



CRITICAL THEORY TO STRUCTURALISM
PHILOSOPHY, POLITICS, AND THE HUMAN SCIENCES

EDITED BY DAVID INGRAM



THE HISTORY OF CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY

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General Editor: Alan D. Schrift

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VOLUME 5
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SERIES PREFACE

“Continental philosophy” is itself a contested concept. For some, it is understood to be any philosophy after 1780 originating on the European continent (Germany, France, Italy, etc.). Such an understanding would make Georg von Wright or Rudolf Carnap – respectively, a Finnish-born philosopher of language and a German-born logician who taught for many years in the US – a “continental philosopher,” an interpretation neither they nor their followers would easily accept. For others, “continental philosophy” refers to a style of philosophizing, one more attentive to the world of experience and less focused on a rigorous analysis of concepts or linguistic usage. In this and the accompanying seven volumes in this series, “continental philosophy” will be understood *historically* as a tradition that has its roots in several different ways of approaching and responding to Immanuel Kant’s critical philosophy, a tradition that takes its definitive form at the beginning of the twentieth century as the phenomenological tradition, with its modern roots in the work of Edmund Husserl. As such, continental philosophy emerges as a tradition distinct from the tradition that has identified itself as “analytic” or “Anglo-American,” and that locates its own origins in the logical analyses and philosophy of language of Gottlob Frege. Whether or not there is in fact a sharp divergence between the work of Husserl and Frege is itself a contested question, but what cannot be contested is that two distinct historical traditions emerged early in the twentieth century from these traditions’ respective interpretations of Husserl (and Heidegger) and Frege (and Russell). The aim of this history of continental philosophy is to trace the developments in one of these traditions from its roots in Kant and his contemporaries through to its most recent manifestations. Together, these volumes present a coherent and comprehensive account of the continental philosophical tradition

that offers readers a unique resource for understanding this tradition's complex and interconnected history.

Because history does not unfold in a perfectly linear fashion, telling the history of continental philosophy cannot simply take the form of a chronologically organized series of "great thinker" essays. And because continental philosophy has not developed in a vacuum, telling its history must attend to the impact of figures and developments outside philosophy (in the sciences, social sciences, mathematics, art, politics, and culture more generally) as well as to the work of some philosophers not usually associated with continental philosophy. Such a series also must attend to significant philosophical movements and schools of thought and to the extended influence of certain philosophers within this history, either because their careers spanned a period during which they engaged with a range of different theorists and theoretical positions or because their work has been appropriated and reinterpreted by subsequent thinkers. For these reasons, the volumes have been organized with an eye toward chronological development but, in so far as the years covered in each volume overlap those covered in the subsequent volume, they have been organized as well with the aim of coordinating certain philosophical developments that intersect in a fashion that is not always strictly chronological.

Volume 1 begins with the origins of continental philosophy in Kant and the earliest responses to his critical philosophy, and presents an overview of German idealism, the major movement in philosophy from the late eighteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century. In addition to Kant, the period covered in the first volume was dominated by Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, and together their work influenced not just philosophy, but also art, theology, and politics. This volume thus covers Kant's younger contemporary Herder, and his readers Schiller and Schlegel – who shaped much of the subsequent reception of Kant in art, literature, and aesthetics; the "Young Hegelians" – including Bruno Bauer, Ludwig Feuerbach, and David Friedrich Strauss – whose writings would influence Engels and Marx; and the tradition of French utopian thinking in such figures as Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Proudhon. In addition to Kant's early critics – Jacobi, Reinhold, and Maimon – significant attention is also paid to the later critic of German idealism Arthur Schopenhauer, whose appropriation and criticism of theories of cognition later had a decisive influence on Friedrich Nietzsche.

Volume 2 addresses the second half of the nineteenth century, in part as a response to the dominance of Hegelian philosophy. These years saw revolutionary developments in both European politics and philosophy, and five great critics dominated the European intellectual scene: Feuerbach, Marx, Søren Kierkegaard, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Nietzsche. Responding in various ways to Hegelian philosophy and to the shifting political landscape of Europe and

the United States, these thinkers brought to philosophy two guiding orientations – materialism and existentialism – that introduced themes that would continue to play out throughout the twentieth century. The second half of the nineteenth century also saw the emergence of new schools of thought and new disciplinary thinking, including the birth of sociology and the social sciences, the development of French spiritualism, the beginning of American pragmatism, radical developments in science and mathematics, and the development of hermeneutics beyond the domains of theology and philology into an approach to understanding all varieties of human endeavor.

Volume 3 covers the period between the 1890s and 1930s, a period that witnessed revolutions in the arts, science, and society that set the agenda for the twentieth century. In philosophy, these years saw the beginnings of what would grow into two distinct approaches to doing philosophy: analytic and continental. It also saw the emergence of phenomenology as a new rigorous science, the birth of Freudian psychoanalysis, and the maturing of the discipline of sociology. Volume 3 thus examines the most influential work of a remarkable series of thinkers who reviewed, evaluated, and transformed nineteenth-century thought, among them Henri Bergson, Émile Durkheim, Sigmund Freud, Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl, Karl Jaspers, Max Scheler, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. It also initiated an approach to philosophizing that saw philosophy move from the lecture hall or the private study into an active engagement with the world, an approach that would continue to mark continental philosophy's subsequent history.

The developments and responses to phenomenology after Husserl are the focus of the essays in Volume 4. An ambiguity inherent in phenomenology – between conscious experience and structural conditions – lent itself to a range of interpretations. While some existentialists focused on applying phenomenology to the concrete data of human experience, others developed phenomenology as conscious experience in order to analyze ethics and religion. Still other phenomenologists developed notions of structural conditions to explore questions of science, mathematics, and conceptualization. Volume 4 covers all the major innovators in phenomenology – notably Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and the later Heidegger – as well as its extension into religion, ethics, aesthetics, hermeneutics, and science.

Volume 5 concentrates on philosophical developments in political theory and the social sciences between 1920 and 1968, as European thinkers responded to the difficult and world-transforming events of the time. While some of the significant figures and movements of this period drew on phenomenology, many went back further into the continental tradition, looking to Kant or Hegel, Marx or Nietzsche, for philosophical inspiration. Key figures and movements discussed in this volume include Adorno, Horkheimer, and the Frankfurt School,

Schmitt, Marcuse, Benjamin, Arendt, Bataille, black existentialism, French Marxism, Saussure, and structuralism. These individuals and schools of thought responded to the “crisis of modernity” in different ways, but largely focused on what they perceived to be liberal democracy’s betrayal of its own rationalist ideals of freedom, equality, and fraternity. One other point about the period covered in this volume is worthy of note: it is during these years that we see the initial spread of continental philosophy beyond the European continent. This happens largely because of the emigration of European Jewish intellectuals to the US and UK in the 1930s and 1940s, be it the temporary emigration of figures such as Adorno, Horkheimer, Lévi-Strauss, and Jakobson or the permanent emigration of Marcuse, Arendt, and Gurwitsch. As the succeeding volumes will attest, this becomes a central feature of continental philosophy’s subsequent history.

Volume 6 examines the major figures associated with poststructuralism and the second generation of critical theory, the two dominant movements that emerged in the 1960s, which together brought continental philosophy to the forefront of scholarship in a variety of humanities and social science disciplines and set the agenda for philosophical thought on the continent and elsewhere from the 1960s to the present. In addition to essays that discuss the work of such influential thinkers as Althusser, Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, Lyotard, Irigaray, Habermas, Serres, Bourdieu, and Rorty, Volume 6 also includes thematic essays on issues including the Nietzschean legacy, the linguistic turn in continental thinking, the phenomenological inheritance of Gadamer and Ricoeur, the influence of psychoanalysis, the emergence of feminist thought and a philosophy of sexual difference, and the importation of continental philosophy into literary theory.

Before turning to Volume 7, a few words on the *institutional* history of continental philosophy in the United States are in order, in part because the developments addressed in Volumes 6–8 cannot be fully appreciated without recognizing some of the events that conditioned their North American and anglophone reception. As has been mentioned, phenomenologists such as Alfred Schutz and Aron Gurwitsch, and other European continental philosophers such as Herbert Marcuse and Hannah Arendt, began relocating to the United States in the 1930s and 1940s. Many of these philosophers began their work in the United States at the University in Exile, established in 1933 as a graduate division of the New School for Social Research for displaced European intellectuals. While some continental philosophy was taught elsewhere around the United States (at Harvard University, Yale University, the University at Buffalo, and elsewhere), and while the journal *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* began publishing in 1939, continental philosophy first truly began to become an institutional presence in the United States in the 1960s. In 1961, John Wild (1902–72) left Harvard to become Chair of the Department of Philosophy at Northwestern University. With a commitment from the provost of the university

and the Northwestern University Press to enable him to launch the Northwestern Series in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, Wild joined William Earle and James Edie, thus making Northwestern a center for the study of continental philosophy. Wild set up an organizational committee including himself, Earle, Edie, George Schrader of Yale, and Calvin Schrag (a former student of Wild's at Harvard, who was teaching at Northwestern and had recently accepted an appointment at Purdue University), to establish a professional society devoted to the examination of recent continental philosophy. That organization, the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP), held its first meeting at Northwestern in 1962, with Wild and Gurwitsch as the dominant figures arguing for an existential phenomenology or a more strictly Husserlian phenomenology, respectively. Others attending the small meeting included Erwin Straus, as well as Northwestern graduate students Edward Casey and Robert Scharff, and today SPEP has grown into the second largest society of philosophers in the United States. Since those early days, many smaller societies (Heidegger Circle, Husserl Circle, Nietzsche Society, etc.) have formed and many journals and graduate programs devoted to continental philosophy have appeared. In addition, many of the important continental philosophers who first became known in the 1960s – including Gadamer, Ricoeur, Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, and Habermas – came to hold continuing appointments at major American universities (although, it must be mentioned, not always housed in departments of philosophy) and, since the 1960s, much of the transmission of continental philosophy has come directly through teaching as well as through publications.

The transatlantic migration of continental philosophy plays a central role in Volume 7, which looks at developments in continental philosophy between 1980 and 1995, a time of great upheaval and profound social change that saw the fruits of the continental works of the 1960s beginning to shift the center of gravity of continental philosophizing from the European continent to the anglo-phone philosophical world and, in particular, to North America. During these years, the pace of translation into English of French and German philosophical works from the early twentieth century as well as the very recent past increased tremendously, and it was not uncommon to find essays or lectures from significant European philosophers appearing first in English and then subsequently being published in French or German. In addition, the period covered in this volume also saw the spread of continental philosophy beyond the confines of philosophy departments, as students and faculty in centers of humanities and departments of comparative literature, communication studies, rhetoric, and other interdisciplinary fields increasingly drew on the work of recent continental philosophers. Volume 7 ranges across several developments during these years – the birth of postmodernism, the differing philosophical traditions of France, Germany, and Italy, the third generation of critical theory, and the so-called

“ethical turn” – while also examining the extension of philosophy into questions of radical democracy, postcolonial theory, feminism, religion, and the rise of performativity and post-analytic philosophy. Fueled by an intense ethical and political desire to reflect changing social and political conditions, the philosophical work of this period reveals how continental thinkers responded to the changing world and to the key issues of the time, notably globalization, technology, and ethnicity.

The eighth and final volume in this series attempts to chart the most recent trends in continental philosophy, which has now developed into an approach to thinking that is present throughout the world and engaged with classical philosophical problems as well as current concerns. The essays in this volume focus more on thematic developments than individual figures as they explore how contemporary philosophers are drawing on the resources of the traditions surveyed in the preceding seven volumes to address issues relating to gender, race, politics, art, the environment, science, citizenship, and globalization. While by no means claiming to have the last word, this volume makes clear the dynamic and engaged quality of continental philosophy as it confronts some of the most pressing issues of the contemporary world.

As a designation, “continental philosophy” can be traced back at least as far as John Stuart Mill’s *On Bentham and Coleridge* (1840), where he uses it to distinguish the British empiricism of Bentham from a tradition on the continent in which he sees the influence of Kant. Since that time, and especially since the early twentieth century, the term has been used to designate philosophies from a particular geographical region, or with a particular style (poetic or dialectical, rather than logical or scientific). For some, it has been appropriated as an honorific, while for others it has been used more pejoratively or dismissively. Rather than enter into these polemics, what the volumes in this series have sought to do is make clear that one way to understand “continental philosophy” is as an approach to philosophy that is deeply engaged in reflecting on its own history, and that, as a consequence, it is important to understand the *history* of continental philosophy.

While each of the volumes in this series was organized by its respective editor as a volume that could stand alone, the eight volumes have been coordinated in order to highlight various points of contact, influence, or debate across the historical period that they collectively survey. To facilitate these connections across the eight volumes, cross-referencing footnotes have been added to many of the essays by the General Editor. To distinguish these footnotes from those of the authors, they are indicated by an asterisk (*).

Alan D. Schrift, General Editor

CONTRIBUTORS

John Abromeit completed his PhD in history at University of California, Berkeley in 2004 and was a member of the University of Chicago Society of Fellows from 2004 to 2008. He is currently Assistant Professor in the history department at SUNY, Buffalo State. He is the coeditor (with W. Mark Cobb) of *Herbert Marcuse: A Critical Reader* (2004) and (with Richard Wolin) *Herbert Marcuse: Heideggerian Marxism* (2005). He is also the author of *Max Horkheimer and the Foundations of the Frankfurt School* (2011).

Peg Birmingham is Professor of Philosophy at DePaul University. She is the author of *Hannah Arendt and Human Rights: The Predicament of Common Responsibility* (2006). She is the coeditor with Philippe van Haute of *Dissensus Communis: Between Ethics and Politics* (1995). She has published in journals such as *Research in Phenomenology*, *Hypatia*, and the *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* on topics that include radical evil, human rights, and the temporality of the political.

Thomas F. Broden is Associate Professor of French at Purdue University. His research interests include modern French literature, semiotics, critical approaches to literature, the history of modern linguistics, and the cultural context of fashion in modern France. His articles have appeared in *Semiotica*, *RS/SI Recherches Sémiotiques/Semiotic Inquiry*, the *Journal of General and Comparative Literature*, *Protée*, the *American Journal of Semiotics*, the *International Journal of Communication*, and *Morphé*. He edited a volume of juvenilia by Algirdas Julien Greimas that includes the author's previously unpublished Sorbonne dissertation on the French vocabulary of fashion in 1830 (2000).

Peter Tracey Connor is Associate Professor and Chair of the French Department at Barnard College and Director of the Barnard Translation Center. His research interests include the theory and practice of translation, literary theory, contemporary French philosophy and modern French literature. He is the author of *Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin* (2000). He has translated Georges Bataille's *The Tears of Eros* (1989) and Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* (1991).

Deborah Cook is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Windsor. Author of many articles on Adorno in journals including *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, *Philosophy Today*, and *Continental Philosophy Review*, she has also published *The Culture Industry Revisited: Theodor W. Adorno on Mass Culture* (1996) and *Adorno, Habermas, and the Search for a Rational Society* (2004). Recently, she edited *Theodor Adorno: Key Concepts* (2008), and published *Adorno on Nature* (2011).

Lewis R. Gordon teaches in the Department of Philosophy and the Institute for African American Studies at the University of Connecticut at Storrs. He is the author of several influential books, including *Bad Faith and Antiracist Racism* (1995, 1999), *Existential Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (2000), *Disciplinary Decadence: Living Thought in Trying Times* (2006), and *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* (2008).

