

studies in

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Volume 23

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special issue - debt and obligation

Interview

Costas Lapavitsas

Author of Profiting Without Producing: How Finance Exploits Us All

Selected Papers - SSPT Conference 2013

Adorno's Imageless Materialism

Sebastian Truskolaski

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The New Ideological Theme

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Costas Lapavitsas

Author of *Profiting Without Producing: How Finance Exploits Us All*

interviewed by Mareike Beck and Craig Gent
30th July 2014

Mareike Beck and Craig Gent: Thank you very much for taking the time to answer a few questions about your book and your general work. You wrote a book, *Profiting Without Producing*, that contributes enormously to a better understanding of what financialization is about and we'd like to hear more about it because it's a really hotly-debated topic.

So starting with the obvious – financialization – in your book you write that contemporary capitalism is financialized and that the turmoil commencing in 2007 is a crisis of financialization. How would you explain financialization? And how was it possible for finance to achieve such a pivotal role in capitalist economies?

Costas Lapavitsas: I think 'financialization' is a more appropriate term to capture what's happening to contemporary capitalism than, say, 'globalization', which is a term that is not precise enough; we use it but we don't know exactly what it means. I also think that financialization is more appropriate than simply 'neoliberalism' which is ideological. Financialization is a term that indicates structural change – historical, epochal, change. That's how I understand it and that's what I've argued in my book. It's a historical transformation of capitalism; capitalism has gone through distinct periods in its history and it seems to me financialization is one of those. It's a transformation that we can identify at the level of the non-financial enterprises, the productive capital, the way they behave; at the level of financial businesses – banks and so on - and how they operate; and at the level of individuals – workers – and households, how they behave. If you take these three areas together you get financialization as a period of transformation I think.

You ask a very interesting question: how was it possible for finance to achieve such a pivotal role? Finance is a very ancient form of capitalism. It precedes industrial capitalism; it is the original form of capitalism. Finance in the nineteenth century was a form of activity that supported industrial

capitalism, but it's always been partially autonomous and independent. Industrial capitalism subdued finance and brought it to a position where it served the interests of industrial capital. What has happened in the late twentieth century is that the autonomous aspect of finance has become stronger and more powerful and finance has penetrated non-financial activity as well, and that is how finance has become so important in the modern world.

MB & CG: So what do you see as the next turn for financialization?

CL: The crisis that began in 2007 is a crisis of financialization in my understanding. Crises are moments of change or periods of change, and for some significant time it wasn't clear what this crisis would bring about. However, after about 2009 it became very clear that financialization was not going to be significantly altered. And that is the case: financialization has not gone away, its fundamental outlook remains here with us. Yet, the shock of the crisis was so great because of the huge bubble that preceded the crisis, and because of the tremendous crisis itself, that the next bubble, the next period of growth of finance – of accelerated financial activity – is not yet clear. Financialization, you see, has been a period of bubbles and crashes throughout. The last crash was so gigantic that the system has had difficulty generating another massive bubble. It's certainly trying at the moment, but it is not finding it easy! So, financialization is not going away, but it has been significantly injured – and that's where we are at the moment.

MB & CG: We often hear the argument that the financial crisis, or financialization in general, was ultimately caused by the escape of capital into finance in search of higher profits, and that this has been accelerated by a period of low profitability in production. What would we miss if we interpreted financialization in this way, rather than conceptualizing it in its own right? You spoke of 'autonomous finance'.

CL: We would miss a lot. Theoretical coherence for one thing! Capital is not a personalised being. There is no such thing in actual existence as 'capital-in-general' which makes decisions for capital as a whole by saying: 'I cannot make a profit in production therefore I go to finance'. Capitals make decisions individually, independently and autonomously, and one has to look at decision-making at the level of the basic units of capitalism to understand structural change. To say that 'capital' doesn't make profit in production and therefore it goes to finance sounds appealing until you try to understand it in terms of detailed decision-making by banks, by

enterprises – you then realize how difficult it is. For one thing, I am aware of no study that shows that the rate of profit – profitability – has been systematically higher in finance than elsewhere. It's easy to say that capitals make big profits in finance. Yes, we know they make big profits in finance! Huge profits are made in finance! But that doesn't mean to say the rate of profit has been higher in finance than in production over several decades. I know of no study that has shown that.

This is a misleading way to approach the phenomenon both in terms of the theoretical content and in terms of the actual nitty-gritty economics of it. To understand financialization it is far better to start with the fundamental agents of capitalist accumulation – in other words with the non-financial enterprises, with the basic units of finance, with the households and workers – and to locate the transformation of their own conduct, to see how profits are made in finance as well as the changes in profitability. It's true that profit-making has changed dramatically, but that does not justify the claim that 'capital can't make a profit in production so it goes to finance'. Profit-making is a very complex process and it has to be examined in-depth for the fundamental agents of capitalist accumulation in order to understand it.

MB & CG: Talking of a theoretical approach, many different approaches exist to make sense of financialization. Your approach to analysing financialization uses Marxist theory and in your book you write that important parts of the Marxist debate on finance do not directly relate anymore to what is going on with financialization today. Why should we still be adopting and expanding classical Marxist analysis instead of developing something else? And what in particular needs to be discarded?

CL: I think there are two different issues here that I want to focus on. The first is that financialization in origin, as far as I know, is something that came out of the Marxist tradition, broadly understood. That has to be said because there are many people in the Marxist tradition - associated with some types of Marxism - who are very sceptical and hostile towards the idea of financialization. I would say that these people are hostile pretty much to any idea that seems new about capitalism, but let that be as it may. Financialization came out of a tradition of thought and analysis and an approach to capitalism which broadly speaking belongs to the Marxist current. It is very important to say that also because orthodox economics neither understands nor recognizes financialization. Financialization, then, is inherently something that comes out of heterodoxy and the Marxist tradition.

Nonetheless, within established Marxism there is still great suspicion,

particularly because much contemporary Marxist political economy suffers from what we might call *rate-of-profititis*. It's a disease that has afflicted Marxism the last three decades or so. The rate of profit is of course a very important feature of capitalism – fundamental to capitalism – and profits made in finance, I would stress, are exceptionally revealing if people actually sat down and thought about them in depth instead of trying to explain them in simplistic ways. Still, *rate-of-profititis* is a disease. It's the kind of disease that makes you think that the tendency of the rate of profit to fall explains pretty everything about the capitalist economy – the past, the present and the future – and all you need to do is make some calculation of the rate of profit, somehow deploying flow of funds data, and then you will answer all your questions about capitalism. Well, that's not how it is and that's not how classical Marxists saw the capitalist economy. Classical Marxists never suffered from this disease, it is obvious from reading the texts. *Rate-of-profititis* is how Marxism has evolved the last two or three decades and I'm afraid that it is a very problematic path. Needless to say, we must definitely analyse profit rates, we must definitely look at profitability, but we must place it in a broader context – an institutional and broadly economic context – in order to understand why capitalism *is*. Now, Marxist political economy is very important for that – provided it is understood broadly and properly – because it tells you that you've got to look at class structures, at the basic process of accumulation. It tells you that you must capture the institutional, social and political context within which accumulation takes place; you have to create a hierarchy of accumulation relations and place finance within that. Marxism tells you how to go about the analysis of finance in a way that is innovative and shows you much about the world. .

Associated with this development is that much of the established contemporary Marxism that looks at financialization with suspicion as an idea, is the kind of Marxism which does not have very much to say about finance. That is a weakness particularly of Anglo-Saxon Marxism which has developed in such a way over the last several decades that didn't have much to say about money and finance. This is a characteristic weakness of Anglo-Saxon Marxism: it has a lot to say about production, exchange, commerce, trade, circulation, but not much to say about finance, and this weakness comes out as a suspicion towards financialization. If you don't have much to say about banks, if you don't have much to say about financial markets – I mean, much original stuff to say – then you are suspicious of any analysis that stresses financialization.

MB & CG: So financialization affects us all and in different ways. Gender discrimination is an issue that many feminists would argue is often excluded

in political economy, especially in the literature on global finance, despite the fact that feminists have shown over the past decades that gender is constitutive of financial markets and especially in the reproduction of the social relations of capitalism more broadly. You argue that the main social consequences of financialization are increasing financial expropriation directly from the household level and profound changes in social stratification. What do you consider to be the gendered implications of this, as well as the potentially male-dominated critique of financialization from within academia?

CL: The simple answer is we don't know, because we don't have enough work on this. And that's an issue that needs considerable, careful study from a political economy perspective and other radical perspectives. The household has become financialized, I would argue, and that *must* have gender implications – it cannot be otherwise because gender roles remain very different within the household still. So, financialization *must* have gender implications, but we don't know what they are. I would also argue that there is secondary exploitation, or financial expropriation as a result of financialization and that *must* have gender implications, but we don't know what these are in the mature countries. Funnily enough, we would have a better idea about developing countries because there has been considerable research on the gender implications of household decision-making and access to finance. Much World Bank literature, for example, argues that in Africa aid should go to women because women in African households make the economic decisions whereas men are likely to spend the money on drink and so on. I'm not suggesting that this is true, of course, but there is work on the gender dimension of household finance and that opens a path to examining the gender impact of financialization. I am sure that there is a gender dimension of financialization in mature countries, but I don't know what it is because there we do not have the studies that look at financialization from this perspective and in sufficient depth. : how it changes the power structures within the household, how it changes access to finance within the household, what does it mean in terms of transfer of surpluses from within the household to banks?

MB & CG: There is for example Adrienne Roberts who looks at how sub-prime credits were given more towards female borrowers, there's Diane Elson and Brigitte Young who look at some of these things.

CL: I am aware of this work, and I know that it is interesting – I'm just saying that we don't have definitive positions and sufficient depth of research on

this issue. It is also difficult to find comparative arguments, for instance, how do the gender aspects of financialization vary from country to country? How do they differ in the UK compared to the United States and to Germany, or even compared to Japan where the gender dimension is actually very different within the household? We need more work of this type.

MB & CG: Talking about the Anglo-Saxon dominance towards financialization, you actually do look at financialization in the Global South and you say that it occurs very differently in so-called developing countries and developed countries. You and Jeff Powell say that we can speak of a ‘subordinate character of financialization’ with respect to developing countries, so how does this approach allow us to reflect upon the exploitative nature of the world economy?

CL: Subordinate financialization I think is one of the most interesting dimensions of financialization today. It’s the newest aspect of it. We see it in a host of middle-income countries, because obviously very poor countries hardly financialize at all. But middle-income countries – Brazil, Turkey, Mexico – definitely are financializing in interesting ways and what one finds is that financialization is subordinate in the sense that it actually, to a large extent, comes from abroad. That, to me, is very interesting because it indicates a number of things that need more study about capitalism today: how does the world market work, and what integration into the world market means today for these countries compared to mature countries. More broadly, how does imperialism work in that context, because obviously we’re not in the classical period of imperialism, but we do have hierarchical relations in the world market and subordinate financialization reflects and reproduces the hierarchy.

Two things are very important here for contemporary capitalism. The first is the role of world money. This is an aspect of imperialism and of global surplus transfers that is very new and distinguishes contemporary capitalism. The dollar is the primary form of money in the world market; this gives an exceptional privilege to the US state which is the issuer of the dollar and allows the USA to obtain major benefits, often in the form of direct transfers from developing countries which are forced to accumulate dollars for a very low return. This is an unprecedented thing in the history of capitalism – unprecedented! It wasn’t the case, for instance, when gold functioned as the main means of payment in the world market. Britain, which dominated the world market a hundred years ago, controlled the major reserves of gold but didn’t receive any returns from developing countries as a direct result of that. The United States, in contrast, receives

direct transfers from the poorest countries today. Again we need deeper study of this issue because it is a dimension of the world market that could be manipulated. It is a feature of managed capitalism, which was absent when gold functioned as world and which gives to the USA extraordinary privileges as a result of financialization.

The second thing relates to the role of banking capital specifically to the globalization of banking capital. The spread of banking capital across the globe carries with it the possibility of domestic financialization in middle-income countries. It also results in a type of economic structure that has very strange and potentially counterproductive features – in Brazil, in Mexico, in Turkey. However, we don't yet know how that will work out, we haven't got enough evidence.

One final comment on subordinate financialization relates to the question you asked me previously on whether financialization was a response to capital not making enough profits in production, and therefore seeking profits in finance. It is common among the Left to argue that production is not doing very well, growth rates are weak and financialization means that capital goes to finance, and growth remains weak and problematic. Well, subordinate financialization is evidence of the flawed nature of this argument. Subordinate financialization has advanced very rapidly in the last ten years while growth rates were also pretty fast. There have been high growth rates in Turkey, very fast growth rates in Brazil, not so fast in Mexico, but faster than elsewhere, and still there has been pronounced financialization in those countries. Financialization, then, is not a response to not making sufficient profit in production! It's something deeper than that as we can see from those subordinate financialization cases.

MB & CG: Another aspect of the financialization of the Global South which we think is very interesting is microfinance. Some authors would argue that this is the financialization of poverty. Obviously it's not comparable to the volume of operations with world money and exchange rates, but what is the relationship between microfinance and the financialization of the Global South and what role does it potentially play – if at all – in establishing and legitimizing financial exploitation as well as financial market expansion, which enables the financialization of so-called developing countries?

CL: The movement of microfinance, on the whole, has had good motives. A lot of people who were involved in it and proposed it originally, had good motives: to promote development, to give access to credit, to allow people to manage their own expenditures and receipts more rationally and more economically and so on. Obviously in the process private businesses also got

involved, and they deal with microfinance in the way of private business: they want to use it as yet another area of profit-making. The results of microfinance, we now know, are nothing like what people expected. Fifteen years ago many people thought microfinance was the answer to the problems of poverty and development, the key to growth. To be blunt, the understanding was that the problem of development in a very poor country was that people didn't have access to, say, fifty pounds to buy themselves a goat, and if they did they would get on the road to becoming successful capitalists in due time. This was always a problematic way of looking at finance and development and we now know that actually microfinance does not generate much growth and does not even have particularly good repayment rates.

From the perspective of financialization, however, the problem of microfinance might actually be even deeper, as your question seems to suggest. It could well be that, unwittingly, the microfinance movement opens the way to financialization in developing countries. It familiarizes people with financial processes, gets them involved with the formal financial system in one way or another, and opens up avenues for banks to begin to make profits by financializing the income of the middle class in the first place but also of anybody else who's got savings in developing countries. That could potentially turn out to be a problematic phenomenon. It would be a good idea for those who advocate microfinance as the answer to development problems to think of that dimension too and not to put their trust in financial ways of dealing with poverty. The world often turns out to be a much more complex and contradictory place, and that could well be yet another one of those instances.

MB & CG: So we've talked about the outcome and implications and causes of financialization, so what might we do about it? It might be claimed that part of Thomas Piketty's recent acclaim is due to his ability to suggest concrete policies that governments might adopt. In the beginning of your book you say you'd like your ideas to aid the practical opposition of financialization, so what would your strategy be or what would you advocate?

CL: Financialization, in my reading, is a structural transformation and an epochal change. Therefore, dealing with cannot be a matter simply of regulation: financialization cannot be reversed simply through regulation. I'm not against the regulation of finance, of course; it is important to find regulation with teeth that will stop the financial system from playing speculative games and making extraordinary profits. The Libor scandal, for

example, keeps bubbling away – more and more banks are proven to have manipulated and defrauded the public by manipulating interest rates and making profits in that way. I'm obviously not against regulation that would stop banks and other financial institutions from engaging in these extraordinary practices and making predatory profits. However, opposing financialization is not merely, or even mostly, a matter of regulation. I don't agree with the approach that says financialization began through lax regulation and that tough regulation will deal with it. It's a structural transformation and it has to be dealt with structurally. Financialization has to be confronted at the level of the non-financial enterprises, which must turn away from financialization, they must be, in a way, *definancialized*. We need a transformation of the operations of productive capital that ought to move toward productive investment, operating with a longer term perspective, *not* playing financial games and making financial profits.

Then we need an intervention at the level of the financial system. Banks must stop making profits out of transactions in the open markets and must refocus towards investing for production and servicing the needs of households. Equally, households must also *definancialize*, in the sense of stopping to rely so heavily on the formal financial system for consumption needs, housing, education, pensions and so on. We need public provision to replace private provision of these things, and at the same time we need to stop private finance for mediating the private provision of these household needs with the aim of extracting profits. If you put all these changes together, you would see that what we're talking about is nothing short of a major transformation of capitalism. In short, effectively to oppose financialization we have to take on contemporary capitalism altogether. From this perspective the struggle against financialization is not simply a struggle for the regulation of finance, but a struggle against the deepest structures of contemporary capitalism. It is an anti-capitalist struggle that opens the way for rational and – dare I say it – socialist organisation of modern economy and society.

MB & CG: That sounds like a lot of work! Within contentious politics we have seen in recent years a shift from an emphasis on 'the worker', who holds a position within the dynamic of capitalist social relations, to 'the activist', who is outside of those. Given the demise of the central role of the traditional working class and the rise of financialized enterprises that you just talked about, which really limit the possibilities for industrial action, who could be identified as the agent of struggle?

CL: This is one of the most difficult questions for radical movements today:

the agent of social change. I'm quite old-fashioned in many ways and I believe in the importance of wage-labour in organising and opposing capitalism altogether. Wage-labour is of paramount importance, but it does not necessarily mean the traditional industrial working class, it is a broader category. Wage-labour hasn't gone away, in fact wage-labour is the characteristic way of earning income across the world, and wage-labourers remain a fundamental social agent for change. I agree with you, however, that the industrial working class – the way we knew it even twenty years ago in the mature countries – is not as strong as it used to be. Although again even there I would enjoin caution because Germany and Japan are different from the United States and Britain, for instance. Nonetheless, I would agree that the industrial working class is not what it used to be; it hasn't got the same weight in society, it hasn't got the organizations, and therefore we need new ways of organizing wage-labour. We also need to think of new and horizontal forms of organization that would incorporate other forms of opposition to capitalism that would not necessarily be based on the workplace. We need new ways of mobilizing all these movements and spontaneous forms of opposition that have emerged during the last few decades. We don't yet have the answer for that problem. The only thing that I would say is that unfortunately the waves of opposition that emerged around 2008/2009 as a result of the financial crisis have not produced sustained forms of organization, with the possible exception of Spain. Spain might be where we will see some interesting new things happening from which we will all learn in the future.

MB & CG: Lastly, what do you see as the role of academic scholars within those struggles?

CL: (smiles) Well, I can tell you that the economics profession within the academic world is a lost cause. Unfortunately very little has changed and the only hope is with students who are actually rebelling against the standard economics that continues to be taught, and something might come out of that opposition. Outside the economics world in the academic environment there's more hope. There is ferment in social science generally speaking. I think that postmodernism has run its course, people are looking for new and more interesting ways of examining the world that are based on material reality. That might bring new and innovative ideas and could prove a contribution that academics make to changing the world in the future. We shall see.

MB & CG: That's great, thank you very much, that was fascinating!

CL: Thanks very much!

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This interview was conducted in person, recorded, and later transcribed. In the interests of clarity and academic integrity, all interviewees are invited to edit their responses after transcription.

Adorno's Imageless Materialism

by Sebastian Truskolaski

Quelle que soit la valeur, la puissance de pénétration d'une explication, c'est encore et encore la chose à expliquer qui est la plus réelle - et parmi sa réalité figure précisément ce mystère que l'on a voulu dissiper.¹

-Paul Valéry

The present piece² is an attempt to examine the meaning of Theodor W. Adorno's enigmatic notion of an "imageless materialism" as it appears in his magnum opus *Negative Dialectics* (1966). As we will find, this formulation is curious, not least, because it brings together an avowedly materialist concern with an ostensibly biblical motif: the Old Testament ban on making images of God.³ Adorno argues as follows:

Representational thinking would be without reflection – an undialectical contradiction, for without reflection there is no theory. A consciousness interpolating images, a third element, between itself and that which it thinks would unwittingly reproduce idealism. A body of ideas would substitute for the object of cognition, and the subjective arbitrariness of such ideas is that of the authorities. The materialist longing to grasp the thing aims at the opposite: it is only in the absence of images that the full object could be conceived. Such absence concurs with the theological ban on images. Materialism brought that ban into secular form by not permitting Utopia to be positively pictured; this is the substance of its negativity. At its most materialistic, materialism comes to agree with theology. Its great desire would be the resurrection of the flesh, a desire utterly foreign to idealism, the realm of the absolute spirit. The perspective vanishing point of historic materialism would be its self-sublimation, the spirit's liberation from the primacy of material needs in their state of fulfilment. Only if the physical urge were quenched would the spirit be reconciled and would become that which it only promises while the spell of material conditions will not let it satisfy material needs. (Adorno, 1973, 207)

Above all, this passage stakes an epistemological claim: that a purportedly materialist cognition, which interpolates images, "a third element", between consciousness and "that which it thinks", in fact, "unwittingly reproduces idealism." Upon first reading then, the section appears to be directed against a form of "representational thinking" (*Abbildendes Denken*) that is commonly associated with classical materialists, such as Epicurus. However, Adorno extrapolates from this point. As will become apparent, his critique extends to a 20th century variant of this problematic: namely, the official materialist doctrine of the Eastern Bloc, exemplified by the theory of reflection (*Abbildtheorie*) advanced in Vladimir Lenin's major theoretical work, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1908).⁴ Admittedly, Adorno's objections to the functionaries of DIAMAT appear somewhat passé, given that the theoretical and political sway of the Soviet Union has been all but consigned to the history books. Nevertheless, I argue, it retains much contemporary resonance inasmuch as the passage entitled 'Materialism Imageless' points beyond the critique of reflection theory to what Adorno describes by a cryptic turn of phrase as a "Utopia of knowledge". (Adorno, 1973, 10) [Translation altered] As I will argue, "The materialist longing to grasp the thing" is conceived as nothing less than the Utopian effort to radically reconfigure the relationship between the subject and the object of knowledge, with respect to their material correlate in natural history. The point is that Adorno views the coercive mechanisms of thought as being co-extensive with a wider sense of societal un-freedom. Recasting these parameters is, thus, a central political concern. Accordingly, the question of what we can really say about "A cognition that neither merely depicts nor constitutes things", posed by Adorno's erstwhile student Alfred Schmidt, contains a substantive socio-political dimension. (Schmidt, 1983, 25) [My translation]

I propose to explore Schmidt's question with respect to the notion of an imageless materialism in two steps: firstly, an account of Adorno's critique of reflection theory and, secondly, some preliminary thoughts on the "self-sublimation" of materialism.

