisions have given the normative discourse of critical neo-Kantianism a distinctively sociological hue. The weakness of these efforts is the other side of their strength. While these revisions have stepped inside of the hermeneutical circle, they have done so gingerly, in an ambiguous way. Trying to avoid relativizing circularity, they continually make assumptions about the rationality of social actors and the pristine solidarity of social order that are unjustifiable in historical fact.

Rawls and the Problem of Reasonable Culture

This is clearly evident in the well-known but not very well understood revisionist effort undertaken by John Rawls in *Political Liberalism* (1993). In his earlier, majesterial *Theory of Justice* (1971), inspired by the universalizing, self-confident, and decidedly modernist political thinking and progressive social movements of the 1960s, Rawls had anchored his claims for social reform on transcendental assumptions about human capabilities. They referred to a hypothetical social contract to which social actors agreed when they were living in the innocence of the "original position," that is, a position without social advantage or blinding prejudices of any kind. These actors were neither historically situated nor encultured. The original position was crucial for Rawls' early theory because he posited that social actors could return to it in every future social decision about the distribution of resources. They would do so by assuming the "veil of ignorance," a blindfold that would keep them from referring, either consciously or unconsciously, to their actual social positions and beliefs in the historically specific, encultured societies in which they actually lived. By the 1980s, however, as the optimism about progressive social movements had faded, this "externalist" approach to justice had been decisively challenged by the "internalist" — communitarian and hermeneutic — arguments of such philosophers as Walzer and Taylor. Nodding to Rawls, or perhaps winking at him, Walzer (1984: 5) acknowledged that, "if constraints on knowing and claiming are suitably shaped, and if the goods are suitably defined, it is probably true that a singular conclusion can be produced [such that] rational men and women ... will choose one, and only one, distributive system." But such abstracting, universalizing assumptions, Walzer countered, simply are unreal, and even dangerously so, precisely because they *are* assumptions: they ignore the concreteness of historically situated cultural life.

It is surely doubtful that those same men and women, if they were transformed into ordinary people, with a firm sense of their own identity, with their own goods in their hands, caught up in everyday troubles, would reiterate their hypothetical choice or even recognize it as their own.

[The] problem is with the particularism of history, culture, and membership. Even if they are committed to impartiality, the question most likely to arise in the minds of the members of a political community is not, What would rational individuals choose under universalizing conditions of such-and-such a sort? But rather, What would individuals like us choose, who are situated as we are, who share a culture and are determined to go on sharing it? (ibid).

It was in response to such criticism that what might be called Rawls I gave way to Rawls II. The hermeneutically revised philosopher, Rawls II, first made his appearance in the Tanner Lectures (Rawls 1980) and then, in a more fully elaborated form, in *Political Liberalism* (1993). Rawls II claimed that Rawls I had actually intended to develop, not a totalizing philosophical theory, but simply a "free-standing political conception" that could co-exist alongside other, less universalizing values.

As an account of political values, a free-standing political conception does not deny there being other values that apply, say, to the personal, the familial, and the associational; nor does it say that political values are separate from, or discontinuous with, other values. (1980: 10)

Rawls II recognized the great diversity of actual social life, that citizens "remain deeply divided on religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines" (ibid.).

Citizens usually have both political and nonpolitical aims and commitments ... In their personal affairs, or in the internal life of associations, citizens ... may have, and often do have at any given time, affections, devotions, and loyalties that they believe they would not, indeed could and should not, stand apart from and evaluate objectively. They may regard it as simply unthinkable to view themselves apart from certain religious, philosophical, and moral convictions, or from certain enduring attachments and loyalties. (ibid., 30–31)

What Rawls II wants to point out is that this very diversity, while desired and acceptable, can be a problem — if one is concerned with justice. Implicitly criticizing the communitarian and hermeneutical approach, Rawls II asks whether it is realistic in the pragmatic (not the normative) sense to let each sphere of justice goes its own way and set its won rules. Is it practical to allow each value-specific, culturally-grounded definition of the good society to have its day? How does this square with the fact that each value sphere, or grouping, insists that its views are so "profoundly divided" from others as to seem "irreconcilable" (ibid., 3–4) with their own? Wouldn't such an unmediated pluralism lead to "intractable struggles" (ibid., 4), struggles that, in practical terms, would make cooperation and even the pursuit of justice within one's own sphere impossible?

Rawls II suggests that there is a way to avoid intractability. "To this end," he writes (ibid. 10), "it is normally desirable that the comprehensive philosophical and moral views we are wont to use in debating fundamental political issues should give way in public life." *Public* life: the point is to move to some common ground, ground defined by values not of private and conflicting but of public and shared reason. The point seems simple and obvious.

Public reason — citizens' reasoning in the public forum about constitutional essentials and basic questions of justice — is now best guided by a political conception, the principles and values of which all citizens can endorse. (ibid.)

This reference to "reason" and the suggestion that citizens are "wont to" apply them recalls Rawls I. What is different is that Raws II roots reason and motivation not in the obligations generated by transcendental presuppositions but in actual, concrete, historical traditions. "We start," he says, "by looking to the public culture itself as the shared fund of implicitly recognized basic ideas and principles." We can find what is shared in the public culture, according to Rawls II, by applying the hermeneutical method to the diverse and plural traditions that only seem to divide us. "We collect such settled convictions" and "try to organize the basic ideas and principles implicit" in them (ibid., 8).

Rawls II, then, wishes to take a hermeneutical path to the independent, more universalizing civil sphere. But can he really get to it in this way? Evidently not. For while he seems to embrace the actual culture of existing societies, it turns out he is only referring to the cultures of already democratic political communities, for example, the United States. Rawls II insists that not just any ideas but only "certain fundamental ideas" are "implicit in the public political culture." By these certain ideas, he means those that refer to "the political institutions of a constitutional regime and the public traditions of their interpretation ... as well as historic texts and documents that are common knowledge" (ibid., 13–14). It turns out that the comprehensive and potentially irreconcilable plural cultures belong, not to the public political culture per se, but only to "what we may call the 'background culture' of civil society."

This is the culture of the social, not of the political. It is the culture of daily life, of its many associations, churches and universities, learned and scientific societies, and clubs and teams, to mention a few. (ibid., 14)

What is the relation of the background culture to the foreground, the democratic principles of public reason? Two different kinds of relations are possible. One is that within these particular traditions of the background culture there are some "perfectly reasonable" elements, which makes sense, Rawls II suggests, because there must be some "inevitable long-run result of the powers of human reason at work within the background of enduring free institutions" (ibid., 4). For example, "religious toleration" and the "rejection of slavery" (ibid., 8) are principles that most, if not all, of the particularistic background traditions of American society share. What results is a common public that is imminent rather than transcendental, an "overlapping consensus" that allows conflicts to occur between "reasonable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines," such that "citizens, who remain deeply divided ... can still maintain a just and stable democratic society" (ibid., 10).

What is wrong with this position is that it slips universalism in via the back door. Even Rawls II recognizes that only *"some* of these [particular] doctrines are perfectly reasonable" (ibid., 4, italics added). It is this recognition that leads to the second possible relation between background and foreground culture: complete separation. "To attain such a shared reason," Rawls II now suggests, "the conception of justice should be, as far as possible, independent of the opposing and conflicting philosophical and religious doctrines that citizens affirm." (ibid., 9).