David Ingram is Professor of Philosophy at Loyola University Chicago. His major publications include *Habermas and the Dialectic of Reason* (1987), *Critical Theory and Philosophy* (1990), *Reason, History, and Politics* (1995), *Group Rights* (2000), *Rights, Democracy, and Fulfillment in the Era of Identity Politics* (2004), *Law: Key Concepts* (2006), and *Habermas* (2010). He currently teaches courses in French and German social philosophy, Latin American philosophy, critical race theory, human rights and globalization theory, feminism, immigration theory, disability theory, and philosophy of law.

William L. McBride is Arthur G. Hansen Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at Purdue University and President of the International Federation of Philosophical Societies (FISP). In addition to French philosophy, especially Sartre's, his research interests include social and political philosophy and philosophy in Eastern Europe. He was cofounder and first director of the North American Sartre Society and is past President of the North American Society for Social Philosophy. In addition to well over a hundred book chapters, articles, and critical reviews, he has authored, edited, and coedited twenty books, most recently *Philosophical Reflections on the Changes in Eastern Europe* (1999), *From*

CONTRIBUTORS

Yugoslav Praxis to Global Pathos (2001), *Calvin O. Schrag and the Task of Philosophy after Postmodernity* (2002), and *Social and Political Philosophy*, Volume 2 of the *Istanbul World Congress Proceedings* (2006).

James McFarland teaches German at Connecticut College. His research interests include Walter Benjamin and Friedrich Nietzsche, and he has published on Theodor Adorno and Thomas Mann's collaboration on the novel *Doktor Faustus*, on the hermeneutics of Peter Szondi, and on the political theology of George Romero.

Ed Pluth is Associate Professor of Philosophy at California State University, Chico. He works on contemporary continental philosophy, and is the author of *Signifiers and Acts: Freedom and Determination in Lacan's Theory of the Subject* (2007) and *Badiou: A Philosophy of the New* (2010).

Brian C. J. Singer teaches at Glendon College, York University, and is associated with the graduate programs in sociology and social and political thought. He is the author of *Society, Theory and the French Revolution: Studies in the Revolutionary Imaginary* (1986) and *Montesquieu and the Discovery of the Social* (2013). He has translated works by Jean Baudrillard and Claude Lévi-Strauss, among others, and he is the author of some two dozen articles and book chapters on issues relevant to contemporary French political and social thought, as well as that of the eighteenth century.

Chris Thornhill is Professor of European Political Thought at the University of Glasgow. His major recent publications are *German Political Philosophy: The Metaphysics of Law* (2006), *Niklas Luhmann's Theory of Politics and Law* (with M. King, 2003/2005), and *Karl Jaspers: Politics and Metaphysics* (2002/2006). His main research interests are political theory and political sociology; theories of legality and legitimacy; Hegel, Marx and critical theory; fascism and its theories. He is currently completing a number of historical/theoretical projects on statehood, constitutionalization, and the social and legal preconditions of political legitimacy.

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INTRODUCTION

David Ingram

The years separating 1920 and 1968 were cataclysmic for the world and for philosophy. The destruction wrought by two world wars could be seen as an indictment of Western civilization itself. Depending on one's point of view, the upsurge of totalitarian and ideological fanaticism marked either the utter eclipse of reason (in the words of Max Horkheimer) or its apocalyptic apotheosis in nihilism. The Cold War that predictably restored faith in reason also witnessed its fetishization, as liberals and socialists accused each other of ideological blindness. The most important continental philosophy during this period was in fact openly left wing and Marxist. Resignation to the rational, bureaucratic order of the liberal welfare state would eventually give way to the revolutionary optimism of the 1960s, reflected in the rise of militant student and working-class movements whose countercultural visions of an alternative society would resonate in the aesthetic philosophies of an emerging poststructuralist sensibility. But in the days that followed the Paris Revolt of May 1968 and the brutal Soviet suppression of the liberal communist regime that had flourished in Czechoslovakia (the so-called "Prague Spring"), this challenge to the established order of reason collapsed with an astounding suddenness. The demise of a revolutionary Marxist humanism would prefigure the emergence of more sober forms of thought that would once again seek to rearticulate the rational meaning underlying modernity. Yet the new wave of critical social theorists was inclined to the view that the contradictions of the liberal welfare state – increasingly laid bare in the emergence of a new global economic order – were intransigent to rational resolution.

The figures, schools of thought, and themes represented in this volume can best be understood as responses to this chronic crisis of modernity and, more specifically, the liberal state. The dawning of twentieth-century Europe revealed

a stark contradiction between newly emergent mass democracies and the rationalist philosophies upholding the older liberal order. The older order had arisen during a time in the previous century when the bourgeoisie had maintained a virtual monopoly on political power. Despite its undemocratic nature, this order had ruled in the name of all citizens. Or, to put matters somewhat differently, its claim to legitimacy resided in upholding universal rights whose foundation was ostensibly identical to reason itself. With the rise of a new corporate phase of capitalism and its by-product – a socialist movement representing the interests of the working class – that pretension was called into question. The sanctified right to property and its corresponding vision of untrammelled individual liberty seemed increasingly anachronistic and even dangerous in a corporatist world that depended on the suppression of class conflict for the sake of maintaining productive social stability.

The liberal reason that natural law theorists, social contractarians, and utilitarians had formerly appealed to in various ways in underwriting the foundations of a stable legal order therefore seemed, in the opinion of many political theorists, incapable of responding to the divided nature of social reality. Thinkers on both the Right and the Left accordingly converged in rejecting Enlightenment rationalism and liberalism. These shibboleths of the previous century, they believed, had exhausted their vitality and, having never been the “neutral” force for universal progress that their proponents had once claimed for them, had finally been unmasked as the mere bourgeois ideologies they in fact were – hence the allure, on the Right, of fascist dictatorial regimes supported by nationalist sentiment and the attraction, on the Left, of communist workers’ associations supported by class interests. In both cases, the crisis of formal rationality and legal positivism opened the door for more substantive philosophies of collective identification, action, and order.

That the thinkers represented in this volume generally represent more nuanced attitudes toward rationalism and liberalism should not mislead us into underestimating their critique of sterile forms of formal rationality and liberal ideology. Indeed, some of them demonstrate less nuanced antirationalist tendencies; this is the case, for instance, with George Bataille and the *Collège de Sociologie*, the decisionism of Carl Schmitt, and the critical theory of Walter Benjamin. The situation is unquestionably more complicated when we turn to the major exponents of the Frankfurt School, to the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Louis Althusser, or even to the existential phenomenology that keenly informs the thought of Hannah Arendt, Jean-Paul Sartre, and many currents of French Marxism and black intellectual thought. In general, these latter tendencies – like their more scientifically oriented counterparts in Austrian and Anglo-American philosophy (pragmatism and logical positivism) – take issue with certain aspects of rationalism or liberalism while retaining others.

The Frankfurt School, for instance, developed a sweeping criticism of formal (or instrumental) accounts of rationality that they, following Georg Lukács, identified with capitalism and its abstract individualism or, even more sweepingly and in keeping with their Nietzschean diagnosis, with the primal will to identify and dominate inherent within subjective consciousness as such. At the same time, however, they retained a healthy – albeit not uncritical – respect for notions of individual autonomy and critical reflection associated with the heroic phase of the bourgeois Enlightenment. Although existential phenomenology certainly rejected scientism for its failure to comprehend lived experience of reality, the philosophers influenced by existential phenomenology in this anthology did not embrace the sweeping dismissal of liberal individualism, freedom, and rationality so characteristic of Heidegger’s thought, for example.

I. PHILOSOPHY AND HUMAN SCIENCE:
APPROPRIATION AND REACTION

The critique of scientism undertaken by existential phenomenologists should not obscure the enormous attraction that the modern human sciences exerted on Marxist and structuralist philosophy during the twentieth century. The critique of sterile forms of philosophical rationalism that had provided so much of the ideological underpinnings of liberal ideology during the previous two centuries meant that philosophy, too, would have to abandon its claim as a self-sufficient source of pure reflective knowledge. Nineteenth-century philosophers like Bentham, Hegel, Marx, and Mill had incorporated the insights of political economy into their thinking. The philosophical amalgamation of anthropology, economics, and politics would proceed apace with the birth of the new social sciences and the transformation of the older humanistic disciplines – philology, anthropology, history, and psychology – into full-blown human sciences, modeled in some respects on the natural sciences.

Marxism, of course, was especially well situated to take advantage of this synthesis of philosophy and science, given its dialectical account of the laws of historical development and natural evolution. By the second decade of the twentieth century, the members of the newly founded Frankfurt Institute would enrich this interdisciplinary vocabulary further with additions from Freudian psychoanalysis and Weberian social science. These research programs, they noted, were less susceptible to assimilation to the natural science paradigm, and so were more or less immune to the accusation of “scientism” that plagued other less critical, “positivistic” social scientific programs (see Chapter 12).

In the meantime, the French developed their own schools of philosophical social science. Marx’s analysis of the deep economic structures determining

entire epochs had opened the way to examining the linguistic and cultural structures underlying all thought. Thinkers as radically diverse as Ferdinand de Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Lacan, and Althusser would embrace this scientific structuralism as a more rigorous basis on which to found the study of society.

In sum, the crisis of rationalism manifested both a rejection of liberalism, with its abstract individualism and divisive parliamentary politics, and an embrace of critical social science as a great engine for revolutionary social and political transformation. Beginning as forms of progressive humanism, these social scientific philosophical movements would eventually lead, by the end of the 1960s, to a strange philosophical reversal: the radical questioning of humanity as a freely self-determining subject of its own making. But this ironic end of the human sciences – and the displacement of the individual as the center of social study and politics – was long in the making, and so we now turn to a brief recapitulation of the intellectual history that led up to it.

II. POST-FIRST WORLD WAR: REACTIONS TO LIBERALISM AS A RATIONALIST IDEOLOGY

Post-Second World War political philosophy evinced a renewed appreciation for liberal individualism and humanism that would belie the structuralist (and poststructuralist) scientific critique of “man” on which I concluded the previous section. But liberal humanism was seen very differently by social philosophers prior to and immediately following the First World War. The mass democracy that had empowered the European working class also raised serious questions about the so-called neutrality of the liberal state in representing the universal interests of all citizens, conceived as abstract holders of formal rights. The rising demand among the working class for a socialist state clearly contradicted the principles of private property and contractual exchange on which the liberal regime had been founded. Orthodox and revisionist forms of Marxism both predicted the demise of this regime, albeit according to somewhat different scenarios. For orthodox Marxism, the collapse of capitalism would follow of economic necessity, as foretold by a scientific understanding of its laws. For revisionist Marxism, the welfare state would gradually evolve into a socialist society as working-class parties gradually wrested political power away from their liberal counterparts. But neither variant of Marxism seemed coherent from the standpoint of practical politics. The revolutionary language of the orthodox camp belied its theoretical defense of economic determinism, which in turn reinforced political passivity; the reform language of the revisionist camp belied its radical aims, which could hardly be reconciled with liberal-democratic principles of compromise and

cyclical transfers of partisan rule. Neither the apolitical rationalism of scientific socialism (economic determinism) nor the political rationalism of lawful social democratic governance (compromise) sufficed to justify what seemed evident to many socialist thinkers influenced by the syndicalist wing of the French and Italian socialist movements: the need for an uncompromising general strike – in short, a revolutionary stoppage – of the capitalist system once and for all.

Georges Sorel's very influential *Réflexions sur la Violence* (1908) can be taken as an early sign of what was to come later in the century. Sorel argued that what was needed to spur on the socialist cause was not a theory or politics of reason but a myth heralding the heroic overthrow of the capitalist system by the working class in one single stroke. Sorel's romantic vision of the working class would later inspire both communists, such as Antonio Gramsci, and fascists, such as Benito Mussolini (himself a former socialist) into developing models of political organization that relied more on the mythic constitution of militant collective identity (proletarian or nationalist) than on any rational appeal to individual self-interest. Of course, Italian fascism was certainly more consistent than its communist counterpart in rejecting Enlightenment conceptions of individual freedom and equality in the name of heroic collectivism, even if it itself remained a movement divided between modernist and antimodernist factions.

Indeed, fascism's elevation of will over reason would strike a deep chord with conservative jurists such as Schmitt (see Chapter 1). Schmitt was above all else a defender of the state as a bastion of order. His critique of liberal parliamentary democracy was firmly based on what he perceived to be the irrational, conflictual nature of a social reality riven by incompatible ideologies. In the midst of this Hobbesian friend versus foe conflict, only an absolutely sovereign will seemed to stand any chance of imposing order. Schmitt's examination of the liberal social democracy founded in Germany in 1919, whose constitution combined elements of pure legal positivism influenced by Hans Kelsen and Max Weber with organic-democratic principles, seemed to confirm his diagnosis. The Weimar Republic's short life was marked by a succession of "exceptional" states in which the president, as defender of the state, was forced to take advantage of the extraordinary dictatorial powers granted to him by the constitution to restore law and order. The illegitimacy of a parliamentary system in which each party sought to impose its will on the other could not but effect the statutory interpretation of the constitution itself. Ultimately, only the president could "decide the exception," that is, finally decide what the law was and how it should be applied.

Much has been made of Schmitt's influence on the later course of German legal history under the Third Reich, but he was no ally of the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP) prior to 1933, viewing it (correctly) as a grave threat to the state. Nor, despite his opposition to the liberal separation of powers, was Schmitt opposed to all forms of constitutional democracy. To be

sure, Schmitt *was* opposed to the (in his opinion) vapid discourse of reasoned justification that supposedly played itself out in parliamentary sessions to no apparent effect. Free speech, he believed, was mainly offered as a show of civil harmony when in reality its effects were quite divisive. With its irrational propagandistic fervor, the full advent of mass “class” politics pitting irreconcilable ideological enemies laid bare the illusion of enlightened liberal debate oriented toward an all-inclusive consensus on universal (or rational) interests. With Rousseau in mind, Schmitt hoped that in place of this lawless state of anarchy a strong national identity might ground a unitary sovereign will that could dispense with discursive and representative forms of partisan-based parliamentary democracy in favor of forms based on direct, popular plebiscites. In this way, the people (discounting those whom the majority judged to be ideological or ethnic outsiders) could be directly identified with the supreme commander and chief, thereby legitimating his decisions as expressions of a general will.