The Theory of Reflection

Materialism and Empirio-Criticism might be read as Lenin's attempt to devise a materialist theory of knowledge for Marxism. As is well known, Lenin is keen to disavow bourgeois philosophies of science prevalent in his day, above all the empirio-criticism of Richard Avenarius and Ernst Mach. He objects to empirio-criticism's attempt to ground a scientific account of reality in a theory of pure experience gained through sense data charging that such a view is, ultimately, idealist inasmuch as it places the constitution of matter

in a reflecting subject. Instead, he insists that the world is a priori material and that consciousness is determined by *it*, not vice versa. Sense data is said to mirror the world as-it-really-is, existing independently *of*- and external *to*-consciousness: "sensation, perception, idea, and the mind of man generally" are to be regarded "as an image of objective reality". (Lenin, 1927, 274)

Adorno objects to this view by arguing that such a theory of reflection succumbs to a naïve realism, which merely re-doubles the aporias of idealism with the "disastrous result" that "the unpenetrated target of criticism remains undisturbed (...) and not being hit at all, (...) can be resurrected at will in changed constellations of power." (Adorno, 1973, 204-205) That is to say, in Adorno's view, "official materialist dialectics, epistemology was skipped by fiat" thus unwittingly reproducing the very imperialism of spirit, which it sought to displace, in a view of reality as seamlessly causal-mechanical. (Adorno, 1973, 205) Accordingly, Adorno claims, the theoretical "deficiencies" of a materialism such as Lenin's ground a political configuration wherein, "on the threadbare pretext of a dictatorship (...) of the proletariat (...), governmental terror machines entrench themselves as permanent institutions", thus "mocking the theory they carry on their lips." (Adorno, 1973, 204)

With this in mind, we might ask how we can conceive of the relationship between "the mind of man" and the "image of objective reality" invoked by Lenin, if the former is not simply a mirror image of the latter. (Lenin, 1927, 274) I take it that there are two points worth noting here: firstly, the fact that the theory of reflection is rooted in the Epicurean idea that matter emits "little images" (Adorno, 1973, 205);⁵ secondly, the fact that Adorno plays with the equivocity of the term *reflection*, between *Abbildung* and *Reflexion*.

i.) The first point concerns a materialist conception that Adorno traces back to Epicurus, which states that matter emits "little images" that are reflected in consciousness. Adorno argues, "The thought is not an image of the thing (it becomes that only in an Epicurean-style materialist mythology which invents the emission by matter of little images)." (Adorno, 1973, 205) These "little images" designate the reflections (*Abbilder*) purported by Lenin as affirming a primacy of the material world. Adorno charges that this claim is metaphysical, inasmuch as it is *extra*-physical, which is incongruent with Lenin's attempt to reduce reality to the level of sheer, a priori physicality. Accordingly, the doctrine of images faces a considerable difficulty: "how does matter, which was previously characterised as wholly without soul or spirit, i.e. causal-mechanical material (...) come to emit such images in the first place?" (Adorno, 1974, 214) [My translation] Lenin's effort to ground his staunchly anti-metaphysical materialist epistemology in a theory of

reflection thus relapses into ungrounded speculation where a "totality of images" – mistaken for reality – "blends into a wall" of un-reflected sensual data "before reality".⁶ (Adorno, 1973, 205) I take it that this is the sense in which the properly "materialist longing to grasp the thing aims at the opposite" of "representational thinking", for "only in the absence of images" could "the full object (...) be conceived". (Adorno, 1973, 207)

ii.) Leaving this point in suspense, for a moment, we turn to a distinction between two different uses of the term *reflection*. I rely here on the peculiar translation of *Abbildtheorie* as "theory of reflection". The German prefix *Ab*, roughly translatable as *of*, already implies that the *Ab-bild* is an image of the image, so to speak – an impermissible tautology, if nothing else. Though it is, elsewhere, rendered as "replica" or "representation", I take it that the notion of an *Abbild* as a literal form of *reflection* – a mirror image – is opposed here to *Reflexion*, which means theoretical reflection. Adorno uses a string of metaphors to indicate the literal replica-character (*Abbildcharakter*) of reflection theory, citing mirror images, photographs etc. Perhaps the most striking of these is his claim that its images are akin to *idols*. As he argues, "What clings to the image remains idolatry, mythic enthrallment." (Adorno, 1973, 205) That is to say, Adorno associates the *ban* on images with the monotheistic proscription of idol-worship: "Demythologisation, the thought's enlightening intent, deletes the image character of consciousness." (Adorno, 1973, 205) Accordingly, the supposed grasp of objectivity delivered by the images of reflection theory is said to be a form of sacrilege and "demythologisation" becomes associated with iconoclasm. Without, presently, wishing to expand at any length on Adorno's peculiar use of theological terms we note the following: 'Materialism Imageless' invokes a monotheistic motif in the service of debunking the "idols" with which materialism traditionally sought to break, but which – Adorno charges – reflection theory upholds.

By contrast, where Adorno speaks of "representational thinking" (*Abbildendes Denken*) as being "without reflection", his use of the term recalls a form of theoretical reflection: *Reflexion*. (Adorno, 1973, 207) The point is that – for Adorno, as for Hegel – dialectics, as the reflexive movement of consciousness through contradiction, procures a series of shapes-of-consciousness understood as the history of its education to the standpoint of science. (To be sure, this is overstating the matter a little. After all, we are dealing with a *negative* dialectic.) Nevertheless, we might say, with respect to the double meaning of *reflection*, which we have asserted, that – for Adorno and Hegel alike – when an object appears to consciousness it is *reflected* – i.e. conceptually mediated – as relative to its conception of what knowledge is. With regards to Lenin's theory of reflection, then, this marks what – in

Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1806) – is merely the first, most partial form of knowledge: sense certainty as a literal *Abbildung* (reflection-as-mirroring) of objective reality in the senses. But by rejecting the centrality of theoretical reflection (*Reflexion*) as bourgeois metaphysics Lenin cannot move forward from this stage despite his assurances to the contrary. “Dialectics lies in things” but “it could not exist without a consciousness that reflects it”, as Adorno emphasises. (Adorno, 1973, 206) That is, “the moment of subjectivity or reflection cannot be taken out of the dialectic. (...) Where this does, nonetheless, happen, the philosophical grounds for a transition to a state-religion are laid, wherein we can observe with horror the deterioration of dialectical theory.” (Adorno, 1974, 215) [My translation] The point is that, on Adorno's reading, there is a materialist moment to the hyper-idealism of Hegelian *Reflexion* and, hence, to the bourgeois subjectivity that Lenin seeks to disavow.⁷

The point, then, is twofold: first, the thing, which materialism of the Leninist cast claims to grasp, remains at the level of a mere sense impression; and, second, the all-encompassing claim of such a materialism, which is entirely causal-mechanical, embeds man in a system of seamlessly determined nature, thus denying “the possibility of freedom, whilst” – paradoxically – “speaking at the same time of spontaneous action, even revolution.” (Schmidt, 1983, 18) [My translation] In other words, where materialism consigns itself to affirming such a total order it betrays its emancipatory tendency by reproducing the antagonistic subject-object relation it hoped to overturn.

Adorno's Concept of Materialism

Let us remind ourselves, briefly, that Adorno's critique of Lenin amounts to a *meta*-critique of the un-reflected precepts of materialism, not its outright rejection. Naturally, it cannot be our aim here to embed Adorno in the canonical history of the term, from Epicurus to Diderot to Marx; rather, it remains to discern something of Adorno's concept of materialism on its own terms. Let this be our point of departure: if materialism runs the danger of reproducing precisely the imperialism of spirit that it seeks to displace, then it follows that a politicised materialism, such as that of Lenin, cannot be “guaranteed to be an emancipatory kind of thinking”. (Jarvis, 2004, 79) Accordingly, I propose to approach Adorno's concept of materialism on three fronts: firstly, his notion of a primacy of the object; secondly, his account of an irreducibly somatic moment in materialism; thirdly, the idea of materialism's self-sublimation.

i.) The notion of a primacy of the object is, above all, a formal point. It

concerns an asymmetry in the relationship between subject and object, wherein objects are said to relate to subjects in a qualitatively different way than subjects to objects: "An object can be conceived only by a subject but always remains something other than the subject, whereas a subject by its very nature is from the outset an object as well." (Adorno, 1973, 183) But how is it that Adorno comes to speak of subjects and objects as distinct in the first place?

In terms of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), the point is that Adorno conceives of the emergence of individuated consciousness from the enchanted union with nature as a splitting asunder of *subject* (man qua individuated consciousness) and *object* (nature). Accordingly, enlightenment must be seen – on the one hand – as the dual process of rationalising deadly forces from without (both physically and intellectually), and – on the other hand – as the self-imposed bondage necessary to persist under such conditions. In other words, the split between subject and object means that history is always already marked by the domination of objects by subjects, even though the subject *is* (unbeknown to itself) a special kind of object. However, whilst the splitting apart of subject and object designates a historical reality, this condition is by no means immutable. The point is not so much to reconcile subject and object in the sense of bringing them back together, but rather, to reconfigure them in a "state of differentiation without domination." (Adorno, 1993, 247) I take it that this is the meaning of the "Utopia of knowledge" intimated at the outset. It assumes that the coercive relation between subject and object has its correlate in *real* socio-historical antagonisms.

The notion of the *primacy* of the object, then, designates an effort to uphold the object's dignity as irreducibly singular in view of its curtailment by the subject. (Of course the real complication of the subject-object relation lies in the ambiguity of the object-status of the subject. It is to do with Lukács and the question of reification.) Without wishing to expand on this point here, it is worth highlighting that while the relationship of coercion and domination brought about by this 'original sin' of philosophy is *real*, it is not eternal but must be expounded by philosophical critique understood as a form of iconoclasm.

ii.) We turn, then, to the somatic moment of Adorno's materialism. As he argues, "Once the object becomes an object of cognition", as it does for idealist and materialist epistemologies alike, "its physical side" – its irreducibly *material* moment – "is spiritualised". (Adorno, 1973, 192) It is "called 'object' only from the viewpoint of a subjectively aimed analysis in which the subject's primacy seems", once again, "beyond question." (Adorno, 1973, 192) To speak of objectivity in terms of epistemology, then, is to reduce *sensation* – "the crux of all epistemology", the somatic moment

of materialism – to a “fact of consciousness”. (Adorno, 1973, 193) Hence, Adorno writes, “There is no sensation without a somatic moment”. (Adorno, 1973, 193) In other words, epistemology (of all ideological shades and hues) runs the danger of misconstruing the material moment of sensation as being purely a link in the chain of cognitive functions. The point is that this excess of physicality, not captured by epistemology, concerns the human body itself. Physical suffering is the somatic index of Adorno's materialism.⁸

Yet Adorno's evocation of suffering as the register of non-identity contains the seed of its own undoing, the demand for its abolition in hedonic fulfilment. The “physical moment tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different”. (Adorno, 1973, 203) [Translation altered] This is the sense in which Adorno argues that “The *telos* of such an organisation of society” as would allow for the satisfaction of want “would be to negate the physical suffering of even the least of its members”. (Adorno, 1973, 203-204) I take it that this is connected, not least, to his attempt at formulating the outlines of a non-coercive – *imageless* – form of materialist cognition.

iii.) In his lectures on *Philosophical Terminology*, Adorno asserts that, “One of the substantive misinterpretations of materialism believes that, since it teaches the preponderance of matter or, indeed, of material conditions, this preponderance is (...) itself positive.” (Adorno, 1974, 198) [My translation] Rather, Adorno argues, “The *telos* (...) of Marxist materialism” – and Adorno is, after all a Marxist, albeit of a highly heterodox cast – “is the abolition of materialism, i.e. the introduction of a state in which the blind coercion of people by material conditions would be broken, and in which the question of freedom would become truly meaningful.” (Adorno, 1974, 198) [My translation] Although the issue of whether this is in fact an accurate reading of Marx will have to remain unaddressed (characterising Marx's concept of materialism falls beyond our remit), it nevertheless goes some way towards demonstrating why Adorno's conception of materialism is, ultimately, “self-sublimating”. That is to say, for Adorno, materialism – properly understood – would be its own undoing, effacing even the trace of itself in the satisfaction of physical need. It would not simply be a counter-position to idealism, but rather the outcome of its thoroughgoing criticism from the inside out – a criticism that aims at an altogether different relationship between subject and object beyond intentionality, instrumentality and means–ends relations: in other words, a “Utopia of knowledge”. I take it that this is what Adorno means by the closing lines of ‘Materialism Imageless’, where he writes: “The perspective vanishing point of historic materialism would be its self-sublimation, the spirit's liberation from the primacy of material needs in their state of fulfilment. Only if the physical urge were quenched would the spirit be reconciled and would

become that which it only promises while the spell of material conditions will not let it satisfy material needs." This is the actuality of Adorno's thought.

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Endnotes

¹ "Whatever the value and penetrative power of an explanation, the thing being explained is still and always the most real, and within its reality figures precisely the mystery that we have been trying to dissipate." (Valéry, 1960, 738) [My translation]

² This article is part of an ongoing effort to investigate the significance of theological motifs in Adorno's work. It is the sum of several conference papers presented at: the "6th Annual Critical Theory Conference", Loyola University Rome (2013); the "Philosophy and the Outside" conference, CRMEP Kingston (2013); and the annual "SSPT" conference at the University of Sussex (2013). I would like to thank Timo Uotinen and Matt Ellison for their incisive notes.

³ It is absolutely crucial to cross-read Adorno's imageless materialism with his notion of an "inverse theology". Only in this configuration does Adorno's account of the *Bilderverbot* become properly illuminated. However, such an inquiry exceeds the scope of the present article. Suffice to note that Adorno is not seeking to nostalgically reassert a lost religious authority. Rather, Adorno adopts displaced theological terms for the critique of a capitalist cult religion, to borrow Walter Benjamin's formulation. Cf. Adorno's letter to Walter Benjamin, dated 17.12.1934.

⁴ As Slavoj Žižek writes in *Less Than Nothing* (2012), it is noteworthy that recent developments in materialist thought bear an uneasy relation to Lenin's theory of reflection. Žižek cites, particularly, Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude* (2006). As he argues, "*After Finitude* effectively can be read as *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* rewritten for the twenty-first century." (Žižek, 2012, 625) Although it is not presently our task to develop this theme, Žižek's view is pertinent when trying to think through the political implications of such new materialisms. Cf. Svenja Bromberg's excellent

article: 'The Anti-Political Aesthetics of Objects and Worlds Beyond' (2013)

⁵ This is, of course, a very partial account of Adorno's reading of Epicurus. While Adorno is certainly critical of some epistemological precepts of Epicurean materialism that have survived into Newtonian physics and, more crucially, into Soviet materialism, his own notion of happiness is undoubtedly indebted to Epicurus.

⁶ It would be worth investigating this issue with a view to the etymology of the term "speculation", which stems from the Latin noun "speculum": "mirror".

⁷ This becomes clear by analogy: if, as Hegel argues, Kant's attempt to ground the conditions of possibility / limits of legitimacy of knowledge *before* knowing already *is* a form of knowing, then this being-conscious-of-something has an irreducibly material moment that Lenin's theory of reflection cannot reproduce.

⁸ It points beyond the confines of the present piece to reconcile this issue with Adorno's ostensibly Christological notion of a "resurrection of the flesh"; suffice to note that this, too, is connected to his 'inverse theology'.

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The Guilt Cult of Capitalism versus the Debt of the Living: Walter Benjamin on *Schuld* and Redemption

by Betty Schulz

Abstract

This paper discusses the concepts of guilt, debt and redemption in the work of Walter Benjamin. I will examine his early sketch *Capitalism as Religion*, where Benjamin posits Capitalism as a false, cultic religion that creates humanity in its image as always-already guilty, and contrast it with the vision of redemption put forward in the *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. I argue that Benjamin, in sharp contrast to Nietzsche's notion of indebtedness to ancestors as a burden, posits identification with the oppressed of the past as a crucial strategy in overcoming the time-continuum of Capitalism.

"One can behold in Capitalism a religion", Benjamin writes; it "essentially serves to allay the same anxieties, torments and disturbances to which these so-called religions offered answers". Crucially, it is a purely cultic religion – "everything only has meaning in direct [*unmittelbar* – unmediated] relation to the cult, it knows no special dogma, no theology" (Benjamin 1996, 288).

For Benjamin, theology designates a reflexive engagement with scriptures and traditions akin to the kabbalistic method, where the world is read as a text with a view to unlocking hidden meanings and signs. It is, as discussed below, to be put in the service of historical materialism – to serve its ends; its aim is thus a potentially liberatory one. Theology, on this understanding, stands in sharp contrast to myth, the pre-theoretical, unreflected acceptance of fate as determination. It is this mythic version of 'religion' that the capitalist cult embodies for Benjamin.

Capitalism as a cultic religion creates a false immediacy, the illusion of direct, unmediated access to truth through partaking in ritual. Everything external to the cult becomes unintelligible *as other*; Capitalism is read back into history and projected far into the future. As a cult, Capitalism is purely ritualistic, enacted rather than professed as faith. Thus it follows that it must be acted out constantly – its permanent duration: "There are no 'weekdays'".

There is no day that is not a feast day, in the terrible sense that all its sacred pomp is unfolded before us; each day commands the utter fealty of each worshipper" (Benjamin 1996, 288).

There are two aspects to this observation. First, Capitalism's cult has replaced transcendence with immanence. It creates a false whole, suggesting that perfection has already been attained in the here and now. Capitalism's cult of hedonism projects itself onto the horizon of what is imaginable. This is ideology; the illusion of festivity, that work is already play, the obverse of which is a festivity which becomes a duty that "commands fealty" in the form of participation in its intertwined rituals of production and consumption. The blurring of the boundaries between free time and labour time already apparent in the Capitalism of Benjamin's era in fact radicalises what Marx observed: the subsumption of *all* time under labour time. Simultaneously, this fact of subsumption is obscured through the cultic illusion of "sacred pomp" and festivity. But if all time is already free, if work is already play, what grounds remain for a critique of Capitalism in the name of freedom?

Second, Capitalism as the consolidation of Christianity takes on the social function previously fulfilled by religious ritual; credit and debt, ritualistically kept in constant circulation, hold human society together. Capitalism thus presents the apex of cultic religion. Under its reign, the permanent re-enactment of guilt (*Schuld*) is no longer rooted in theological doctrine and ritual. Instead, it crystallizes into the very material organisation of life, where capital circuits must remain dynamic and commodities and value must be kept in constant circulation. This is the third feature of the capitalist cult apparent to Benjamin – as an indebted cult, a cult that renders guilty (*ein verschuldender Kult*), it materialises religious doctrines of guilt and openly relies on debt, *Schulden*, to exist – thus it renders everyone a debtor, *Schuldiger*, and therefore *schuldig*, guilty. Under Capitalism, society's debt and guilt, and as a result the debt-guilt of individuals, grows ever larger.

The passage of time under Capitalism is precisely what keeps expanding that which Benjamin elsewhere terms the "guilt nexus of the living" (Benjamin 1996, 204) even as it roots human society in the constant re-enactment of a moment of foundational violence. As Benjamin writes in Thesis XV of the *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, "The initial day of a calendar serves as a historical time-lapse camera. And, basically, it is the same day that keeps recurring in the guise of holidays, which are days of remembrance" (Benjamin 1999, 253). In Capitalism's perpetual day of celebration, what is enacted is its original and persistent victory. Its calendars and holidays describe not a forward motion, but a traumatic, compulsive re-enactment of the ever-same.

This is the same temporality as that which Benjamin sees reflected in gambling. In the *Arcades Project*, gambling is examined in its function as a phantasmagoric ritual of the cultic religion of Capital, endlessly reproducing its guilt-time in homogeneous, empty moments, keeping its values and social forms in circulation. Benjamin discerns in gambling an apparent contraction of time, the phantasmagoria of infinite possibility, the conflux of fantastical and romanticising historical imaginaries. Crucially, in promising the possibility of these feats of metaphysics, the social praxis of gambling becomes shrouded in myth, rendering the gambler ever more guilty and indebted under the guise of offering the possibility to circumvent or escape the guilt nexus of Capitalism (Benjamin 2002, 489-515). It is precisely the inhumane character of the human praxis of gambling, its utter alien-ness and alterity to human reason, which makes it seemingly worthy of veneration. It leads gamblers to be viewed as full of blame, as guilty subjects, rather than to question the integrity of a system that allows for such “demonic ambiguity” (Benjamin 1996, 289). And it is precisely here that an inversion becomes apparent for Benjamin. Read from the standpoint of redemption, such a God cannot but be a false one. Capitalism’s cultic “golden age” for Benjamin is synonymous with hell. Gambling is posited as an easy way out of the hellish time of Capital, when in actuality it mirrors in its compulsive repetition the hellishly circular time it seeks to escape.

Benjamin writes that pagan religion “regarded individuals who were irreligious or had other beliefs as members of its community, in the same way that the modern bourgeoisie now regards those of its members who are not gainfully employed” (Benjamin 1996, 290). There is thus no ‘outside’ of Capitalism; everyone is drawn into the guilt nexus of the living by virtue – or rather, vice- of living in the time of Capitalism’s idolatrous cult, the time before redemption.

If there is thus no way for things to improve because ‘perfection’ has supposedly already been attained – if reform of something thoroughly guilty is necessarily impossible and if there is no ‘outside’ of Capitalism from which a critique could be mounted – then all that can seemingly be hoped for is for things to get worse, utterly worse. A complete “ruination of being” (Hamacher 2002, 96), which is what, for Benjamin, the capitalist cult tends towards: “to include God himself in this guilt...the final complete infusion of guilt into God – the attainment of a world of despair still only hoped for” (Benjamin 1991, 101). To ‘kill God’ in the Nietzschean sense is to give him an afterlife in the form of ultimate guilt, present precisely through his absence, a spiritual trauma. For Benjamin, on the other hand, to draw God into the fate of man is to render him immanent and thus make visible the fact that even the supposedly divine is part of the guilt nexus. Our guilt –

original sin – becomes debt in the new cultic religion of Capitalism, which is total and effaces any trace of previous belief contexts in the immediacy of its symbolic order. Thus Capitalism is the ultimate religion; it becomes seemingly unassailable in a way Christianity attempted, but ultimately failed. Thus,

Its fourth trait is that its God must be concealed, may only be addressed in the zenith of his culpability. The cult is celebrated before an unripened divinity, every image, every thought of it harms the secret of its fruition." (Benjamin 1991, 101)

What is concealed is the whole untruth of the cult of Capitalism: the nonexistence of its God, who far from preceding the cult, demanding worship and thus performing an initiating function, is shown to be a product of the cult itself. It follows for Benjamin that the confrontation with the falsehood of the cultic God could present a moment of *Umkehr*, dialectical inversion, where the mythic foundations of Capitalism are shaken and the whole structure collapses. This passage could thus be read as holding out hope for a moment of clarity where the credit and debt structure of Capitalism becomes exposed and where the utter guilt of God becomes visible. Importantly however, Benjamin is not *advocating* this hope for an utterly guilty God drawn into the fate of a ruined world, but describing a certain consciousness that expects redemption and healing to emerge quasi-automatically from utter destruction. He describes this subjectivity as that of the *Ueberschensch*, "the first who knowingly begins to realise capitalist religion" (Benjamin 1991, 101).

What this passage could be seen to suggest is that a *chance* for humanity to 'seize the day' and become liberated can emerge in times of crisis, at a specific historical juncture. However, the exposure of the mythic form of Capitalism is concealed through the workings of its ideology, spanning positions from reformism, renunciation, to the idea that automatic transformation of the cult into something radically different is possible. Benjamin perceives this ideological kernel even in the thought of Nietzsche and Marx. He rejects what he sees as their conceptualisation of escape from Capitalism as occurring through a forwards-oriented (*vorwaertsgewandte*) movement of the historical subject through what he terms "homogenous, empty time" in the *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (Benjamin 1999, 252). Neither Marx nor Nietzsche's vision of historical change is radical enough. Marx, for Benjamin, assumes a quasi-automatic teleological movement towards socialism through a qualitative transformation of Capitalism, analogous to the accruing of interest and compound interest of money.

Nietzsche's thought, meanwhile, is insufficiently dialectical – the Uebermensch is the heroic individual of an ultimately bourgeois imaginary, who merely intensifies the contradictions of his age without truly doing away with the problem of guilt. Neither thus breaks with capitalist forms, crucially, the value form, whence originate debt (*Schulden*) and, in Capitalism's subsumption of previous forms of bad conscience, guilt (*Schuld*).

What, then, will pierce the ideological veil? A key to the 'emergency exit' lies in Benjamin's indictment of Nietzsche's Uebermensch and the dual meaning of the German word *Sprung*. Benjamin writes that the idea of the Uebermensch relegates any possible apocalyptic *Sprung* - here a crack or fissure - into the future. The problem stems from the fact that this fissure is imagined to appear not through "reversal, atonement, purification, penitence" (Benjamin 1991, 101) but from a forwards and upwards-directed intensification of capitalist humanity which will ultimately result in a *Sprengung*, a blasting apart, of that very same order which brought it about.