A distinguishing feature of a political conception is that it is presented as freestanding and expounded apart from, or without reference to, any such wider background. To use a current phrase, the political conception is a module ... This means that it can be presented without saying, or knowing, or hazarding a conjecture about, what such doctrines it may belong to, or be supported by. (ibid., 12–13)

In order to achieve the degree of universalism that overlapping consensus requires, Rawls II returns to Rawls I, stepping entirely outside the heremeneutical effort to reconstruct the actual traditions of an actually existing society.

We must find some point of view, removed from and not distorted by the particular features and circumstances of the all-encompassing background framework, from which a fair agreement between persons regarded as free and equal can be reached. The original position, with the features I have called "the veil of ignorance," is this point of view. (ibid., 23)

Rawls II tries to backtrack, claiming that he has not stepped outside of his new found hermeneutic perspective. "The original position," he claims, "is simply a device of representation," a "means of public reflection and self-clarification" that "helps us work out what we now think once we are able to take a clear and uncluttered view of what justice requires" (ibid., 26). But the problem is the clutter. It is the cultural clutter that prevents us from getting a "clear" view. Rawls I didn't see this, and neither, in the end, does Rawls II. The rumors about Rawls' reunion of hermeneutical and normative thinking have been greatly exaggerated.

Habermas and the Problem of the Empirical Will

When Seyla Benhabib (1992b: 169) calls the later Rawls "hypothetical" and "disembodied," she draws attention to the much more far-reaching revisionist ambition that has marked the Habermasian line of critical neo-Kantian thought. From the beginning of his work, Habermas (cf. 1967, 1984) was intent on somehow following Kant without being disembodied or a priori Even in one of his most recent responses to his hermeneutical critics, this is the point he immediately stresses. He insists that his approach to justice, despite its rational and abstract bent, derives from "an intersubjective interpretation of the categorical imperative," not an a priori one (Habermas,

1995). To elaborate and justify this more grounded approach, Habermas has incorporated the early Hegel's account of psychological and moral development as involving a struggle for recognition and George Herbert Mead's interactionist approach to the creation of the internalized generalized other. He has referred to the homologies between his own understandings and Parsons' and Kolberg's investigations into the historical and individual evolution of normative abstraction. Finally, connecting his interactionally-generated imperative to Hannah Arendt's emphasis on the importance of the public sphere, he has presented it as a "discourse ethics."

Yet, while these historical, sociological, and psychological connections are certainly important in illustrating the intensity of Habermas' efforts to avoid the a priori, they are more elaborating armaments and auxiliary justifications than the core argument itself. For the latter surely derives from speech act theory and the manner in which Habermas has interpreted it in what seems at once a transcendental and pragmatic way. Even in the more recent statement of this position, Habermas (1995: 1) continues to argue that "the meaning of the basic principle of morality" — the universal principle that Kant derived from the a priori categorical imperative — "can be explicated in terms of the content of the unavoidable presuppositions of ... argumentative practice." What is unavoidable about entering into conversation with others, Habermas has always insisted, is the moral recognition that it "can be pursued only in common with others." Communicative action demands, in and of itself, a certain respect for the reasoning powers of one's conversational partners, a respect that implies solidarity and impartiality. Thus, because "rational discourse" has a "communicative structure," it "forces itself intuitively upon anyone who is at all open to this reflective form of communicative action." With this still intact theory of "universal pragmatics," developed initially with Karl-Otto Apel, Habermas is convinced that he has succeeded in incorporating a social — ethical or lifeworldly — reference "without incurring the cost of a historical dissolution of morality in ethical life".

The hermeneutical critics of neo-Kantian theory, we have seen, have tried to avoid the dangers of radical historicity, with its debilitating relativism, by bringing universalism in through the back door. Habermas avoids the opposite danger, rigid and a priori objectivism, in much the same way. By referring to the back door, I mean that these efforts at "repair" want to have their cake and eat it too. Hermeneutical philosophers want to keep the cake of particularity but to eat it in a universalizing way. Habermas wants to keep the cake of universal reason but to eat it in a particularizing way. The problem with both efforts is that they try to resolve philosophical difficulties without systematically transcending them. Habermas has made a mighty effort to avoid positing abstract universalism a priori. But if he assures us that universal standards will

"unavoidably" be evoked for pragmatic reasons, has he really opened up moral rationality to the contingencies of empirical and historical life? If morality is really an unavoidable presupposition for conducting communication, why should one bother to study moral language or culture in an historical or sociological way?

While Habermas has continued to defend universal pragmatics as a valid and sufficient grounding for a "practical philosophy" of morality, that earlier program bears the mark of the idealizing, optimistic confidence in rationality that distinguished maximalist approaches to justice in the sixties and seventies. Since that time, one can observe in Habermas' approach to normative discourse a revealing and significant, if unacknowledged, change. Faced with the frustration of newly legitimate conservative regimes and the growing backlash movements against immigrants and racial and religious minorities, Habermas appears to have become markedly less confident about the transparency and efficacy of moral claims, even in the normative domain itself. This philosopher of critical social movements has also had to confront the fact that progressive movements in the last two decades — and especially their intellectuals, like Iris Marion Young — increasingly have framed their demands in terms of difference and separation rather than universalism and expanded solidarity.

It was the emergence of this discourse of the other, in its conservative and progressive forms, that motivated the hermeneutical turn toward to plurality, locality, and context. While Habermas refuses this route in principle, he feels compelled to face up to the same challenge. Referring to "the voice of the other," he writes that "we have to learn from the painful experiences and the irreparable suffering of those who have been humiliated, insulted, injured and brutalized." What must be learned, Habermas now acknowledges, has to do with the restriction of universalism. A new kind of actor must be understood, "someone who in the name of universalism excludes another" (15). Because actors can misuse and misunderstand the categorical imperative, Habermas reasons, "universalistic principles" must have "merely *presumptive* generality"; they can, moreover, be "*selectively* employed" (italics added).

For critical neo-Kantian traditions, even more so perhaps for one that is supposed to be pragmatically grounded, such an acknowledgment poses a terrific philosophical challenge. Habermas seems to be struggling precisely with this challenge when, in the conclusion to this recent restatement of his position, he protests that "the reasons underlying [moral] validity claims are not *completely* ineffectual" (italics added). At the very least, he suggests, "the validity claim we associate with normative propositions certainly has *obligatory* force" (italics added). But in this context, obligatory means something very much less than the confident assertion that recognition of the claim to

morality is "unavoidable." Indeed, Habermas here sharply curtails the pragmatic status of moral discourse, calling it "a purely *cognitive* undertaking" (italics added) which has no necessary empirical relation to action. The cognitive validity of moral demands, he acknowledges, cannot prevent "the uncoupling of *moral* judgment from the *concrete* motives that inform actions" (italics added). This uncoupling can occur because, in their actual empirical practices, actors must "*summon the resolve* to do what is judged to be right" (italics added). In other words, the issue of resolve — empirical motivation — is intrinsic to the possibility of maintaining the autonomy that rationality and universal imply, for "moral *insights* do not of themselves lead to autonomous *actions*"(italics added). To the contrary, "the autonomy of [an actor's] will is a *function* of whether he is capable of *acting* from moral insight" (italics added).

In order to conceptualize the sociological contingency of "capability," Habermas introduces the notion of "empirical will," as contrasted with the more abstract, normative conception of "autonomous will."