Schmitt’s interest in what he called “political theology” and his Rousseauian belief in absolute sovereignty as a reflection of unitary will maintaining and reflecting community resonated with other strands of thought contained in this volume – some of them remarkably antagonistic to the conservatism of Schmitt’s own philosophy. One extreme example is the Collège de Sociologie (1937–39) and its most renowned member, Bataille (see Chapter 6). Although members of the Collège reflected a broad spectrum of political opinion – from Georges Bataille, Alexandre Kojève, André Breton, and Walter Benjamin (the last three fellow travelers who regularly attended meetings) on the Left to Pierre Libra on the Right – they all gravitated around a profound disinclination toward the enervating effects of liberal capitalism and its worship of rational efficiency and utility. The Collège was devoted to studying the prerational (or religious) unity underlying social community. This venerable theme had been the centerpiece of Émile Durkheim’s pioneering work on the collective consciousness underlying religious-based community over thirty years earlier, but in the hands of the Collège it was given a distinctly Nietzschean (or Dionysian) signification. For Bataille, especially, human existence truly comes into its own only during those moments of transgression and excess when it achieves an absolute sovereign freedom from action, exchange, utility, and morality (understood as a conformity to rules). Only during these rare moments does it experience itself as a kind of unity, and nowhere more so than in primitive rituals of sacrifice that form the life of secret communities (of which the Collège’s companion society, *Acéphale*, was one). Benjamin’s own singular synthesis of theological messianism and Marxism (see Chapter 4), as reflected in his posthumously published essay based on Paul Klee’s etching of Angelus Novus (the Angel of History), “On the Concept of History” (1940), and his “Critique of Violence” (1920–21), written as a synthesis of Schmitt and Sorel, also sought to defend the possibility of a violent

rupture with the status quo and the whole deterministic history leading up to it by appeal to an apocalyptic leap into the past as an explosive moment of (or secular illumination from within) the present. Not surprisingly, Benjamin's fascination with surrealism and cinema as a method of propaganda would strike his more rationally inclined compatriots within the Frankfurt School (most notably Adorno) as a dangerously reactionary (and in the Freudian sense, regressive) attempt to dissolve the Apollonian limits of the autonomous individual vouchsafed by liberalism into the solvent of a Dionysian collective unconscious.

Despite Schmitt's disdain for German revisionist Marxism, whose corporatist conceptions of the state he thought were corrosive of any unified polity, some of his most famous students were Marxists who shared his critique of the modern state. Franz Neumann and Benjamin both came under Schmitt's spell. Otto Kirchheimer, who along with these thinkers would later associate himself with the Frankfurt School, argued in his dissertation (written under Schmitt's direction) that parliamentary democracies instituted on a capitalist base inevitably lack legitimacy. In his opinion, the sphere of private law allows capitalist enterprises to contest the sovereignty of the state in asserting their own partial interests in the form of statutory protections. The solution to this problem, Kirchheimer argued, was the abolition of an autonomous sphere of private law immune from democratic regulation by the state. Thirty odd years later, Kirchheimer's Schmittian diagnosis of capitalist democracy would resurface in Jürgen Habermas's youthful masterpiece, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), which documented the decline of a liberal public sphere grounded in rational, open debate in the face of propagandistic class democracy. Habermas's later masterpiece, *Legitimation Crisis* (1973), reframes this diagnosis in terms of a vaguely Schmittian conception of legitimacy, understood as a process of democratic will formation whose legal results reflect a unitary consensus on common interests, as distinct from a strategic compromise that balances plural interests according to their relative share in political power. This notion of legitimacy – which Habermas has since considerably qualified – was presented by him as starkly antagonistic to the principles underlying the liberal state: the separation of powers, the private law/public law distinction, and the grounding of legal policy in class compromise.

Two other Marxist thinkers whose ideas resonate with Schmitt's are Lukács and Gramsci (see Chapter 1). In general these thinkers agreed with Schmitt that law is inherently political (not rationally neutral), that politics is essentially a partisan struggle to monopolize power in defining the law, and that in liberal democracy the most powerful economic interests (representing the capitalist class) will generally dominate this struggle. Like Sorel, Gramsci rejected the economic determinism of orthodox Marxism and emphasized the importance of voluntary syndicalist action and the crucial role of political parties in organically

shaping and founding hegemonic (sovereign) historical blocs (hence his tribute to Machiavelli's *The Prince*). As Gramsci's voluminous *Lettere di Carcere* (*Prison Notebooks*; 1929–35) attest, the state is not an instrument of rational economic management but rather the center of a vast cultural-ideological apparatus that infuses all of society. Hence, far from being a superstructure that more or less passively adapts itself to autonomous economic class structures, it is rather key in constituting these structures. The function of the Party is to unify various sectors of society – “the multiplicity of dispersed wills with heterogeneous aims” – in wresting control of the state's ideological apparatus, thereby ensuring the continued dominance of the Party as sovereign.

Lukács developed these voluntarist themes in terms of a far-reaching critique of formal rationality, which he took to be the hallmark of reified, capitalist society. Written without knowledge of Marx's then still-unpublished *Paris Manuscripts* (1844) and *Grundrisse* (1857–58), Lukács's *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (*History and Class Consciousness*; 1923) adopted the Hegelian distinction between dialectical rational reflection (*Vernunft*) and analytical formal reason (*Verstand*) in arguing against Engel's and Lenin's assimilation of Marxism to natural scientific categories. According to Lukács, scientific analyses of reality view society no less than nature as an objectified ensemble of isolated phenomena externally and deterministically connected by formal causal laws. As a consequence of this abstraction, not only do such analyses conceal the dynamic, historical essence of society, but they themselves actually reflect the alienation and commodity fetishism (the principles of exchange and identity) of a capitalist system whose functioning seems at once anarchic and machine-like (that is fragmented and yet determined). By contrast, dialectical insight grasps the totality or mutual relatedness of all phenomena, as a function of conscious, historical praxis.

Lukács believed that only the proletariat, which comprises simultaneously active producers and passive consumers, can experience the contradictions embedded in the “natural” laws of capitalism. Hence, he concluded, only the proletariat can overcome the alienation of subject from object (and, thanks to the collective nature of organized production and organized resistance, individual from society), acquire dialectical insight into society's unitary, practice-based essence as a whole, and thereby become the free and united conscious agent of history.

III. THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL

Perhaps the most significant school of humanistic Marxism (or rather neo-Marxism, since its interests were more philosophical than political) from the

1920s until the 1960s was that associated with the Institute for Social Research founded in Frankfurt in 1923. The institute's first director, Carl Grünberg, had allied himself with the neo-Kantian revisionism associated with Austrian Marxism, whose main exponents included such notables as Max Adler, Otto Bauer, Rudolf Hilferding, Otto Neurath, and Karl Renner. These philosophers insisted on retaining a strict separation between scientific economic theory and morality-based political practice. Thanks to the influence of the Hegelian Marxism of Karl Korsch and Lukács, at least some members of the school (notably Kirchheimer) would take a more totalizing, revolutionary stance. But as the failure of the Russian Bolshevik Revolution to develop forms of workplace democracy became apparent, the members of the school became disillusioned with prospects for revolutionary practice. The authoritarianism implicit in the German Communist Party, the ability of the NSDAP to win over workers to its program (which initially promised to side with workers against the "Jewish capitalist class"), and the increasing "convergence" of communist, fascist, and social-democratic liberal states toward a kind of "state capitalism" (as Friedrich Pollock referred to it) led the school to retreat step by step into a shadow of pessimism from which it would never return.

Here, for the first time in the twentieth century, we witness a variety of non-revisionary Marxist thought that sought to preserve the ideas of the bourgeois Enlightenment in a reconciled form, free from the integuments of class domination. However, as against the moral idealism of neo-Kantian rationalism that formed the core of Austro-Marxism, we here find a materialist (or hedonist) appreciation for the satisfaction of basic instinctual drives and desires. Indeed, Horkheimer, who as a close childhood friend of Pollock was recommended to become Grünberg's successor as director of the institute in 1931 (see Chapter 2), was receptive to the psychoanalytic research of Erich Fromm and Wilhelm Reich in articulating the sexual allure of fascist propaganda, authoritarianism, and mass culture.

One of his most telling appointments was an acquaintance of his from the early 1920s: Theodor Wiesengrund (who would later adopt his mother's surname, Adorno). Benjamin, another important contributor to the institute's *Zeitschrift*, had been influenced by the Jewish messianic Marxism of his mentor, Ernst Bloch (see e.g. the latter's *Prinzip Hoffnung*), and this feature of Benjamin's thought would also impact the younger Adorno. Benjamin wrote on literature, art, and culture (including theological reflections on language and history). His most influential essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), discusses how cinema, photography, and lithography alternatively destroy and refashion the sacral aura of the work of art that attaches to its original site. The reproduction disenchant the timeless authority of the work and makes it available for more secular uses while at the same time relying on vestigial traces

of the aura to illuminate (in secular fashion) the present. So conceived, reproduced images can function as mass propaganda (as in Eisenstein's movies or in the Nazi pageant's echo of monumental art forms characteristic of the Roman Empire) or – as in the case of surrealism and Dadaism – as clashing images that shock and disrupt perception.

Although Adorno (see Chapter 3) was much less sanguine than Benjamin about the revolutionary potential of mass artistic reception and its secular destruction of the transcendent autonomy of art, he was, as noted above, more receptive to Benjamin's theological reflections as contained in "On the Concept of History." Adorno's tribute to this essay in his lectures on history delivered in the 1960s was foreshadowed by the earlier masterpiece, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*; 1944), which Adorno coauthored with Horkheimer (with assistance from Leo Löwenthal). Written in exile during the height of the Second World War and filled with literary and theological allusions, this darkly pessimistic work initiated a decisive break with the Frankfurt School's former mode of interdisciplinary social scientific research and, more radically, impugned the very possibility of scientific critique in its thesis that formal (instrumental) rationality, far from emancipating humanity, binds it all the more firmly to those natural forces it seeks to dominate and suppress. Largely neglected and misunderstood in this masterpiece and its companion volume (Horkheimer's *Eclipse of Reason* [1944]) was the left-wing pragmatism of John Dewey that had come to define so much of the progressive philosophical landscape of their adopted country: a "scientism" that had managed to articulate a similar critique of positivism and abstract formal rationality, but without jettisoning experimental instrumentalism, which it interpreted phenomenologically as a form of radical, democratic praxis. Despite Adorno and Horkheimer's missed opportunity to assimilate this American philosophical strand of thought whose critique of reification resonated so strongly with their own, their extension of Lukács's equation of analytic rationality with the capitalist commodity form and its archaic prehistory in mythic thought still spared dialectical reason as a category of critical reflection, a category of rationality that neo-Hegelian pragmatism also deployed, albeit under the guise of a kind of naturalistic idealism. However, twenty years later, in Adorno's *Negative Dialektik* (*Negative Dialectics*; 1963) and in the posthumously published *Ästhetische Theorie* (*Aesthetic Theory*; 1969), even this most hallowed of Marxian categories was subjected to withering critique, thereby foreclosing any possibility of reconciling subject and object, theory and practice, outside an aesthetic mode of communication.

This almost total retreat from political action (which Lukács derided as a retreat to "Hotel Abyss") did not describe Herbert Marcuse (see Chapter 2), who gained considerable notoriety in the 1960s as the guru of the new left counterculture. Marcuse had been active in the German Social Democratic Party

(SPD) from 1917 until 1919 and attended rallies by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. Their assassination in 1919 (which Marcuse blamed on the leaders of the SPD) and the failure of the Munich Council Republic in the spring of that year ended his revolutionary activism. Studying with Heidegger and Husserl, his first important theoretical efforts involved synthesizing Heideggerian existential conceptions of historicity and authenticity with Marxian categories of political praxis. The publication of Marx's *Paris Manuscripts* in 1932 drew him ever more closely to a philosophically (and later psychoanalytically) informed hedonism that relied heavily on the classics of German thought, most notably Schiller, Hegel, and Nietzsche. Although his most famous books, *Eros and Civilization* (1955) and *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), develop a sustained criticism of modern technological society, they also entertain the possibility of an emancipated society based on an alternative, aesthetic rationality. It was this vision that the countercultural currents of the new left found so appealing in his thought. Not surprisingly, Marcuse's name could be seen right beside Marx's and Mao's on the placards carried by student demonstrators in Europe during the turbulent events of 1968.

IV. CONTINENTAL SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY DURING THE COLD WAR

The aftermath of the Second World War followed by the arrival of the Cold War elicited two responses from continental social philosophers. On one hand, there were those such as Arendt (see Chapter 5) who argued that the totalizing ideologies of Left and Right were both equally complicit in ushering in the totalitarian demise of political life that Europe had just witnessed. On the other hand, the defeat of fascism (and the popularity enjoyed by the Communist Party in light of the heroic role it played in the Resistance) as well as the birth of new independence movements in the third world – many students from the African and Caribbean colonies were now entering French universities – gave new hope to philosophers schooled in Marxist thought that their revolutionary hopes were not for naught.

Arendt's own condemnation of totalizing philosophies (ideologies) marked something of a reaffirmation of the liberal state. Like Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (2 vols; 1945) (see Chapter 12), her major studies on totalitarianism and the human condition generally contain a strong indictment of the kind of totalizing philosophy from Plato through Marx that seeks to impose unity over plurality, closure over the unpredictable and open. Her hostility to political theory in the normal sense of that term as well as her dismissal of deterministic philosophies of history led her to embrace a kind of existential phenomenology of the political – or, more precisely, of political action – that

reflected her own highly idiosyncratic synthesis of the ancient Greek philosopher Isocrates, Augustine, Kant, and Heidegger (whose student and lover she had been). Key to Arendt's phenomenology of the political is her distinction between labor, work, and action, a distinction, she thought, that had its justification in the most original form of political life: the ancient Greek *polis*. While laboring activity is oriented toward producing and consuming the necessities of life, cultural work is given over to producing relatively permanent artifacts that express meaning. Unlike these modes of activity, which can be subject to formal (instrumental) rational discipline, political action is always subject to the contingency of beginning and ending. Action undertaken before and in concert with others is always a response to a prior action and its own final meaning is essentially deferred and open with respect to others who interpret it and take it up. So construed, the essence of action is contingency, unpredictability, and plurality. Its *modus operandi* is expressive speech, not decision and its aim is not to rule but to disclose the individuality of the actor.

Given this understanding of political action, it is not surprising that Arendt would single out Marxism as a false doctrine of emancipation. In her opinion, the Marxist utopia of a stateless society of pure producers is not at all a free society, since freedom is essentially a political category that occurs within a contested public space that is free from both economic and administrative constraints. Although modern revolutions that found states are the purest forms of spontaneous action (subsequent generations of citizens being less free to initiate a new beginning), they contradict their own political intention if, like the French Revolution, they are conceived as affecting a total transformation of society in the name of a general will (the people) and especially if that transformation includes the top-down economic administration of life. For this reason, Arendt felt an especially strong kinship to the American founding fathers, who had the temporary luxury of ignoring the "social problem" (slavery) and who could thereby concentrate on the problem of dispersing power whose guarantee was so essential to the preservation of political action. That said, Arendt's own political proclivities were neutral: her equal admiration of Luxemburg and John Adams, worker council democracy and New England town hall democracy, stand as monumental testimony to her nonideological commitment to action wherever it might occur.

Arendt's writing reflects her years of living in exile, first in France, where she worked for Jewish relief organizations, and later in the United States. As noted above, social circumstances also explain the remarkable vitality of French Marxism (see Chapter 7) and the French Communist Party during the period from 1945 until 1968 (a vitality that led Sartre to declare that Marxism represented the "unsurpassable horizon of our time"). Before the war, during the short-lived Popular Front of 1936–38, the Party had joined with the Socialists

in a coalition government (which collapsed with the conclusion of the Stalin–Hitler pact). During this time there were a number of humanistic currents of French Marxism that competed with the Party’s official “scientific” (dialectical) materialist line. One such current of French Marxism was inspired by Kojève’s introductory lectures at the École Pratique des Haute Études on Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* and especially his proto-Marxist interpretation of the famous passage beginning the section entitled “Self-Consciousness,” more familiarly known as the dialectic of “master and slave” or “lordship and bondage.” Those attending these lectures, which Kojève delivered in the 1930s, included Bataille, Lacan, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and many others. Although some of those influenced by Kojève were members of the Communist Party – this was true of Henri Lefebvre, who translated Marx’s *Paris Manuscripts* into French – others of more independent streak, who were not beholden to the Party’s own conception of dialectical materialism (Diamat), were receptive to Kojève’s own proto-existentialist variety of Hegelian Marxism.