This can be contrasted with another *Sprung* in Benjamin's thought - "the tigers' leap" into history of the *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (Benjamin 1999, 253). If the Uebermensch leaps at all, Benjamin seems to suggest, it is in the wrong direction. The tiger's leap into history, on the other hand, if conceptualized dialectically, can accomplish what the Uebermensch, and similarly Marx's "non-inverting" Capitalism, fail to do. Only in constituting a leap *backwards* "into the past" can it simultaneously propel us out of the continuum of guilt history *into history proper*, as Marx described it (Marx 1971, 9), – a history written by humanity in the double sense of the word; freely determined rather than following from the 'fate' to which the structures of Capitalism seem to condemn us.

How can we begin to conceptualize this leap into autonomy? I propose that Benjamin's 1940 *Theses* can give answers here. Thesis II states that

The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply. Historical materialists are aware of this. (Benjamin 1999, 245)

This 'secret agreement' between past and present generations translates into a redemptive obligation of the latter to the former, and forms the obverse of

Benjamin's earlier work on debt-guilt in *Capitalism as Religion*, where humanity's debt is situated within an inhumane economic system. We inherit our "weak messianic power" from those who came before us and struggled for human freedom, thus it follows that they have a claim to it. We are indebted to them, but paradoxically, this is a potentially liberating form of guilt. Under Capitalism, our debt grows with capital accumulation, and we are compelled to worship Capitalism's generative principle through our own rituals, selling our labour power, buying commodities, keeping value in circulation – a cult in permanent duration. To reintroduce the human element to debt and guilt, Benjamin seems to suggest, is the only way to free ourselves of these forms that have become ossified in Capitalism's cultic religion. As Michael Löwy put it, "A secret pact binds us to our ancestors, and we cannot easily throw off the demand they make upon us if we wish to remain faithful to historical materialism - that is to say, to a vision of history as a permanent struggle between the oppressed and the oppressors" (Löwy 2005, 2). The role of this demand is further clarified in Thesis XII, where Benjamin writes

Social Democracy thought fit to assign to the working class the role of the redeemer of future generations, in this way cutting the sinews of its greatest strength. This training made the working class forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren." (Benjamin 1999, 252).

Benjamin here draws a crucial contrast: Both the hatred of the oppressors and the spirit of sacrifice (*Opferbereitschaft*) for enslaved ancestors are activated by the *concrete* suffering of the dead that has already occurred and cannot be undone, and stands in opposition to hypothetical happy grandchildren who remain a mere potentiality. What Benjamin is describing here is a sort of retrograde futurity – only the hopes for future generations of *those that have already perished* is valid. "Our coming was expected on Earth", we really *do* exist in the here and now, and, unlike the dead, have the power to act concretely on the world. This is our "weak messianic power" in the radical singularity of the historical now (*Jetztzeit*) and as such an injunction to action in a contingent situation, at a "moment of danger" (Benjamin 1999, 247).

Benjamin here takes a very different position to Nietzsche, who in the *Genealogy of Morals* considers the guilt to 'ancestors' as the originary, generative guilt of society, and thus something from which to free ourselves

(Nietzsche 1996). For Benjamin, to make conscious the struggles of our 'enslaved ancestors', to deliberately position ourselves in a tradition with them, is a chosen, autonomous, free identification with the oppressed. This stands in radical opposition to the heteronomous, preordained belonging to a community qua community deplored by Nietzsche.

Where Nietzsche sees the power of the ancestor grow over time, just as our guilt to them grows, for Benjamin, it is the *accumulated powerlessness*, the vastness of the dashed hopes of the dead oppressed, in the face of which we are enjoined to act and to make good on this lack. Benjaminian ancestors are enslaved, robbed of their power to act through their untimely death. We *choose* to take on the burden of redemption by recognizing their struggles as our own, rather than out of a sense of guilt or bad conscience. Our duty of redemption does not originate in some feat they accomplished for our sake in the past, but precisely because their struggles remained unsuccessful.

This is what Benjamin had in mind when he wrote about remembrance, *Eingedenken*. "The enemy", Benjamin reminds us, "has not ceased to be victorious". We owe those who came before because we have it in our power to achieve what they did not, and because "even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins" (Benjamin 1999, 247). And we must recognize that if the dead are not safe, then neither are we – this is the Benjaminian "moment of danger" at which the "true image of the past" becomes recognizable to "the struggling, oppressed class" as it flits by (Benjamin 1999, 251).

For Benjamin, there is thus a 'false' identification with the past – that of monuments and unhalting "triumphal processions" (Benjamin 1999, 248), siding with the victors of history – and a 'counter-hegemonic' one that still needs to be written. That of resistance to the discourse of bourgeois historiography that asks us again and again to identify with the victors, to accept the world as whole and not in need of fundamental mending.

This is not just an injunction to honour and remember 'correctly', but a call to action: to try to make good in the now past hopes for emancipation, to complete the struggle of a free humanity for happiness, to attempt the restitution of the past through transformation of the present. It is a guilt which spurs us into action. The challenge of a revolutionary act is to be thorough; to make good on the utopian promise of the failed revolutionary attempts of the past. Only in attempting a redemption of the past in the present moment can the beginning of a concrete hope for the overcoming of the guilt principle become conceptualised.

Conclusion

The possibility of overcoming the time of guilt and debt is already

foreshadowed in *Capitalism as Religion* where Benjamin states that “We cannot draw shut the net in which we stand. Later, however, a commanding view will become possible” (Benjamin 1996, 100). The temporality hinted at in this statement implies the standpoint of a redeemed, emancipated humanity, which must be hypostatized as a really existing possibility for any critique to be intelligible or even possible. On this view, it is only in striving to make good once and for all our debt of redemption that we can interrupt the vicious cycle of guilt and indebtedness of Capitalism.

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The New Ideological Theme: Transferring Responsibility from Global Capitalism to Suffering Nations

by Uğur Aytaç

Abstract

As the concentration of capital increases and financialisation becomes the main determinant in global economic relations, a new ideological theme emerges to sustain the status quo. It is the widespread argument that in countries that are victims of debt crises, the financial mismanagement of their governments has primary responsibility. I will conceptualise this ideological theme as manufacturing consent for punishment. My first thesis will argue that the mismanagement itself is a structural extension of financialisation, neoliberalism and the international division of labour. Secondly, the thesis suggesting that manufacturing consent for punishment is an instance of false identification will be presented. This theme identifies a structural problem with being a failed nation. The final thesis is that technocratic discourse is becoming a component of ideological hegemony through politics and mass media. New judgements are being produced arguing that the financial sector shares a common fate with the public.

The New Character of Late Capitalism

Financialisation may be accepted as one of the most important characteristics of late capitalism. When there is an intention to analyse capitalism and its tools—the tools that sustain the current relations of production in a stable manner—the process of financialisation should not be isolated from the totality (the capitalist system as a whole) and other features of that totality such as the fall in profit rates starting from the early 1970s, the neoliberal attempt to restore profitability, and the new international division of labour. It is crucial to clarify what the term “financialisation” actually means. If

financialisation in world capitalism is defined in terms both of increasing shares in the profit rates of the financial sector relative to non-financial corporations and the value of financial assets with respect to GDPs, then there is growing evidence that the financial sector is becoming dominant and widespread.

Özgür Orhangazi presents the supporting data concerning the issues mentioned above in his work: "Since the 1980s, world financial markets have been growing rapidly. The value of total global financial assets (equities, government and corporate debt securities and bank deposits) reached to 140 trillion dollars by the end of 2005 from 12 trillion in 1980, 64 trillion in 1995 and 93 trillion in 2000". Orhangazi also states that financial corporations' profits as a percentage of the profits of NFCs (Non Financial Corporations) increased from 20% to 70% between the 1970s and the 2000s (Orhangazi, 2008, p.13).

According to Orhangazi, that sort of financial proliferation is closely related to the internationalisation of industrial production:

While industrial firms reached their national limits and intensified their pursuit of opening to cross-border operations, the predominant business and economic theories of the era began to claim that regulations and restrictions were barriers to development, employment, profitability and survival. Hence, the success of industrial and productive firms created a powerful push to get rid of the regulatory restrictions to spread to new markets, areas and lines of business. Restrictions on commercial banks and financial intermediaries allowed firms to outgrow their financiers, which contributed to the emergence of an environment in which large NFCs widely supported deregulation to allow financial firms to properly service their growing needs. (*Ibid.*, p.33)

Moreover, David McNally evaluates the role of the financial sector in world capitalism by emphasising crises and the difficulty of restoring profitability, especially after East Asian Crisis in 1996. McNally makes an important distinction between two periods of financialisation. From 1980 to 1997, US profit rates were recovering at a similar rate to the New York Stock Exchange index. After this period, profit rates began to decrease while the NYSE index continued to increase, an imbalance which is often seen as a signal for impending bubble crises (McNally, 2009).

I find McNally's distinction significant for my discussion since this paper tries to focus on financial discourse as an ideological tool to

manufacture consent. Financial discourse contains terminology, arguments and rationalisations of the financial sector that are dictated to the public. It also uses non-financial economic arguments to justify financial outcomes that have an exploitative character for the public, a point I will discuss later. According to McNally, in the first period (1980-96), the increasing exploitation of labour and capital inflow to cheap labour regions restored profitability and were more central for the class conflict between labour and capital. As the financial sector becomes a way of postponing the overaccumulation crisis and creating bubble economies, inevitably it includes harsh conflicts at its heart. This ensures that financial discourse must reproduce and massify itself to sustain the conflicts stemming from its own nature. That's why I want to use the term "financialisation" particularly in thinking of its role in the era of bubble economies and the overaccumulation crisis.

Hegemony and Two Aspects of Financial Discourse in Ideological Hegemony

In *The German Ideology* Marx states that "the ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships" (Marx, 1968). This statement is consistent with the claim that financial discourse is becoming a widespread ideology fueled by the material relationships of capitalism in the era of bubble economies and financial debt crises. However, it will be useful briefly to discuss Marx's successors concerning the concept of "hegemony". Following Lenin's use of this concept to imply proletarian hegemony over other classes in order to consolidate a revolutionary front that includes the peasantry, there is Gramsci's discussion of "hegemony" to explain the ideological superiority of the capitalist class, particularly in western societies (Lenin, 1962; Anderson, 2007). I will also touch upon Althusser's theory of ideology in the context of the paper. The purpose of these references is to illuminate what this paper intends to argue about the role of hegemony in capitalism. specifically in the era of financial crises.

First of all, this paper does not agree with Gramsci's idea claiming that the state is just an exterior surface of the bourgeois rulership, nor does it agree with the claim that there is a strong civil society behind the state which is decisive for the permanency of capitalism (Gramsci, 1971). On the contrary, capitalist rulership is based on the state and the use of force in the last instance (Anderson, 2007, p. 70). It is possible to observe this feature of the ruling class in times of crisis. There are a number of examples, ranging from the rise of fascism after the Great Depression to the violent suppression of the Occupy Wall Street movement in recent times. Similarly, the mass riots

in Greece, attacked by police forces and “neo-fascist vigilante”, are clear examples of the decisive role of the use of force to sustain the status quo (Panayotakis, 2009).

Another point is that when this paper mentions ideological means working to maintain hegemony, ideological means are not identical to the concept of ideological state apparatus as Althusser defines it. My disagreement with Althusser stems from his thesis arguing that there is no distinction between state and civil society (Althusser, 1989, p. 29). He uses “state” in an inclusive way that ignores any separation between public and civil spheres. Althusser’s conclusion causes an ambiguity for theoretical and political agents attempting to differentiate fascistic – totalitarian and liberal democratic modes of government in capitalist societies (Anderson, 2007, p. 45-60). However, having that sort of differentiation is significant, especially in these days of financial crises in which mainstream liberal governments are inadequate to the task of overcoming structural conflicts. Although fascistic modes of government may not be a feature of developed capitalist societies, oppressive policies in peripheral and semi-peripheral countries are in great harmony with neoliberal exploitation that shifts the costs of the overaccumulation crisis of capitalism to those regions in order to restore profitability.

There are two aspects of financial discourse that relate to suffering nations and the response of world capitalism to the global crisis. In general, the function of these two aspects is to support the ideas of the ruling class, who claim that capitalism is the only way to create wealth and development. There is also another function of financial discourse which is more specific and concrete. It is to “manufacture consent for punishment”. Manufacturing consent for punishment is a hegemonic operation of world capitalism which, through politics, mass media and technocracy, produces arguments to justify austerity policies in countries suffering from crises. The costs of structural crisis caused by the overaccumulation problem are being shifted to suffering nations and especially their working classes. To sustain this process with the least resistance, there is a need to create as much consent as possible. As will be discussed in detail below, elected governments of countries like Greece are held responsible for debt crises regardless of negative deregulations stemming from global capital’s interests, such as the international division of labour, trade liberalisation, and increasing exploitation of labour linked to neoliberalism. In reality, due to austerity policies, the one who pays the cost is not the government but the public. Certainly, manufacturing consent for punishment is not something new to have emerged in the latest crisis. It is present throughout all crisis periods of world capitalism and has merely become more common in the past few years.

The first aspect of financial discourse is “economic racism”, which identifies a structural problem with being a “failed nation”. According to this, countries suffering from debt crises are responsible for their current situation since they have unproductive economies, mismanage their fiscal and financial policies, and consume more than they produce.

New (Economic) Racism

First of all, it is important to remember that there have always been attempts to claim a scientific basis for racism. In the nineteenth century, scientific racist theories originating from Malthusian political economy and Herbert Spencer’s Social Darwinism became widespread in Europe (Chase, 1977). Spencer’s argument, claiming that “aiding children of poor people is a serious crime against society since it is to aid the offspring of the unworthy and causes disadvantage for the offspring of the worthy through burdening their parent by increasing tax rates,” (Chase, 1977, p. 106) has much in common with today’s European debt crises and the imaginary relationship between South and North economies created by the ideological means of global capital. Malthusian political economy uses similar “scientific” arguments to justify inequality when it claims that “man’s ability to produce babies will always exceed his capacity to grow enough food to feed them” (Chase, 1977, p. 75).

When initial religious and scientific attempts to justify racism collapsed, new ways of producing racist rationalisations emerged. James Blaut explains the rise of Eurocentric geographical theories in this context:

The answer lies in the long-standing and happy marriage between environmentalism and Eurocentrism. It was a marriage, so to speak, made in heaven... Later, overtly religious explanations became unpopular, and Europe’s (or the West’s) superiority was attributed mainly to race and environment, held jointly to have created a uniquely progressive culture. Now racism has been rejected, and Eurocentric history stands on just the two legs: environment and culture. (Blaut, 1999, p. 391)

Blaut uses racism as a sub-category of Eurocentric history which also contains religious and environmentalist justifications. However, this paper accepts racism not as a sub-category but as an inclusive concept, since religious, economic, and geographical justifications all work to conclude that some parts of societies or nations are superior by ignoring real conditions of

inequality.

There is a possible criticism against this kind of understanding of racism that raises the question: Do all justifications of inequality necessarily give rise to racism? For instance, if I think of the Rawlsian limited legitimisation for inequality, it is obvious that this kind of justification does not give rise to racism directly. Here are John Rawls' conditions for legitimate inequality:

First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others. Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all. (Rawls, 1999, p. 53)

Even if I agree with Gerald Cohen's critique of Rawls, where he suggests that "social inequalities will appear beneficial to or neutral toward the interest of those at the bottom only when we take as given unequal structures and/or inequality-endorsing attitudes that no one who affirms the difference principle should unprotestingly accept", Rawls is not a racist philosopher who develops theories like Malthus and Spencer (Cohen, 1991, p. 270).

The problem lies in the nature of the relationship between racist/liberal discourses and capitalism. Although all liberal justifications of inequality are not directly the same as racism, the former establishes the ground on which the latter develops itself by using the rationalisation of liberalism and the market economy. In particular, liberal justifications based on economic arguments metamorphosise into racist discourse in times of crisis by identifying negative outcomes of the crisis with the features of a social group or nation and holding it responsible. This is the essence of manufacturing consent for punishment: there is a need for racist discourse to originate from a non-racist discourse so that it is easier to create the illusion that the nation deserves punishment (austerity policies).

Alenka Zupančič presents another account of racism which is also related to capitalism and class structure:

The problem is, rather, that success is becoming almost a biological notion, and thus the foundation of a genuine racism of successfulness. The poorest and the most miserable are no longer perceived as a socioeconomic class, but almost as a race of their own, as a special form of life. We are indeed witnessing a spectacular rise of racism or, more precisely, of 'racisation'. ...

To take a simple example: if a 'successful artist' is invited as a guest on a TV show, the focus is practically never on her work, but instead on the way she lives, on her everyday habits, on what she enjoys, and so on. This is not simply a voyeuristic curiosity; it is a procedure that systematically presents us with two elements: 'success' on the one side, and the life that corresponds to this success on the other—implying, of course, a strong and immediate equivalence between the two. They are one of the crucial cultural catalysts through which all kinds of socioeconomic and ideological differences are being gradually transformed into 'human differences'. (Zupančič, 2008, p. 5-6)

Similar to the argument of this paper, Zupančič claims that certain aspects related to inequality are transformed into biological "facts". However, Zupančič's argument includes capitalist society and its way of shaping judgements, even those concerning daily life. Hence, her account is more general. I want to focus instead on the international political economic context and the debt crisis by taking Greece as an example.

During the debt crisis Greece is currently suffering from, it can be observed that neoliberal economic arguments are being used continuously to transfer responsibility from global capitalism to the suffering masses by way of austerity policies. Those arguments are being propagated through mass media, politics and technocracy. Much of the news output from mainstream media institutions has propagated the idea that even though Greek workers work hard, they are unproductive in comparison to northern economies, and "Greece lived beyond its means even before it joined the euro". Lower labour participation rates and uncompetitive industries are also used to justify the neoliberal explanation of the debt crisis and support austerity policies which are "deserved" by the people of Greece (Caruso-Cabrera, 2011; McDonald, 2012).

Politics and technocracy also act in accordance with mass media. Angela Merkel's solution is a clear example of the situation: "Strong states must teach weaker ones how to make balanced budgets and increase competitiveness" (Bohle, 2010, p. 6). Similarly, the austerity package presented by the IMF is being normalised by given structures that caused many of the existing problems for underdeveloped economies: "Wage and public spending cuts since there is no chance for depreciation of currency". Because of the Eurozone and the impossibility of devaluation, Greece is forced into a kind of internal devaluation (Bohle, 2010, p. 5; Arghyrou & Tsoukalas, 2010, p. 6). In this context, what makes currency devaluation impossible is nothing but pure ideology.

When we think of the arguments of neoliberalism concerning debt crises, it can easily be said that all of the outcomes that those arguments mention stem from the reorganisation of world capitalism dictated by global capital after the 1980s. The average growth rate of the Greek economy fell from 4.7% in the 1970s to 1.5% in the 1980s, a period when protectionist policies started to become extinct. Similarly, the export-over-import ratio of the Greek economy fell from 55% in 1980 to around 30% in 2008 (Georgakopoulos, Paraskevopoulos & Smithin, 1994). Costas Panayotakis summarises the outcomes of economic integration for Greek industry:

As the recent European crisis has made clear, most of the benefits of European economic integration have gone to the economically stronger countries of the European North, such as Germany, which gained greater access to the markets of the South. Meanwhile, the productive capacity of weaker countries, like Greece, was wiped out. (Panayotakis, 2013)

This process leads inevitably to the destruction of competitiveness for any non-developed industry, just as it does in Greece. Economic integration between unequal partners has also affected the international division of labour and labour productivity in Greece. Sectoral shifts to the businesses that are not dominated by developed industrial countries would normally have low productivity (such as natural and agricultural sectors).

Slavoj Žižek emphasises a need to create an image of emergency in order to reduce resistance to austerity policies: "One thing is clear: after decades of the welfare state, when cutbacks were relatively limited and came with the promise that things would soon return to normal, we are now entering a period in which a kind of economic state of emergency is becoming permanent: turning into a constant, a way of life" (Žižek, 2010, p. 86). Another thing is also clear: racist discourse spread by the leaders of global capitalism is a convenient way to manufacture a delusion (for others and themselves) in which a permanent state of emergency is normal because outcomes are the results of national features. Of course, it takes time to fix essential features. According to the hegemonic language of capitalism, that is the way Greek people and others live. This language ignores all of the structural conditions mainly reorganised by global capital that lead to unproductivity and a lack of competitiveness.

In all kinds of racism, there is an instance of false identification. Claiming that black people are potential criminals by using statistics showing that there are more black criminals in jail than white criminals is pure racism. Needless to say, statistics are true. However, because of

discrimination and all policies that encourage inequality, statistics do not have the faculty to clarify under what conditions a person commits a crime and how those conditions differ among black and white people. The very same relationship between suffering nations and economic arguments is valid. Labeling a nation by using economic statistics regardless of the conditions that lead to current outcomes is another instance of false identification. This identification functions to assert the inferiority of a group with regard to any issue, and to manufacture consent for punishment due to current bad outcomes.

Being Exposed to the Ideology of Technocracy

The second aspect of financial discourse is the massification of technocratic terminology and arguments related to the financial sector. Technocracy represents expertise in the economy and has a scientific appearance, just like the new (economic) racism. In this way, the masses are being exposed to the ideology of technocracy. The concept of "ideology" is used in a partial meaning which refers to the dominant ideology of the ruling class in general. It is one of the most visible features of the totality in the period of late capitalism and financial crisis. Technocratic arguments are mainly based upon the manufactured belief that the interests of the stock exchange, banks and other financial components of capitalism are in common with the public interest. Some features of the financial sector and its responsibility in crises are discussed above in the first part of this paper. Further political economic evaluations are not included, for I am trying to emphasise what is new to, and characteristic of, finance in maintaining ideological hegemony in order to manufacture consent.

It is obvious that the non-financial economic arguments of the dominant ideology also manufacture similar delusions, triggering the idea that capitalist development shares the common interests of all. For instance, the welfare state is not related to financialisation but creates a very similar belief that ultimately vindicates capitalism. What makes financial discourse and the ideology of technocracy special is the fact that the fetish character they display is more intense than non-financial ideology.

First, it is necessary to remember Marx's account of fetishism:

The equality of all sorts of human labour is expressed objectively by their products all being equally values; the measure of the expenditure of labour power by the duration of that expenditure, takes the form of the quantity of value of the products of labour; and finally the mutual relations of the

producers, within which the social character of their labour affirms itself, take the form of a social relation between the products... A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour... There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things... This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities... (Marx, 1999)

According to Marx, the fetish character of commodities stems from confusing the properties of exchange-value with the relationship between producers occurring through the exchange of commodities. If it is argued that the "social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour", then this understanding of commodities is another ideological fabrication caused by the political economic base. Given relations of production invent an impediment against grasping the true nature of commodity production and the role of labour in creating value. I want to use the notion of fetishism in a different context. This paper argues that technocratic ideology emerges not only from the compulsory outcomes of commodity production like other ideological means, but also from the derivatives of commodity production which do not consist directly of relations between commodities. Bubble economies and financial rescue operations are justified in an unrelated manner to generalised commodity production through mass media and politics. Placing great emphasis on the fate of the stock exchange and private financial institutions becomes a myth handed down by the gods. Although the outcomes of austerity policies are real for the masses, the stock exchange index is an isolated and sacred theme for the society whose fate will be determined by this sacred thing. The purpose of using the notion of fetishism in this context is to grasp theoretical parallels in the relationship between, on the one hand, the social character of labour and the "objective" character stamped upon the commodity and, on the other hand, the relationship between the social character of impoverishment due to a financial casino manipulated by global capital and the "objective" character of the society in which the rescue of the financial sector is indispensable for common interests.