What happens when actors are incapable of acting morally is that "the empirical will ... has split off from the autonomous will." Yet, while Habermas is certainly right to note that such "division of the will is a symptom of weakness," he seems to have named a problem rather than to have succeeded in explaining or conceptualizing it. He has, of course, made highly interesting forays into philosophical, sociological, and psychological research that bear directly on the problem of empirical will formation. His commitment to grounding the orientation to justice in universal pragmatics, however, has led him to draw from these literatures only material that supports universalizing claims.

When we earlier examined the progressive strands of recent hermeneutical philosophy, we saw how its internal contradictions forced it to move from the empirical discourse of civil society to the normative, in the Kantian sense. In tracing Habermas' unacknowledged self-criticism of his earlier efforts to bring Kant down to earth, we have been forced to move in the opposite direction, from the normative discourse of civil society to the empirical, the very territory of the hermeneutical traditions that Habermas has wished to avoid. If Habermas were to try systematically to conceptualize the weakness of will, he would have to incorporate some of the critical insights of the anti-Kantian tradition earlier described. Blockages to universalism do not exist only as residual categories or developmental byways. They exist as robust traditions in the spheres that border and restrict civil society. I criticized the pluralistic approaches for not recognizing that broad conceptions of justice are achieved when the solidarizing claims of the civil sphere interpenetrate and restructure the more restrictive spheres of religion, economy, state, ethnicity, family, and

science. Habermas can be criticized in a formally similar way. He does not systematically theorize how the uncivil spheres interpenetrate, restructure, and particularize the cultural premises, institutional contours, and interactional practices of civil society. This is what Habermas would have to investigate if he were to understand the weakness of empirical will.

I wish to understand the recent projects of Habermas' two most important revisers, Seyla Benhabib and Axel Honneth, precisely in this way, as efforts to carry out more systematic and coherent investigations into the possible weakness of the empirical will.

Benhabib and the Problem of the Utopian Concrete Other

Benhabib has carried Habermasian ideas into the very center of feminist debate and in the process has felt compelled to offer major revisions of critical theory in turn. Her feminist investigations begin, in fact, exactly where Habermas' end, with the sense that moral resorts to reason have been betrayed in the normative realm itself. Criticizing "moral theories in the Western tradition," she argues that "the universalism they defend is defined surreptitiously by identifying the experiences of a specific group of subjects as the paradigmatic case of the human as such" (Benhabib, 152–153). Because of this selective employment, she concludes, the very "definition of the moral domain" has been distorted and "the ideal of moral autonomy" has been defined in a particularizing way to include only subjects who "are white, male adults." Up until this point, in other words, the ideal of universalism has in practice been anything but inclusive, for it has prevented female subjects, among others, from legitimately being included in the public sphere, leading to "the privatization of women's experience and to the exclusion of its consideration from a moral point of view." Because it is "disembedded and disembodied," she concludes, this vision of the subject is "incompatible with the very criteria of ... universalizability advocated by the defenders of universalism."

Benhabib proposes to overcome this social distortion of universalism by inverting the notion of the "generalized other" that, borrowing from Mead, Habermas has presented as an example of how universalism can be fully grounded in empirical social-psychology. She attacks this conception for its very generality. By employing such a concept, she argues, "we abstract from the individuality and concrete identity of the other." In order to overcome this debilitating abstraction, which conceals the male point of view, she proposes that the conception of morality must be extended to include "the standpoint of the concrete other [which] is implicit in those ethical relationships in which we are always already immersed in the lifeworld" (Benhabib, 1992c: 10).

In making this proposal, Benhabib has made a dramatic move into the concrete lifeworld of the hermeneutic tradition, a move that has the potential of forcing moral theory to come face-to-face with the empirical restrictions on rationality that the ethical sphere sustains. Indeed, if one enters into "the standpoint of the concrete other," she warns, one has actually to reverse the traditional logic of moral theory, for one has to "abstract from what constitutes our commonality, and focus on individuality". Benhabib has arrived at the same empirical will as Habermas, but she has done so in a more coherent way. It turns out, however, that Benhabib does not intend to investigate the possible "weakness of the will." Her ambition vis-a-vis the empirical will is altogether different. She has entered into the ethical world in order to expand the understanding of the empirical will in a moral way. Drawing on Carol Gilligan's reconstruction of the "relational rationality" of women, Benhabib defines the distinguishing empirical orientations of the ethical sphere as "friendship, love, and care" (159). These orientations have emerged as regulatory ones, she argues, because insofar as actors are concrete others they engage with each other in genuinely reciprocal and complementarity ways.

In fact, Benhabib's (1992c: 10) conceptualization of the empirical orientations of concrete others introduces the same kind of ineluctability argument as Habermas' more abstracted account of argumentative practice. "To be a family member, a parent, a spouse, a sister or a brother," she argues, "means to know how to reason from the standpoint of the concrete other." Once again, the empirical has come to the rescue of the transcendental. Universality — respect, rationality, solidarity, altruism — is achieved through concrete means. There is no danger to the normative prerogative. The "capability problem" that developed when Habermas recognized how the empirical could be split off from the autonomous is completely avoided. "One *cannot act* within these ethical relationships in the way in which standing in this kind of relationship to someone else demands of us *without being able to think* from the standpoint of our child, our spouse, our sister or brother, mother or father" (ibid., italics added). Rather than the interpenetration of the moral and ethical presenting empirical strains and normative contradictions, the relation between the spheres is complementary. Each facilitates the realization of the other: "I envision the relationship of the generalized to the concrete other as along the model of a continuum ... extending from universal respect for all as moral persons at one end to the care, solidarity and solicitation demanded of us and shown to us by those to whom we stand in the closest relationship at the other."

This is indeed an ennobling moral vision, and there is certainly no doubt that the empirical wills of women and other concrete others must be understood in a more hermeneutically sensitive and morally expansive way. Nonetheless, to enter into the ethical world merely in order to rehabilitate it does not do justice to the complex and often debilitating relations between the normative and the empirical discourses of contemporary life.

Honneth and the Problem of Universalizing Recognition

In his most recent writings, particularly in *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Axel Honneth has created a more far-reaching revision of Habermas, one that throws a powerful light on the weaknesses of the empirical will, on why it splits off from the autonomous will and resists the requirements of the moral life. He rejects Habermas' communicative grounding of the categorical imperative as too cognitivist, rationalistic, and abstract, in short, as too Kantian. In its place he suggests "recognition," a term drawn from Hegel's early investigations of the struggle for love and esteem in ethical rather than moral life.

Honneth's (1995: 131) description of the ordinary language basis for this choice reveals how the concept of recognition forcefully addresses the constitution of the empirical will. "In the self-descriptions of those who see themselves as having been wrongly treated by others," he observes, "the moral categories that play a dominant role are those — such as 'insult' or 'humiliation' — that refer to forms of disrespect, that is, to the denial of recognition." Denying recognition hurts people "not simply because it harms subjects or restricts their freedom to act" — the Kantian claim — but also "because it injures them with regard to the positive understanding of themselves that they have acquired intersubjectively" (ibid.). This new grounding for critical judgment, in other words, allows Honneth to reach into the ethical domains that have been the subject of hermeneutical, anti-Kantian work. By suggesting not just abstract justice or equality but "self-realization," it incorporates the "settled ethos of a particular life world," or, quite simply, the claims of what Aristotle called "the good life" (171).