Although the Party frowned on the “bourgeois individualism” of the new existentialist philosophy that was all the rage in France after the war, existentialists – who included Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Simone de Beauvoir – were much taken with Marxism’s focus on concrete action. Their synthesis of Marxism and existentialism was not original (Marcuse had anticipated this development by almost twenty years), but it was certainly more volatile within the peculiar context of Sartre’s own Cartesian version of it, which postulated an ontological dualism between Being and nothingness (or consciousness). In any case, the founding of the journal *Les Temps modernes* in 1945 (named by its chief editors, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, after the famous Charlie Chaplin film), provided a lively forum for French existential Marxists to explore their differences with one another and with more orthodox Marxists, such as Roger Garaudy and Lefebvre.

The most important postwar book written by an existential Marxist was Merleau-Ponty’s *Humanism and Terror* (1947), which sought to rebut Arthur Koestler’s argument in his novel *Darkness at Noon* that the main fictional character (representing former top Soviet official Nicolai Bukharin) had dishonestly confessed to having committing treason during the infamous Moscow Purge Trials of 1937. Merleau-Ponty’s response was not intended as an apology for Stalin’s regime (although it was interpreted by many that way, including Albert Camus, who broke off relations with Merleau-Ponty following the book’s publication). Rather, it was offered as a philosophical discussion of the possibility of being objectively guilty of betraying a cause without having intended to do so.

Merleau-Ponty was to split from Sartre over the Korean War, which Merleau-Ponty blamed on North Korean aggression and Sartre blamed on American provocation. The result was Merleau-Ponty’s *The Adventures of the Dialectic* (1955), in which he accused Sartre of being an “ultra-Bolshevik” whose adherence to

Cartesian dualism led him to undialectically equate the spontaneous decisions of the Communist Party with correct understanding of history. According to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of embodied existentialism, experience and perception are themselves intermediate between consciousness and being, so that political decisions are always ambiguous in meaning and agency is never transparent or absolute.

Merleau-Ponty's claim in that book that "revolutions are true as movements but false as regimes" could have stood as the epigraph of Sartre's own response to Merleau-Ponty. Written during the Algerian War, Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960) represents a sustained attempt to reinterpret his dualistic existentialism within a Marxian framework. The "analytic" or *regressive* part of the book postulates an unsurpassable antagonism between freedom and material scarcity. Freedom can be realized authentically only within revolutionary groups that are consciously oriented toward "totalizing" revolutionary projects involving radical self-choice. However, the very scarcity that generates injustice and enables such "groups-in-fusion" spontaneously to coalesce in defining themselves in opposition to their oppressors also acts to dissolve them into mechanically regimented individuals (or serial groups). The "fraternity terror" that organically fused agents impose upon themselves in order to limit voluntary defections from the group eventually becomes crystallized in the form of a bureaucratic state that institutionalizes freedom and justice only by once again reducing its constituent members to passive appendages of the "practico-inert." As recounted in the historical (or *progressive*) part of the *Critique* contained in the second volume (whose unfinished text was published posthumously), this dialectic is exemplified in the history of Stalinist Russia in the 1930s. The lesson of this narrative seems clear enough. As in Arendt's existential phenomenology, economic necessity comes to trump political freedom.

This is a starkly pessimistic diagnosis for any philosophy, let alone one that calls itself existentialist and Marxist. Given this paradox, it is not surprising that by the mid-1960s, existentialism was being seriously challenged by structuralism, the latter presenting itself as a more scientific mode of philosophizing. Lévi-Strauss (see Chapter 10), a friend of Sartre's, had already become famous with the publication of his *Anthropologie structurale* (1958) in which he argued, against Sartre and with Kant, that the mind is structured by certain universal categories that find expression in dichotomous ways of classifying reality (e.g. culture versus nature). Consequent upon this shift we observe a new wave of structuralist Marxists whose chief exponent was Althusser (see Chapter 7). Althusser, who mentored several generations of students at the École Normale Supérieure, including such distinguished students as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Étienne Balibar, and Bernard-Henri Lévy, did not expressly identify himself as a structuralist for fear that his philosophy would be confused with

the kind of formalism associated with Lévi-Strauss. Yet his major works, *For Marx* (1965) and the two-volume *Reading Capital* (published in the same year and prepared with the help of Balibar and others), display strong structuralist features. In contrast to humanistic varieties of Marxism, Althusser's structural Marxism insists on a sharp "epistemological break" (as Gaston Bachelard puts it) between objective science and truth, on one side, and subjective experience and ideological practice, on the other. In the Althusserian version of this break, science is one of four autonomous, irreducible spheres of production within society, the other three being identified with economics, politics, and ideology. True science – as distinct from bourgeois empiricism, historicism, and Hegelian essentialism – seeks to uncover society's global structure that predominantly conditions but does not exhaustively determine the mutually interacting and autonomous structures governing the other spheres of production (the "law of overdetermination"). The "structure of dominance" is by no means necessarily economic; in feudal society it is dominated by the political sphere, in early capitalism it is dominated by the economic sphere, and in late capitalism – with the growing importance of governmentally regulated forms of economic activity requiring technical education, mass communication, and a variety of incentives related to work, consumption and investment, and loyalty – it is dominated by ideology.

In *For Marx*, Althusser dismissed Marx's early Hegelian writings as unscientific while at the same time maintaining that the mature Marx of *Capital* had inaugurated a new epistemological break – equal in importance to the breaks initiated by Greek mathematics and Galilean physics – in his discovery of social and historical science. This theory, along with the theory of structural overdetermination, has exerted a strong influence on the anthropology of Maurice Godelier and the critical sociology of Nicos Poulantzas, as well as on the post-structuralist archeology of knowledge of Foucault. Meanwhile Althusser's emphasis on the dominance of ideological structures resonated with a whole school of semioticians on the Left who have sought to uncover the unconscious mythical codes that reinforce bourgeois culture and class hierarchy (the latter include Roland Barthes, Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Lacan, and others, many of whom were associated with the journal *Tel Quel*).

Finally, to conclude this chapter of existential Marxism, one should not neglect the important connection between African and African American varieties of existentialism and Marxism (see Chapter 8) and the French varieties discussed here. Marxism, of course, had been an attractive philosophy for leading African American intellectuals such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Richard Wright because of the American Communist Party's active role in the early civil rights movement. After Wright permanently moved to Paris in 1946, he became a part of a circle of intellectuals that included such notable existentialists as

Sartre, Beauvoir, and Camus. In 1956, he organized the Black Writers Congress of 1956, which featured such notable Afro-Caribbean existentialists as Aimé Césaire and his former student, Frantz Fanon.

Césaire's *Discours sur le colonialisme* (*Discourse on Colonialism*; 1953) deepened the Marxist theory of class by postulating that class exploitation and racism were essentially linked to the extent that exploitation was directly proportional to the dehumanization of the exploited, a fact that explained the enslavement of Africans but not Europeans. Indeed, in true dialectical fashion he argued that dehumanization dehumanizes the dehumanizer as well. In keeping with his existentialism, Césaire insisted that the peculiar context of racial dehumanization in which blacks found themselves could be reversed, so that blackness and the unique aspects of the African personality could be positively affirmed.

Much of Césaire's philosophy of *Négritude* was taken up by Fanon and the Senegalese social theorist Léopold Senghor. However, as Fanon observed, it was easier for this philosophy to get off the ground in an African country whose majority was overwhelmingly black than in a Caribbean context. So it was Fanon, a revolutionary psychoanalyst, who explored the psychological dynamics of racism in his memorable works, *Le Damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*; 1960–61) and *Peau Noire, masques blancs* (*Black Skin, White Masks*; 1952). Fanon had studied with Merleau-Ponty (he later successfully solicited Sartre to write the preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*), but his postdoctoral work in hospitals in Tunisia and Algeria as well as his experience in treating both torturers and the tortured while secretly training forces for the Front de Libération Nationale gave him a unique perspective on the effects of colonial racism on the black psyche. Especially central to his Sartrean analysis is the phenomenon of black antiblack racism, in which blacks internalize the gaze of whites and wear this gaze as their own mask. Yet in another sense, blacks are never allowed by whites to wear these masks no matter how hard they try to "pass." Hence, there is a sense in which blacks are not even allowed to enter into the "master–slave" dialectic of unequal (or failed) recognition that Hegel had in mind when speaking of European class society. Indeed, the task faced by blacks to find acceptance as reasonable and rational (and therefore as human) is impossible once reasonableness and rationality are stamped as white; the more they act like white people – and try to surpass white people in being reasonable – the less normal and reasonable black people appear.

V. CONTINENTAL SOCIAL THOUGHT IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE 1960S

Anticolonial fervor reached its climax during the Vietnam War, just as existential Marxism was being eclipsed. Although Althusser had been a member of the

Communist Party, he was never among the inner circle, and his student Bernard-Henri Lévy followed many other students in leaving the Union des étudiants communistes (UEC) after the Party refused to support the students in their call for a general strike during the May Revolt of 1968. At first the revolt seemed to gain momentum (Sartre gave a short speech encouraging the students), but it was soon crushed by the government. The years following the revolt saw many philosophers, including Sartre and Foucault, drifting over to the ultra-left Maoist *Gauche Prolétarienne*. Also on the rise was a strong anti-Marxist reaction, which received impetus after revelations of the Stalinist gulags became public (Lévy was one who switched his allegiance from the Maoists to the *Nouveaux Philosophes*, as they were called). Former members of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, Cornelius Castoriadis and Jean-François Lyotard, also moved away from their former radical positions. Among the major figures, only Alain Badiou, Étienne Balibar, and Jacques Rancière retained a strong Marxist identity.

With the eclipse of existentialism and Marxism, new philosophies of post-modern and poststructural bent came to the fore. These philosophies claimed a certain nonideological pedigree, as befit their structuralist lineage. Indeed, for all of his political activism, Foucault's archaeological and genealogical studies were nothing but exercises in creative textual exegesis whose aim was to stir people to think about the historically changeable structures determining their own knowledge of self, society, and world rather than to call them to action (Foucault even went so far as to describe himself as a "happy positivist"). The same could be said of Derrida's deconstructive efforts and Lyotard's paradoxical ruminations on the "postmodern condition." The linguistic turn, anticipated some years before by the structural linguistics that had been inaugurated by Saussure (see Chapter 9) seemed to have all but extinguished the speaking and acting subject, or dissolved it into a dynamic chain of signifiers. With the end of the subject came the end of all the humanistic categories associated with "metaphysics": totality, history, community, individuality, rationality, and freedom. Of course, these poststructuralist studies – like the psychoanalytic course lectures presented by Lacan (see Chapter 11) and the ethnological interpretations elaborated by Lévi-Strauss – contained a critique of capitalist modernity and its liberal conceptions of abstract rationality and individuality. The critique of totalizing, reductive approaches indeed had the beneficial effect of pluralizing the field of political hierarchies beyond class to include hierarchies of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, nationality, sexual orientation, age, species, and so on. A similar reaction could be found among second and third generation critical theorists, but under an entirely different influence. With its progressive synthesis of neo-Kantian and neo-Hegelian idealism, on the one hand, and evolutionary naturalism, on the other, the American pragmatist tradition of John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, and Charles Sanders Peirce (see Chapter 12) offered a critical

phenomenology that was close to Marx's own early writings. By contrast, in French philosophical circles dominated by postmodernism, poststructuralism, and deconstructionism the aim was no longer to revolutionize the world apart from revolutionizing our understanding of the self, something that philosophers had always done more or less well since Socrates, thereby bringing to a close an era of radical social thought.

1

CARL SCHMITT AND EARLY WESTERN MARXISM

Chris Thornhill

I. LIBERALISM AND MARXISM: SHARED ANTINOMIES

The transformation of liberalism

The first decades of the twentieth century were marked by a wide-ranging rejection of the body of theoretical concepts that had supported most ideas of state legitimacy through the nineteenth century: that is, liberalism. First, this period witnessed an increasing hostility towards *positivism*, which had been the dominant doctrine among liberal constitutional theorists of the European bourgeoisie. Second, this period also witnessed a growing opposition to the various outlooks associated with *Kantianism*, which, especially in Germany, had shaped the more progressive political theories of the liberal class.¹

Positivism and Kantianism, although diametrically opposed in questions of normative deduction, shared much common ground. In particular, both outlooks can be viewed as theories promoting minimalist models of statehood and constitutional rule, and both converged around the view that states obtain legitimacy through formal and largely apolitical normative processes. That is to say, both outlooks claimed that states acquire legitimacy by ensuring that their actions comply with a thin set of norms (objectivized as constitutional rights) that are withdrawn from everyday politicization; both implied that in modern societies political systems demonstrate legitimacy through formal acts of rights-attribution, and they are not required to integrate members of society

*1. For a discussion of the influence of both positivism and Kantianism in the early decades of the twentieth century, see the essays by Mike Gane and Sebastian Luft and Fabien Capeillères in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 3*.

as active participants or even specifically to respond to the definite relations of civil society; both thus defined constitutions as documents that legitimize the state by ensuring that the state does not become a battleground for rival social interests and by restricting the degree to which its foundations need to be explicitly contested. In principle, therefore, both positivism and Kantianism can be seen as liberal theories that deduced the form of political legitimacy from a *principal antinomy* between law and politics, and both presupposed that the law independently sets the preconditions for political legitimacy and political freedom, so that particular state actions and particular political volition always remain subsidiary elements in the constitution of political legitimacy. In both views, in fact, this antinomy was rooted in a wider set of antinomies, between *norms* and *facts*, *ethics* and *action*, *reason* and *will*, and *theory* and *praxis*, which together gave rise to the distinctive liberal claim that the sources of political freedom and legitimacy are essentially external to the state itself, and the state plays little factual, active, volitional, or practical role in securing the conditions of its legitimacy.

Viewed from a historical point of view, it can be observed that the liberal visions of positivism and Kantianism reflected the reality of European constitutional states that had not fully entered the condition of mass democracy, and in which the social interests that could be legally represented were restricted. With the increasing demands for substantial franchise reform in most European states after 1900, however, liberal theories began to modify their formalistic constructions of legality and legitimacy. The reorientation of liberal theory became particularly intense during the First World War, by which time it had become clear in most states that the political apparatus would shortly be forced to integrate materially divided and intensely nationalized civil constituencies. It is in the context of this precarious shift to mass-democracy, most importantly, that the political writings of Max Weber are best appreciated.² Weber's writings might be seen as emblematic for the redirection of liberal theory at this time. Weber argued for a reconstruction of liberalism as a doctrine that, although accepting the need for a parliamentary system and the formal rule of law, was able to integrate diverse social sectors by promoting techniques of elite leadership and personalistic legitimation not widespread in standard liberal theories.³ Underlying this new brand of liberalism was the quasi-Nietzschean

*2. For further discussion of Weber, see the essay by Alan Sica in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 2*.