There is an important question about whether any argument representing ruling class interests has a fetish character since it has some sort of delusion due to the intermingling of appearance and reality. I do not conclude that all means, institutions and arguments to sustain ideological hegemony have a fetish character. Marx places fetishism at the heart of commodity production, but this is not pure ideology creating an illusion. The fetish character is a reflection in the ideological realm caused by social-economic practice which directly depends on the fundamentals of the capitalist mode of production. That is why it is difficult to say that ideological means such as church or school, which are semi-independent from the fundamentals of the capitalist mode of production, have a fetish character. However, the distinction between the two is not always clear. For example, art may be thought of as having an indirect relationship to the fundamentals of the capitalist mode of production. However, Theodor Adorno, in developing his understanding of the fetish character in art, disagrees:

Everything is looked at from only one aspect: that it can be used for something else, however vague the notion of this use may be. No object has an inherent value; it is valuable only to the extent that it can be exchanged. The use value of art, its mode of being, is treated as a fetish; and the fetish (the work's social rating misinterpreted as its artistic status) becomes its use value, the only quality which is enjoyed (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2000, p. 210-211).

This analysis is an important reminder. What determines the fetish character is not being in a specific ontological set (economy, art, politics) but being in relation to the commodification of components of things. The reason that I argue that financial discourse has a fetish character is the same as in relation to the capitalist mode of production. The financial sector became the dominant carrier of contradictions stemming from the capitalist mode of production because it functions in postponing the crisis caused by overaccumulation and the rearranging of relations of distribution. Even if the exploitation of labour still takes place in non-financial sectors, contradictions are redirected to the final stage due to the competitive and devastating nature of capital. The fetish character of financial discourse arises from its inseparable relation to social practice; for both exploiter and exploited are liable to perceive the sector isolated from this social practice. When a small investor goes bankrupt in the stock exchange rate, the same perception creates an illusion of a mysterious nature. Even he can think that the stock exchange index is affected by the latest news in politics and

economy, and outcomes can be attributed to behavioural issues between optimism and pessimism already inclusive of the spirit of the financial casino. If the social character of men's derivative exploitation appears to them as an objective character of an isolated economic "fact", I call this fetishism.

The Unity of the Two Aspects In the Concept of Financial Discourse

New (economic) racism and the ideology of technocracy are components of financial discourse maintaining the ideological hegemony of the capitalist class. It is crucial to explain why "financial discourse" is chosen to define the unity of the components. There are several reasons clarifying why "economic discourse", which is more general, is not chosen. In sum, financial discourse is a set of false identifications and constitutes a new ideological theme in response to the latest needs of global capitalism.

First of all, financialisation is the highest stage that capitalism reaches in response to the overaccumulation crisis. Financial capitalism includes all ideological and economic means from previous forms of capitalism and also has specific means of its own. The ideology of technocracy is an example of specific means in the era of financialisation. There were similar delusions about the financial sector and public interests before the era of financialisation. However, the size of the delusion and the level of isolation from reality are so intense that this quantitative aggregation creates a qualitative jump. Moreover, beyond the quantitative aggregation, the role of the financial sector in postponing crisis and constituting bubble economies means that global capital is obliged to create an ideological theme that justifies autonomous rationalisations of the financial sector.

On the other hand, new (economic) racism seems to be a non-financial discourse since its justifications mainly depend on productivity, consumption and competitiveness. We must be reminded that financial discourse includes all discourses from previous forms of capitalism. In this context, the financial is not antithetical to the non-financial but rather is a transcendental concept that contains the non-financial economy. Furthermore, the financial feature of new racism consists of debt crises, dependency on credit and speculative capital creating an imaginary welfare and providing a good amount of profit for global capital thanks to high interest rates. Economic racism is not something new. However, it has a new context in the era of debt crises and the financial dependencies of suffering nations.

Financial discourse provides capitalism with a new ideological theme to transfer responsibility from global capitalism to suffering nations and

classes. It is the paradigm of dominant tendencies representing the current relations of production that includes political economic arguments presenting themselves as science, as in the case of new racism, and a fetish character stemming from the nature of economic life under given conditions. The dominant attitude towards global crises and all the efforts to rescue financial institutions while the masses are suffering from austerity policies are consistent with this paradigm. When the ideology of technocracy blesses the interests of the financial sector, nations are labeled as lazy and austerity policies become the only way. The final stage of world capitalism increases the intensity of its contradictions by creating further racism and fetishism, and produces greater alienation. However, the new ideological theme has the potential to be self-destructive. It is, after all, easier to refute hidden economic racism and the fetish character of financial discourse in times of crisis.

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Philosophy and Today's Debt Crisis: Minsky and Hegel on Good and Bad Debt

by David C. Merrill

1. Philosophy and the Real Economy

Debt is at the centre of the world's economic problems. There seems too much of it and its excess seems to lie behind both the Great Financial Crisis of 2008 and current Great Recession. Furthermore, there is both private and public (or sovereign) debt. The evaluation of all of this is at the centre of much public debate. Can philosophy make a contribution to the discussion? This is the question that this paper will tackle. However, it is unlikely that debt is even a concept to be found in philosophy. Accordingly, to discuss debt as a philosophical topic may require situating debt in a relation to something that is philosophized. This is in fact the course this paper follows. As will become clear, to grapple with this external relation of debt to philosophy is a many-staged process. In fact, the preliminary stages in such an enquiry are so substantial that to get to any kind of deliberation about debt philosophically, for a brief paper such as this, entails making major assumptions regarding the prefatory theory and its validity. The method for tackling this particular problem is as follows: for philosophy to address a phenomenon that exists only in real life and not in philosophy, requires having both a valid philosophy and a valid science of the phenomenon in question at hand already and each independently established. Since the topic in question, debt, falls within economics, this will mean that what is required is, first, an ethics of the economy whose validity has been established on the basis of philosophical criteria and, second, a social science, that is an economics, that also has a validity established independently from within the discipline of economics.

The ethical philosophy pertaining to the economy will be a philosophy of economic justice and what the content of economic justice figured philosophically is to be can only be established by philosophy itself. The philosophy cannot be relative to given economic circumstances but must satisfy the standards of universality and necessity which and only which constitute philosophical truth. Yet, even with a true philosophy of the economy in hand, said philosophy does not spontaneously relate itself to real economies or a specific topic with a real economy, such as debt.

Consequently, it is necessary to have already at hand a valid descriptive account of an economy. How is one to know whether one's view of economic life is correct if one's view is not informed by the science of economics (and the best science at that)?

With these two disciplines established it is then possible to make a judgement – and it is only a judgement – as to whether phenomena from economic life have the appearance of justice. One might ask, do the scientific description and the philosophical prescription share a similar logic. Whether they do, is a judgement that will have to acknowledge its limitations for it will lack the validity of a science or the conceptual objectivity of philosophy. This paper not only proceeds on this basis but also proposes the philosophy and economics that meets the requisite standards. Of course, setting out this project in this way will be highly controversial especially with regard to the philosophy. However, the reader's indulgence is requested here. Do not dismiss the paper because of its truth claims regarding the philosophy. Rather, wait until the philosophy in its treatment of the economy becomes more concrete. Then it is hoped that the philosophy will have a ready plausibility. Furthermore, even if the reader accepts some version of post-modernism and so forsakes the possibility of objective truths, preferring instead, for example, the ways of pragmatism, what ought to be done about the economy is a question that cannot be dodged. It is a question that will require theorizing on some basis and so what comes here proposes itself as a worthwhile candidate for that exercise. Furthermore, from whatever philosophical perspective one comes from, even for those who tend to frame all normative questions as ones of morality, it is important to realise that the philosophical question is an ethical one. For the answer that is sought is what the design of the economy ought to be. None of its institutional components can be assumed as a given for the normative philosophizing.. It is hoped that the more concrete discussion of ethical economic norms proffered here might engage those who are inclined to turn away upon encountering the paper's underlying philosophical ambitions. The reader's forbearance is counted upon.

On the other hand, it is less controversial to assert that one's view of real economies should be valid. Yet, the reason for choosing one school of economics over another are always highly contested. This is particularly so when the economics chosen is heterodox, which happens to be case for this paper. However, this paper will not provide the reasons for the selection of the chosen school of economics as it does not for the philosophy it follows. The point to be made is that it ought to be incumbent on social scientists as well as philosophers of the economy, especially philosophers of economic policy, to make explicit their choice of the school of economics that is used

in their work. At least this much is accomplished in this paper.

So now to a quick introduction to the economics and philosophy that the paper asserts are the prerequisites for making ethical judgements about real economic phenomena. Having described these two, the paper will then bring the philosophy alongside the economics for the sake of making a judgement about the justice or otherwise of economic phenomenon. Finally, the paper will turn to the specific problem of debt. The paper will set out briefly what role debt plays in both just and unjust economies and so be in the position to make a judgement regarding which debt is legitimate ethically and which is not.

2. Minskian Economics

The economics chosen by the paper has the work of the late American economist, Hyman Minsky, at its centre. Minsky begins with a commitment to Keynesian theory. (See his *John Maynard Keynes* (2008).) Minsky then adds to Keynes what he considers the key missing element, his famous “financial instability hypothesis”. (See his *Stabilizing an Unstable Economy* (2008).) To this foundation are added later contributions from the field of economics. These include the insights of Mosler (2010), and the economists more generally associated with Modern Money Theory (see Wray 2000 and 2013), into the monetary and fiscal operations of central banks and national treasuries and Godley’s (1996) work on sectoral balances. Another important contribution to this strand of economics is the work on economic innovation by the University of Sussex’s own Professor Mariana Mazzucato (2013).

The economists working today who bring all these strands together best include, at the least, Kregel (1975), Wray (2009, 2013) and Tcherneva (2013), who are all associated with the Levy Institute of Economics at Bard College in the United States. For the moment, there appear to be no leading non-American figures in this group. This school is distinguished for both its prediction and diagnosis of the Great Financial Crisis of 2008 and the ensuing Great Recession. (See Tymoigne and Wray 2014.) However, it is not the analysis of contemporary economies that is the economics that this paper is interested in. Rather, it is the prescriptive side of Minskian economics that will receive the main attention. It is this strand of the economics that will be brought alongside the philosophy and so provide the basis to set out ultimately an ethics of debt.

A truncated version of the Minskian idea of the good economy follows. The end of the good economy is a regulated or mixed capitalist economy that produces a rough social equality with a high priority given to full employment. Minsky itemizes its attributes in the following way: “a low investment, high consumption, full-employment economy with a favourable

disposition towards organizations that are small, thus minimizing bureaucracy" (Minsky 2008: 329; see also Minsky 2013). Strikingly, Tymoigne and Wray (2013) claim that the path to this good economy is not a revolutionary one. The essential failure that rests behind current economic injustice does not lie primarily in markets. In other words, the economy does not require some major overall transformation for the sake of, for example, new standards of competitiveness or innovation. Rather, they argue that the remedy comes in a new bolder central government fiscal policy and the shrinking and simplification of the financial sector. With the introduction of these two measures alone much of the injustices of contemporary economies could be overcome. However, it is the first of these two policy areas, which is the paper's chief concern.

Regarding the former, the favoured policy is a public Job Guarantee (JG) that would offer all those willing to work meaningful employment at a fixed, uniform and living, though minimal, wage. Real programmes closest in design to this JG policy, most likely to be known to the general public, are the New Deal employment programmes from America's 1930s, often best known by their initials, WPA (Works Progress Administration), CCC (Civilian Conservation Core) and NYA (National Youth Administration). A major difference, though, between the historical programmes and the JG is that with the latter the offer of employment is permanent and is not to be introduced only as a response to depressions. In fact, its permanent existence would prove to be a major source of macroeconomic stabilization, preempting not merely remedying economic downturns. With this sketch of what constitutes the good economy now set out, it is now time to turn to the philosophy of the just economy. Only with that established will it be possible to rule on the justice or otherwise of the Minskian ideal and thereby establish an ethical view of debt

3. Winfield's Reconstruction of Hegel's Philosophy of Civil Society

It may strike the reader as hubris for one paper not only claim to identify the most valid economics but then move quickly on to assert the existence of something much larger, true philosophy, but that is what the paper does and it beseeches the reader's indulgence in doing so. As mentioned above, the recommendation to the reader, troubled with this aspect of the paper, is not to tarry over these grandiose systematic claims but move quickly on to the more concrete argumentation where the plausibility of the overall thesis will not seem to depend so on ultimate truth claims, claims about universality and objectivity and so on.

The chosen philosophy is Winfield's reconstruction in his *The Just Economy* (1988) of Hegel's social philosophy that Hegel sets out in his

Elements of the Philosophy of Right (1991). The Winfield/Hegel philosophy of the economy is situated in a larger comprehensive philosophy, the totality of which is required to prove that the philosophy of the economy is true, that is, universal and necessary. Now it may be said that it is unfair to claim that the ultimate truth of the philosophy of the economy depends upon mastering the whole system. There is some validity in this position. Nevertheless, there is no getting around the character of philosophical thought, which requires the all-encompassing system. As has been said above, assuming the reader will not rush off and master the whole system or has not already done so, the paper counts on there being a plausibility to the section on economic philosophy when encountered in isolation that will carry the reader along without the preliminary study required to master the whole system. It is the opinion of the author that the Winfield/Hegel philosophy of the economy, which it is asserted is the philosophy of the just economy, while strikingly foreign in the manner of its origination is much less so in its most concrete formulations. It could not be otherwise given that the whole paper's project is to show that the philosophy of the just economy supports the more than familiar if still heterodox Minskian notion of the good economy. Therefore, this is a 'Hegel without metaphysics' but only in the sense that it is possible to make sense of the economics without a knowledge the whole system, but not in the sense of rejecting the very idea of a total philosophical system that solves, so to speak, all the classic problems of philosophy.¹

The philosophy of the just economy begins with the ethics of the market. The market in this philosophy is a domain of right. The philosophy sets out a prescriptive account of the market; it states what the market ought to be. The individual in such a market will be able to exercise certain freedoms because they will pre-exist in that market as rights. It is possible to speak of the ethic of the market combining two categories of right. These are the right to a freely determined welfare specific to the market and the right to engage in commodity relations that are themselves relations of freedom. Another way of making this point is to say that the ethical market makes real two things. One is the ability to voluntarily choose one's own economic interests and then see them realized as one's welfare through free market interactions. The second is the ability to participate voluntarily within commodity relations, which are themselves relations of freedom, for the sake of one's welfare. These rights have also their concomitant duties. There is an obligation to engage in commodity relations to achieve one's welfare. There is also an obligation to attend to the welfare needs of others when choosing one's path in the market. The unity of the two rights at the centre of the ethical market means that having one without the other is not sufficient. Markets

where only the freedoms of commodity relations but not welfare are guaranteed are not just and nor is the guarantee of welfare at the expense of the freedoms of commodity relations.

Sometimes students of Hegel's ethics miss in his philosophy the conception of the ethical market (see Herzog 2013). It is true, in his *Philosophy of Right*, as soon as Hegel begins to specify the character of the just market he begins talking about its instability and dissolution. A conceptual specification of the market in a manner consistent with Hegel had to wait for its first thorough if not complete treatment in the work of the mature Marx, for example, in his *Capital*. However, Marx's account of the market and then capital is conflicted; he is divided whether his project is essentially conceptual or descriptive. It took Winfield to bring about the reconciliation of Marx and Hegel. In Winfield (1988), one finds the scheme of commodity relations Marx originated reintegrated into the Hegelian conceptual ethics of the economy.

However, as has been said the Hegelian philosophy of the market is prescriptive. It does not assume the necessary reality of the market. There is no imputed mechanistic or organic nature to the market that entails, for example, spontaneous endogenous tendencies toward equilibrium. Unlike the thinking of a figure such as Adam Smith or mainstream orthodox neo-classical economics, in the Winfield/Hegel ethical concept, there is no claim that the market if allowed to operate under its own rules will guarantee its own reality. The market is a domain of freedom, with individuals freely participating in commodity relations, freely choosing their own interests and seeking to realize them through the market's commodity relations. While this freedom does not necessarily lead like Locke's state of nature or Plato's fevered or luxury city to a state of war, there is no hidden hand that ensures that all markets clear. In the Winfield/Hegel idea of the market, there is an idea of justice specific to the market, but the market – because it is composed of free individuals – is unable to bring about the justice that is intrinsic to it. This is so because the individuals in the ethical market must only conform to the rights and duties of free commodity relations and not to the stylized conventions of neoclassical microeconomics necessary for the mechanistic determinism that ensures general equilibrium. (See Lee and Keen 2004.) In fact, the imposition of the conditions necessary for equilibrium to which neoclassical economics adheres would violate the market freedoms of participants in the market. The opposition of neoclassical economics to the idea of the market as the domain of the free individual is made most clear by the complete absence of free agency in the workings of the neoclassical production and preference functions that constitutes the overarching supply and demand curves that ensure the self-correcting tendencies toward

equilibrium. One could say that the problem with neoclassical economics is not with its version of *Homo economicus*, but in effect her or his absence from the neoclassical model of the market.

However, while it is highly likely that market disequilibrium will be the norm for the market conceived by the Winfield/Hegel philosophy (as in reality), it remains the case that this philosophy of the just economy has argued that there are rights specific to the market. So, similarly to neoclassical economics, this philosophy of the just economy is a champion of markets. The difference between the philosophy of the just economy and neoclassical economy is that the philosophy looks outside the market, to find the modalities to ensure the existence of market rights for all. The philosophy does not ask of markets what they cannot deliver or pretend that markets on their own do in fact deliver what in reality they do not

The modalities proposed that fall outside the market of individuals that will bring into existence the ethical market will in effect provide the embeddedness that, Polanyi (2001) famously stated, markets always require. Unlike Polanyi, the philosophy here sets out what the context of embeddedness ought to be. These are first, the social interest group, what Hegel calls the 'corporation', whose most important instantiation in the real world is the economic phenomenon known as corporatism. This type of group is made up of individuals who share a common interest and see in the group the means to advance more efficiently their interests within the market. Such a group is voluntary and must respect the rights and duties of commodity relations and so remains at one with the freedom of the market. Yet, because it is based on the interests of its members and remains subject to the contingencies of the market like any other market actor, it is unable to ensure the rights of the market. The economic agency that can guarantee economic right and so is to be set alongside the individual and social interest group is the economic welfare administration. This is Hegel's 'police', and it might also be called the welfare state. This public entity operates upon the market but is itself not market based. It has as its end the realization of economic justice that first appears as a justice specific to the market. However, with the introduction of the social interest group and of the economic welfare administration, which operate alongside each other and the individual in the market, the ethical philosophy no longer pertains just to the market but now is the ethics of the economy.

There is a bit of a paradox in that the further two economic agencies are not individuals yet their reason for existence is a set of rights that are first conceived in terms of individuals relating to other individuals. That will mean, especially for the public entity, that interventions in the economy will seek in the first instance to be as minimal as possible, always seeking to get

the individual back in the dominant role. Of course, things may go so far wrong that the public authority may have to revolutionise the terms of economic life to reinstate economic justice for every individual. Furthermore, and this may bring reassurance to those who find themselves at odds with conventional views of *Homo economicus*, market participants' experience with social interest groups and the public administration of welfare may lead them to see their welfare and market rights better served by a larger contribution to the economy by social interest groups and economic welfare administration. The balance in this regard is not something the philosopher can predetermine but is for a free people to determine for themselves. This completes the account of the ethics of the just economy. The question now is whether sufficient similarities can be found between the philosophy and the Minskian policy for the good economy so that a judgement can be made that the Minskian policy is just. If there is a lack of similarities then the conclusion will have to be that the Minskian model is unjust.

4. The Ethical Evaluation of a Real Economic Policy

For simplicity's sake, it is best to narrow the focus to the proposals for the JG. As mentioned above, the JG has as its goal the option of employment at a living wage for all those who want it. The means are central government expenditure to employ all those who seek employment. The central government can offer employment directly or work through intermediaries. Either way, both will have to ensure that there are meaningful work opportunities for those seeking employment in this way. With the JG, welfare injustices are addressed through the income employment has brought. Yet, the central government is not remedying welfare injustice in a way that does not uphold the second pillar of market right, the rights regarding commodity relations. This would be the case if the government offered a Basic Income Grant instead of the JG and thereby separated income from employment. By contrast, the JG does not attempt to separate income from employment, as Basic Income does, but rather employment from profitability. Nor is the government, for example, focussing only on the enforcement of the property laws required by the market's commodity relations. Such an approach to policy might be described as libertarian. Such a policy would violate rights to do both with welfare and with the participation in commodity relations. The libertarian approach takes no responsibility for the prior existence of commodity relations that are available for individuals to participate in nor, of course, success with regard to welfare.

As well, the JG policy does not see the public authority's duties regarding the economy to be of the kind that has characterised the dominant

trend in fiscal activism in the United States and the United Kingdom since World War Two. This policy, which has been well described by Tcherneva (2013) might be called business or even neo-liberal Keynesian and has two main strands: 'conventional aggregate demand management' or 'pump priming' and New Consensus fiscal policy. With these approaches, fiscal activism has as its goal putting a floor under Gross Domestic Product, profits and asset prices and in this regard has been largely successful. However, this policy has failed miserably with respect to unemployment, poverty and income inequality. The JG differs from these approaches but not on the grounds of fiscal activism. All of these alternatives are examples of fiscal activism. It is wrong therefore to suggest that either the philosophy of the just economy or the Minskian economics is proposing the option of governmental intervention over against the alternative of free markets. The JG's difference is that its fiscal activism better meets philosophy's standards regarding the universality of the rights to do with market welfare and the market's commodity relations. It is true that the JG only offers an employment guarantee at incomes at a low if liveable level and this would seem to violate the universality of the philosophy of economic justice. Whether it does would require a more extensive consideration of the subject. It is possible for now to conclude though that the JG at least makes a start in the right direction.

Given that the judgement has been made that the Minskian policy is in line with the philosophical concept of economic justice the issue of debt at last can be raised. Debt that accommodates or supports the Minskian economic policy will be deemed in accordance with justice. Debt that does not can be viewed as unjust.

5. Debt and Philosophy: Just and Unjust Debt

Debt can be divided between public and private. Public debt can itself be divided between debt held by governments that are currency issuers and those that are currency users. The former include countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom that issue their own currencies and so are said to have sovereign currencies. The latter include subnational governments such as the states of the United States or national governments that are members of a currency union, such as the Eurozone.

For a quick explanation of the significance of a sovereign currency, one can begin by venturing a brief analysis regarding the nature of money. Following the theorising of Wray (1998, 2012), one starts by stating that all money is an IOU. In other words, money is created through credit relations. In these simple, abstract terms, anyone can issue money because anyone can

issue an IOU. However, the key question is what types of IOUs will be accepted by others. There are private parties that are able to issue private IOUs that will be accepted by others. A typical private IOU that is commonly accepted by others is the kind issued by banks. For example, an individual account at a bank is an IOU issued by a bank. A country with a sovereign currency when it issues its currency is in effect issuing IOUs and this too will be accepted, because the government accepts them back in payment against whatever monetary charges the government might place against individuals. In fact, the government's sovereign currency is on the top of the pyramid of credit worthy IOUs. They are the ones everyone is happiest to have. One way of explaining the difference between private IOUs and a sovereign government's IOUs is to point out that, on the one hand, the private entity pays off its IOU not with more of its own IOUs but with a third party's IOUs, usually the national currency. On the other hand, the central government is able to pay off its IOUs simply by issuing more IOUs, that is: its own currency. The reason individuals will accept the central government's IOUs is due most importantly to the government's power to tax and so impose a liability on members of society that can be enforced with more coercive force than any other kind of liability. Acceptance of the currency also depends upon the successful management of the economy by the government so that the currency does not vary greatly in value and so that there are commodities priced in the domestic currency individuals want to buy (see Wray 1998, 2012).