Honneth parses recognition into three different dimensions of the empirical will: self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem.[3] Each of these personal needs is linked, in turn, to institutions outside the moral sphere. Confidence, for example, is generated within family and friendship groups. Employing psychoanalytic object relations theory, Honneth suggests that if "good enough mothering" is not provided, actors will not experience "basic trust," and immoral behavior like criminal aggression and violence will result. Esteem, by contrast, develops from the solidarity that actors experience by participating in concrete communities that share values. If they are not allowed to become part of such communities, if community values are not extended to include their particular identities, the other's disrespect will be experienced as the self's lack of esteem.

Yet, while Honneth has succeeded in delineating key elements of the empirical will and linking them to spheres of ethical life, he does not conceptualize

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3 I draw in the following from J. C. Alexander and M. P. Lara (1996).

the tensions between the latter and the normative, or civil sphere in a sufficiently determined and complex way. Residues of evolutionary and dialectical thinking in his work lead him to take up a developmental approach to the weakened will. The result is that the problems he describes too often are converted into mere triggers for expanded development. Frequently, he draws a direct line between the fulfillment or frustration of personal needs and whether or not social actions assume a moral form. But have not well brought up and "confident" people behaved aggressively to other members of the community, abetting criminal and even violent behavior, and sometimes engaging in it themselves? Because even relatively secure and psychologically functional adults continuously employ the "classic" defense mechanisms like splitting, projection, denial, and neutralization, people self-confident in their recognition have often been anti-Semitic, racist, misogynist. Equally important, unconfident, insecure, badly brought up persons can, paradoxically, act in ways that give others confidence, respect, and esteem.

While Honneth dramatically shifts the focus of moral theory to institutions and values in the ethical sphere, in his analysis of the latter he focuses in an exaggerated way on transformations that can make the ethical complementary with the moral. As I have suggested repeatedly in my earlier discussions, however, the relations between civil and uncivil spheres must be understood in a much more mediated way. Respectful interaction is not only or even primarily the result of strengthening the empirical will in the ethical spheres of socialization. It is also produced by the impact of morally oriented cultural norms and social institutions. In her influential book *The Reproduction of Mothering*, for example, Nancy Chodorow demonstrated how misogynist socializing structures created within girls and women strong and supposedly debilitating dependency needs — in Honneth's terms, insecurity and the lack of self-respect. How did it come to be, then, that as young women, these "badly" socialized actors created the active, autonomous, and self-confident women's movement of the sixties?

What was missing from Chodorow's analysis, and what is missing from Honneth's, is a sense of the mediation vis-a-vis (female) psychological structures that is provided by surrounding cultural ideals (which in the sixties increasingly emphasized highly universal, gender and race neutral conceptions of freedom) and by surrounding social structures (the new experiences in the sixties of extended political participation and legal guarantees). It is the interpenetration of the ethical by such moral norms and institutions that can provide learning opportunities for transforming personal feelings of inadequacy into healthy, confident, and assertive public behavior.

The women's movement was possible not because good enough mothering had been provided for women when they were young girls, but because in the late sixties young women found psychological gratifications (self-confidence

and recognition) in the interactional and cultural structures that were institutionally available in the universalizing public sphere. Structures in the ethical sphere were restructured with resources from civil society, and the latter were subsequently restructured in more universal and gender-sensitive ways in turn. The latter success has made it possible for "insecure" women to be treated in ways that increase their self-confidence and recognition. The moral rehabilitation of the ethical does not happen for developmental reasons or simply because of personal need. The tension between ethical and moral spheres, rather, creates an environment for the moral exercise of human agency.

The same kind of strictures can be applied to Honneth's discussion of recognition-as-esteem and its relation to community and cultural life. It is certainly true that the participation in a shared value, or ethical, community can provide actors with a sense of esteem. What is more problematic is whether this feeling of personal security will lead, in an unmediated way, to moral action. Esteem is, in fact, often provided within the particularistic, self-affirming boundaries of segmented communities which experience themselves as having become more peripheral in terms of status or power. In this kind of situation, demands for recognition that appear subjectively legitimate to social actors, which emerge, indeed, from their concrete forms of ethical life, are often profoundly suspect in moral terms. Based on deep resentments, they can easily become demands for domination, for the subordination of the values of other groups to those that appear "naturally" to be affirmed in one's own.

In his discussion of social movements as related to esteem, Honneth begins to approach the mediations between ethical communities and morality, and the contingency of agency, in a more complex way. "There must be a semantic bridge," he writes, "between the impersonal aspirations of a social movement and their participants' private experience of injury, a bridge that is sturdy enough to be enable the development of collective identity" (163). But in trying to explain how such a semantic bridge can be constructed, Honneth moves, once again, directly from an anthropological emphasis on emotional needs in the ethical sphere directly to moral practices like resistance, emancipation, and enlarged participation.

In the context of the emotional responses associated with shame, the experience of being disrespected can become the motivational impetus for a struggle for recognition. For it is only by regaining the possibility of active conduct that individuals can dispel the state of emotional tension into which they are forced as a result of humiliation. But what makes it possible for the praxis thus opened up to take the form of political resistance is the opportunity for moral insight *inherent in these negative emotions*, as their cognitive content. (138, italics added)

While the opportunity for moral insight may be inherent in the experience of shame — Honneth really does avoid the ineluctability argument of Habermas and Benhabib — the history of reactionary social movements in the twentieth century indicates that cognizing a moral content in response to

feeling publicly and privately shamed is not particularly likely in the empirical sense. Even if the response to shame does take the form of constructing a collective identity and injecting it into the public sphere — "a practical process in which individual experiences of disrespect are read as typical for an entire group" (162) — there is no necessary sense in which this is a good thing from a moral point of view. Such interventions have often led, indeed, to the creation of social structures and languages that create a self-righteous facade of legitimacy for the exclusion and domination of others. Collective organization based on ethical identities that are not morally reconstructed is a very dangerous thing. The lifeworldly forces that split the empirical from the autonomous will can be repaired only by intervention from the moral sphere.

While Honneth stresses that "our approach departs from the Kantian tradition in that it is concerned not solely with the moral autonomy of human beings but also with the conditions for their self-realization," it is very important for him to insist that, "in contrast to those movements that distance themselves from Kant, this concept of the good should not be conceived as the expression of substantive values that constitute the ethos of a concrete tradition-based community" (172–173). It is true that in moral terms the good should not be so substantively conceived. The problem is that in empirical terms this is often what conceptions of the good imply. The awareness of this problem motivated the caution of the minimalist program, with its thick, hermeneutical investigations of ethical textures. Honneth has entered the ethical sphere, but he has exercised his hermeneutic powers in a much thinner way. From "the plurality of all particular forms of life," he informs us (ibid.), he has "normatively extracted" the "structural elements of ethical life." With the latter, he believes, we can attain "the most general norms possible." We hear echoes of the a priori. The revision of neo-Kantian critical theory still has not gone far enough.

Empirical Discourses about a Civil Society

In my discussion of the very powerful recent movements to reconstruct the good society in hermeneutical terms, I showed how such philosophical-efforts seem ineluctably forced to posit empirical developments in contemporary society that give leverage to universalistic, abstract, transcendentalizing claims to reason, humanity, and civil society.[4] In my discussion of recent developments in critical neo-Kantian philosophy, I showed that there exists a formally similar process of revision. The possibility of universal justice is posited as

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4 I draw for the following from Alexander (1993).

necessary, but in order to avoid the a priori and ground universalism in a less unreal way these efforts have been forced to acknowledge the particularity of different forms of reason and to theorize their extra-civil origins in hermeneutical ways. In the course of these discussions, in other words, we have discovered a strange paradox. The antagonistic movements in contemporary moral and political philosophy appear to circle back to the same place. They converge on the necessity to conceptualize not only the independence but the interpenetration of the ethical and the moral, the particular and the universal, the historical and the transcendent.