3. It is notable, however, that Weber's position was not conceived in a liberal vacuum, and it had a clear analogy to Vilfredo Pareto's account of modern society as shaped by the conflictual circulation of elites, each of which seeks to preserve the monopoly of material and ideological control. See his *Sociological Writings*, S. E. Finer (ed.), D. Mirfin (trans.) (London: Pall Mall Press, 1966), 315. For background to Weber in this respect, see Walter Struve, *Elites*

assumption that classical liberal ideas had too easily assumed that all society could be pacified under law. They had failed to reflect on the ineluctable aspect of *conflict* in all politics,⁴ and they had omitted to observe that modern democratic polities could be unified – and legitimized – only through encompassing political experiences, which integrate citizens in the formal-legal, the active, and the emotive-experiential dimensions of their lives. For Weber, therefore, the stability of democracy depended on the extent to which it was informed by the direct personal appeal of its leaders.⁵

The transformation of Marxism

Similarly, the early twentieth century was also marked by an increasingly hostile critique of the orthodoxies upholding the other main ideology of the nineteenth century: Marxism. As is well documented, in the later nineteenth century Marxist orthodoxy consolidated itself around deterministic and quasi-scientific ideas, and Marxist theorists tended to endorse a brand of socialism that construed the progression toward a socialist economy as a quasi-natural process and used categories of political economy for providing formal analysis of class relations at different junctures in this process. Although clearly separated from liberal principles on questions of material ethics, therefore, the main lineages of socialist orthodoxy before 1900 had important points of overlap with mainstream liberal theory. Most particularly, Marxist orthodoxy shared with liberalism the positivistic conviction that society could be interpreted as a body of rule-bound and rationally constructible social facts, and that the evolution of society was largely independent of human volition and required little transformative intervention. In its political dimensions, moreover, Marxist determinism also followed liberal outlooks in accounting for human improvement and liberation as an essentially apolitical process, in which positive laws of progress predetermined functions and limits of political action, and in interpreting the political apparatus of society as a deterministically produced element of superstructure, possessing neither directive nor integrative force for society as a whole. In this respect, the orthodox Marxism of the late nineteenth century might be seen to have partly replicated the formal-antinomical structure of liberalism, and it too ordered its account of social reality around underlying antinomies between reason and action, freedom and history, and law and politics.

against Democracy: Leadership Ideals in Bourgeois Political Thought in Germany, 1890–1933 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973).

4. See Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Second Essay, §11.

5. Max Weber, “Parlament und Regierung im neugeordneten Deutschland,” in *Gesammelte politische Schriften* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1921), 391.

In consequence, the reaction against orthodox Marxism after 1900 showed similarities with the reaction against liberalism, and it brought a dramatic expansion of the political-actionistic content of Marxist theory. This was manifest in the works of Rosa Luxemburg, who developed a theory that emphasized the role of spontaneous industrial action as a “political weapon” in class struggle.⁶ This was also visible in the works of Lenin, who proclaimed that the political party was the vanguard of the proletariat engaged in class struggle, and assigned to the party the central role in coordinating the revolutionary process.⁷ At the same time, different strands of French and Italian syndicalism began to accentuate local political action as the central source of political transformation and so fully to reject the rule of law and the rationalized state bureaucracy as forces for social change.⁸ This syndicalist tradition culminated in the works of Georges Sorel, who sought to eradicate the positivist and formalist dimensions from Marxist theory, and argued that radical social upheaval could be induced only by unreflected collective voluntarism, which was to be concentrated in the general strike.⁹ During the First World War, moreover, this actionistic reconstruction of Marxism also migrated across the political spectrum, and it was reflected in the ideas of Benito Mussolini and other early Italian fascists.¹⁰ Mussolini’s doctrine, after he had abdicated his position on the actionist wing of the Italian socialist movement, was designed to overcome the perceived actionistic weakness in Marxism by identifying the nation as a focus of political identity, which could unify human action far more potently than any sense of class affiliation.¹¹ He thus championed, not the class, but the mythical nation as a unit of political

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6. Rosa Luxemburg, “Der politische Massenstreik und die Gewerkschaften,” in her *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. II (Berlin: Dietz, 1972), 470.
 7. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *What Is to be Done?*, R. Service (ed.), Joe Fineberg and George Hanna (trans.) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988).
 8. See Georges Lefranc, *Le Mouvement Syndical sous la Troisième République* (Paris: Payot, 1967), 14; F. R. Ridley, *Revolutionary Syndicalism in France: The Direct Action of its Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 18.
 9. Georges Sorel, *Réflexions sur la Violence* (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1946), 221–68.
 10. See in general Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, David Maisel (trans.) (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 178; David D. Roberts, *The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), 12.
 11. See A. James Gregor, *Mussolini’s Intellectuals: Fascist Social and Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 10. For an excellent study of the distinct form of Italian liberalism and its particular problem of weak cohesion, see Sándor Agócs, “Giolitti’s Reform Programme: An Exercise in Equilibrium Politics,” *Political Science Quarterly* 86(4) (1971). For the tame collapse of Italian liberalism, see Alexander De Grand, *The Hunchback’s Tailor: Giovanni Giolitti and Liberal Italy from the Challenge of Mass Politics to the Rise of Fascism, 1882–1922* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 241.

action capable of overthrowing liberalism and so also of building a robustly integrated state.¹²

The early twentieth century, in sum, brought about a theoretical realignment at all points in the political landscape, through which *political action* came to act as a term for correcting the formalistic dimensions of the main pre-1914 ideologies. Indeed, by the end of the First World War the self-critique of liberalism was showing clear signs of coalescing with the self-critique of Marxism, so that antiliberal and anti-Marxist political attitudes were manifestly beginning to run together. In both theoretical lineages, it was argued that liberalism and Marxism had failed to support their ideas of government and progress with anything more than highly abstracted and quasi-metaphysical accounts of natural order, and that only a more substantial concept of political existence could overcome the conceptual antinomies responsible for this. Politics, thus, was configured as a unifying category of social voluntarism, which superseded the abstraction of human society and human experience under liberalism and Marxism, and which was posited as decisively implicated in all social transformation and as decisively constitutive of all human freedom.

II. CARL SCHMITT AND LIBERALISM

It is in this context that the intellectual origins of the works of Carl Schmitt¹³ can be located. Schmitt, a Roman Catholic born in the (strongly Catholic) Rhineland area of Germany, was the preeminent constitutional lawyer in Germany during the interwar era, and he was a fierce conservative critic of the Weimar Republic. He gained particular notoriety for his endorsement of the use of prerogative legislation in the early years of the Republic, for his advocacy of executive rule and authoritarian governance after 1930, and for his substantial part in the constitutional suspension of the democratic Prussian parliament in 1932. Although originally associated with the Roman Catholic party (the Zentrum), after 1933 Schmitt (to the surprise of his associates) became one of the leading spokesmen of the regime established by the NSDAP. He fell out of favor with the regime in

12. See A. James Gregor, *Italian Fascism and Developmental Dictatorship* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 74. On the (sometimes uneasy) theoretical fusion of integral nationalism and authoritarian statism in Italian fascism, see Giovanni Gentile, *Origini e dottrina del fascismo* (Rome: Libreria del Littorio, 1929), 43.

13. Carl Schmitt (July 11, 1888–April 7, 1985; born and died in Plettenberg, Germany) was educated at the Universities of Berlin, Munich, and Strasbourg (1907–10). His influences included Hegel, Hobbes, Jellinek, Kierkegaard, Pareto, and Weber, and he held appointments at Universität Greifswald (1921), Universität Bonn (1922), Handelshochschule Berlin (1926), Universität Köln (1932), and Universität Berlin (1933).

the mid-1930s, but he was incarcerated during the period of de-Nazification after 1945 and was barred from holding positions at universities in the Federal Republic of Germany.

Schmitt's entire work might be viewed as a critique of the antinomies of liberalism (and, to a lesser extent, of Marxism), and it has the particular characteristic that it defined *constitutional law* as the theoretical discipline in which a political corrective to these antinomies was most urgently required and could be most persuasively administered. Schmitt, therefore, was a constitutional lawyer, who pursued analysis of particular constitutional problems in Germany in order to examine the legitimacy predicaments of modern mass-democratic states, to explain how the legitimacy of these states could be reinforced, and to counteract the destabilizing loss of political content and political will, which he saw as the result of both liberalism and Marxism.

Schmitt's work had its theoretical center in a critique of the liberal constitutional theories associated with legal positivism,¹⁴ and especially of Hans Kelsen's *pure theory of law*. In this regard, Schmitt reserved particular antipathy for Kelsen's assumption that law is a *neutral* medium of social organization, whose normative or value-rational content is not politically determined,¹⁵ and he denounced the Kelsenian assumption that state legitimacy is produced by neutral legal norms, enshrined in a formal constitution, to which the state is perennially obligated and over the terms of its obligation to which the state cannot exercise decisive influence.¹⁶ Central to Schmitt's work through the 1920s was the conviction that the legal neutralism of positivism had created a tradition of weak statehood in Germany. This tradition, culminating in the constitution of the Weimar Republic (ratified in 1919), had produced a succession of states that were fraught with internal divisions, that lacked cohesive foundations, and that were inclined to extreme indecisiveness and instability, thus imperiling the national freedom of all Germans. In consequence, he concluded that a legitimate political order could not be founded in neutral or external legal norms: it must be founded in the one uniform and *sovereign* will of a constituent power, and this will must provide totally decisive and fundamentally *political* preconditions for all acts and laws of the state. At the center of Schmitt's political outlook was thus the Hobbesian claim that the liberal-constitutional *Rechtsstaat* is based in falsely idealized assumptions about the ethical standards and the principles

14. The sections on Schmitt below contain condensed versions of arguments I have set out elsewhere, notably in *German Political Philosophy: The Metaphysics of Law*. However, both the thrust and the context of the argument here are rather different from the earlier work.

15. See Hans Kelsen, *Allgemeine Staatslehre* (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1925), 37.

16. See Hans Kelsen, *Der soziologische und der juristische Staatsbegriff: Kritische Untersuchung des Verhältnisses von Staat und Recht* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1922), 93–4.

of sociality governing human life, and that real human order depends on the constant exercise of inalienable and indivisible sovereign power.

Throughout his career, in consequence, Schmitt devoted himself to isolating the corrosive elements of liberal theory, to identifying the concrete reasons why liberalism undermined the integrity of particular states, and – as a matter of day-to-day political engagement – to elaborating principles to counteract the dissolution of statehood enacted by liberal arguments and liberal principles of institutional design. Schmitt's analyses of liberal theory converged around the following critiques.

Liberalism and private law

First, Schmitt claimed that liberal constitutional ideas had weakened the state because they had led to the construction of state power around principles of *private law*. Central to the liberal doctrines and early parliamentary-democratic regimes of the nineteenth century was the belief that political power should recognize and represent private interests, and that positive law, neutrally formulated in legal codes, could ensure that private-legal interests delineated the form and limits of state power. One result of early liberalism, in consequence, was that it created political regimes in which the state resigned structural primacy in society, and it became increasingly accountable to “organizations” of “individual freedom,”¹⁷ whose power was sanctioned, within the state, under the system of private law. Liberalism thus instilled a “pluralism of concepts of legality” at the center of the state,¹⁸ and in so doing it established a state whose ability to define conditions of political order for society was debilitated. This problem remained relatively imperceptible during the period of high liberalism, in which states were only expected to integrate small and relatively uniform constituencies. However, through the later institution of mass-democracies and welfare-democracies after 1918, states were compelled to represent and even to internalize an amalgam of acutely antagonistic private prerogatives, all of which were equally and neutrally protected under private law. The outcome of this, then, was that in most societies the state was transformed into a legal battlefield in which organized groups of private interests vied with each other for the power to influence legislation and to use the state as a clearing house for advancing particular private ambitions: the state became an “instrument of social and political technology,” which could only presume legitimacy by responding, however fitfully, to the demands of the

17. Carl Schmitt, *Der Leviathan in der Staatslehre des Thomas Hobbes: Sinn und Fehlschlag eines politischen Symbols* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1995), 118.

18. Carl Schmitt, *Der Hüter der Verfassung* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1931), 90.

pluralized private associations that it incorporated.¹⁹ The norms of private-legal positivism thus acted as masks for the destructive self-interest of powerful social groups, and the chimerical neutrality of liberal legal thought allowed these groups to destroy the state. In consequence of this, Schmitt concluded, modern states could never be sovereign, legitimate, or integrally *political*: their attempts to demonstrate legitimacy through sovereign will-formation were always offset by their need to uphold a precarious balance of private material interests, they could only sustain their sovereignty as an unselective and inherently unstable system of command, and society as a whole was no longer able to rely on the protective functions that states had conventionally performed.

Liberalism and political parties

Second, Schmitt argued that the principle of legal neutrality in liberalism had a particularly corrosive impact on states that defined themselves and their legitimacy as *democratic*, and he thus claimed that *liberalism* and *democracy* necessarily existed in an uneasy relation to each other. Under the principle of positive-legal neutrality, Schmitt argued, the modern form of the democratic state had evolved as a regime that was in principle indifferent to the actual persons exercising a share of its political power, and it was widely (and neutrally) assumed that the state would retain a persistent integrity against the singular decisions of the governments that it incorporated. This principle, then, had permitted the modern state to evolve, not as a true democracy, but as a *parliamentary democracy*, which, Schmitt suggested, was a governmental form that both contradicted the inner legitimatory spirit of real democracy and eroded the structure of the state. Schmitt in fact argued that the original democratic belief that the will of the people is the sole constituent foundation for both state and government was a principle that, under certain sociological conditions, was surely capable of founding legitimate sovereign states. This principle, however, had been abandoned through the fateful fusion of liberalism and democracy. It had been replaced by the idea of a state apparatus in which constitutional law sanctioned and supported the fragmentation of the political will between different organs (i.e. executive, legislature, and judiciary) within the state, and in which the positive laws regulating parliament ensured that power was substantially placed in the hands, not of the constitutional *demos*, but of its appointed representatives in *political parties*. These parties commonly originated in and represented particular milieux within society, and they were consequently

19. Carl Schmitt, *Die geistesgeschichtliche Lage des heutigen Parlamentarismus* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1923), 12; *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, Ellen Kennedy (trans.) (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 8.

incapable of acting together to articulate one decisive voice that could be transmitted through society as the foundation for legitimate laws. Indeed, Schmitt asserted, it is particular to parties that they obstruct the formation of one sovereign or constituent political will, they allow the political will to fragment in “compromises and coalitions” and so remain at a level of extremely unresolved particularity,²⁰ and they ensure that the day-to-day running of government is internally focused on the details of inter-party bargaining in order to manage and prevent the erosion of these compromises and coalitions. Once placed at the center of government, the compromises underlying party-parliamentary government might temporarily be glossed over or incompletely mediated by the technical principles of positive law. Yet it is impossible for a government founded in inter-party compromises to generate unitary principles that give integrity and legitimacy to its laws, and it is impossible for such government to act in a legitimately sovereign or legitimately democratic fashion. Government conducted through parties in parliament, in short, is always an external adjunct to the state, and it cannot derive legitimacy from or reciprocally consolidate the legitimacy of the state. Over long periods of time, parliamentary government must necessarily weaken the power of the state, and it must frivolously give state power to social groups outside the state, who wish to overthrow it or use its power for democratically nonmandated ends. Indeed, for Schmitt, the fact that modern mass-democracies normally permit any party to gain access to power, regardless of whether this party supports or opposes the principles of democratic rule, underlined the weakness of party democracies and their creed of legal neutrality, and it demonstrated in symbolic simplicity that parliamentary states were wholly unable to express clear principles of sovereign – or democratic – order. The positivist ideals of liberal law, in sum, had fed a mirage of legal neutrality and neutrally brokered legitimacy within the parliamentary-democratic state. In so doing, they had created conditions in which real democracy was impossible, and in which the state could be easily dismantled and the fiction of its legitimacy revealed.