This is a lengthy way of saying that a Government with a sovereign currency faces no budget constraint, deficits and debts are never unaffordable whatever their size, and can be sustained forever, as even a summary glance at the history of America's national debts and deficits reveal. When it wants to spend, as long as the desired item is priced in the domestic currency, a central government with a sovereign currency simply issues more of its IOUs, i.e. money. The real limit to the sovereign governments spending is public policy regarding the real economy. Circumstances where policy would urge a halt to spending include if the economy is in such a state that more spending will lead to inflation or the depreciation of the currency.

Furthermore, as Godley's (1996) work on sectoral balances show, in an economy modelled as only having a public sector and a private sector (that is, leaving out the foreign sector), a negative balance in one sector – that is, more spending than income – has to result in surplus in the other sector – more income than spending. Thus, in such an economy, the level of the net deficit position of the public sector is identical to the level of the net surplus position of the private sector. As it is good policy for the private

sector to save it must therefore be the case that it is equally good policy for the public sector to be in deficit. (See Wray (1998, 2012) for a complete study of these issues.) Thus, debt for a government with a sovereign currency does not cause funding problems for the government and is in fact a good thing because it and only it allows for net savings in the private sector. Of course, the infinite ability to finance deficits means that the government is always able to afford a JG. It can provide the inelastic demand for labour that JG requires. Furthermore, there is equally no budget constraint on the financing of the kind of Green New Deal the globe desperately needs. Thus, this kind of debt is in accord with justice.

Public debt for countries who do not issue their own currency can be a serious problem. The evidence for this is playing out now within the Eurozone, where it is only countries that have a trade surplus that are able to overcome the recessionary bias of economies with central governments that are currency users. However, those Eurozone nations that have a trade deficit cannot make up for the inadequacy of domestic private spending by either a trade surplus or public spending. Such governments lack fiscal autonomy and cannot fund their economic welfare administration to the level justice requires. In this circumstance public debt does not support the ethical economy but neither does fiscal consolidation.

Private debt can be divided between private individuals and corporations, and for corporations between financial corporations and the rest. Ideally for the private individual, his or her private debt should be kept to a minimum, to the point where servicing the debt with regard to both the interest and the premium do not lead to welfare injustices. In other words, personal expenditure should as much as possible be fundable out of income, especially with regard to the most important interests an individual might pursue. The JG addresses this issue by radically improving the income position of a large swathe of individuals through their employment by the JG. Furthermore, because JG is countercyclical spending, the income position of the rest of the economy is improved and so again provides a means to prevent increases in private indebtedness. As well, the policy space open to countries with sovereign currency means that such a government has the capacity to increase the quantity of spending on public goods, such as health and education, and thereby curtail the impetus to get into private debt for these ends.

Turning to the corporate sector, debt in the non-financial sector has remained under control so that indebtedness in that sector has not become a problem (Tymoigne and Wray 2014). Of course, the indebtedness level of this sector as with all sectors gets worse in an economic downturn. The JG's countercyclical fiscal measures just discussed will go a long way to overcome

this aspect of the debt problem. Finally, turning to the financial sector, debt is a huge problem there and it was the layering of debt on debt within this sector that caused the Great Financial Crisis (Tymoigne and Wray 2013). A few simple points can be made. According to Galbraith (2012), it is the growth of the financial sector and its commensurate increase of debt within the sector that best explains the growing levels of inequality. As well, the increase of indebtedness explains the growing financial fragility of the sector and the ever increasing size and frequency of the economic crises of the past four decades. The argument is made that above a certain percentage of GDP, the financial sector adds nothing to the well being of individuals outside of the financial sector. Rather, its affect is to undermine their earning opportunities. The financial sector is an intermediate good. A well run economy would want the financial sector's share of GDP to be as small as possible for it produces nothing that is in an individual's basket of final consumption goods. The Minskian economists point out that during the Golden Age of western capitalism (the three decades or so after the Second World War) the financial sector was both small and simple. This modesty was not an obstacle to prosperity but the reverse. Furthermore, as mature economies, the industrial nations do not have the same need for the levels of investment characteristic of the mid-twentieth century. The financial sectors services are required less even as they grow at an unprecedented pace.

Now, the philosophy of the just economy states that the aim of the economic welfare administration is to promote as much as possible the private individual route to economic justice for all. It could then be asked, would not Minskian measures to reduce and simplify the financial sector undermine the freedom of the individual regarding how he or she wishes to participate in the economy? Yet, the philosophy does not say that any one sector of the economy, any one specific profession or craft, has exemption from public interference. In other words, while the public abolishment of capitalists or even workers as a class would be a violation of economic justice, making certain sub-sectors, such as finance, smaller is not. The guarantee justice requires is to have the opportunity to find in the market the means to secure desired welfare outcomes. Thus if one sector of the market prevented, for a reason intrinsic to that sector, the rest of the economy from finding justice in the economy then that sector may have to be sacrificed for the sake of economic justice for all.

However, it is possible to put the argument more strongly. If the government were able to ensure prosperity through both the JG, and a well provisioned public sector providing public goods, the effect might be, to speak metaphorically, to squeeze out any space for the financial sector to

operate within, other than that required for the realization of economic justice for the totality of the market. In general, it is better to work from this end and so treat the question of a bloated financial sector that causes injustice, as a residual factor. Finally, all financial enterprises, to an extent not true of non-financial enterprises, are dependent on the government, through the operations of the central bank, the other government agencies concerned with banking affairs and through legislation. The financial sector is never autonomous in this regard. All financial institutions are public-private partnerships. Therefore, their existence is conditional on public support which itself ought to be conditional on the financial sector's support of the good economy which ought to lead the government to support only a small and simple financial sector.

In conclusion, one can say that philosophical ethics largely supports the whole Minskian project. The only variance between the two mentioned in the paper concerned the JG's support mainly for incomes at the bottom of the wage and salary scale. Yet even here, it is suggested that a fuller treatment of the subject might resolve apparent differences. Regarding debt specifically, the philosophy continues to support the Minskian approval of public debt for national governments with sovereign currencies and disapproval of the complexity and high levels of private debt for today's private individuals and the private financial sector

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Debt, Responsibility and Subjectivity in Light of Phenomenology and Contemporary Ethics

by Anna Harciarek

Introduction

In this paper I will treat the crisis that is currently taking place in Europe as a starting point for two anthropological and ethical considerations. The first one states that we are now dealing with a situation where there is no identity between a subject that has taken up certain actions (government incurring debt) and a subject that is held liable for those actions (society suffering due to austerity). The second thesis states that such a situation leads to a violation of society's right to self-determination and to a loss of their subjectivity. I will focus on issues of debt, responsibility and subjectivity. The latter two are terms that have been repeatedly taken up by philosophy, although as is often the case in philosophy, interpretations are different in different philosophical schools and strands. This doesn't apply to debt, which hasn't been so far the object of philosophical interest. This may come from the belief that philosophy needs to gain a greater distance from the object of its research; consequently it is difficult for philosophy to refer to what is currently going on. Nevertheless, the question of debt, especially in its present form, is closely connected to anthropology and ethics. It may seem, especially with regard to anthropology, that it is absent in main-stream debates on the economy and the general socio-political condition of Europe. But this is untrue. Some kind of anthropology is always (consciously or not) implicitly assumed. And the philosophers' task is to reveal assumptions made by participants of those debates, assess them and to propose anthropology that will adequately describe the status and place of the human in the world. And when it comes to ethics, as a practical discipline of philosophy acting participants should always be taken into account, especially those whose actions have consequences for larger groups of people. In this sense returning to Aristotle's thought seems inevitable, as he understood ethics, politics and the economy as closely connected areas of social life.

Ethical characteristics of debt

The structure of public debt is a complex issue and for present considerations it needs simplification. It is also due to the fact that for anthropological analyses it is important how a given problem, in our case debt, is understood by the general public; how it is presented and how they respond to it. Still, this general public understanding of debt (non-professional, non-academic) is not conclusive as a science in general, subsequently philosophy is not democratic.

While analyzing debt from the social side it should be stated that it is a special kind of relation between people. Its characteristic feature is the asymmetry that occurs between subjects engaged in it. The side that grants the credit, thanks to its financial resources, has power over the side that applies for the credit.

But what is the moral status of credit? Are we entitled to consider credit in the categories of good and evil? Saint Thomas of Aquinas, and Catholicism after him, believed that any usury is a sin. However, many things have changed since that time and today such a position towards credit is not authorized. Not all usury is a sin. However, it is still necessary to define the border that separates the granting and taking of credit that can be assessed as good from that which can be assessed as bad. Such a border may be indicated by the terms of subjectivity. It will be addressed in more detail later on, but now it can be defined as the capacity for deliberate and conscious action. Granting credit and taking it would be bad if that situation would destroy the subjectivity of the person who applies for it and if it wouldn't be of benefit to the good of that person. Additionally, debt is bad when there is no chance of its being repaid; that is when the money obtained wouldn't be properly invested. For example, after Wittgenstein, someone may invest millions in an attempt to teach a lion to speak, but a project like that will never be successful, therefore will never create profit.

Such limits of good and bad debts may be put in yet another way. If the government of a given country would like to realize a project similar to that mentioned above, citizens of that country would clearly not stand to benefit. And if such debt would be incurred without the knowledge and consent of the public it would threaten their subjectivity. Those two conditions, together with the condition stating that the person who provides loans knows that this action is undertaken without consent and against the will of the people, are, according to Alexander Sack, the conditions constitutive of an illegitimate debt. Even a cursory analysis allows us to state that the majority of debts incurred by European countries meet these criteria.

Not only incurred debt has a moral dimension, however. Additional charges for borrowers, such as interest rates, should also be taken into account. People borrow money for various reasons, in more or less dramatic situations. When the subject is unable to meet his substantial needs, borrowing money might be necessary, but high interest rates would be regarded as ethically bad. When credit is granted to meet needs that might be characterized as unnatural and unnecessary (that is needs that are created by markets), such assessments may not appear appropriate. In reality however, this is just a theoretical discussion, especially when it comes to individual borrowers, because the context, which consists of the motivation and the situation in which they find themselves, is not taken into consideration when the credit is issued. In this case only the ability to repay the debt is important for the lender.

Summing up the issue of morality or its absence in incurring debt, it is worth repeating that borrowing and lending money are special cases of human action. Deliberate human action directly or indirectly realizes different values and becomes itself positive or negative through them. Someone might say that incurring a loan is bad from the point of view of the individual. This stance is not shared by heterodox economists and as such is here discarded. When someone takes a loan they are not self-sufficient anymore, but in a well-functioning society one doesn't have to be self-sufficient. What really matters is not the question of whether to take credit, or not, but for what. Credit should be a means to realizing aims that would be beneficial for the development of the individual and their society. Borrowing only to have money that will be spent on pure consumption is pointless. Individualism and hedonism is such an attitude. Even the king Midas wasn't happy though he had gold in abundance, but it seems that this is the direction of capitalism's development; that is the constant creation of new needs. Discussing the critique of European bourgeois civilization by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Robert Speamann as his first motif cites the fact that "modern civilization is based on creating ever bigger needs. But all additional needs are the new ties for human beings because they increase his dependence. Arts and sciences beautify this process, encourage it but at the same time conceal it. The truth is that the hedonistic society cannot be free. Development is a progressive loss of freedom (Speamann, 2011: 55-56)¹.

It seems that the present situation in European indebted countries is perceived by their citizens as an attempt to make a public debt out of private debt, and surely is an attempt to authorize an unlawful debt. Money that was borrowed was spent on fulfilling false pre-election promises that guaranteed and maintained the privilege of power for a certain group of

people. But that group, despite committing evident faults, still enjoys this privileged position and is not held liable. Instead, it is the society that bears responsibility for actions taken up by someone else and in the interests of someone else. It is forced to pay for something that does not belong to it. This responsibility in the form of austerity, which is imposed in order to obtain new loans, has tragic consequences. Such action, however, is illegal.

The ontological status of responsibility

It is hard to imagine that in the context of law, where the notion of responsibility occurs originally and is most frequently associated with everyday language, knowing that the subject has not committed the forbidden act that he would still be sentenced anyway by the judge for committing it. This situation would clearly show the absence of identity between the acting subject and the subject that is supposed to be responsible for this action. Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden considers identity and values as the ontological foundations of responsibility. As values are its basis, responsibility itself cannot be one of them, but can be classified as a virtue in Alasdair MacIntyre's sense. He defines virtue as "acquired human quality, the possession and compliance of which enables us to achieve goods that are internal to the practices, and lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving those goods" (MacIntyre, 1996: 344). The practice, in turn, is "a coherent and complex form of socially established, cooperative human activity through which goods, which are internal to that activity are realized in the pursuit of models of excellence which are characteristic for this type of activity and partly define it" (MacIntyre, 1996: 338). It is impossible to achieve internal goods outside given practice. But also virtues themselves can be "goods, by means of which [...] we are able to define our relation with those people, with whom we share our aims and models that define given practice" (MacIntyre, 1996: 345). In this approach, responsibility could be a quality that by practicing we would be able to achieve the good of trust. Without trust, society and democracy are impossible.

The question of identity

Identity is a problem that is widely discussed in ethics. We can distinguish qualitative identity, when two beings are the same in all aspects, from numerical identity, when two beings are in fact one and the same being (Parfit, 2012: 244). There is a physical criterion of personal identity which

we are entitled to speak of: continuity of existence in space-time of the same body and the same brain, or in radical versions, of a sufficiently large part of a brain that can be considered as the brain of a living person. On the other hand there is a psychological criterion, which can be found in the works of John Locke, which ascribes preservation of identity to the importance of memory. Both criteria are carefully analyzed and thought experiments which adopt assumptions consistent with current and anticipated achievements in medicine are conducted, but they still do not give a clear answer as to where we can, if at all, place a clear boundary of identity. However, what is considered in those experiments are borderline cases, with which we do not deal when examining the question of personal identity between the individual who took the debt and the one who is to repay it. For our purposes we can follow Ingarden in his understanding of human beings as physical, psychological and spiritual creatures, whose personal 'self' is particularly committed to responsibility. If we want to talk about identity, there must be a continuity of existence, which means that during the time of body's being, there isn't any gap in its existence as an entity, or if formulating the negative condition, that in the time between birth and death there isn't such a phase when none of the given body's parts wouldn't exist. Identity of body is necessary, but is not sufficient for the identity of a person. Ingarden talks also about the necessity of maintaining the continuity of memory and character (Ingarden, 1972: 122-124). None of those conditions are met between any person holding the post of Member of Parliament in any given peripheral country of the European Union and any member of the society in this country, for example, who opposed the decisions of their government by striking or demonstrating. Obviously, decisions about austerity required by the EU, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund were not made unanimously. The members of governments and parliaments remained members of their own societies and as such austerity measures should also affect them. Nevertheless, it can be reasonably assumed that, if at all, such measures are not as painful for them as for the rest of society. Moreover, if according to the main idea of democracy, they are the representatives of the people, they shouldn't act against the will of their electorate, which has, however, taken place. There are no grounds for authorities to assume that they know better as to what is good for their people.

How do members of society feel in the present situation? Rapid response towards it in the form of strikes, demonstrations and bottom-up initiatives can indicate both bad and good conditions of society.

Its bad condition manifests itself in awareness of being used and cheated by the authorities. Society has been treated instrumentally and

patronizingly. Roughly speaking, it has been evaluated as naïve and stupid, lacking the will or the ability to act and decide for itself. In other words it has been deprived of subjectivity. Despite the fact that human rights do not explicitly discuss subjectivity, it is however, implicitly included in every single human right. And recent events in Greece have violated the right to freedom of speech and the right to free access to information².

The dual aspect of the acting subject

What does it really mean to be a subject? As was previously mentioned, the most general definition of a subject states that it is a carrier of awareness (“self”), which is able to act. Similar understanding of this issue is showed by Peter Sloterdijk, who writes that: “to be a ‘subject’ means [...] the transition from theory to practice” and that “correct understanding of subject implies [...] ability to act” (Sloterdijk, 2011: 73). He writes also about the figure of obedience towards oneself, about subjectivity as disposition, which is vested in those who are able to shape themselves as masters and owners of their own sufferings (Sloterdijk, 2011: 78). Obviously, ownership of subjectivity is not only associated with mere benefits. Frequently we are not capable of dealing with its burden. Therefore, according to Sloterdijk, we have recourse to ideologies, or the help of so called consultants, who in fact don’t know any more than we do. Similar attitudes towards the figure of the therapist in the modern world are presented by MacIntyre. At the end of his considerations on subjectivity, Sloterdijk formulates a pessimistic statement, which probably relates well to the present situation. He says that “sovereign is he, who decides himself on what he wants to be fooled” (Sloterdijk, 2011: 84).

Sloterdijk’s intuitions are very close to phenomenological discussions on personhood as presented by Karol Wojtyła in his book *Acting Person* (Wojtyła, 1979). According to him, self-determination is a relation between will and person. This relation refers to the fact that will discloses itself as a quality of the acting person and thanks to the will, action is made possible. But not only does the will demonstrate itself through the person. Also the very person demonstrates itself through the will (Wojtyła, 2000: 151). Self-determination is an ability that defines person, as “the person is who possesses himself and at the same time, it is what is possessed only by himself” (Wojtyła, 2000: 152). Wojtyła also states that self-determination is a will, which in turn is a person’s quality (Wojtyła, 2000: 154). While acting, thanks to self-determination, a person is not only the subject, but also becomes an object of its own action. Self-determination realizes subjectivity. There are also other intra-personal, structural relations that are

related to self-determination. Those are self-mastery and self-possession. The latter, which enables self-determination (self-determination assumes self-possession), is also a condition for self-mastery. At the forefront emerges self-possession, which is possible only in the case of person; and is both active (person possesses itself) as well as passive (person is possessed by itself). Also when it comes to self-mastery we are dealing with active and passive aspects. All three qualities or relations that have been mentioned, form together a dynamic structure of person. Human beings constantly experience tensions between the will and desires. These are also expressions of the dual aspect, which constitutes a person, and when referred to acting, can manifest itself in the possibility of stating that "I am acting" (will) and "something is going on in me" (desire, actioning). Persons that can act freely constitute themselves; constitute what he/she is. He or she can act even though they do not have to, but instead want to. Through this act a person exceeds, transcends itself horizontally, to other objects, as it is a prime object for itself. At the same time one can transcend oneself vertically, towards the realization of values.

The dual aspect of subjectivity applied to the current socio-economic and political situation in Europe (from 2007 on)

How does all of this refer to the present situation in Europe? Attempts have been made to deprive citizens of their qualities as persons, of their self-mastery, to decide for themselves. They are not allowed to act, but are forced to experience and accept someone else's actions; citizens know that something is going on, but cannot act or have influence on the direction of this activity. The complete misunderstanding of human nature is very clear here. In fact, what has been done is totally against it and leads to de-subjectivity and to reducing human beings to the level of animals with which we share the ability to experience that "something is going on in us". In the long run, operating against human nature turns out to be impossible because, if there are to be any changes in the world, which a person is an integral part of, firstly what must be recognized is the structure of world and person (or maybe person above all, as the subject who makes changes is also a person).

European societies actively defy those who show such a lack of understanding of a person's essence. In this lies the good condition of societies in their activity, unity and taking measures that are contrary to what has been assumed by authorities; that they will not be able to act. Strikes, demonstrations and bottom-up initiatives are the expression of and evidence for the dual aspect of person; the highlighting of activity and

passivity in a person's life.

If the crisis will be overcome, and together with that a new order established that will operate effectively, it will have to be adapted to the dynamic structure of person, in order to prevent its freedom or its subjectivity being taken away. It will enable people's development in the realm of ideas that will be followed by the development of the whole of society. Sadly, history teaches us that neither capitalism nor socialism as ideologies have taken into account the very essence of man; what in the case of socialism has led, and in the case of capitalism is leading before our eyes, to their downfall. Therefore, the question about the future of each European country, of the European Union as a whole or maybe even of the world, is not a question about the choice between socialism or capitalism, (although individual economic solutions proposed by those schools might be correct). The question that we are facing now is a question about anthropology and ethics, without which even the most brilliant economic proposals will prove to be wrong. Every social, political and economic solution that is not taking into consideration the essence of man is like an attempt to build sandcastles bereft of its foundations. Politics and the economy should serve people, not people serve politics and the economy.

It is also clear what the task of philosophy, anthropology and ethics is, and that they are indispensable more so now than ever. They enable both interpretation and change; change which will firstly take place in society. It will encompass the understanding of the human being and its goal in life, which in no way should be continuous enrichment at the expense of others. It will overcome individualism, greed and vanity and replace it with trust, participation and solidarity. It won't be a quick and easy process, because changes in awareness are never like that. How will it be done? By making ethics a vital part of education and upbringing. But what kind of ethics? The great ethical disputes about life and death, justice and freedom, equality and independence remain unresolved because the relevant arguments are used disproportionately and we do not possess the tools to resolve conflicting claims. There are only a little less ethical stances than people dealing with ethics and in a situation of such pluralism no change of awareness has a chance of being successful. The task which everyone will be focused on will be the battle between the different strands of ethics and the attempts to convince others. Although it will be difficult, there must be an agreement on a certain ethical minimum, which will be the base for the education that will lead to the change in societies' awareness that will finally allow economic proposals to work and to flourish for the benefit of all.

The ethical proposal of Tadeusz Kotarbiński

It seems that a good suggestion of such an ethical minimum is the independent ethics of Tadeusz Kotarbiński who is known for his praxeology and reism. He was looking for non-religious and non-ontological justification for the precept of loving thy neighbor. This is why this ethics is called independent, because it is independent of any particular worldview. The main problem of ethics is a question of what to do and what not to do, if one wants to earn respect from the people who are themselves worthy of respect. Again, we see here that what is ethically evaluated is action that enables one to realize different values and not, for example, innate traits of character. Answers to this question showed that “people are respected for kindness, courage, integrity and self-discipline and are condemned for cruelty, cowardice, dishonesty and lack of will that would be resistant to temptations” (Kotarbiński, 1978: 151). Kotarbiński came to the conclusion that ethically significant behavior is appropriate for the attitude of trustworthy guardian or caregiver, that is a person that one can rely on in difficult circumstances. To defend this concept from the plea of socio-historical origins of ethical evaluations, Kotarbiński pointed to situations in which people have to count on the care and protection of others as being commonly repeated throughout history. Obviously, the trustworthy caregiver is not free from the necessity of choosing between possible actions, because it is impossible to show care and provide assistance to everyone who needs it, in every situation. In those cases it is inevitable to appeal to conscience, understood as ethical motivation. Being a trustworthy caregiver is rather acting to reduce suffering and protect others and not to cause excessive suffering in necessary defense. Of course, it is impossible to expect everyone to become a caregiver, so it is important that in society there are as many people as possible who show behavior consistent with the ideal type of a trustworthy caregiver and that can happen only if this model is widely promoted as exemplary. All of these qualities for which the trustworthy caregiver is appreciated are inevitable in the creation of society in which members trust each other and cooperate with each other.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that the present crisis is primarily analyzed in terms of economic categories, this paper aimed to show that one of its elements is in fact a deficit in the area of ethics. There is lack of ethical and anthropological reflection over today's situation in Europe, and this is followed by a lack of ethics in practice, both at the individual and group

level. It seems that the above mentioned concept of independent ethics with its ideal of the trustworthy caregiver is a good starting point for the reversal of this situation and for shifting the focus of discussions from technical issues (that is from questions of how to solve the crisis in economic terms) to the more fundamental level of philosophical interpretation, which might lead to changes on the behavioral level. Its advantage is not only worldview independence, but also, in relation to responsibility and subjectivity, the fact that responsibility may be acknowledged as a respectable attitude, which fits well with the image of the trustworthy caregiver and one that may be promoted together with this ideal. Moreover, it is obvious that no one takes the role of trustworthy caregiver once and for all and in all situations, which allows experience of one's subjectivity both in its active aspect (while being a caregiver) as well as in the passive one (when experiencing care provided by others).