I propose that this philosophical paradox can be seen as a higher order reflection of the ordinary empirical discourse of civil society. In the historical and contemporary studies conducted by my students and myself, we have found that individual and organized efforts to create "the good society," and to oppose it, persistently evoke the same binary cultural language, or ideology. In this empirical discourse, universalism and particularism are conceived, not as abstract theoretical concepts but as the objectively existing qualities of the motives, relations, and institutions of different and often opposing groups of human beings. Before investigating the structure of this binary language in more detail, we must briefly explore the broader "society" that it tries to call into being.

Grounding Universalism in Historical Ideals

If we study the social movements, the scandals, the crises, the individual and group demands for inclusion and exclusion in contemporary societies, we find that these very practical actions refer to the existence of an imaginary world of a very utopian kind. The world Kant imagined as a priori is, in empirical terms, a regulating if imaginary ideal. The people who inhabit this ideal sphere are conceived of as "our equals" in status, a status that is neither economic, political, religious, or ethnic but specifically human. At the basis of this imagined community there exists an idealization of the "free and autonomous individual," an actor who is conceived as inherently possessing fundamental capacities and rights. These individuals are believed to form a community, membership in which exhibits solidarity of a collectively binding type. This solidarity is broad and diffuse. It creates the notion of "the people." These are imagined, however, only as a people of a very specific type, namely, those who are capable of maintaining individuality and openness in a self-governing, democratic community.

While this community seems like an ideally Kantian one, it has been powerfully constructed only in very specific historical places and times. In broad brush terms, of course, the ideal of an enlarged community has been an imminent part of all human societies, from aboriginal bands to ancient

civilizational empires like the Chinese, where conceptions of moral but especially ethical civility were widely accepted and in important respects remain so even today. Nonetheless, in its radically universalistic rather than primordial form, its emphasis on status equality and insistence on the autonomy of the individual, this conception can be traced back to more specifically Western sources: to the transcendent community of ancient Israel and its extension in the "universal otherhood" of Christianity; to the Greek Polis; to the communal movements and individualistic philosophies of the Renaissance; to the radical Puritans' ideal of the community of all believers; to the Philosophes and the French revolutionary articulation of liberté/egalité/fraternité; to the ideals and practice of socialism in its Western form.

The historically constructed existence of such an idealized community within the hierarchical and segmented cultural and organizational structures of developed societies has created in democratic, semi-democratic, and modernizing societies a fundamental tension between the "ideal" and the "real." In my earlier critical investigations of philosophy, I described this as a tension between the moral sphere of civil society and the ethical spheres that surround and constrain it. and noncivil society, are the focus of much of this book. Empirically, in fact, civil society can never be separated from the rest of society. Its regulating ideals and hypothetical, imagined relationships, while socially very significant, are opposed, denied, and corrupted in systematic ways. Yet, to one degree or another, this imagined community does exist as a distinct empirical sphere, and it often sustains quite a bit of autonomy from other spheres. Insofar as it is separate, in fact, civil society can be conceived as a sphere that has its own culture, its own institutions, even its own psychology and forms of interaction. Insofar as civil society is not very independent, this web of culture, institutions, and interaction will serve, not the imagined whole, but a fragment of it; they become subordinated to others kinds of institutions and other demands. These, of course, are analytic statements. Empirically, the situation is always irremediably mixed. The normative and the ethical, the ideal and the material, the universal and the particular are always interpenetrated in the concrete sense.

The Binary Structure of Civil Discourse

The linguistic or semiotic approach to civil society seems warranted on the empirical grounds that institutionalizing justice in a mass society demands a shared language. Civil society demarcates ties with persons who will never be personally known. This, of course, is exactly what the notion of abstract and universal solidarity implies. For this reason, civil society must have a symbolic status; it must function in part at least as a language. Civil society, then, can be understood as a sign system, composed of abstract signifiers and

social referents. The signifiers identify, or construct, the qualities that allow people to become members of civil society and those that do not. This cultural dimension is manifest as public opinion and depends upon the deepest structures of socialized meaning. Universalism is institutionalized as a language game and can be understood only in a hermeneutical way. Contestation over the structure of civil society takes place in terms of a social language, a code, that define the nature of the objects, structures, and processes upon which this relatively autonomous domain rests.

These cultural dimensions of civil life have rarely achieved sustained attention in social science. When they have been examined, moreover, they have been understood in a restrictively Kantian fashion. Whether framed as "values," "orientations," or "ideologies," culture has been treated in a one-sided and highly idealized way. Not only has such an approach made culture less relevant to the study of social conflict but it has produced an atomistic and ultimately fragmented understanding of culture itself. Culture is reduced to discrete normative ideals about the right and the good in a moral sense. Certainly political culture is normative and evaluative. What is vital to recognize, however, is that this quality does not mean that it is either one-sided or exclusively concerned with delineating the moral life. Political culture is a binary structure that defines not only the immoral but the immoral, the civil and the uncivil. Indeed, it is only from within the contradictory pulling and pushing of these oppositional forces that the cultural dynamics of contemporary social life emerge.

The cultural core of civil society is composed not only of codes but of countercodes. These antitheses create meaningful social representations for "universalism" and "particularism," categories that in philosophy are treated schematically and abstractly and in sociology are treated as empty dependent variables in the structural and developmental literature on modernization. On the one side, there is an expansive code that identifies the actors and structures of civil society in terms that promote wider inclusion and increasing respect for individual rights; on the other, there is a restrictive code that identifies actors and structures in terms that focus on ascriptively grounded group identities — identities grounded in the "ethical" sphere — and promote the exclusion that follows therefrom. The discourse of civil society is constituted by a continuous struggle between these codes and the actors who invoke them, each of whom seeks hegemony over the political field by gaining definitional control over unfolding events.

The binary character of this cultural boundary is demonstrated not simply by the fact that code and countercode are present in every society that aspires to be a civil one, but also by the striking circumstance that each code can be defined only in terms of the alternate perspective the other provides. Weber suggested that theodicy — religious doctrine about how people can be saved

— begins with the notion of from what the potential sinner must be saved, implying that the positive theory of salvation works only with a negative theory as its base. The discourse of civil society can be seen, in a certain sense, as revolving around the challenge of secular salvation. To know how to be part of civil society is to know how one can be "socially saved." Members of a society can understand the requirements of social salvation, however, only if they know the criteria for social damnation, for exclusion on the basis of lack of deserts. In fact, just as there is no developed religion that does not divide the world into the saved and the damned, there is no civil discourse that does not conceptualize the world into those who deserve inclusion and those who do not. Members of national communities firmly believe that "the world," and this notably includes their own nation, is filled with people who either do not deserve freedom and communal support or are not capable of sustaining them. Members of national communities do not want to "save" such persons. They do not wish to include them, protect them, or offer them rights, because they conceive them as being unworthy, as in some sense "uncivilized."