Liberalism and peace

Also of central importance in Schmitt’s theory was the claim that liberal theories erroneously assume that *peace* is the natural condition of human coexistence, and liberal governments naively presuppose that positive law could sustain itself by referring to simply moderated compromises between all members of society. For Schmitt, however, the opposite is true: he saw the liberal belief in “social harmony” as a metaphysical belief, which jeopardized the most reliable factual

20. Schmitt, *Die geistesgeschichtliche Lage*, 11; *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, 6.

precondition of social peace – that is, the will of the sovereign state itself.²¹ He argued in particular that mass-democratic polities are characterized by extreme antagonism between social groups, and the state of a mass democracy cannot rely on any conditions of ordered coexistence that it does not produce for itself through its own acts of volition. Indeed, Schmitt concluded that the legitimacy of any state, in the final analysis, depends on its ability to withstand the total absence of natural peace and natural norms and to exert a sovereign will in *exceptional* conditions of normative suspension. In other words, Schmitt claimed that it is only in those moments where a state assumes for itself the final responsibility for underwriting social order and for autonomously generating its own sovereign political ethic that the state fully obtains and demonstrates legitimacy. It is only in the “state of exception,” Schmitt thus declared, that “the core of the state” is revealed “in its concrete character.”²² It is against this conceptual background, then, that Schmitt outlined the most famous aspect of his political theory: namely, the claim that the exercise of legitimate power presupposes the existence of a political will that is able to make a concrete decision between *friend* and *foe*. In this claim, Schmitt concluded that a state that cannot differentiate between those that support it and those that threaten to undermine it cannot stand the acid test of exceptionalist pressure, and it cannot produce a will likely to facilitate its survival: it is not sovereign.²³ At this juncture, Schmitt argued that to be legitimate the state must be founded, not in neutral or natural norms, but in concrete *decisions*, which form the basis of political order as they are sustained and enforced by a constant and sovereign political will. Schmitt did not insist that the decision upholding legal/political order must be an expression of violent or dictatorial sovereignty. This decision might be a decision of a historically united and sovereign people. Or, equally, it might be the decision of a president or a commissarial dictator. Whatever its source, however, the decision that founds state legitimacy must be a manifestation of unity and integrity, which, where required, is able to assert itself, *exceptionally* and *totally*, to the exclusion of other wills and other decisions.²⁴ Radical acceptance of underlying social antagonism, therefore, must remain the primary indicator of a state’s capacity for obtaining and conserving legitimacy.

In consequence of these criticisms, throughout his career Schmitt concluded that state legitimacy is sustained only where the constitution of a state renounces

21. Schmitt, *Die geistesgeschichtliche Lage*, 45; *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, 35.

22. Schmitt, *Der Hüter der Verfassung*, 131.

23. Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1932) (new extended edition of essay of 1927), 26–9; *The Concept of the Political*, George Schwab (trans.) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 25–7.

24. Carl Schmitt, *Verfassungslehre* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1928), 87; *Constitutional Theory*, Jeffrey Seitzer (trans.) (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 136.

the liberal commitment to *polycracy*, and where its content is declared as the expression of one constituent will. Schmitt accounted for the uniform will embodied in a legitimate constitution in different ways at different times. In his writings of the early-Weimar era, he argued that, at least in periods of crisis, commissarial dictatorship might be the governmental form that can most effectively “protect” the constitutional will of the state.²⁵ He concluded at this point that dictatorship itself might under some circumstances be more democratic and more legitimate than parliamentary governance.²⁶ Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, then, he defended government by presidential prerogative, and he argued for the concentration of political power around a presidial executive elite. He claimed at different points that a president, partly freed from parliamentary accountability, was the most effective custodian of the principles embodied in a constitution,²⁷ and he insisted that a president could secure sufficient legitimacy for his tenure on power by garnering popular *acclamation* in one-issue plebiscites.²⁸ This argument was especially relevant for the regime in Germany in the last years of the Weimar Republic (1930–33), when Germany was governed by a succession of increasingly authoritarian chancellors, to whom Schmitt provided extensive consultative service, who relied for their legitimacy on presidential nomination and had little or no parliamentary mandate. However, in *Constitutional Theory* (1928), Schmitt also endorsed a more broad-based system of constitutional rule for Germany. He claimed here that the democratic constitution of the Weimar Republic could be viewed as founded in the unified will of the German people, and it could be seen to obtain a degree of legitimacy as an expression of the historical existence of the united national community.²⁹ At this point, he attempted to explain how the legitimacy status of the Weimar constitution might be reinforced, and he sought to clarify the measures required to ensure that it was not eroded by the technical provisions for legal pluralism more generally characteristic of liberal constitutions. He concluded that all traces of liberal legalism – that is, the guarantees for a separation of legislature, executive, and judiciary, and the catalogue of basic rights – should be removed from the constitution, so that all acts of state could be traced to one undisrupted and unifocal constituent will.³⁰ At this juncture, Schmitt’s ideas might be placed on a certain continuum with strong-state republicanism, and his thought contained

25. Carl Schmitt, *Die Diktatur: Von den Anfängen des modernen Souveränitätsgedankens bis zum proletarischen Klassenkampf* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1921), 136.

26. *Ibid.*, 22.

27. Schmitt, *Der Hüter der Verfassung*, 159.

28. Schmitt, *Völkersentscheid und Volksbegehren: Ein Beitrag zur Auslegung der Weimarer Verfassung und zur Lehre von der unmittelbaren Demokratie* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1927), 34.

29. Schmitt, *Verfassungslehre*, 65; *Constitutional Theory*, 116.

30. Schmitt, *Verfassungslehre*, 200; *Constitutional Theory*, 235.

a partial justification of democratic statism. The hallmark of a legitimate constitution, he claimed at this point, is that it guarantees the integrity of a strong central state, capable of ensuring that emphatic principles of order are reflected in every act of state power – and he saw no reason why this could not also be a feature of a strongly centralized and constitutionally concentrated democracy. Indeed, even at the end of the Weimar era, Schmitt was reluctant to lend assistance to those groups agitating for a complete overthrow of the republic, and (to no practical effect) he urged that the state should be reinforced so that parties intending to dismantle the republic (especially the NSDAP) should be prevented from entering government.³¹

Throughout all changes in his more practical commentaries, however, Schmitt's defining claim was that legitimate order must embody one set of constituent and fully sovereign principles. These principles must – if necessary – override all pluralistic aspects of the polity. Underlying this view was the conviction that all political wills have a total dimension: that is, each will seeks to impose principles through the state that determine social life in all its dimensions. Politics, thus, is always, residually, a conflict between total acts of volition. The neutralism at the heart of liberalism meant that liberal regimes could not recognize this fact, and they could, over longer periods of time, not produce principles to sustain reliably legitimized states.

III. SCHMITT AND MARXISM

Schmitt was emphatically hostile to Marxist political theory and, as discussed, he offered service to a number of authoritarian rightist cabinets in Germany. Schmitt's deep hostility to Marxism is seen in a number of different ways. Most obviously, he viewed the quasi-corporate regime of the Weimar Republic as an irresponsible outgrowth of the revisionist Marxism of the German Social Democratic movement. Throughout his work, he campaigned against the principle that political order could be reliably organized around inter-party deals

31. At one point, for instance, Schmitt denounced the total "parties" or the "activist parties" seeking to "dominate the state" in late-Weimar politics (Schmitt, "Weiterentwicklung des totalen Staats in Deutschland," in *Verfassungsrechtliche Aufsätze aus den Jahren 1924–1954: Materialien zu einer Verfassungslehre* [Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1958], 359–71, esp. 362–3). More famously, he also went to great pains to show that the supposed neutrality of law under the parliamentary systems made it easy for parties to hold "legal power in their hands" in order entirely to destroy the constitution. In this analysis, he implicitly suggested that the president should use decisive powers to prevent the assumption of power, by legal means, by the NSDAP (Carl Schmitt, *Legalität und Legitimität* [Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1932], 37; *Legality and Legitimacy*, Jeffrey Seitzer [trans.] [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004], 36).

concerning material provision or welfare, and he derided the corporatist revision of Marxism in the German labor movement as a particularly debilitating political pluralism. More generally, then, he also indicated that in espousing a final vision of a naturally evolving society without scarcity, Marxism reflected the weaker aspects of liberalism in pledging itself to an antipolitical utopia, and in so doing it deeply depleted the capacities for conflict and decision that every successful movement requires; indeed, it negated the constitutive structure of politics itself. Despite this, however, Schmitt's arguments against liberalism also contain a series of points that both intersected with and supported Marxist analysis of modern democracies.

First, Schmitt's critique of the positivist rule of law replicated elements of more common Marxist analyses of the concept of legality in parliamentary democracies. Above all, Schmitt dismissed as a fiction the belief that law can be extracted from political struggle and used as a medium that can independently or neutrally prescribe or manufacture preconditions for political legitimacy. For Schmitt, law is always political, and as such it is always an object of the total struggle for power between rival ideological visions and rival political movements, which forms the irreducible structure of all politics. In close analogy to Marxist principles, therefore, he argued that the law has no functional autonomy, it cannot produce legitimacy through palliative administrative acts, and its content must always be observed as asserting an underlying and potentially hegemonic political will. Indeed, Schmitt came close to suggesting that the liberal/positivist belief in the neutrality of law is simply ideology. Certainly, the Kelsenian idea that there can be *pure norms* in a society must appear both to a Schmittian and to a Marxist perspective as a deeply absurd and in fact evidently *ideological fallacy*.

Second, Schmitt indicated that in democratic states sanctioning the neutral rule of law and guaranteeing equal opportunity to all political and economic actors, there is always a high probability that economically advantaged social groups will exploit the parliamentary apparatus for their own ends, and they will monopolize the law to consolidate their own authority over the state and through society more generally. The tension between liberalism and democratic legitimacy, therefore, is always flanked by a tension between *capitalism* and *democratic legitimacy*, or between capitalism and democracy *tout court*. In this aspect of his theory, Schmitt evidently had much in common with radical left-leaning critiques of the parliamentary system, and he even cleared the terrain for a specific critique of democracy under conditions of *late capitalism*. In particular, he claimed that under the system of neutrally protected private law in modern democracies it is inevitably the case that the boundary between polity and economy becomes blurred, and this allows private economic agents to use the power attached to their social positions outside parliament to secure

a dominant stake in the parliamentary apparatus of the state. This has the result that the state forfeits the ability to consolidate its legitimacy above or against the plural associations of civil society, and, under certain conditions, the state is forced to fuse with private prerogatives receiving only minimal political sanction and support. Where this is the case, the state can easily be transformed into an instrument of economic control.

In addition to this, third, it can also be observed that Schmitt's thought overlapped with some of the more radical-voluntarist stances at the political fringe of Marxist theory in the early twentieth century. Specifically, Schmitt shared with left-oriented political voluntarism the conviction that the main ideologies arising from the nineteenth century were deficient because they examined social existence in antinomical, dualist/metaphysical and politically depleted terms. Like other voluntarists, Schmitt argued that these ideologies catastrophically undermined their own programs by failing to understand that the political dimension of society could not be separated out from other (perhaps economic or legal) aspects of society, and by omitting to recognize that in modern societies, and especially in mass democracies, all political organs (both states and parties) are incessantly engaged in a conflict for the monopoly of political power. Schmitt's claim that political organs are called on to legitimize themselves through a fundamental exercise of the will, that they must recognize all social acts as relevant for and even formative of political power, and that the consolidation of political power requires the presence of an integral political bloc, might thus have appeared particularly accurate and helpful to theorists on the voluntarist Left, who were necessarily committed to ideas such as mass-mobilization and uniform solidarity, and who were deeply skeptical about pluralism and the rule of law. In any case, the emphasis that Schmitt placed on the decisive sovereign will as the unitary basis for political ethics fused clearly with theories on the political Left, and it was correlated both with the radical-Left critique of liberalism and the radical-Left critique of deterministic Marxism.³² In particular, Schmitt's thought intersected closely with views of those on the Left who also suspected that the formal rule of law and the sharing of power between classes in a parliamentary apparatus could not place the state-founding sector of society (in this instance, the revolutionary class) in an enduring position of advantage, and that consequently concluded that legitimate (i.e. sovereign) government always presupposes an aspect of *totalism*.³³

32. I found helpful commentary on this in Renato Cristi and Pablo Ruiz-Tagle, *La República en Chile: Teoría y Práctica del Constitucionalismo Republicano* (Santiago: LOM, 2006), 66.

33. Hence also Schmitt's closeness to some aspects of Austro-Marxism, especially to Max Adler's argument that a socialist state presupposes unified solidarity; see Max Adler, *Die Staatsauffassung des Marxismus: Ein Beitrag zur Unterscheidung von soziologischer und juristischer Methode* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973), 49.

IV. SCHMITT AND EARLY WESTERN MARXISM

The Frankfurt School

The utility of Schmitt's concepts for neo-Marxist political analysis was not lost on his contemporaries. For instance, some theorists peripherally attached to the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt made productive use of Schmitt's work.³⁴ Most importantly, Otto Kirchheimer, whose doctorate was supervised by Schmitt, elaborated a critique of liberal parliamentarism, in which he tied Schmitt's critique of legal pluralism to a political-Marxist account of the legitimacy processes and the role of modern law in modern democracies. Kirchheimer argued that in societies combining capitalism and parliamentary democracy states invariably suffer from a lack of legitimacy, and fundamental – that is, sovereign – decisions regarding the constitutional form of the state are dissolved by principles that are protected under liberal private law, which in fact asserts a surreptitious primacy over all other law.³⁵ Kirchheimer thus extended the implicit critique of late-capitalism in Schmitt's theory by arguing that states secure legitimacy only if they possess a unitary constitution containing a mandatory decision concerning all the areas of society that can be legally regulated – including, expressly, the private economy – and if this decision can be enforced in order to subordinate to the state all elements of legal pluralism – including, most particularly, private law.³⁶ Kirchheimer's programmatic constitutional voluntarism clearly repudiated many of Schmitt's principal stances. However, his theoretical approach was strongly influenced by Schmitt, and it clearly marked an attempt to translate Schmitt's theory of sovereignty into a model of decisive government under a decisively class-based constitution.

At a later stage in the formation of critical theory, then, Jürgen Habermas also transfigured some of Schmitt's arguments, and he harnessed these views to a radical-democratic conception of legitimate political order.³⁷ Most obviously,

34. For more extensive commentary on these themes, see Ellen Kennedy, "Carl Schmitt und die Frankfurter Schule," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 12 (1986); Volker Neumann, "Verfassungstheorien politischer Antipoden: Otto Kirchheimer und Carl Schmitt," *Kritische Justiz* 14 (1981); Alfons Söllner, "Jenseits von Carl Schmitt: Wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Richtigstellungen im Umkreis der Frankfurter Schule," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 12 (1986), 502–9.

35. Otto Kirchheimer, "Verfassungswirklichkeit und politische Zukunft der Arbeiterbewegung," in *Von der Weimarer Republik zum Faschismus: Die Auflösung der demokratischen Rechtsordnung*, Wolfgang Luthardt (ed.) (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1976), 73.

36. Otto Kirchheimer, "Weimar – und was dann? Analyse einer Verfassung," in *Politik und Verfassung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1964), 54.