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Reviews

Levinas and the Postcolonial: Race, Nation, Other

by John Drabinski

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Post-colonial Levinas: for those whose discourse is dance

by Joanna Hodge

John Drabinski begins his book with the puzzle concerning the contrast between Levinas' exquisite sensibility with respect to the opacities of the ethical condition, and his crassness on the status of non-European peoples and, more specifically, concerning the condition of Palestine. In the current context of the demolition of Gaza by proxy, apparently by Israel, but actually by force of US arms, this geo-political obtuseness becomes all the more scandalous. Drabinski has written a book which goes some distance to uncovering the logic of this paradox, in which commitment to a Holy History of Israel is challenged by an historically incarnate, but, by Levinas, unrecognised other. A footnote in the penultimate section reveals that Drabinski's book roughly speaking takes up where Howard Caygill's excellent *Levinas and the Political* (Routledge 2002) left off, posing the question, what has Levinas to say to actual political conditions of historic conflict and postcolonial asymmetry.

Emmanuel Levinas is and will remain a controversial thinker. The claims are major: since Aristotle, the western philosophical tradition has erred in privileging metaphysics over ethics; the religious bonds constituting the religious other as other are irreducible, in the strictly phenomenological sense; and the ethically prior relation is the murder of the elder brother by the younger, as sanctioned by the Lord. All three are deeply contentious and a counter theorising, still indebted to Levinas, proposes that all the same ethics as first philosophy is metaphysically committed; that religious bonds can be adequately described only by the religiously unbounded; and that an infinitely more persuasive ethical priority, proposed by Levinas himself, lies in the relation of nourishing the infant, and securing the future. There lacks only the reversal of Heidegger's reading of death, as revealing the possibility of impossibility, into Levinas' account of death, in the mode of an impossibility of possibility, to render this a complete set of four antinomies in the style of Kant. Thus Levinas' enquiries present an inheritance of the western philosophical tradition, from Aristotle and from Kant, from Parmenides and from Descartes, as critically in dispute and ripe for re-

reading. Drabinski takes up the task of re-reading in an expanded and more radical context, confident in the expectation that the Levinasian text, if not the man, can, indeed must respond. The future of philosophy and conceptuality, of ethics and politics hang in the balance.

Drabinski sites his reading of Levinas at the crossroads between local and global, between Zionism and transnationalism, between European hegemony and post-colonial kick-back. The intensity of the resulting collision of forces makes that reading all the more starkly instructive. In his Preface Drabinski poses three questions, before carefully laying out a summary of the arguments of his previous excellent study, *Sensibility and Singularity: the Problem of Phenomenology in Levinas* (SUNY 2001). These three questions are: what is Levinas' place in any discussion of cultural and racial diversity, both in philosophy, and more largely; secondly, does the language of alterity and responsibility speak to such matters; and, thirdly, is the Levinasian register too provincial, too bound to a specifically European trauma for the purposes of articulating responsibly a 'global encounter with the Other'? To all three questions Drabinski responds roughly speaking in the affirmative. These questions put the focus firmly on the thematics of strangeness and otherness, on the empirical other and the transcendental instance, Other, on responsiveness and responsibility, although those taken up more explicitly by Derrida, of hospitality and asylum, separation and violence are not far behind.

Drabinski proposes to bring this network of concerns into question by exposing them to the challenge of Gayatri Spivak's analyses of the silences of subalternity; of Homi Bhabha's notions of hybridity and interstitial identities; and of Franz Fanon and Eduard Glissant on negritude and creolisation, on a being and thinking which are the same, because both are fragmented. The focus on these Levinasian thematics is ruptured only towards the end of the book, by the invocation in the penultimate chapter of Glissant's transformation of the Deleuze-Guattari rhizome, by exposure to the movement of an Antillanité. This is construed by Glissant as an inheritance of differentiation specific to the Antilles, as both condition of existence and method of forming meaning: an experience of the Caribbean, for which the phenomenological inheritance and that of Rimbaud's 'I is another' are constituent parts. Drabinski describes how the rhizome thereby becomes a verb, no longer a name, and an open ended practice of negotiated identities takes the place of any search for origins.

The sub-title of the Introduction 'Decolonizing Levinasian Ethics' is bracketed with that of the penultimate chapter, 'Decolonizing Levinasian Politics', and as a warning of what is to come, a citation from Glissant is attached to the former: 'The Occident is not in the west: it is a project not a place'. Europe, as thought by Kant and by Husserl, and indeed by Levinas

and Fanon, is shown to constitute an imaginary geography and, in accordance with the logic of globalisation, is everywhere. Drabinski disrupts the collusion between these twin processes of imaginary geography and globalisation by mobilising a concept of incarnate historiography, to deflect and intensify Levinas' ethical and political analyses. The challenge arrives when Drabinski opens his discussion by juxtaposing the publication dates of Levinas' *Discovering Existence with Husserl and Heidegger* (1949) with that of Franz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), that of *Totality and Infinity* with that of *The Wretched of the Earth*, both in 1961. These two trajectories of enquiry, while simultaneous in time, do not encounter each other as history. This separation, for Drabinski, calls out for the refinement of Merleau-Ponty's notion of incarnate history, which has organised an order of discourse in which these two marginalised voices remain inaudible one to the other.

For Drabinski the task is to explore the application of Levinasian concepts in contexts to which, for whatever reason, Levinas chooses not to attend. The proposal is to detach Levinas' ethics from their metaphysical and religious inheritance, and to insert them into a geography informed by a history of expropriation. This proposal is supplemented by the development of an epistemology of alterity, following Levinas' own critique of Husserl's formalization, insisting instead that all description, and all conceptuality is bound by singular and determinate horizons of meaning fulfilment. Sense, as universally delimited and available, is accessible only through the determinacies of locally given sensory conditions. Thus Levinas' curiously foreclosed conception of Europe, suspended between Athens and Jerusalem, which all too easily succumbs to an inappropriate dialectical synthesis, is shown to be conditional on Levinas' own insider as outsider status, over eagerly accepting the values of the host. A more sustained critique of this non-Levinasian simplification in Levinas' own thought would permit Drabinski to show how, in the ruin of representation and terminal dissolution of this European inheritance, Israel becomes the representative instance, and executive moment for a disavowed US/European will to violence, and desire to destroy, in this case, Palestine, as an unacceptable face of an unacceptable Islam. This would install a Levinasianism contra Levinas.

Drabinski advances his analyses by proposing four lines of enquiry. He first discusses the entanglement of meaning and intending in the differential embodiments which give rise to differential histories. He then exposes Levinasian otherness to Spivak's careful negotiations of not speaking on behalf of the silenced. He expounds the ethical force of resurgent hybrid and interstitial identities, as developed by both Spivak and Bhabha,

and he construes differences between a will to homogeneity in the European tradition, and the multiplications of differences in the Caribbean, with an ending of the lives of the indigenous peoples consequent on the arrival variously of the colonisers, Spanish and French, English and Scots; of the enslaved of West Africa, and the non-arrival of those who did not survive the middle passage; and of the indentured, from the Indian sub-continent and other regions of the then flourishing empires. The resulting metamorphoses of languages and identities pose both the challenge and the opportunity for revisioning both metaphysical and political thinking. This revisioning then both permits the reformulation of the Parmenedean trope: thinking and being are the same, in the notion that both are in fragments, and compels a recognition that the European heritage is in ruins. Drabinski here cautiously resists the temptation to sound a Nietzschean note of celebration.

Postcolonial community is the upshot of chance encounters and expropriating violence. The contrast with the tyrannical politics of aggression, as depicted by Levinas in the opening pages of *Totality and Infinity*, could not be more stark. In his concluding reflections, Drabinski brings out clearly how in postcolonial contexts, there can be here no bland presumption of unities of blood and tradition, granting meaning to the mythemes of social cohesion; there is no natural, inevitable derivation of order and authority, of sovereignty and meaning from an order of things, from an originary polis, or from a divine word. Neither the myth of the Greek polis, nor the divine intendings of Holy Scripture, but this politics of chance, and of survival emerges as the only politics worthy of the name. In his penultimate chapter, 'Decolonizing Levinasian Politics', it may be that Drabinski misses a trick, in not reverting to a critique of these mythic origins, and of falsely naturalised concepts of authority, as masked by the Levinasian insistence on disjoining the aporetic of ethics, from response to the *raison d'état* of politics. It is, however, the clarity of his exposition, and the lucidity of his arguments which permits such a criticism to surface.

This is a timely and admirable study, which will instruct some and enrage others. It is deeply respectful of Levinas' thought, while posing a radical challenge to those, who would, oddly, seek to protect Levinas from such externality, or who would, with Levinas, seek to protect the European heritage from the depth and urgency of these various critiques from these various margins. United under the paradoxical rubric 'post-coloniality', these critiques, as expounded by Drabinski, reveal that the populations of the metropolitan centres have also undergone, and continue to undergo, colonisation.

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Social Ontology: Collective Intentionality and Group Agents

by Raimo Tuomela

Oxford University Press 2013, hbk £47.99 (ISBN: 9780199978267), 352pp.

by Richard Weir

Raimo Tuomela is undoubtedly one of the founding fathers of a burgeoning field of interdisciplinary research that centres on the concept of *collective intentionality*. In fact, it is arguably the case that over the last two or three decades he has done more than any other to advance and facilitate the success this field. And yet it is perhaps also arguably the case that his work is the least discussed of the 'big four' names in the field (the other three being John Searle, Michael Bratman, and Margaret Gilbert). It is difficult to pinpoint precisely why this is the case. It may be in part due to the fact that his position is not quite as distinct as the other three, drawing as it does on elements that can be found in each of their respective theories (although one ought to consider this more of an academic virtue than a vice). The more likely culprit, however, is the unfortunate combination of a sometimes convoluted writing style coupled with the common perception that his position has fluctuated quite heavily over the years (a perception that he vehemently denies). Either way, it is evidently the case that Tuomela's latest work, given the broad title of *Social Ontology*, is an attempt to finally set the record straight. An attempt to set forth his position in the clearest manner possible and to bring it into focus through a study of its applicability and relevance for other areas of social theory.

Collective intentionality, as a concept, is broadly concerned with trying to find a middle ground between individualist and collectivist analyses of the social world. More specifically, it attempts to provide an irreducible account of collective action without transgressing the principle that consciousness is fundamentally an individual phenomenon. As Tuomela puts it himself, while the collectivist position is ontologically impoverished (lacking a firm ontological foundation), the individualist position is conceptually impoverished and utterly unable to explain some quite basic features of the social world (p. 4). What is therefore required is an account that provides both the conceptual tools necessary to explain social interaction fully, as well as the ontological foundation necessary to cash those claims out.

It is towards the most robust defence of this middle ground that Tuomela's entire book is singularly directed. To this end he begins by setting out the criteria that a set of individuals must meet in order to count as a fully-

fledged group (a *we-mode* group in his terms), before establishing why his particular account of *collective intentionality* enables said group to meet these criteria. It is thus chapters 2 and 3 that contain the heart of Tuomela's position, and will be of primary interest to all those concerned specifically with *collective intentionality*. The next three chapters flesh out concepts that this account relies heavily upon and which require an independent treatment in order to be understood fully. Thus we are provided with robust explanations of what it means to act on the basis of group reasons, to collectively accept the ethos or attitude of the group, and to cooperate as a group in the context of (internal and external) relations of authority. Tuomela then includes chapters that apply his account to some familiar contexts, first to the applicability of *we-reasoning* in solving certain fundamental problems in choice theory, and then the role of such *we-mode* thinking in the constitution of social institutions. Both areas are heavily associated with other theorists in the field (the first with the work of Michael Bacharach and the latter with that of John Searle), which Tuomela acknowledges, but goes to some lengths to illustrate the advantages that the particularities of his position offer over existing accounts. Finally he concludes by way of an illuminating characterisation that links his theory with the notion of solidarity and with the phrase made famous by Alexandre Dumas's musketeers, 'all for one and one for all'.

To readers familiar with Tuomela's work certain features may come as a slight surprise, but which bring a unity to his position that it was hitherto lacking. For a start he is eager to make clear that he now holds the order of priority to run from the *joint intention* (the glue that holds the group together) to the *we-intention* (the individual part in the joint intention), rather than the other way round. In turn this places an increased emphasis on the role of commitment, in a way quite similar to Margaret Gilbert's work. Which is to say, it is the very fact that the members are already committed to the group in the appropriate way- to thinking and acting from the perspective of the group- that they can count as *jointly intending*, from which the subsequent individual slices of this intention (the *we-intentions*) can be drawn. We can derive individual *we-intentions* from the joint intentions precisely because we are already committed to furthering the cause and ethos of the group.

Overall this gives the distinct feeling that this is the most clear and comprehensive account of Tuomela's work to date and that he is determined to leave no avenue unexplored. There is a moment in the crucial third chapter, which contains the very core of his theory of *collective intentionality*, where one is faced with the familiar feeling that Tuomela almost wishes to conceal the vital and telling features of his argument from the reader. However, this feeling is quickly swept aside by Tuomela's determination to

make his point crystal clear and to confront the problem from as many different angles as possible. Indeed, repetition in this case is a small price to pay for clarity and, ultimately, even though Tuomela's account is difficult to grasp purely in virtue of its complexity, the persistent reader should find what they are looking for. To those unfamiliar with the field this is unlikely to serve as a useful introduction, owing largely to the fact that Tuomela does not attempt to situate his theory in relation to others in the field and the fact that he goes to some lengths to avoid common causes for disagreement. But for those familiar with this area of thought, and with Tuomela's work, this is a crucially clear and new explication of his theory of the group.

Indeed, in many ways it presents a certain zenith for the way in which *collective intentionality* has originally been discussed. By taking a multifaceted approach and incorporating and building upon the key elements of their theories, Tuomela's position exhibits some notable advantages over the work of the other three central theorists. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, it provides a serious response to one of the most damning criticisms of his position to date. The charge being that of circularity, in that Tuomela's account of *collective intentionality* seems to require recourse to collective concepts that would themselves require some form of *collective intentionality* in the first place (for instance see Schmid 2009, 24). Tuomela's response hinges on a clarification he makes repeatedly, as to the difference between ontological and conceptual priority. He claims that in terms of ontological priority his position is 'bottom-up'; ontologically speaking only individuals can count as full-blown intentional agents and any speak of groups in such terms must be, at least a slight, ontological fiction. Nevertheless, in terms of conceptual priority the theory is 'top-down'; conceptually and functionally groups can count as intentional agents owing to individuals' ability to treat them as real and to give up part of their natural authority over their actions to the group. Thus, while Tuomela may well make reference to collectivity in order to get his theory of collectivity off the ground, the two notions of collectivity being utilised are intended in two very different senses (ontological and conceptual).

However, while this is a perfectly reasonable response to the challenge at hand, rather like stamping on an ill-fitted and uneven carpet, this seems to only push the problem to a slightly different area. Instead it appears to place a heavy burden upon what Tuomela seems to take to be an individual's innate ability to think and reason from the perspective of the group. For, unless the participant individuals are able, from the very start, to think and act in terms of, and with reference to, an irreducible collectivity (even if only conceptually), then there is no foundation from which Tuomela's theory can get off the ground. The problem is that Tuomela seems to take it for granted,

perhaps relying on certain intuitive notions, that such an innate ability is unproblematic; that the individual can make reference to the 'we' without this presenting any serious problems, just so long as the 'we' in question is not supposed to be ontologically real. But the closer we come to the third person plural the more problematic it becomes, and something we took to be so intuitively obvious presents serious challenges for any form of philosophical analysis. What might the perspective of a collectivity be? What is the relation between the 'we' and the 'I'? And what are the cognitive mechanisms that might allow us to think in terms of it? These are the sorts of questions to which many in the field are now turning, but to which Tuomela provides no answers.

As such, Tuomela leaves us with what is undoubtedly an important formal schema for how one might act jointly without transgressing the principle that only individuals can count as proper intentional agents. To this end it should be considered an important achievement in the context of the theory of *collective intentionality* and of the highest interest to all those concerned with this area of thought. But what he does not provide us with is an account of what it really means to act jointly in the first place. In this vein, and like many other accounts, Tuomela confronts the problem from the wrong side, as it were, and leaves open the question of what it really means to think and reason as a 'we'. What is required is a return to questions of agency simpliciter, that *collective intentionality* as a whole has largely ignored up until now, and to the very relation between the 'we' and the 'I'.

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Liberal Realism: A Realist Theory of Liberal Politics

by Matt Sleat

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by David Moss

In recent years the 'realist' movement in political theory has attracted increased attention. Spoken about as a movement in this way, political realism is exceedingly diverse. Figures such as Bernard Williams, Raymond Geuss, John Gray, Glen Newey, Judith Shklar and Chantal Mouffe have been identified with this movement (this is not to say that they would identify themselves as "realists") and thinkers such as Thucydides, Hobbes, Machiavelli and Schmitt have been counted as part of a tradition of more realistic political thought. Realism is commonly understood in contrast to a presently dominant approach to political theory, characterised variously as 'High Liberalism,' 'Liberal Moralism' or the 'Ethics First' approach, with John Rawls a core exemplar. Naturally, there are various ways in which mainstream political might be considered to not be 'realistic' and the themes that have been associated with realist political theory are quite varied. For example, a recent influential review by William Galston (2010) identifies realism in opposition to ideal political theory and identifies a number of distinct hallmarks of realism, including a moral psychology that is more attentive to emotions and passion, more attention to institutions and conflict, a rejection of utopian thinking and an understanding of politics as autonomous from individual morality.

Within this context, Matt Sleat's book represents a welcome attempt to focus and clarify realist thought. One useful attribute of Sleat's book is that, unlike many of the works produced by the leading 'realists' identified above, it is self-consciously realist and so is explicitly concerned with questions about the contours of realist political theory and the relation between political realism and its historical antecedents (including, 'realism' as it occurs in International Relations). Thus the book offers a useful entry point for those wishing to learn more about the 'realist vision of the political.'

While granting that realism is a "rich and complex tradition" that it would be impossible to do full justice to, and that his own account of realism is necessarily somewhat "selective and exclusionary," (2013: 45) it is clear that Sleat seeks to defend an understanding of realism that is narrower and more focused than that which is often advanced. Realism is often conflated with non-ideal theory (debates about which are also increasingly prominent (Valentini, 2012)), but Sleat argues that realism should be seen as offering a quite distinctive form of political theorising. Doing non-ideal theory is

compatible with still operating within essentially the same mainstream, moralistic approach as before- by simply trying to work out how best to apply your preferred moral theory in practice. However, a core theme of political realism is that political theory should *not* be about taking an ideal normative theory worked out without reference to real politics (for example, simply through doing moral philosophy) and trying to apply that to politics. Political realism is rather more about the kind of normativity that is appropriate for politics. A consequence of this is that, in Sleat's view, political realism is not to be opposed to abstraction, *per se*. It is perfectly possible to be a realist and to engage in abstract theorising, depending on what one does and does not abstract from. As Sleat puts it:

realism is a fundamentally different way of conceiving politics to liberalism, grounded in a very different set of assumptions about politics, the circumstances in which politics arises, the questions that it takes politics to address and the most salient features of any plausible political theory. (2013: 11)

Sleat offers a neat and compelling expression of the core differences between liberalism and realism's distinctive visions of the political. These are described in detail in chapters 1 and 2 respectively. Sleat identifies liberalism with a "consensus vision of the political" motivated by its normative commitment to respecting citizens as free and equal: "liberalism must be a politics of consensus because it is only if all people accept the political principles that regulate the authority that rules over them that they will be able to live on terms that respect them all as free and equal" (2013: 40). For the realist, by contrast, politics is a sphere of perpetual, radical and widespread disagreement- even about what *counts* as a political question (p46) and so the most basic political question is "how we are to live together in the face of such deep and persistent disagreement. (2013: 47)"

The precise nature of how this leads to a realist critique of liberal politics is spelt out in chapter 3. It is here also that Sleat addresses various liberal objections to this characterisation of liberal politics. A liberal might object that, really, liberalism entirely recognises widespread disagreement and, in fact, Rawls' later work in *Political Liberalism* can be seen as explicitly seeking to provide an answer to this question. Sleat acknowledges that "Rawls clearly accepted the presence of political disagreement" (about justice), but that he has the "procedures and values that underpin public reason, which are accepted by all reasonable citizens, provide the political framework for reaching future legitimate and commonly binding decisions... politics take place within the framework of principles of justice consistent

with public reason. (2013: 73)“ So this Rawlsian approach does not go far enough in acknowledging the “discord that politics is called upon to address. (2013: 73)“ It excludes from politics disputes between reasonable liberals and the ‘unreasonable’ persons, who would adopt an alternative political framework. Moreover, it fails to acknowledge *as reasonable*, disagreements about the fundamental political framework, despite the fact that “it seems somewhat absurd to hold that people can reasonably disagree about the fate of one’s eternal soul yet disagreements about the fundamentals of politics must necessarily be the result of irrationality, bias, prejudice, self-interest or some other unreasonable source. (2013: 78)“

The rest of the chapter deals with three further liberal objections. The first of these is quickly dealt with. It might be objected that realism is “indeterminate” regarding how we should respond to the facts of disagreement, for nothing “normatively follows from accepting political disagreement and conflict,” and so liberalism remains “a possible and often viable answer” to how we should respond to those facts (2013: 79). Sleat grants that in one sense this is true. Political realism does not, in itself, rule out the possibility of defending liberalism in the face of radical political disagreement, but nor does it allow liberals to simply “carry on business as usual” once they’ve acknowledged that there is serious and intractable political disagreement (2013: 81). Rather, the recognition of realism’s insights requires that liberals fundamentally recast their normative commitments: giving up on their “consensus vision of the political,” and their understanding of liberalism as offering a “non-oppressive” form of politics (2013: 81) and rethinking in what sense, if any, liberalism can be held to be about respecting citizens as free and equal.

The second criticism addressed is the claim that realism over-emphasises conflict. The claim might be made that (among citizens of Western liberal democracies at least) there is actually quite a large degree of convergence on basic political matters (e.g. support for the fundamentals of liberal democracy). Of course, the quickest and most obvious objection to this- and one Sleat makes- is that this is probably simply false. In any case, it is not clear that liberalism can really accept *any* reasonable divergence at this level, without having to reconsider its fundamental normative commitments.

The final objection dealt with here is the claim that while liberalism might have to recognise that full agreement on political fundamentals is, strictly speaking, impossible, nevertheless the liberal ideal of consensus serves as a fruitful ideal aspiration against which the legitimacy of a state can be judged (2013: 83). Again, part of Sleat’s response is to note that this liberal response fails to take the extent of political disagreement seriously

enough. Even if the liberal might say that a state is more legitimate in virtue of coming closer to the ideal standard of full consensus, an answer is still required about how it is- in liberal terms- legitimate to coerce those who do not consent, especially given then, according to the realist, such disagreement is *reasonable*.

At the end of this chapter Sleat outlines some of the problems facing any attempt to develop a liberal realism. The next two chapters address in more detail some prospective attempts to accommodate some of the insights of realism within liberalism. The first of these discusses Judith Skhlar's 'liberalism of fear' and *modus vivendi* liberalism (advanced, for example, by John Gray) and the second addresses Bernard Williams' more realistic liberalism. Sleat finds that these putative alternatives are insufficiently realistic. In varying ways, they seek to find some more modest standard (peace, security or some other legitimating answer) which might legitimate political associations. But, Sleat argues, there will still be reasonable disagreement about even these more modest requirements, so politics "will inevitably require forcing some to live according to terms, rules, values, and principles that they reject" (2013: 27)- in short, successful domination.