When citizens make judgments about who should be included in civil society and who should not, about who is more a friend and who is more an opponent or enemy, they draw upon a highly generalized culture structure, a symbolic code that has been in place since the founding of democratic communities. The basic elements of this structure are sets of homologies, which create likenesses between various terms of social description and prescription, and antipathies, which establish antagonisms between these terms and other sets of symbols. Those who consider themselves worthy members of a national community — as most persons do, of course — define themselves in terms of the positive side of this symbolic set; they define those who are not deemed worthy in terms that are established by the negative side. In this sense it is fair to say that members of the community "believe in" both the positive and negative sides, that they employ both as viable normative evaluations of political communities. For the members of every democratic society, both the positive and the negative symbolic sets are thought to be realistic descriptions of social life, describing the qualities that constitute morality and immorality in turn.

This symbolic structure, both in its universalist and particularist lines, was already clearly implied in the very first philosophical thinking about democratic societies that emerged in ancient Greece. Since the Renaissance it has permeated popular thinking and behavior, even while its centrality in philosophical thinking has continued to be sustained. The symbolic structure takes different forms in different nations, and it is the historical residue of diverse movements in social, intellectual, and religious life — of classical ideas, republicanism and Protestantism, Enlightenment and liberal thought, of

the revolutionary and common law traditions. The cultural implications of these variegated movements, however, have been drawn into a highly generalized symbolic system that divides civic virtue from civic vice in a remarkably stable and consistent way. It is for this reason that, despite divergent historical roots and variations in national elaborations, the language that forms the cultural core of civil society can be isolated as a general structure and studied empirically as a relatively autonomous symbolic form.

Coding and Narrating Motives, Relationships and Institutions

Despite its historical associations with modernity and its philosophical associations with rationality, autonomy, and reflexivity, in an empirical sense the discourse of civil society rests upon relatively unreflexive, taken for granted assumptions about human nature, which allow the motives of political actors to be clearly conceptualized along with the kind of society they are capable of sustaining. Code and countercode posit human nature in diametrically opposed ways. Because democracy allows self-motivated action, the people who compose it must be described as being capable of activism and autonomy rather than as being passive and dependent. They must be seen as rational and reasonable rather than as irrational and hysterical, as calm rather than excited, as controlled rather than passionate, as sane and realistic, not as given to fantasy or as mad. Democratic discourse, then, posits the following qualities as axiomatic: activism, autonomy, rationality, reasonableness, calm, control, realism, and sanity. The nature of the counter-code, the discourse that justifies the restriction of civil society, is already clearly implied. If actors are passive and dependent, irrational and hysterical, excitable, passionate, unrealistic or mad, they cannot be allowed the freedom that democracy allows. To the contrary, these persons, it is believed, deserve to be repressed, not only for the sake of civil society but for their own sakes as well.

The Discursive Structure of Social Motives

Democratic Code	Counterdemocratic Code
activism	passivity
autonomy	dependence
rationality	irrationality
reasonablenes	shysteria
calm	excitable
self-control	passionate
realistic	unrealistic
sane	mad

Upon the basis of such contradictory codes about human motives, distinctive representations of social relationships can be built. Democratically

motivated persons — persons who are active, autonomous, rational, reasonable, calm and realistic — will be capable of forming open social relationships rather than secretive ones; they will be trusting rather than suspicious, straight-forward rather than calculating, truthful rather than deceitful; their decisions will be based on open deliberation rather than conspiracy and their attitude toward authority will be critical rather than deferential; in their behavior toward other community members they will be bound by conscience and honor rather than by greed and self-interest, and they will treat their fellows as friends rather than enemies.

If actors are conceived of as irrational, dependent, passive, passionate, and unrealistic, on the other hand, the social relationships they form will be represented by the second side of these fateful dichotomies. Rather than open and trusting relationships, they will be said to form secret societies that are premised on their suspicion of other human beings. To the authority within these secret societies they will be deferential, but to those outside their tiny group they will behave in a greedy and self-interested way. They will be conspiratorial, deceitful toward others and calculating in their behavior, conceiving of those outside their group as enemies. If the positive side of this second discourse set described the symbolic qualities necessary to sustain civil society, the negative side describes a solidary structure in which mutual respect and expansive social integration has broken down.

The Discursive Structure of Social Relationships

Democratic Code	Counterdemocratic Code
open	secret
trusting	suspicious
critical	deferential
honorable	self-interested
conscience	greed
truthful	deceitful
straight-forward	calculating
deliberative	conspiratorial
friend	enemy

Given the discursive structure of motives and civic relationships, it should not be surprising that this set of homologies and antipathies extends to the social understanding of political and legal institutions themselves. If members of a national community are depicted as irrational in motive and distrusting in social relationship, they will naturally be represented as creating institutions that are arbitrary rather than rule-regulated; that emphasize brute power rather than law and hierarchy rather than equality; that are exclusive rather than inclusive and promote personal loyalty over impersonal and contractual obligation; that are regulated by personalities rather than by office obligations

and that are organized by faction rather than by groups which are responsive to the needs of the community as a whole.

The Discursive Structure of Institutions

Democratic Code	Counterdemocratic Code
rule regulated	arbitrary
law	power
equality	hierarchy
inclusive	exclusive
impersonal	personal
contractual	ascriptive loyalty
social groups	factions
office	personality

These three sets of discursive structures are tied together. Indeed, every element in any one of the sets can be linked by analogy to any element in another set on the same side. "Rule-regulated," for example, a key element in the symbolic understanding of democratic social institutions, is considered homologous — synonymous or mutually reinforcing in a cultural sense — with "truthful" and "open," terms that define social relationships, and with "reasonable" and "autonomous," elements from the symbolic set that stipulates democratic motives. In the same manner, any element from any set on one side is taken to be antithetical to any element from any set on the other. According to the rules of this broader cultural formation, for example, "hierarchy" is thought to be inimical to "critical" and "open," and also to "activistic" and "self-controlled."

When they are presented in their simple binary forms, these cultural codes appear merely schematic. In fact, however, they reveal the skeletal structures upon which social communities build the familiar stories, the rich narrative forms, that guide their everyday, taken-for-granted political life. The positive side of these structured sets provides the elements for the comforting and inspiring story of a democratic, free, and spontaneously integrated social order, a civil society in an ideal-typical sense. People are rational, can process information intelligently and independently, know the truth when they see it, do not need strong leaders, can engage in criticism, and easily coordinate their own society. Law is not an external mechanisms that coerces people but an expression of their innate rationality, mediating between truth and mundane events. Office is an institutional mechanism that mediates between law and action. It is a calling, a vocation to which persons adhere because of their trust and reason. Those who know the truth do not defer to authorities, nor are they loyal to particular persons. They obey their conscience rather than follow their vulgar interest; they speak plainly rather than conceal their ideas; they are open, idealistic, and friendly toward their fellow human beings.

The structure and narrative of political virtue form the "discourse of liberty." This discourse is embodied in the founding documents of democratic societies. In America, for example, the Bill of Rights postulates "the right of people to be secure against unreasonable searches" and guarantees that "no person shall be deprived of liberty without due process of law." In so doing it ties rights to reasons and liberty to law. The discourse is also embodied in the great and the little stories that democratic nations tell about themselves. for example, the American story about George Washington and the apple tree highlights honesty and virtue; English accounts of the "Battle of Britain" reveal the courage, self-sufficiency, and spontaneous cooperative of the British in contrast to the villainous forces of Hitlerian Germany.