The final two chapters outline Sleat's own answer to how one might have a 'liberal realism' and contain, in my view, some of the more important insights of the book. The first of these chapters concerns the inherently partisan nature of any political framework. Citizens can reasonably disagree about fundamental political questions (even about what counts as a political question). Thus, "liberalism needs to explicitly accept that liberalism is a controversial and contested account of politics. (2013: 132)" Liberals cannot pretend to have a neutral framework, which specifies how politics is to work, which is itself not political: it is "but one player, or indeed family of players, in the struggle for power than is politics." So liberals have to actually present substantive arguments for their normative commitments- for "why liberalism is worth fighting for" and defend their vision of the "political good" (2013: 139)- rather than try to settle how we are to decide on political questions pre-politically.

But if this is so, then liberals will have to face up to the fact that they will inevitably have to coerce those who reasonably disagree about their claims to legitimacy- liberalism will "be experienced as an imposition by those that reject liberalism or several of its key tenets" (2013: 156). The final chapter therefore explains how liberalism might be understood as a "moderate hegemony." As Sleat puts it:

Essentially the liberal master places on him or herself a series of normative and institutional constraints that ensure (as far as

possible) that coercive power is not used in a manner that violates the freedom or moral equality of any person... liberals are... self-restrained masters and it is this self-restraint that respects the freedom and equality of enemies. (2013:161)

Of course, such considerations will likely not be convincing to non-liberals, but they are “important in explaining to *liberals* why it is that they have the moral and political right to claim legitimacy over internal enemies” (2013: 174).

It is in this respect that Sleat’s book is an important contribution to political theory. Not in offering a dubious “realistic” argument, that politics is thus and so believe-it-or-not you really have to accept liberalism, but rather in offering a compelling philosophical case that liberalism is a controversial, partisan political position about which there will be reasonable disagreement. If Sleat’s conclusions were to be widely accepted, this would represent an enormous improvement in the character of mainstream political theory.

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Understanding Marxism

by Geoff Boucher

Acumen Publishing 2012, pbk £14.99 (ISBN: 9781844655212), 240pp.

Adorno Reframed

by Geoff Boucher

I.B. Tauris 2012, pbk £12.99 (ISBN: 9781848859470), 160pp.

by Ben Gook

In late 2012, German-born artist and cultural critic Hito Steyerl opened her exhibition, “Adorno’s Grey” in Rotterdam. It has since travelled to North America and will be in the UK this year. In it, she probes the enduring myths about Theodor Adorno—not his thought per se, but overfamiliar ideas about the man and the stories that circulate about his late Frankfurt teaching. In a wholly grey room (carpet, walls, projections, title cards and so on, all grey), Steyerl presents a multi-faceted rendering of the later Adorno and his role in the West German republic. The work’s presentation is a knowing gesture toward Adorno’s statement in *Negative Dialectics* (1977, 377-8): “greyness could not fill us with despair if our minds did not harbour the concept of different colours, scattered traces of which are not absent from the negative whole. The traces always come from the past.” This, in turn, was Adorno’s implicit reference to Hegel’s claim “philosophy paints its grey in grey,” meaning that it “succumbs to the existent.”¹ So Steyerl’s work asks us to look past the grey, to find that which already exists but is obscured by inherited ideas, to find the potential in an object (Adorno’s thought) too easily passed over with cheap references to incidents (after 1968) and second-hand understandings (e.g. the banal caricature of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *The Culture Industry* taught in the Anglo world). What remains to be discovered?

Steyerl’s artwork brings into the field of vision some of those apparently *telling* events and asks that we look at them again. What can be made, she asks, of the famous *Busenattentat* of April 1969, in which three female students approached Adorno bare-breasted at the beginning of a lecture and showered him with flower petals? Shocked, Adorno left the lecture and never again stood at a lectern. Adorno died three months later. In cultural memory, this “attack” has come to signify the shifting position of a man who had done much to interrogate the complacency of postwar West Germany, including its universities, but who was ambivalent about the methods and aims of the often anti-intellectual but militant 1968 student movement. (Adorno rejects all political violence as a means to an end, an

end that he envisioned as a utopian reconciliation which precluded violence—more on this below.) This ambivalence is nicely captured by Steyerl through an archival interview with an activist, who notes that Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* was literally used by many as a shield in 1968 confrontations with the police. Returning to the lecture theatre and the title of the work, Steyerl also explores whether it was true that, at the height of his influence in the late 1960s, Adorno ordered the walls of his over-flowing lecture theatre be painted grey. Adorno reasoned that grey would better hold the attention of the assembled students. Given Adorno's unforgiving attention to aesthetics, this apocryphal story does seem plausible. And so, in "Adorno's Grey," Steyerl projects footage of conservationists fastidiously digging through years of maintenance work on the room, attempting to find the layer of grey paint. This is a deft depiction of the work that must be done by all of us today to get back to Adorno—the work of a man hidden beneath years of discrediting tale-telling about "Adorno," the political quietist if not outright reactionary, the outmoded prude and the highbrow snob, forlornly staring out in comfort from the Grand Hotel Abyss, in Lukács' famous indictment. Steyerl's intervention is especially fitting because Adorno would have appreciated an aesthetic approach to unveiling the truth about this object and subject, his life and thought. Not least we should appreciate that Steyerl has the temerity to suggest that Adorno is worth reconsidering today. And yet she is not alone, as the welcome reception her work has received, and as suggested by the number of re-translations and an uptick in new secondary works.

In *Adorno Reframed*, Geoff Boucher undertakes similar work via different means. In the preface, he writes: "despite the fact that Adorno is one of the only important contemporary philosophers to have published a theory of aesthetics, his influence in the arts has been severely limited by the perception, shared unfortunately by some commentators, that his is merely a negative position." In short chapters, Boucher makes clear the ways in which aesthetics was central to Adorno's philosophical project—and above all else, Boucher wants to rescue Adorno's thought from his reputation. Adorno makes an appearance too in Boucher's *Understanding Marxism*, itself another attempt to introduce readers to a strain of thought that, beyond the campus, is seen as widely discredited. Both books, then, are "introductory" works with a project of surveying and presenting the thought of a thinker and a tradition at its best. Without forgoing criticisms by allies and foes of their respective topics, both books are excellent and systematic overviews of research programs which still have much to offer contemporary thought and praxis. As anyone who has taught introductory university courses knows well, the pedagogical challenges of such teaching can prove hugely beneficial

for both teacher and student—perhaps more so for the teacher, who may find themselves coming up against all sorts of aporia in knowledge when faced with a sceptical student. A flimsy grasp on the material just won't do—and so it is with Boucher's task here, expounding on two philosophical traditions which face much scepticism, and the end results of his research suggest a real mastery of the literature in each book.

To continue with *Adorno Reframed* for the moment. This may be an entry in I.B. Tauris' series of books "interpreting key thinkers for the arts," but Boucher is not content to render Adorno into a more readable or approachable figure via textbook-style platitudes. Nor does he produce a revisionist Adorno for instrumental uses today. The task for Boucher—and all Adorno readers—ought not to be underestimated for (at least) four reasons, as he outlines it: a) Adorno's remarkable reading in the history of continental philosophy can be intimidating, as it is often referenced with little aid to the novice reader regarding the provenance and tradition of the concepts; b) Adorno had a principled stance against defining his concepts, which he saw as historical entities subject to the dialectical movement of change and so ultimately undefinable; c) the lapidary and aphoristic formulations, some of which have become cheap quotable quotes from Adorno, are sometimes dense allusions that need unpacking, perhaps more so for novice English readers; d) some appalling translations into English that have made all of the above even more bewildering than was necessary.² Against this challenging backdrop, this book outlines a strong and fruitful take on Adorno, which attempts to disabuse us of the image we know well: austere, morose, melancholic thought with contempt for the masses. As with all caricatures, there is both something true and something excessive in this, something apt and something grossly overstated. Firstly, against the claim of pessimism and melancholy (no doubt fanned by Adorno's own reference to the "melancholy science" he practised and the often dark aphoristic style of its practise), Boucher claims Adorno as a utopian thinker. As Boucher puts it: "there can be no question that for Adorno, the anticipation of reconciliation—permanent peace, a balance with nature, freedom from fear and hunger—is what makes life meaningful." (8) Art is where this flame is kept alive, for Adorno. Philosophically, Adorno simultaneously presents two perspectives: critical negativity and utopian reconciliation. To date, the emphasis in his English reception has been on the first of these perspectives. Secondly, making his incision on the ground of what has been cultural studies' chief complaint against Adorno (and the Frankfurt School *in toto*—i.e. a second-hand understanding of the culture industry critique wherein audiences are duped by the industrial-scale entertainment industry), Boucher propounds an argument about Adorno's Marxist Individualism.

The central claim here is that Adorno regretted the lack of attention to ethical and cultural factors in socialist politics and Marxist programs. Informed by his reading of Lukács and Weber—a tension between philosophy, literature and sociology that produced some of the Frankfurt School's greatest insights—Adorno argues that instrumental reason looms over the individual and demands always that the subject be objectified. The complexity of an individual life is reduced to figures, calculable rules to manage social questions, subject to formal rationality and so on. Under conditions of commercialisation and bureaucratisation, reason is thereby diminished to a faculty for performing calculations, whereas rationality can also be used to “reflect on the substantive goals of human action and the forms of life conducive to human flourishing.” (34) Furthermore, under capitalism, universal equivalence reigns, subordinating all particulars: what is lost here are “the particularity of the unique individual, the particular qualities of material things and the particularity of radically individuated artworks.” (62) All is classified, ultimately, by monetary relations and driven toward—especially in respect of individuals—enforcing social conformity. Adorno wants to draw attention to Marx's focus not only on equality but also on subjectivity and individuality. Previously, economics and political power had become the central sites of intervention for Marxist thinking and action. Thus, in a theme discussed at some length too in *Understanding Marxism*, Boucher contends that Marxists ought not to cede ground to liberals on the question of the individual. Adorno disputed in the strongest terms the reduction of the individual to a self-interested and self-preserving being. Marx's revolutionary vision, after all, was to see individuals liberated to achieve their inborn potentials and flourish on their own terms (“to each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs”), rather than be subject to the “damaged life” of an oppressive division of labour. Furthermore, the individual ought to be autonomous, able to reflect on laws and convention—and therein morally able to break through cultural constraints. This is a familiar Kantian position. But Adorno is a materialist, as Boucher makes clear, because this moral reflection issues from an individual body with a natural existence, a body that suffers and yearns for happiness. Adorno's ethics for Boucher, then, are a deontological moral theory with an emphasis on hedonistic considerations.

The role of aesthetic modernism in Adorno's thinking, then, is to offer a repository of expressive material in the face of rationalising forces. Modernism presents a form of rebellion and resistance to the quashing of individuals and objects. Boucher rightly begins his first chapter with a salvo to recall the stakes of modernism in the twentieth century. Now inured to its shocks by years of advertising knock-offs and postcard reproductions, we

have forgotten just how radical and expressive modernism was in its time and place. Reading Adorno's aesthetics may remind us of the vitality and radical energy in the best of modernism: the shock of the new in expressionism, surrealism and so on, which attempted to make visible the affective and perceptual experience of the twentieth century. Adorno, then, confronted otherwise sympathetic fellow travellers—such as Lukacs—who saw in modernism no merit, a deviation from the true path of socialist art, which would always be realism. Boucher details here the debates between Lukacs and Adorno over the status of modernism and realism, especially concerning their role in progressive politics. Adorno comes down in favour of modernism's dissonance (especially in his most beloved aesthetic form of music): he believes the dissonant notes "are justified by the evolving dialectical relation between the universal and the particular—that is, quantitative generalisations and the qualitatively specific—in contemporary society." (62) Modernism "documents the worsening antagonism between individual and society in the administered world." (62) In these circumstances, artists can "rationalise" their work (via new techniques and understandings of medium) or defend what is lost through appeals to "authenticity" (attempts to recover "authentic" complexes of feeling and insight through primitivism or intuition). Adorno posits these positions as a polarity and reads art history on the basis of their dialectical conflict. Ultimately, for Adorno, modernism is the aesthetic redemption of modernity, whereby autonomous art is the carrier of an emancipatory impulse. "Autonomous art, with its individuated contents and dissonant forms, at once gestures toward reconciliation and indicates that the world makes it impossible." (126) Such art, then, makes plain through its protest that the promise of happiness and contentment has been broken. For Adorno, a similar emancipatory impulse is present in dialectical philosophy.

Adorno Reframed ends with a chapter titled "Adorno Today." Here, Boucher considers not only the obvious question (what can we do with Adorno's thought today, what are its potentials) but a more confronting question too (what would Adorno think of our thought today). Boucher's answer to this question is not pretty: "The confidence with which most commentators announce that Adorno is passé would, to Adorno, have evidenced a waning of utopian energies and a slackening of critical tension that is flabby, and sad." The end of history—and the attendant mocking of social alternatives to the status quo—has marked a generalised critical resignation, seen in the fundamental acceptance of what is political, culturally and socially "realistic" today. Nevertheless, Boucher, in this final chapter, considers those contemporary thinkers who still find critical resources in Adorno's work: Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek come in for

particular mention, but Boucher also makes the crucial point that Adorno has not inspired the usual doctrinaire (“Adornian”) school of thought, but rather many feel “licensed” by Adorno’s demanding work to engage critically and appropriate selectively. “The refreshing thing about Adorno’s anti-systematic philosophy is that it does not produce acolytes: at worst, its enigmatic density generates academic commentators; at best, its contradictory fragments spark highly original, independent positions.” (127-8) This is a fruitful inspiration, as Adorno’s own positions have needed defending and reconsideration. Adorno’s thought has been significantly challenged by debates concerning: the relation between mainstream (consumer) culture and the artworld (i.e. the postmodern condition of aesthetic commodification and its consequences for art); the emergence of second-wave feminism as a critique of normative masculine determinations of individuality; the linguistic turn in philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century. To account briefly for these challenges: how can autonomous art exist in postmodernity, how can there be aesthetic redemption in a culture both obsessed with and oblivious to aesthetics; how can we talk about a universal “subject” or “individual,” and how can feminist individuation be assimilated to an idea of reconciliation; the second generation Frankfurt School (especially Habermas and Wellmer) turn to a social philosophy that finds it difficult to uphold the idea of instrumental reason as anything other than a small subset of (language based) rationality, hence reason still holds deep emancipatory potentials. Needless to say, Boucher argues that Adorno still has much to add to these debates—and our contemporaries have not had the final word. Despite attempts to shutter Adorno in his grey room—the melancholy master at the lectern, endlessly intoning about the great works of modernism and an austere, dialectical social philosophy—this book is a model of bringing the emancipatory intent back into the world, back into dialogue with present discussions. In that sense, it is both an excellent introduction to Adorno—including, as it does, an annotated bibliography of other texts to consult—and an argument in itself for the research program and method of the early Frankfurt School.

Understanding Marxism is also a timely overview of various Marxist traditions and their interrelation; “timely” because many (tenuous) media reports tell us that sales of Marx’s *Capital* spiked in the midst of the recent financial crisis, while *Capital* reading groups were multiplying around the world after the Occupy movement flared and then faded. Once the final leaf of *Capital* (be it volume 1 or 3) has been turned by these readers—presuming they make it that far—where do they turn next? In the tawdry history of factionalism (if not assassination) and intellectual cold war, which of the various Marxist

traditions can one profitably read today? The critiques of critiques of critiques endemic to this branch of thought can baffle newcomers. This book ought to help the baffled make a decision about where to next turn.

Boucher simplifies his task by not considering every twist and turn in the history of Marxism. Some have criticised the decision, but Boucher focuses on the better-known tendencies within Marxist thought, more or less leaving aside the writings of Mao, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg and so on, while the writings of party leaders (e.g. Stalin, Honnecker, Castro) are also left aside, as are the dissident varieties of, say, Eastern Marxism (e.g. Rudolf Bahro) and dissident Western Marxism (libertarian Marxists, e.g. CLR James, Castoriadis, Italian Autonomism). These are pragmatic decisions, to be sure, not least because this book takes its place in a series (*Understanding Movements in Modern Thought*) intended to introduce readers to the most influential research within a tradition. If Marxism is a field of debate, certain tendencies have accrued explanatory power and are commonly referenced, such that smaller and dissident groups often exist at margins of the better-known schools.³ In that sense, Boucher has made a judgment call about tendencies with which the novice should become acquainted. So what remains? The book has a chapter each on: Classical Marxism; Hegelian Marxism; the Frankfurt School; Structural Marxism; Analytical Marxism; Critical Theory; Post-Marxism. The introduction (“Marx and Marxism”) and first chapter (“Marx before Marxism”) succinctly outline the basic positions and concepts in Marx. Nevertheless, as becomes clear by the book’s close, “basic” interpretations of Marx are perhaps the most fraught. Boucher manages to stay even-keeled throughout, judiciously summarising and assessing the key claims of each school of thought.

We should not be surprised, given the other volume under review here, that Frankfurt receives quite a bit of attention: separate chapters are dedicated to the original generation of Frankfurt School thinkers (Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse—with a throughline to the Hegelian Marxism of Lukacs, covered in the previous chapter) and Critical Theory (taken as Habermas, primarily, but also Axel Honneth and Seyla Benhabib). This preference should not be surprising, given Boucher’s interest in psychoanalysis, literature and political thought—the domains where the Frankfurt School applied Marxist approaches to great advantage. (Perhaps my own preferences are now becoming clear.) Indeed, Habermas also provides a device for arranging connections across Boucher’s text.⁴ Habermas’ insight helps to explain why Marx’s original synthesis (history, structure and praxis) broke up—and how it was put back together in different forms by three evolving types of approach: restoration, renaissance and reconstruction. These are posited as three stages through which any

research program will evolve. Habermas discusses these in a *theoretical* description of the Marxist field, whereas Boucher adds in the *empirical* complexity of their unfolding and outlines the many variants within each type. *Restoration* signifies “the recovery of an original doctrine from its subsequent distortion, which happens when the connection between praxis, structure and history is reasserted.” Boucher finds this approach in classical, “orthodox” Marxism of the Second, Third and Fourth Internationals, wherein the leaders and thinkers attempted to bring natural scientific approaches to bear on new conditions, thereby re-integrating history, structure and praxis per that methodology, albeit expressed as a return to Marx (via Engels). *Renaissance*, meanwhile, opens up “new directions through a variation of an argument’s premises; in this case through taking any two of praxis, structure and history, and varying the third.” This is the approach of the twentieth century “Western Marxists,” who selected elements of Marx’s combination and imported external philosophical ideas, integrating the parts into a new synthesis. Hence, the Hegelian Marxists returned to Hegel so as to highlight praxis and history in Marx while freshly conceptualising structure. The Frankfurt School, interested in the relation between Marxist structure and history, radically interrogated praxis given the failure of the revolutions in Germany and elsewhere. Structural Marxism (Althusser, Poulantzas), meanwhile, rejected the teleology of Marx’s concept of history, thus focussing their attention on the relation between praxis and structure, therein also strikingly reconceiving the historical process. Lastly, there have been attempts to *reconstruct* Marxism, which means the “complete redesign of an argument to fit its goals to new premises; in other words rethinking praxis, structure and history, and their connection, from the ground up.” Boucher classifies under this approach the efforts to reconstruct Marx’s insights into alienation and liberation around new concepts of history, structure and practice. This follows—chronologically—in the wake of what Boucher terms the renaissance strategy’s “impressive results.” So Analytical Marxism (Elster, Cohen, Olin Wright), has sought to reconstruct Marxism via methodological individualism (e.g. neoclassical economics, rational choice theory and so on) and using contemporary (analytic) philosophical research methods. Critical Theorists have sought to rework the Frankfurt School and Marxist approaches by importing various non-Marxist sources. Post-Marxism (Žižek, Laclau, Mouffe, Butler, Badiou), meanwhile, looks to reconstruct favourably Structural Marxism, attempting to illustrate the potentials of bringing post-structuralism and the Marxist renaissance into an encounter. In all, this is a useful optic to understand the movements of convergence and divergence in the history of Marxist thought. It helps to make sense of what is varied across the schools and how they

push Marxism to different ends and toward regeneration.

The book's second half may irk some of those given to classical or Hegelian Marxist approaches. Habermas, Mouffe, Honneth and so on are more often categorised as (radical) liberal thinkers today. So how can they be included here? Boucher more or less approaches their inclusion as non-controversial. In the book's attempt, across the whole, to bring the account of Marxist traditions up to date, their inclusion seems without question. But what we learn by including them here, at the end of a text outlining Marxist traditions, is the deep Marxist roots still nourishing their thought. The early Habermas, for example, or Benhabib's sharp take on Adorno and the Frankfurt School, remain indispensable texts for twenty-first century Marxism. We might also argue that the proceduralist accounts of Critical Theory become a repudiated aspect of Post-Marxist thought and, thus, are worth understanding in this connection. The debates *within* Post-Marxism, Boucher implies, are inflected by the linguistic turn and the place of "discourse" within a Marxist analytic.

The book works exceptionally well as an introduction. We emerge with questions and a wish to follow up on debates, readings and so on. It is also presented in a way helpful but non-condescending for students, while still informative for advanced scholars. For example, a blow-by-blow recount of the chapters here is made redundant by the excellent dot-point summaries of the stakes and positions at the end of each chapter. Overall, each chapter is largely taken up with an ecumenical, fair-minded exposition of each research program, with a closing set of criticisms and a sense of why the program was challenged by its own limitations. The chapters could be used standalone in survey courses, as they retain integrity on their own.

Both books here are, of course, paraphrastic and thus present Boucher with the difficulties of retaining some authorial and critical voice. To the extent that all scholarship is a dialogue with other authors, this is doubly so when the text is billed as an introduction to another's thought. Given the task of summary, Boucher's prose can tend toward dense jams of conceptual nouns—a heady brew, at times. This can make the odd phrase forbidding and demanding to the outsider. This was a real difficulty in his first book (*The Charmed Circle of Ideology*), which presumed of all its readers a systematic understanding of philosophy, aesthetics and political theory that many of us can only wish to hold. There was also a pugilistic style that was stirring to read but jarred with conveying meaning in some of its difficult passages. Although no less stringent, however, the phrasing is looser in these books for less specialised audiences. This is a reassuring development, as Boucher's grasp of critical social theory ought to be widely accessible in times that, to paraphrase him, intellectual and political endeavour is too often flabby and

sad. Especially in the Adorno book, perhaps spurred by his subject's own writing, some crystalline and aphoristic turns capture ideas in ways that at once clarify the stakes or movements of thought. Read together, these two books more than make the case for the ongoing relevance of their topics—they suggest that both are necessary to understanding our contemporary predicament.

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Endnotes

¹ In *Aesthetic Theory* (2002, 39-40), meanwhile, Adorno discusses the dominant role of black in (his then) contemporary art. We will leave this aside for now, except to note that Adorno's interest in grey and black as figures of artistic practice and philosophical thought is continuous with his tight conjoining of aesthetics, politics, the social and subjectivity.

² We ought to make a distinction between Adorno's reception in English-speaking countries and in Germany. In English, we have had to make do with substandard translations for many years. These have no doubt skewed his common representation, as has the emphasis on his essays in *The Culture Industry* collection. In recent times, some beneficent translators have made available for free online alternate translations—and publishers seem to have caught wind that there are readers interested in new translations of these texts. In Germany, meanwhile, Adorno was a figurehead for psychically rigorous, philosophically informed and culturally meaningful attempts to “come to terms” with the Nazi past. Adorno was a presence in the national media, presenting lectures for radio broadcast.

³ Boucher clearly does not mean this to indicate these “marginal” schools are to be ignored. Indeed, he strongly advocates the research of the Regulation School as a primer for understanding twentieth-century economic developments—but this school is not covered in the text. This is just one indication that Boucher deals in the book with the influential planks of Marxism, rather than those its author finds have the most explanatory power.

⁴ Boucher draws this from Habermas' *Zur Rekonstruktion des Historischen Materialismus* (1976), a short book reprinted in English as “Toward a

Reconstruction of Historical Materialism" in *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (1979, 130-77).

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Institutions In Global Distributive Justice

by Andras Miklos

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by Melis Menent

Professor Andras Miklos is a member of Simon Business School and the Department of Philosophy, Rochester University. Previously he has taught at the Harvard University, The European University Institute and the University of Oxford. He is interested in ethics, political philosophy and health policy. He is the author of 'Institutions in Cosmopolitan Justice', 'The Basic Structure and the Principles of Justice', 'Public Health and the Rights of States', and 'Nationalist Criticisms of Cosmopolitan Justice'. 'Institutions in Global Distributive Justice' was published as part of the series of Studies in Global Justice and Human Rights by Edinburgh University Press. In 'Institutions in Global Distributive Justice' Miklos analyses the effect that social, economic and political institutions have on distributive justice. More than 19 per cent of all human beings born into our world die of poverty' he writes. In the face of this, Miklos defends a cosmopolitan conception of justice by developing a novel theory of distributive justice for addressing the inequalities between the most affluent and the poorest countries. In this cosmopolitan conception of justice, nation-states are not considered to be obstacles before the global scope of justice. They do, instead, provide a framework in which existing political and social practices are conceived as the fundamentals on which Miklos develops a theory of justice with a global scope.

The idea of all human-beings having equal worth, seems natural for most people living in liberal democracies. Yet many people consider the nation-state as an assumption, when it comes to dealing with theories of justice. The boundaries of the national political community carry moral weight, and a vast range of literature presumes that we carry particular duties to our fellow citizens, which we do not have to others. The principles of justice which are accepted for the domestic domain, that is at the level of nation-states, are not embraced globally. By advocating a cosmopolitan understanding of justice, Miklos questions the applicability of principles of distributive justice at the global level. While the book is not meant as a fully-fledged defence of egalitarianism, it argues that, if there are reasons to accept distributive egalitarianism in the domestic case, then there are equally compelling reasons to accept it for the global domain. In the chapter on the Nationalist Theories of Justice, he argues against a conception of culture which presumes that principles of justice are inextricably linked to the

nation-states. Justice, in the way Miklos understands it, requires that we measure individual well-being in terms of abstract goods which provide an unbiased standard of interpersonal comparison. This unbiased standard of interpersonal comparison requires that more concern for the interests of fellow members, of our nation-states can be permitted, only once we have contributed our fair share to impartial global institutions, which pursue global interests. The problem of justice, for Miklos, is a political problem: it concerns how citizens ought to be treated by their governments and what citizens owe one another qua citizens. Political institutions at the domestic level create a special relationship that, for the time being, is predominantly shared between fellow citizens. Broadening the requirements of egalitarian distributive justice derives from a special relationship that fellow nationals owe to one another. In this sense, nation-states, as they exist today, constitute the primary foundations of global distributive justice.

A political conception of justice, which is restricted to the level of nation-states, fails to take account of institutional relations at the global level. This political conception presumes that foreigners have no obligation to one another qua fellow human beings and permits injustice against outsiders. While criticising a political conception of justice, Miklos argues that one of the weaknesses of a political conception of justice is its inability to consider various ways in which global institutions can be unjust. Therefore, while defending the idea of cosmopolitan institutions and global justice, he also argues for a specific understanding of global justice and global institutions which would not lead to injustice. Miklos gives Rawlsian justice as an example of a relational view of justice. He argues that Rawls develops his theory of justice for domestic societies in *A Theory of Justice* and in *Political Liberalism* and restricts the scope of egalitarian justice to the domestic domain in *The Law of Peoples*. Despite arguing for the obligation to respect human rights globally, the institutions which support these, in Rawlsian justice, become entangled with the domestic sphere. While regarding the institutions of nation-states as necessary for the generation of requirements of distributive justice, Rawls also conceives the limits of the nation-state as the point where the scope of justice ends. David Miller joins Rawls in arguing that the collective responsibility for the faith of a people belongs to a nation (as opposed to humanity as a whole). Miklos goes against this by advocating that there are globally valid requirements of justice which broaden a political conception of justice as well as a nationalistic approach to responsibility.

Miklos postulates that global justice is capable of maintaining itself naturally. For him, just global institutions can generate their own support in the long run. He opposes the idea that nation-states are natural constructs and defends cosmopolitan egalitarianism in global distributive justice while

Rawls favours the nation-states rather than a world-government. For Rawls, there is no way of conceiving global governance without undermining particular cultures and hence becoming despotic. Miklos states that the Rawlsian argument does not demonstrate why the scope of social and economic cooperation coincides with national boundaries. He does, however, carry out a discussion about the Rawlsian approach to global governance and nation-states in which Rawls ties the success of social cooperation and distributive justice with institutions that can be maintained only in a domestic sphere with a common shared culture. Despite demonstrating the Rawlsian argument against the weakness of a possible world-government successfully, Miklos does not develop the reason why he finds this Rawlsian conception limited. He introduces the conception of Rawlsian basic structure and recognizes that the Rawlsian theory is focused on this basic structure, which is politically regulated cooperation, within which citizens participate. These citizens ought to be governed by a common political constitution, a legal system and share a common political culture for the effective functioning of political institutions and of the basic structure. For Miklos, the same reasons Rawls gives for the application of principles of justice within basic structures also hold for the global domain as he seeks to address humanity as a whole, rather than developing his theory on citizens of nation-states recognizing one another as such [p.114].

Miklos opposes Rawlsian justice to non-relational cosmopolitan theories which hold that institutions are not necessary for requirements of justice [p.117]. The scope of justice is global by definition, and it is construed independently of the participation of all humans in it. Global justice is for everyone, independent of their citizenship status and institutional regulations which may (or may not) bind individuals to one another (as citizens). It is these non-relational cosmopolitan theories of justice which Miklos favours more than the relational theories of justice. The non-relational cosmopolitan conception of justice offers a broad scope of justice. It regards common humanity as sufficient to generate global distributive requirements. While not giving rise to principles of justice, global institutions can affect the scope of application of these principles [p.141]. In this sense, Miklos places faith in humanity as a whole at the core of this conception of justice. Statists and nationalists who argue against a cosmopolitan conception of justice would need to show why social cooperation, moral obligations and global political institutions are necessary, for the application of Rawlsian principles of justice, cannot be established [p.115]. 'Once we accept its global scope, the duty of justice requires that we rely on some of the existing elements of this scheme, reform others so that they better fit principles of justice, and establish new ones, rather than return to the system of territorially defined

nation-states [p.157]`. Therefore, relying on nation-states in the way Miklos understands justice constitutes the partially existing foundations of global distributive justice.

Miklos explores the question on the necessity of institutions for generating the requirements of Rawlsian and Cosmopolitan theories of justice. While arguing for broadening the scope of justice to the global domain, Miklos challenges the conception of justice which applies within a national context only. He competently uses the theories of justice, nationalism, Rawls's Law of Peoples and the political conception of justice. Despite demonstrating fluid competence of such complicated issues in political philosophy, Miklos does not sufficiently develop his point about the nation states burdening the freestanding Rawlsian understanding of justice. Cosmopolitanism as well as Rawlsian Justice both point out to a conception of justice which applies independent of the social context. Construing the nation-states as a transitory stage on which a more efficient and novel theory of justice can be developed, however, is a must for the cohesion and realism of a cosmopolitan utopia applied in the institutional and economic domain. The social and political context and the political culture, which in our day is marked by the impact of the nation-states, poses a bigger obstacle than it seems to do in Miklos's writing. Applying the most abstract and appealing concepts in political philosophy to business and global ethics is a noble task, which Miklos would have carried out with more success had he dedicated larger space to the elaborating a discussion on the cultural reverberations of the nation-state on the political formations of the contemporary world.

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Sharing Democracy

by Michael L. Ferguson

Oxford University Press: New York 2012, pbk £17.99 (ISBN: 9780199921584), 224pp.

by Jack Isherwood

Michael Ferguson's "*Sharing Democracy*" claims that democratic theory has interrogated difference and diversity at the expense of adequately questioning the connection between commonality and sharing. Ferguson's book offers a critical de-construction of these ideas and articulates an alternative political project which places freedom as its central normative commitment.

The argumentative strategy of *Sharing Democracy* is premised upon a basic distinction between two perspectives of democracy- the first characterising it in terms of common institutions, practices, historical traditions and cultural and ethnic identifications whilst the second characterises democracy in an Arendtian sense as a set of activities orientated towards freedom.

According to this latter view, which Ferguson keenly endorses, democracy refers to distinctive forms of interaction between people which permit "the exercise of political freedom in acts of self-government" (Ferguson, 2012: 12). The author maintains that democracy is ultimately grounded in the human capacity to "shape the meaning of the world in which we live...in how we share the world together, rather than in what (or whether) we share" (Ferguson, 2012: 12). Ferguson's understanding of democracy therefore stresses that freedom is a momentary affair which is only realised in the moment when people 'act in concert' together- for instance, in a protest march.

The author's case is developed via two further arguments. Firstly, Ferguson suggests that *the* aim of democratic politics should be to "open up our awareness of this capacity for freedom", to actively encourage its exercise and to "proliferate competing claims about how we should make sense of the world we share" (Ferguson, 2012: 27). Secondly, the author argues that democracy is threatened in contexts where this capacity is frustrated or occluded- that is, in cases where "we accept the contours of our world as given, as natural or as simply beyond our ability to affect" (Ferguson, 2012: 27).

This is an important point as Ferguson maintains that understandings of democracy which stress the significance of common goods, values, historical legacies and beliefs potentially harbour anti-democratic

implications. Of course, this is not a novel criticism but Ferguson particularly stresses that notions of commonality might occlude our “human agency in making sense of the world”. (Ferguson, 2012: 6). The author is concerned that this “occlusion” could justify excluding voices which challenge claims of commonality and it could also lead people to disregard their moral responsibility for the contingent manner in which democratic communities are imagined.

Furthermore, the author argues that accounts of democratic agency which rely on some notion of commonality are flawed because they supposedly prioritise the “passive possession” of commonality over the “active exercise of political freedom” (Ferguson, 2012: 6). Ferguson fears therefore that objective accounts of sharing underplay the productive necessity of disagreement, conflict and discord in maintaining vibrant liberal-democratic societies.

This flaw, Ferguson claims, ultimately stems from an unquestioned commitment to an ‘objective’ conceptualisation of sharing which presupposes that people can share a quality in common “without doing anything, and without even knowing that we share it” (Ferguson, 2012: 9) From this perspective, any claim to ‘commonality’ constitutes a descriptive truth claim. According to the author, this conceptualisation of sharing assumes that either one can share something or not- there can be “no room for disagreement or interpretation” as the commonality of any shared object is independent of “how and whether it is perceived by the persons said to share it” (Ferguson, 2012: 37; 40). This suggests the possibility that sharing does not even require first-person experience- instead, it is possible that an independent observer might be able to form a better understanding about the nature of objects shared between people. (Ferguson, 2012: 37; 40).

Ferguson maintains that this assumption encourages an approach towards democratic theory that articulates a “flattering self-portrait of the theorist as a neutral producer of knowledge that justifies an elitist (as opposed to a bottom-up) approach to addressing political problems” (Ferguson, 2012: 37). Ferguson is concerned about this mode of academic theorisation as it evokes the spectre of a ‘Rousseauian legislator’ whose role is to observe what kinds of commonality are latent within a community and to propose suggestions for how such commonalities might be cultivated in the future. The author fears that identity theorists could become captive to a faulty epistemological and ontological framework which narrowly focuses on objectively shared objects at “the expense of examining the first-person experience of sharing a world with others”. (Ferguson, 2012: 42)

Conversely, Ferguson argues that it is possible to re-interpret the notion of commonality in a manner which is more sensitive to pluralism and

political contestation. She argues that commonality should be understood as an activity of political freedom in which people “do the work of making sense of the world” (Ferguson, 2012: 56). Ferguson argues that this activity is normative as it is possible for people to render this work critical and self-conscious, thereby implying that people can assume responsibility for “how we make sense of the world” and for re-imagining it. (Ferguson, 2012: 72).

It has been already noted that the author believes that it is through people’s mutual interactions that the demos is brought into being, a power which is ultimately grounded in our common capacity to “inter subjectively make sense of the world we share” (Ferguson, 2012: 26). This is important because Ferguson claims that “acting without knowing” constitutes the *ordinary* condition of democratic politics as public contestation is conducted without any guarantees of support or sureties of outcome. In fact, the author claims that democracy involves “acting together with people we do not know, to pursue goals we cannot know in advance that we share, in the hope of a future we cannot control” (Ferguson, 2012: 8).

Consequently, the author stresses that this activity of ‘world remaking’ is defined by its lack of predictability, certainty and controllability. Indeed, Ferguson maintains that democracy is a process of constant contestation as certain interpretations render some possibilities intelligible and others unintelligible. The staking of *claims* over commonality is therefore an activity of world-building as people strive to generate consensus over how to understand and interpret social reality. As Ferguson summaries, when people attempt to interpret the world with others we are “participating in building the world we share in common with others” (Ferguson, 2012: 56).

However, this does not mean that people can imagine ‘the world’ in an arbitrary manner. Ferguson argues that ultimately interpretations are constrained by the world’s physical properties. Making sense of the world is also not entirely a matter of free-choice as our interpretations are inherently connected to structures and relationships of power as well as the various historical inheritances which limit our existing social vocabularies. This implies that disagreement, conflict and discord should not be seen as a symptom of political failure or as a potential threat to democratic societies but rather as an expected outcome of political activity.

In conclusion, Ferguson hopes that re-imagining the concept of commonality might encourage people to become more open to “...inhabiting the world with *plural* others” (Ferguson, 2012: 59, emphasis original). From this perspective, the uncontrollable and unpredictable experience of conflict and disagreement can occasion a renewing of “openness to the other and a sense of one’s own non sovereignty” (Ferguson, 2012: 59). In addition, the

author hopes that by re-conceptualizing commonality it might be possible to render the “identity of the demos” more resilient in the face of “multiple, overlapping and not entirely contiguous practices of democratic collective identity” (Ferguson, 2012: 59).

Nevertheless, it is also clear that there are some significant limitations to the author’s argument. First of all, it is often unclear which theorists harbour the objectivist conceptualisation of sharing that Ferguson attributes to them. This problem compounded by the author’s argumentative strategy which often only critiques one particular theorist (for instance the discussion of Charles Taylor in Chapter 5) as a means to generate broader criticisms about the objectivist approach as a whole. As a consequence, the author also obscures the possibility of nuance between the (often unnamed) theorists she categorises within the objectivist school. For example, at one point in Chapter 1 Ferguson simply asserts that (unnamed) “theorists stubbornly try to hold on to some form of commonality” without any explanation in the text or even in a footnote about which theorists she is specifically critiquing (Ferguson, 2012: 23).

Moreover, although Ferguson is clearly advocating a form of radical democracy which transcends prevailing institutional arrangements perhaps her critique could have been complemented by an account of which kinds of institutional arrangements serve as pre-requisites for the ‘world-building’ freedom she advocates. Alternatively, it might have been insightful to explore what kinds of institutional arrangements limit or compromise activities of world-building freedom- a point which might have been developed in her discussions of the Arab Spring and the Occupy Movements which were largely repressed by coercive state institutions.

In addition, there are also issues with the author’s account of commonality, particularly in terms of the claim that it is possible to *meaningfully* communicate in the absence of commonly shared objects. For example, it seems strange that given the frequent citation of Arendt’s work there is only a single, passing reference to Arendt’s notion of ‘dark times’ where the capacity to render the world intelligible is imperilled or compromised (as Jonathan Lear memorably articulated in his book “*Radical hope: ethics in the face of cultural devastation*”).

Given the importance of this notion to Arendt’s work, it is unfortunate that the author did not engage with this concept in more detail as a way to illustrate the potential communicative problems faced by people in contexts where relations of oppression, domination and injustice are rationalised, euphemistically described or denied in public discourse or where power relations compromise people’s receptivity towards the testimonies of marginalised individuals, groups and communities. If Ferguson had taken

greater note of such circumstances it would have added critical nuance to her claim that simply by re-imagining the concept of commonality democratic societies can become more open to political contestation and more sensitive to the complex realities of contemporary pluralism.

Another apparent problem with *Sharing Democracy* is that it seems to ignore situations where partially incommensurable vocabularies frustrate mutual understanding or undermine the prospects for resolving political conflicts as has been illustrated in recent environmental disputes in Australia between the state and indigenous communities. In addition, it is noteworthy that *Sharing Democracy* predominantly focuses on the productive nature of political conflict at the expense of considering how political conflict can be profoundly dysfunctional or even destructive. For instance, it seems difficult to apply the author's work to deeply divided societies where a general unwillingness to engage in cross-cutting dialogue facilitates the continuity of conflict or to societies where social discourses encourage practices of 'moral exclusion' and the political de-legitimatization of one's opponents.

This point is significant because Ferguson argues that *the* goal for democratic politics should be to cultivate openness to disagreement and difference in a manner which enables continual interaction. However, Ferguson offers the reader no clear indication of how such a strenuous ideal might be realised in practice. In particular Ferguson does not adequately justify her claim that merely embracing the realities of human "plurality" and the "non-sovereignty" of 'our' viewpoints will allow people to be more receptive to difference and disagreement. The case of deeply divided societies illustrates that robust and cross-cutting engagement across conflict is frequently exhausting and counter-productive. Consequently, there might be a wide range of moral and prudential reasons to *avoid* political dialogue in circumstances of deep distrust and mutual suspicion in the interests of peace and social order.

Nevertheless, Ferguson's *Sharing Democracy* constitutes an insightful and very challenging read which should be commended for its depth and breadth of analysis and its originality. Her book will interest activists working in diverse social movements and academics who are grasping with the problem of how contemporary democracies can accommodate cultural and moral pluralism in the face of profound economic, social and political inequalities. Whilst it has its limitations, it evidently makes an important contribution to the literature on sharing and commonality in liberal-democratic societies.

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Religion and Public Reason: A Comparison of the Positions of John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas and Paul Ricoeur

by Maureen Junker-Kenny

Berlin: De Gruyter 2014, hbk €99.95 (ISBN: 9783110346213), 322pp.

by Huw Rees

This book, the sixteenth volume in De Gruyter's series on "Practical Theology in the Discourse of the Humanities," will be welcomed by students of religious and political philosophy. The academic cottage industry of "postsecular studies" has been up and running for some time now, and its products are well known. Rejection of a crude version of Weber's secularism thesis; criticism of Rawls' model of Political Liberalism; cautious embrace of Habermas' account of a postsecular public sphere; argument that religious contributions can enrich politics, and cure the maladies of modernity. It is refreshing, then, to read a book which broadens the terms of the discussion. Maureen Junker-Kenny is well placed to make such a contribution. She works in the field of Theological Ethics, "one of theology's philosophically mediated sub-disciplines." (2014:2) Theologians of this tendency engage with contemporary philosophical movements, rather than focussing exclusively on their own religious traditions. Dialogue is the goal, not apologetics. Theological Ethics calls for a deep knowledge of potential philosophical interlocutors, as well as a nuanced understanding of the theologian's own tradition. Junker-Kenny has all this in abundance, as her previous book *Habermas and Theology* demonstrated.¹

In *Religion and Public Reason*, Junker-Kenny evaluates the relationship between the titular concepts in the work of Rawls, Habermas and Ricoeur. Her choice of theorists alone is innovative. Rawls and Habermas are the usual poles of the debate; Ricoeur rarely makes an appearance. This is puzzling, given his voluminous and sympathetic writings about religion, and the eminent suitability of his hermeneutic approach for tackling the postsecular problematic. For Rawls and Habermas, an interest in religion was a late addition to their work on political theory. For Ricoeur, it was a major element of his work from the beginning. What the three theorists have in common, says Junker-Kenny, is their Kantian heritage. Rawls adopts the label of "Kantian constructivism" in politics and morality; Habermas sees his Discourse Ethics as an intersubjective version of the Categorical Imperative; and Ricoeur unites his hermeneutic approach with a "post-Hegelian Kantianism." In three long chapters, Junker-Kenny thoroughly analyses each theorist's position – not simply their view of religion and public reason, but their entire philosophical project. Her exposition is

detailed enough that the book could function as an introduction to Rawls, Habermas or Ricoeur. The chapters are broken down into nested sections and sub-sections, some as short as a paragraph, focussing on a single topic. On the one hand, this structure is measured and transparent. On the other, the nested nature of the sub-sections can cause confusion. By the time the reader has reached the end of section 2.3.4.2, they may have forgotten what 2.4 was meant to be about. It cannot be denied, however, that Junker-Kenny succeeds in discussing three complex philosophical positions, and marshalling a crowd of theorists, commentators and critics.

The main virtue of the book, especially for Anglophone academics, is that it introduces new voices into the debate on postsecularism. Junker-Kenny draws on the untranslated work of many German philosophers, as well as theologians whose contributions are not always heeded by philosophers. English-speaking philosophers may be familiar with Rainer Forst and Karl-Otto Apel, but will they have read Otfried Höffe or Herta Nagel-Docekal? Likewise, non-theologians will have heard of Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard, but are not likely to know the work of Thomas Pröpper or Saskia Wendel. In all cases, Junker-Kenny explains the substance of their criticisms of the three theorists with clarity. If the basic impulse of the postsecular project is to let religious voices be heard in a presumptively secular modernity, then Junker-Kenny has fulfilled it perfectly.

Junker-Kenny gives a critical account of Rawls' and Habermas' approaches to religion, and indeed of their philosophical projects as a whole. She explains, for example, the possible contradictions of Rawls' dual justification for his principles of justice, and the various limitations of Habermas' paradigm of postmetaphysical thinking. These detailed criticisms are drawn back, at the end of the respective chapters, into evaluations of the theorists' views of religion and public reason. This gives Junker-Kenny's judgements a great deal of philosophical weight. Ricoeur does not receive the same treatment, and it is clear from the start that Junker-Kenny accepts his view of religion and public reason as substantially correct. Rawls and Habermas both think that they can recruit religion to support philosophical and political projects which are, ultimately, non-metaphysical. The fact that Ricoeur does not abstain from metaphysics – he has no compunction about constructing a philosophical anthropology – makes his engagement with religion much more fruitful than the other two. There is nothing wrong with an author taking sides, and Junker-Kenny does make a case for how Ricoeur's theory wins out over Rawls and Habermas. Nonetheless, the contrast between her criticisms of the first two theorists and her championing of the third is noticeable. Some critical evaluation of Ricoeur would not go

amiss.

Rawls, according to Junker-Kenny, takes religions seriously as social facts and sources of normative motivation, whose presence must be accommodated by the political system.² But by levelling them out as comprehensive doctrines, which are mutually incommunicative and serve only to “embed” political conceptions of justice, he overlooks their innovative and transformative power. Habermas, in his recent work at least, is very aware of religion’s cognitive content. He sees that it can address questions and articulate concerns which are outside the purview of his postmetaphysical philosophy. He wants to recruit religion for the task of resisting the colonization of the lifeworld, via a process of dialogue and translation.³ Nonetheless, Habermas is incapable of seeing religion as a contemporary partner in dialogue. It is still the “other of reason,” a phenomenon with a dogmatic core which is “discursively extraterritorial.” Only Ricoeur, argues Junker-Kenny, gives religion the place it deserves in the polyphony of the public sphere. His hermeneutic approach allows him to understand the symbolic power of religions, seeing them as part of the foundation of public reason, rather than antonyms of reason which must be accommodated but cannot, in the end, be understood.

With luck, Junker-Kenny’s book will broaden the discussion on postsecularism beyond its narrow bounds. It is a welcome addition to the secondary literature.

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Endnotes

¹ Maureen Junker-Kenny, *Habermas and Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2011)

² See John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), especially Lecture VI, “The Idea of Public Reason.”

³ See Jürgen Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere: Cognitive Presuppositions for the ‘Public Use of Reason’ by Religious and Secular Citizens,” in *Between Naturalism and Religion* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008).

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