Whatever institutional or narrative form it assumes, the discourse of liberty centers on the capacity for voluntarism. Action is voluntary if it is intended by rational actors who are in full control of body and mind. If action is not voluntary, it is deemed to be worthless. If laws do not facilitate the achievement of freely intended action, they are discriminatory. If confessions of guilt are coerced rather than freely given, they are polluted. If a social group is constituted under the discourse of liberty, it must eventually be given social rights, because the members of this group are conceived of as possessing the capacity for voluntary action. Political struggles over the status of lower class groups, racial and ethnic minorities, women, children, criminals, and the mentally, emotionally, and physically handicapped have always involved discursive struggles over whether the discourse of liberty can be extended and applied. Insofar as the founding constitutional documents of civil societies are universalistic, they implicitly stipulate that the discourse can be and must, despite the large and often tragic practical restrictions on rights that such historical documents typically entail.

The elements on the negative side of these symbolic sets are also tightly intertwined. They provide the categories for the plethora of taken-for-granted stories that permeate democratic understanding of the negative and repugnant sides of community life. Taken together, these negative structures and narratives form the "discourse of repression." If people are not represented as having the capacity for reason, if they cannot rationally process information and cannot tell truth from falseness, then they will be loyal to leaders for purely personal reasons and easily manipulated by these leaders in turn. Similarly, because such persons are ruled by calculation rather than by conscience, they are without the honor that is critical in democratic affairs. In a revealing passage in his *Politics*, Aristotle links the acquisition of honor to democratic participation and citizenship, and he attributes anticivil motives to those would seek to sever this link.

The name of citizen is particularly applicable to those who share in the offices and honors of the state. Homer accordingly speaks in the *Iliad* of a man being treated "like an alien man, without

honor," and it is true that those who do not share in the offices and honors of the state are just like resident aliens. To deny men a share [may sometimes be justified, but] when it is done by *subterfuge* its only object is merely that of *hoodwinking* others. (Bk III, Pt A, Ch. IV, sec. 9, italics added)

Aristotle's English translator, Ernest Barker, who was a distinguished student of politics in his own right, elaborates this discussion in a manner that illustrates the rule of homology, according to which concepts like honor, citizenship, and office are effectively interchangeable.

The Greek word time which is here used means, like the Latin honos, both "office" and "honor." The passage in the *Iliad* refers to honor in the latter sense: Aristotle himself is using it in the former; but it is natural to slide from the one into the other (ibid).

If men and women are not accorded honor in this civil sense, they do not have the capacity to regulate their own affairs. They would be inclined, therefore, to subject themselves to hierarchical authority, an inclination that would endanger civil society itself.

Constructing person in terms of such anticivil qualities makes it necessary that they be denied access to rights and the protection of law. Indeed, because they have the capacity for neither voluntary nor responsible behavior, these marginal members of the national community — those who are unfortunate enough to be constructed under the counterdemocratic code — must ultimately be repressed. They cannot be regulated by law, nor will they accept the discipline of office. Their loyalties can be only familial and particularistic. The institutional and legal boundaries of civil society, it is widely believed, can provide no bulwark against their lust for personal power.

The positive side of this discursive formation is viewed by the members of democratic communities as a source not only of purity but of purification. The discourse of liberty is taken to sum up "the best" in a civil community, and its tenets are considered to be sacred. The objects that the discourse creates seem to possess an awesome power that places them at the "center" of society, a location — sometimes geographical, often stratificational, always symbolic — that compels their defense at almost any cost. The negative side of this symbolic formation is viewed as profane. Representing the "worst" in the national community, it embodies evil. The objects it identifies threaten the core community from somewhere outside of it. From this marginal position, they present a powerful source of pollution. To be close to these polluted objects — the actors, structures, and processes which are constituted by this repressive discourse — is dangerous. Not only can one's reputation be sullied and one's status endangered but one's very security as well. To have one's self or movement be identified in terms of these objects causes anguish, disgust, and alarm. This code is taken to be a threat to the very center of civil society itself.

Concretizing Civil Discourses in Everyday Life

Public figures and events must be categorized in terms of one side of this dis-
cursive formation or the other. When politics functions routinely, of course,
such classifications are neither explicit nor subject to extended public debate.
"In an existing ethical order in which a complete system of ethical relations
has been developed and actualized," Hegel wrote in *The Philosophy of Right*,
"virtue in the strict sense of the word is in place and actually appears only in
exception circumstances of when one obligation clashes with another" (Pt III,
para. 150). Even in routine periods, however, it is their specification within
the underlying framework of discursive codes that gives political things meaning
and allows them to assume the role they seem "naturally" to have. Even when
they are aware that they are struggling over these classifications, moreover, most
political actors do not recognize that it is they who are creating them. Such
knowledge would relativize reality, creating an uncertainty that could undermine
not only the cultural core but also the institutional boundaries and solidarity of
civil society itself. Social events and actors seem to "be" these qualities, not
to be labeled by them. Represented and representing in terms of an historically
specific language, they are unaware they are speaking prose. The categories
of the social language are posited as transcendental a prioris.

The discourse of civil society, in other words, is concrete, not abstract. It
is elaborated by narrative accounts that are believed to faithfully describe not
only the present but the past. Every nation has a myth of origin, which
anchors this discourse in an account of the historical events involved in its
early formation. Like their English compatriots, early Americans believed their
rights to have emerged from the ancient constitution of 11th-century Anglo-
Saxons, the same courageously independent and heroic group who had been
resurrected to legitimate the English revolutionaries struggle against royal
authority. The specifically American discourse of liberty was first elaborated
in accounts of the communities formed by rational and self-disciplined Puritan
saints and later in stories about the revolutionary heroes. It was woven into
the myth of the virtuous, highly individualistic yeoman farmer who first
settled America's "virgin land;" then into the tales about hard-working,
straight-talking, and honest shooting cowboys who civilized the West; and still
later, with urbanization, into pulp stories about detectives who worked
tirelessly for the public good and who resembled the cowboys and Western
sheriffs in every way other than name. As Merle Curti once wrote about the
mythical exploits of these early dime store heroes, they "confirmed Americans
in the traditional belief that obstacles were to be overcome by the courageous,
virile, and determined stand of the individual as an individual." Later, in the
mid-20th century, this narrative hero became the FBI agent or "G-Man,"
whom Richard Gid Powers describes as that "startlingly intelligent hero" who

played the central role in Hollywood movies and later American television and who always manifest an uncanny ability to find "a devious murderer out of a crowd of equally likely suspects." Energetic opponents of "gang rule," in either its criminal or political form, G-men were consistently portrayed as "rebelliously individualistic" officers engaged in "an epochal struggle between lawful society and an organized underworld."

The discourse of repression was made palpable in a similar way. Early Puritan accounts of religious miscreants described them as Antinomians, which suggested an inability to control their passions and the egoism that was held to result. The Revolutionaries' tales about English loyalists and American aristocrats in the Revolutionary war constructed these enemies as conspiratorial, secretive, hierarchical in their beliefs and deferential in their practice. The counterdemocratic code was later narrated in accounts of the wild and savage Indians who implacably opposed the progress of American civilization. In the last decades of the 19th century and the first years of the 20th, "Popish" and Jewish immigrants were stigmatized not only for being religiously backward, hence deferential and secretive, but often for being politically radical as well. In 1886, during the first flush of this immigration, a Protestant minister claimed that "anarchism, lawlessness, labor strikes, and a general violation of personal rights" were things "the Anglo-Saxon race has not witnessed since Magna Carta," concluding that "this horrible tyranny is wholly of foreign origin." Thirty years later, in a speech preparing America to enter World War I, President Woodrow Wilson concretized this discourse of repression in a particularly colorful. Immigrant radicals, he proclaimed, had "poured the poison of disloyalty into the very arteries of our national life." Arguing that "American has never witnessed anything like this before," he demanded that "such creatures of passion, disloyalty, and anarchy must be crushed out."

For contemporary Americans, the categories of the pure and polluted discourses seem to exist in just as natural and fully historical a way. Democratic law and procedures are seen as having been won by the voluntary struggles of the Founding Fathers and guaranteed by historical documents like the Bill of Rights and Constitution. The qualities of the repressive code are embodied in the dark visions of tyranny and lawlessness, whether embodied by 18th-century British monarchs or contemporary Soviet communists. Pulp fiction and highbrow drama seek to counterpose these dangers with compelling images of the good. When works of the imagination seem to represent the discursive formation in a paradigmatic way, they become contemporary classics. For the generation that matured during World War II, for example, George Orwell's 1984 made the discourse of repression emblematic of the struggles of their time.

Within the confines of a particular national community, the binary codes and concrete representations that make up the discourse of civil society

typically are not segmented by the ideologies of different social groups. To the contrary, even in societies that are wrent by intensive social conflict the same constructions of civic virtue and civic vice are widely accepted by both sides. What is contested in the course of civic life, what is not at all consensual, is how the antithetical sides of this discourse, its two symbolic sets, will be applied to particular actors and groups. If most of the members of democratic society accepted the "validity" and "reality" of 1984, they disagreed fundamentally over its relevant social application. Radicals and liberals were inclined to see the book as describing the already repressive, or at least imminent tendencies of their own capitalist societies; conservatives understood the work as referring to Communism alone.

Contesting Determinations of Universalism and Particularism

Of course, some events are so gross or so sublime that they generate almost immediate consensus about how the symbolic sets should be applied. For most members of a national community, great national wars clearly demarcate the good and the bad. The nation's soldiers are taken to be courageous embodiments of the discourse of liberty; the foreign nations and soldiers who oppose them are deemed to represent some potent combination of the counterdemocratic code. In the course of American history, this negative code has, in fact, been extended to a vast and variegated group, to the British, native peoples, pirates, the South and the North, Africans, old European nations, Fascists, Communists, Germans, and Japanese. Identification in terms of the discourse of repression is essential if vengeful combat is to pursued. Once this polluting discourse is applied, it becomes impossible for good people to treat and reason with those on the other side. If one's opponents are beyond reason, deceived by leaders who operate in secret, the only option is to read them out of the human race. When great wars are successful, they provide powerful narratives that dominate the nation's postwar life. Hitler and Nazism formed the backbone of a huge array of Western myth and stories, providing master metaphors for everything from profound discussions about the Final Solution to the good guy/bad guy plots of television dramas and situation comedies.

For most events, however, discursive identity is contested. Political fights are, in part, about how to distribute actors across the structure of discourse, for there is no determined relationship between any event or group and either side of the cultural scheme. Actors struggle to taint one another with the repressive brush of repression and to wrap themselves in the rhetoric of liberty. In periods of tension and crisis, political struggle becomes a matter of how far and to whom the discourses of liberty and repression apply. The effective cause of victory and defeat, imprisonment and freedom, and sometimes even of life and death, is often discursive domination, which depends upon just how

popular narratives about good and evil are extended. Is it protesting students who are like Nazis, or the conservatives who are pursuing them? Are members of the Communist Party to be understood as Fascistic or the members of the House un-American Activities Committee who interrogate them? When Watergate began, only the actual burglars were called conspirators and polluted by the discourse of repression. George McGovern and his fellow Democrats were unsuccessful in their efforts to apply this discourse to the White House, executive staff, and Republican Party, elements of civil society that succeeded in maintaining their identity in liberal terms. At a later point in the crisis, such a reassuring relationship to the culture structure no longer held.

The general discursive structure, in other words, is used to legitimate friends and delegitimate opponents in the course of real historical time. If an independent civil society were to be fully maintained, of course, the discourse of repression would be applied only in highly circumscribed ways, to groups like children and criminals who are not usually taken to be in sufficient possession of their rational or moral faculties. It is often the case, indeed, that individuals and groups within civil society will be able to sustain the discourse of liberty over significant period of time. They will be able to understand their opponents as other rational individuals without indulging in moral annihilation. Over an extended historical period, however, it is impossible for the discourse of repression not to be brought into significant play and for opponents to be understood as enemies of the most threatening kind. It may be the case, of course, that the opponents are, in fact, ruthless enemies of the public good. The Nazis were moral idiots, and it was wrong to deal with them as potential civic participants as Chamberlain and the other appeasers did. The discourse of repression is applied, however, whether its objects are really evil or not, eventually creating an objective reality where none had existed before. The symbolism of evil that had been applied by the Allies in an overzealous way to the German nation in World War I was extended indiscriminately to the German people and governments of the postwar period. It produced the debilitating reparations policy that helped establish the economic and social receptiveness to Nazism.

This points to the fact that the social application of polarizing symbolic identifications must also be understood in terms of the internal structure of the discourse itself. Rational, individualistic, and self-critical societies are vulnerable because these very qualities make them open and trusting, and if the "other side" is posited as devoid of redeeming social qualities then trust will be abused in the most merciless terms. The potential for dependent and irrational behavior, moreover, can even be found in good citizens themselves, for deceptive information can be provided that might lead them, on what would seem to be rational grounds, to turn away from the structures or processes of democratic society itself. In other words, the very qualities that

allow civil societies to be internally democratic — qualities which include the symbolic oppositions that allow liberty to be defined in any meaningful way — mean that the members of civil society do not feel confident that they can deal effectively with their opponents, either from within or without. The discourse of repression is inherent in the discourse of liberty. This is the irony at the heart of the discourse of civil society.

Conclusion

In the first two sections of this essay, I entered the realm of recent developments in philosophy to explore ethical and normative discourses about the good society. Limiting myself to critical strands in the hermeneutic and neo-Kantian traditions, I found that, while fundamentally antagonistic in epistolary and epistemological terms, at the most imaginative and reconstructive edges of these traditions there is an ambivalent but decided opening to the kind of thinking represented by the other side. In trying to explain the possibility of a good society in an historically situated world of differentiated social spheres, Walzer, Boltanski and Thevenot, Taylor, and even Young eventually posit the empirical presence or lament the absence of some sort of impartial civil sphere. In trying to understand the reasons why moral universalism has not yet been sufficiently institutionalized as a regulatory ideal, Habermas, Benhabib, and Honneth, for their part, have reached into the particularistic spheres of the ethical lifeworld.

In the course of reconstructing this paradoxical convergence in the first two sections of this essay, I offered various ad hoc empirical observations about progressive and reactionary social movements and institutions which seemed to support the analytical case for interpenetration. In the essay's third and final section, I have presented my research into the empirical discourse of civil society in a more systematic form. I have shown that the universalizing language of expansion and emancipation is always and everywhere shadowed by a particularizing language of restriction and repression. The universal cannot be thought or lived without its nemesis, the particular. These are not just philosophical concepts that refer to the moral and ethical spheres. They are the very stuff of social existence and the struggles to shape it.

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