*37. Habermas's work is discussed in more detail in the essay by Christopher F. Zurn in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 6*.

in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), Habermas joined Kirchheimer in asserting that modern capitalist democracies are marked by a suppressed tension between the sociofactual conditions of legal validity and the normative democratic decisions that are enshrined in the constitution as principles of state legitimacy. In political systems commonly viewed as democratic, he claimed, the unitary political will of the people is undermined by compromises between political parties, and by organs of corporate interest and economic management that disrupt and parcellate the sovereign public will.³⁸ As a result of this, in modern (capitalist) democracies, laws do not reflect commonly formed interests or agreements, and they cannot represent a clearly legitimizing political will: they are technical institutions that are utilized primarily for administering material goods in order to maintain basic conditions of social harmony, and their essential function is to palliate social conflicts, to obscure the legitimacy weaknesses that underlie the polity, and to pursue emollient strategies of regulation. Only a democratic polity that is constitutionally based in universal agreements, obtained in communicative political interaction in a free public sphere, can, for Habermas, be authentically legitimate.³⁹ Even Habermas's later argument, outlined in *Legitimation Crisis of Late Capitalism* (1973), that late-capitalist polities are invariably hamstrung by insoluble weaknesses arising from the fact that they *materialize* their reserves of political legitimacy, cannot quite obscure its origins in Schmitt's critique of liberal pluralism.⁴⁰

Georg Lukács

If Kirchheimer and Habermas undertook the most literal reception of Schmitt on the political Left, however, it can also be observed that, because of the conceptual horizons in which they worked, the concerns motivating Schmitt's thought were quite generally reflected among radical theorists. For this reason, even theorists on the Left who vehemently opposed, or in fact had no first-hand knowledge of Schmitt's work also developed theoretical structures that showed a marked similarity with elements of Schmitt's approach.

Similarities with Schmitt's critique of liberalism as political metaphysics and his attempt to found a sovereign politics beyond the antinomies of liberalism can

38. Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990), 294; *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Thomas Burger (trans.) (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 197.

39. Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, 273; *The Structural Transformation*, 179.

40. Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimationsprobleme im Spätkapitalismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973), 97; *Legitimation Crisis*, Thomas McCarthy (trans.) (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 93.

be seen, for example, in the works of Georg Lukács.⁴¹ Lukács was in many ways the leading Marxist intellectual of interwar Europe. His works assumed seminal importance in the formation of the theoretical canon of Western Marxism. Born in Hungary, he studied in Germany, where he was deeply influenced by Weberian sociology, neo-Kantian epistemology, and Kierkegaardian existentialism, and he wrote many of his major works in German. He was a member of Béla Kun's government during the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919, after the collapse of which and the assumption of power by Miklós Horthy's counter-revolutionary regime he went into exile, first in Berlin and then in Moscow. He later held office in Imre Nagy's anti-Stalinist government in Budapest in 1956. After the dissolution of this government, he was interned in Romania, and he remained on very uneasy footing with the Soviet authorities.

Although he referred to Schmitt only in tones marked by intense invective, Lukács's work moved close to Schmitt in a number of ways. In particular, Lukács's work mirrored Schmitt in that he too claimed that liberal thinking is prevented by its inner antinomies from envisaging the sources of integral social life, and that, because of this, it cannot produce principles to institute or even imagine a fully legitimate system of public order. Moreover, he also moved in parallel to Schmitt in arguing, against the antinomical constructions of liberalism, that each mode of social order reflects an absolutely integral condition of society, that there can be no enduring coexistence between elements of rival systems of social order, and that the political aspects of society must be analyzed as sustained by a highly pervasive and effectively *total* set of underlying forces.

At a primary level, Lukács argued that liberalism was not only a series of theoretical stances or political dispositions, but also a socioepistemological reality that needed to be analyzed both in its economic and in its cognitive/theoretical dimensions, and that could only be superseded if its cognitive foundations were both adequately comprehended and dismantled. Liberal society, Lukács claimed, had its formative substrate in a formal-subjectivist or *quasi-monadic* conceptual apparatus, which he termed *false consciousness*, and which he saw as concentrated in exemplary fashion in the ideologies of liberalism: positivism and Kantianism. Lukács viewed false consciousness, most especially, as consciousness that is unable accurately to reflect its formative relation to objective reality: that is, it is a mode of consciousness that constructs itself within a duality between subject and object, between rational truth and material history,

41. Georg Lukács (György Szegedy von Lukács; April 13, 1885–June 4, 1971; born and died in Budapest, Hungary) was educated at the Universities of Budapest and Berlin. His influences included Hegel, Kierkegaard, Lask, Marx, and Rickert, and he held appointments as: Commissar for Culture and Education, Budapest (1919); Member of Parliament, Budapest (1949–56); Professor of Aesthetics and Cultural Philosophy, Budapest University (1945–56); and Minister of Culture, Budapest (1956).

between ethical norms and social facticity, and that supports its claims to knowledge by positing the forms of its knowledge as antinomically or *metaphysically* independent of the objectively determinant reality of material history. False consciousness, Lukács then explained, is causally enmeshed with the economic base of capitalism, and, in imagining human rationality as dislocated from and indifferent towards historical objects and historical processes, it also reflects the capitalist social order as an invariable or even quasi-natural external order of society. As a result, however unwittingly, it helps ideologically to solidify and perpetuate the relations of economic exchange characterizing capitalism.⁴² False consciousness, in sum, is the foundation for the liberal-capitalist condition of society in its totality.

For this reason, Lukács also claimed that the objective or institutional forms typical of bourgeois society also result from and reflect false consciousness, and they are preserved by distinct patterns of rationality and concept-formation. His attack on liberal bourgeois reason thus also contained an attack on the ethical and the juridical/political foundations of liberal thinking. In particular, he claimed, in ascribing to human reason a primary capacity for static norm-production and in assuming that the institutions of society could be prescribed by statically deduced norms, the false consciousness of liberal reason directly impedes insight into the concrete/material determinacy of society's laws, and it again constructs its truth claims in categorical forms that reflected the outer reality of the capitalist order in metaphysically apologetic terms. The tendency in Kantianism and in positivism to provide entirely formalized accounts of legal validity was thus, for Lukács, an example of a mental attitude that reproduced and reinforced the "intellectual forms of bourgeois society,"⁴³ and so served ideologically to legitimize both inner and outer reality as perennial and unshakably natural. For Lukács, therefore, the legal ideas of liberal consciousness might once have purported to promise ethical integrity and political freedom for modern society. In fact, however, they obstructed any meaningful objective analysis of the conditions of freedom, and they deeply consolidated the overarching condition of social heteronomy that they sought to supplant.

In setting out these analyses, Lukács concluded that liberalism could be grasped only if it was approached as the total form of a society, incorporating the material base, the legal-political superstructure, and the principles of human cognition in one highly alienated and coercive social bloc. This society, then, could be overcome only through a total transformation, impelled formatively by

42. Georg Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein: Studien über marxistische Dialektik* (Berlin: Malik-Verlag, 1923), 28; *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, Rodney Livingstone (trans.) (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 158.

43. Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, 207; *History and Class Consciousness*, 109.

a change in the structure of reason: that is, it could be overcome only if human consciousness evolved from the state of false or bourgeois consciousness to a state of *proletarian* consciousness. A proletarian consciousness, he suggested, is consciousness that has the following features: it recognizes its objects as materially produced and determined by underlying social (economic) process; it reflects itself as *mediated* through the totality of objective (economic) historical conditions in society; it comprehends the ways in which changes in material process determine subjective consciousness and in which changes in subjective consciousness alter material processes; it overcomes its antinomial *reification* towards material contents and processes by examining both itself and its objects as socially produced; it obtains, as a result of these facts, a degree of constitutive freedom and historically formative autonomy in its relation both to itself and its objects.⁴⁴ Postbourgeois consciousness, in short, must necessarily take the form of *revolutionary consciousness*, and as soon as consciousness has acquired unitary knowledge of itself and the objective conditions of its formation, it must express this knowledge in a single revolutionary moment. That is, it must – in the “free act of the proletariat” – liberate itself from the conditions of its objective determinacy and recreate the objective reality of society as a condition of objectively realized collective freedom.⁴⁵ Lukács thus saw the revolutionary act, coordinated by a political party embodying “proletarian class-consciousness,”⁴⁶ as an act that removes the material causes of false liberal consciousness (that is, it removes capitalism), that institutes a sociopolitical order that is no longer dominated by the cognitive fictions of liberal reason, and that creates a collective order in which the legal apparatus is fully unified with the needs of human beings as these arise from their objectively determined societal position. Proletarian consciousness, Lukács thus concluded, is consciousness that finally leads to a genuinely human political society, in which consciousness, reflected through the totality of its objective conditions, provides a unifying cognitive foundation for all society.⁴⁷

In this respect, Lukács’s critique of liberalism and liberal consciousness can be seen as the most far-reaching attempt to envisage a political condition resulting from the end of liberal antinomism. That is to say, it imagined a condition in which human cognitive/ethical and active/practical life were unified in a social order that integrated human life in its totality: that is, that no longer separated human existence into the false antinomies of theory/praxis, law/politics, norms/action, reason/will, and so on. At the same time, Lukács’s work also embodied

44. Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, 282; *History and Class Consciousness*, 159.

45. Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, 355; *History and Class Consciousness*, 209.

46. Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, 455; *History and Class Consciousness*, 299.

47. Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein*, 328; *History and Class Consciousness*, 190.

the most radical attempt to overcome the scientific determinism in Marxism. Lukács argued that a socialist society can develop only under specific cognitive preconditions, and he claimed that the material transformation of society has its precondition in a total cognitive and a total active transformation of society. Although far removed from Schmitt's express concerns, therefore, Lukács's thought clearly circled on the same antinomies that preoccupied Schmitt, and his idea of legitimate order as a total condition of society reflected aspects of Schmitt's thought. Like Schmitt, in particular, his attempted resolution of these concerns critically traversed the ideological divide between liberalism and Marxism, and it proposed a concept of social totality that aimed, at once, to resolve the antinomies in both these theoretical stances.

Antonio Gramsci

After Lukács, Antonio Gramsci⁴⁸ can also be named as a Marxist theorist whose thought showed a distinct, although also only very partial, parallel to Schmittian ideas. Gramsci was the main Marxist theorist of twentieth-century Italy. He was a founding member of the Italian Communist Party, whose effective leader he had become by 1924. With Palmiro Togliatti and others, he ran the journal *L'Ordine nuovo*, which played a highly influential role during the years of industrial unrest in Italy after 1918. He was imprisoned under Mussolini's emergency laws of 1926, and was very roughly treated in prison, often being kept in isolation. He died shortly after his release on grounds of ill health.

Naturally, it might appear rather absurd to mention Schmitt and Gramsci in the same breath.⁴⁹ There is no strong evidence to suggest that Gramsci knew or was sympathetic to Schmitt's thought. However, at the level of theory-construction, Gramsci's work revolved around the same conceptual problems as Schmitt's ideas, and it can also be viewed as a theory that sought to imagine legitimate political order by moving at once beyond the antinomies of liberalism and the antinomies of classical Marxism.

The first point requiring analysis in this respect is Gramsci's critique of the prevalent *economism* in Marxist theory. For Gramsci, the assumption in orthodox Marxism that social transformation follows a deterministic path,

48. Antonio Gramsci (January 22, 1891–April 27, 1937; born Ales, Sardinia, Italy; died in Rome) was educated at the University of Turin (1911–15). His influences included Croce, Lenin, Marx, and Pareto, and he held appointments as: editor of the journal *Grido del popolo* (1917); founder of the newspaper *L'Ordine nuovo* (1919); Leader of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and Communist Deputy in Parliament for Veneto (1924).

49. See the treatment of this relation in Andreas Kalyvas, "Hegemonic Sovereignty: Carl Schmitt, Antonio Gramsci and the Constituent Prince," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 5(3) (2000). This is an excellent essay, but it does not substantially inform my discussion here.

and that scientific economic analysis provides sufficient utensils to understand the course of social change, was deeply misguided, and it failed to identify the elements of concrete conflict and selective strategy by which social change is caused. Marxist economism, Gramsci concluded, was an outlook directly derived from liberalism, and it replicated many of the antinomies of liberalism.⁵⁰ On this basis, he argued that it was essential to rescue Marxism from economism, and to ensure that the Marxist theory of social revolution incorporated an adequate account of political action and an adequate knowledge of the specific historical constellations in which political action was to be conducted. Gramsci therefore followed Sorel in introducing a strongly voluntaristic dimension into Marxist doctrine, and he focused his work on the need to examine the specific modes of political organization required to effect and consolidate social revolution.

This emphasis on the necessity of political analysis, political action, and political consciousness had a number of implications for Gramsci's thought as a whole. In his early work during the *biennio rosso*,⁵¹ for instance, he ascribed singular importance to the political activities of workers' councils, which he specifically differentiated from the particularistic interests pursued by syndicates and trade unions,⁵² and which he defined as cells promoting a general ethic of political self-organization and quasi-Tayloristic "self-discipline" among the revolutionary class.⁵³ The organization of workers in councils, he argued, brought the primary benefit that it allowed workers to assume political responsibilities close to those assumed by states and political institutions in society more widely, and it enabled them to gain educational experiences of self-administration and to propagate a political and ideological culture likely to support eventual proletarian autonomy. He consequently defined the council as the "model of the proletarian state," in which members of the proletariat received the opportunity to test out practices likely to consolidate a pattern of statehood adequate to revolutionary interests and revolutionary consciousness.⁵⁴

Throughout the course of his work, moreover, Gramsci also defined the political party as a crucial center of political organization, and he ascribed to

50. Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, Sergio Capriglio and Elsa Fubini (eds) (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), vol. III, 1589; *Prison Notebooks*, Joseph A. Buttigieg (trans.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992–2007), Notebook 13, §18.

51. This term describes the two years of widespread and often violent industrial agitation in northern Italy after the end of the First World War.

52. See Gwyn A. Williams, *Proletarian Order: Antonio Gramsci, Factory Councils and the Origins of Italian Communism 1911–1921* (London: Pluto, 1975), 196.

53. On Gramsci's enthusiasm for US-style Taylorism, see Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, vol. III, 2173; *Prison Notebooks*, Notebook 22, §13.

54. See Antonio Gramsci, *L'Ordine nuovo, 1919–1920* (Turin: Einaudi, 1954), 37.

the party a distinctive function in creating conditions likely to facilitate and solidify social transformation. In his notes on Machiavelli, contained in his *Prison Notebooks*, he claimed that in modern societies political parties have a position analogous to that of the state-founding or *sovereign* activities of the prince in a classical republic, and the revolutionary party acts as an “organism” that forms and articulates the “collective will” required to found and stabilize new political institutions.⁵⁵ In addition to this, Gramsci also accorded crucial significance to the political function and status of the intellectuals in the political party, and he argued that, admittedly with certain “distinctions of degree,” all members of political parties perform intellectual functions for society. That is, all party members operate as “agents of general activities,” and they provide educational and ideological support to underscore the hegemony of dominant social groups.⁵⁶

In each of these respects, Gramsci clearly indicated that human society contains irreducibly political elements, and that the formation of a political – that is, relatively generalized – consciousness is constitutive for all effective social transformation. In addition to this, however, Gramsci’s critique of Marxist economism also brought forth a further and more encompassing political argument, which gradually, through the course of his theoretical career, became the central and most distinctive pillar of his thinking. This dimension arose from the fact that he saw economist analysis as pursuing a deeply reductive approach to the political superstructure of modern society, and that he increasingly perceived the formal-instrumental conception of the state in Marxism as incapable of explaining either the sources of political stability and compliance in society or the mechanisms required for restructuring society through revolutionary action. Even in his early work, therefore, Gramsci envisioned the state, even under the domination of capital, as performing distinctively generalized functions in society, and he refused to accept the economist claim that the state could be analyzed as a technical element of the superstructure: that is, as an institution that possessed no directive or legitimacy primacy for a society as a whole. Whatever its role in regulating exchange and securing conditions for the production of excess capital,⁵⁷ he argued, a state always relies on and generates some degree of general legitimacy or *social consent*, it cannot be accounted for in narrowly coercive terms, and it even performs educational and rationalizing responsibilities for society as a whole.⁵⁸ It is on this basis, then, that Gramsci introduced the concept for which he is most renowned: *hegemony*. Gramsci

55. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, vol. III, 1558; *Prison Notebooks*, Notebook 13, §1.

56. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, vol. III, 1518, 1522; *Prison Notebooks*, Notebook 12, §1.

57. Gramsci freely admits that states have these primary roles; see Gramsci, *L’Ordine nuovo 1919–1920*, 4.

58. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, vol. III, 1570–71; *Prison Notebooks*, Notebook 13, §11.

developed this concept in an attempt to propose a multilayered analysis of the conditions of domination and stratification in a society, and he used it to argue that the primacy of one class at one social juncture must be understood as the expression, not only of its monopolization of the means of production, but of its own pervasive political ideology – or even its own *political culture* – which is both concentrated around and in turn underpins and strengthens the apparatus of the state. He saw class dominance, in other words, as a total political condition of society, in which the status of one social class is “stabilized on a universal level” (i.e. it forms the historical bloc around which society as a whole is organized), and in which this class ensures that its interests, its underlying mental dispositions, and its social values transfuse the entirety of society and create overarching (or total) conditions through which its dominance will be reinforced and perpetuated.⁵⁹ The state, thus, is the aggregate of institutions that both stabilize the hegemony of one class and promote a wider generalized culture that makes the ongoing dominance of this class probable. For this reason, Gramsci indicated that social analysis had to be primarily focused on the superstructure, and that it was only through adequate interpretation of hegemonic relations in the superstructure that the conditions for effective social transformation could be ascertained.

On each of these counts, in consequence, Gramsci replaced the thin and technical Marxist account of the political apparatus of society with a culturally and ideologically embedded concept of the political. In this approach Gramsci developed the claim that the assertion of a political will is the precondition of all social transformation, and, like both Sorel and Vilfredo Pareto, he examined the consolidation of political power as the accomplishment of a class combining both material supremacy and the capacity for producing pervasive cultural motivations. This ascription of relatively autonomous formative power to the political system also led him to conclude that any transformation of society had to be preceded by a transformation in the superstructure, and this could only be effected through a concerted and far-reaching cultural, ideological, and educational endeavor, in which new intellectual or cultural conditions for sustaining governmental power were established throughout society in its totality. Radical social transformation, in other words, was necessarily tied both to political revolution and to cultural/intellectual revolution. Conditions of material equality in the economy could not be instituted without the strategic construction of a new hegemonic bloc, able to establish and maintain an ideological force likely to stabilize these conditions. It is for this reason that Gramsci imputed to the political party such a crucial role in effecting social transformation. Unlike Lenin, who viewed the party as the relatively autonomous source of leadership for the

59. Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere*, vol. III, 1584–5; *Prison Notebooks*, Notebook 13, §17.

revolutionary class,⁶⁰ Gramsci argued that the party must act as a mediating link between the revolutionary class and the means of governmental coercion, and it must act to found and consolidate not only a public apparatus supporting the material interests of the revolutionary class, but also a broad culture likely to sustain the ultimate political hegemony of the working class. He thus viewed the success or otherwise of any workers' party as determined by the degree to which it was able to "possess its own proper notion of the state" and its own "program of revolutionary government."⁶¹ Indeed, although he occasionally acceded to Engels's dictum that after a successful social revolution the state would finally disappear and be replaced by a "regulated society,"⁶² Gramsci suggested that each stage of history necessarily produced its own hegemonic structures and that each socioeconomic condition was articulated with a particular mode of hegemony or with a particular mode of statehood.⁶³ A proletarian society, in consequence, would not exist without a political system. A proletarian state would be a state of *proletarian hegemony*, founded by a quasi-sovereign political party.⁶⁴

On balance, therefore, it can be concluded that Gramsci imputed three distinctive meanings to politics, and in each of these he saw politics as a distinct realm of human praxis and as formative for society as a whole. First, he argued that the state is a quasi-universal dimension of human society, which disseminates increasingly generalized principles through society, and whose power cannot be construed exclusively in instrumental terms. Second, he argued that any moment of social transformation must be analyzed, prepared, and conducted, not merely at the level of economic relations, but also at the level of superstructure, and that societal analysis that formally detaches politics from society cannot grasp the composition of society as a whole. Third, he argued (albeit more implicitly) that, even after the transition towards a socialist society, some kind of hegemonic apparatus would remain, as socialist societies retain a requirement for the universalizing and rationalizing resources contained in and enforced by state power. In each of these respects, Gramsci's work can be seen as an internal correction of the antinomies of classical Marxism: it relocated the

60. Lenin, *What Is to be Done?*, 185.

61. Antonio Gramsci, *Socialismo e fascismo: L'Ordine nuovo, 1921-1922* (Turin: Einaudi, 1966) 5. For commentary see Anne Showstack Sassoon, *Gramsci's Politics* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 17.

62. See Norberto Bobbio, "Gramsci and the Conception of Civil Society," in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, Chantal Mouffe (ed.) (London: Routledge, 1979), 41.

63. See John M. Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1967), 126. For a stronger claim in this regard, see Richard Bellamy and Darrow Schecter, *Gramsci and the Italian State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 32.

64. See the link between sovereignty and hegemony as posited in Kalyvas, "Hegemonic Sovereignty," 362. See also Gramsci, *Socialismo e fascismo*, 61.

impetus of societal transformation onto the terrain of resolute political action, and it stated that societies lose consistency if they are not held together – or even *legitimized* – by an overarching political or sovereign will and by a total political culture. In each of these respects, Gramsci's reconfiguration of Marxism was also intended to move Marxist analysis conclusively away from the residues of liberal doctrine. Indeed, as discussed, from Gramsci's perspective classical Marxist economism and formal-democratic liberalism were often coterminous. In each of these respects, moreover, Gramsci's argument also turned on the quasi-Schmittian insistence that legitimate order was not thinkable without a highly pervasive will, capable of transmitting principles of political form through all levels of society.

V. CONCLUSION

Schmitt's ideas, it can be concluded, had a central exemplary status in the theoretical history of early-twentieth-century Europe. First, they proposed a concept of the political that was designed to overcome the theoretical antinomies of liberalism. In this, second, they at once overlapped with the Marxist critique of liberalism and contributed to the self-critique of Marxism by proposing a theory of volitional conflict and sovereign will-formation as the only means of securing order in highly unstable and deeply contested societies. In such societies, Schmitt argued, principles of order always possess a totalizing character, and the political apparatus sustained by such principles could not be understood as a mere neutral adjunct to the formative processes in society. Political Marxists tended to differ from Schmitt's view in that, unlike Schmitt, they saw, not the state, but the political party as the organ of political will-construction. However, Schmitt's broader claim that no aspect of social exchange can be immediately excluded from politics, and that the sovereign will must constantly work to reinforce its hold on all society and to preserve itself against rival and equally total ideological positions, moved him close to much political Marxism. Simultaneously, third, Schmitt's ideas also reflected the wider sense that pervaded (often in a half-reflected manner) many theories in the early decades of the twentieth century that the political ideals of the nineteenth century had allowed human life to fragment into false oppositions between theory and praxis, ethics and action, process and transformation, law and politics, legality and legitimacy. They had consequently dismembered human society and crucially undermined its resources for self-preservation, freedom, legitimacy, and abiding stability. The diagnosis that this malaise could be surmounted only through the end of political antinomies – or of political metaphysics – and through a restatement of politics as an integral category of generalized action was a diagnosis that moved

between perspectives formally attached to the political Right and perspectives formally attached to the political Left, and that could be sympathetically received by much thinking that imagined conditions of enduring order outside the classical conventions of liberalism and Marxism.

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THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE
 MODEL OF EARLY CRITICAL THEORY IN THE
 WORK OF MAX HORKHEIMER, ERICH FROMM,
 AND HERBERT MARCUSE

John Abromeit

At the risk of being overly schematic, one could say that three main currents went into the formation of the critical theory of the so-called first generation of the Frankfurt School. The first and most important current was developed by Max Horkheimer¹ in collaboration with Erich Fromm in the late 1920s and early 1930s.² The second, significantly weaker, but nonetheless important current was introduced by Herbert Marcuse,³ when he joined Horkheimer's

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1. Max Horkheimer (February 14, 1895–July 7, 1973; born in Stuttgart, Germany; died in Montagnola, Switzerland) was educated at Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität (1919–25), and took his habilitation there in 1925. His influences included Freud, Hegel, Kant, Marx, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer, and he held appointments at Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität (1925–33, 1950–58), including Rector (1951–53), and was Director of the Institute for Social Research (1930–58).
 2. Erich Fromm (1900–1980) was born to an upper-middle-class, orthodox Jewish family in Frankfurt. While completing his training as a psychoanalyst Fromm became involved in the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute and he also helped found the Frankfurt Psychoanalytic Institute in 1929. Horkheimer offered Fromm a lifetime membership in the institute in 1930 and placed him in charge of a psychoanalytically informed empirical study of the German working class. Fromm published a number of pioneering articles in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* in the early 1930s, which helped lay the foundations for the institute's innovative theoretical synthesis of Marx and Freud. But in the mid-1930s, Fromm began to question orthodox Freudianism. His critique of Freudian drive theory, in particular, pushed him away from Horkheimer. Fromm's membership in the institute was officially terminated in 1939. His social-psychological study of the roots of fascism, *Escape from Freedom*, was published in 1941 and still bore the marks of the institute's theoretical positions. For an overview of Fromm's life and work, see Rainer Funk, *Erich Fromm: His Life and Ideas* (London: Continuum, 2000).
 3. Herbert Marcuse (July 19, 1898–July 29, 1979; born in Berlin; died in Starnberg, Germany) was educated at Humboldt University (1919–20) and the University of Freiburg (1920–22, 1928–33). His influences included Dilthey, Freud, Hegel, Heidegger, Horkheimer, Lukács, Marx,

Institute for Social Research in 1933. Finally, with the growing estrangement between Horkheimer and Fromm in the late 1930s, the path was cleared for a closer working relationship between Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, which initiated the beginning of a new phase in the development of critical theory. Although Horkheimer and Adorno became acquainted in the early 1920s, the development of their thought followed different trajectories in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Adorno's greater interest in aesthetic issues and the significant influence of Walter Benjamin on his thought during this time are just two examples of this divergence. Adorno and Benjamin's work is treated elsewhere in this volume,⁴ so I shall limit myself in this essay to an examination of the first two of the three main currents that led to the formation in the 1930s of the distinctive and highly influential school of thought known as critical theory.⁵ In the late 1930s and early 1940s Horkheimer and Fromm abandoned some of the key assumptions of this early model of critical theory, but it continued to inform Herbert Marcuse's work. For this reason and also owing to Marcuse's key role in introducing critical theory to a much broader audience in the 1960s, I shall also provide a brief overview of his later writings.

I. MAX HORKHEIMER

Max Horkheimer was born in 1895 in Zuffenhausen, a suburb of Stuttgart, Germany. His parents were members of Stuttgart's Jewish community, which had grown steadily in the course of the nineteenth century and had succeeded in establishing itself as an integral part of the city's economic, political, and cultural life. His father was of modest origins, but took advantage of the economic boom in Wilhelmine Germany and established himself as a successful textile manufacturer. His father hoped that Horkheimer would take over his factory, but Horkheimer demonstrated little interest in the life of an industrialist. In 1911,

Nietzsche, and Schiller, and he held appointments at the Institute for Social Research (1934–42), the Office of Strategic Services (1942–51), Columbia University (1952–53), Harvard University (1953–54), Brandeis University (1954–65), and the University of California, San Diego (1965–79).

*4. See the essays in this volume by Deborah Cook and James McFarland.

5. In the German context "critical theory" still refers primarily to the first-generation Frankfurt School thinkers. The term has much broader connotations in the Anglo-American scholarly world, but I shall use it here throughout to refer to Horkheimer and his colleagues at the Institute for Social Research and their particular school of critical theory. [*] For a discussion of the work of the subsequent generations of Frankfurt School thinkers, see Christopher F. Zurn's essay on Jürgen Habermas and James Swindal's essay on the second generation of critical theory, both in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 6*, and Amy Allen's essay on the third generation of critical theory in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 7*.

Horkheimer met Friedrich Pollock, whose father was also a wealthy industrialist.⁶ The two of them soon became inseparable friends – a bond that would prove decisive for the development of critical theory over the next half century. Horkheimer and Pollock's parents sent them to Paris, Brussels, and London to learn French and English and to study the most advanced techniques in textile production. While living abroad, Horkheimer and Pollock devoted most of their time to their burgeoning interests in literature and philosophy and to pursuing a bohemian lifestyle. With the outbreak of the First World War, they were forced to return to Stuttgart and Horkheimer took a position working in his father's factory. Having already lived abroad and realizing that other Europeans were no better or worse than the Germans, Horkheimer was immune to the nationalist hysteria that accompanied the outbreak of the war. As the war and his labors in his father's factory dragged on, Horkheimer's already significant disaffection with the bourgeois world of his parents and the career path his father had chosen for him grew to a fevered pitch. Horkheimer expressed his radical rejection of the war and the society that had produced it in a series of novellas, short plays, and diary entries.⁷ After serving briefly as a noncombatant in the war, Horkheimer was sent to a sanatorium near Munich to recover from a debilitating illness. While there Horkheimer made contact with Germaine Krull, an avant-garde photographer and a leading figure in the radical leftist, bohemian circles that

6. Friedrich Pollock (1894–1970) was born to a wealthy, highly assimilated Jewish family in Freiburg, Germany. Soon after moving to Stuttgart around 1910, he met Horkheimer and formed a friendship that would last for the rest of their lives. In 1923, Pollock completed his PhD in economics with a dissertation on Marx's theory of money. At about the same time he, Horkheimer and Felix Weil – who was also the son of a wealthy industrialist – hatched the idea for an Institute for Social Research, which would be financed by Weil's father Hermann. The following year the institute was officially opened, with Carl Grünberg as its first director. Unlike Horkheimer, Pollock worked directly for the institute during the 1920s. His first full-length study, *Experiments in Economic Planning in the Soviet Union*, was sponsored and published by the institute. After Horkheimer assumed Grünberg's position as the director of the institute, Pollock's role became increasingly administrative, although he did contribute a series of articles on the topic of "state capitalism," which contributed to a substantial shift in Horkheimer's theoretical position in the late 1930s. Pollock accompanied Horkheimer and Adorno from New York to Los Angeles in 1941. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the product of Horkheimer and Adorno's theoretical collaboration during this time, was dedicated to Pollock on the occasion of his fiftieth birthday. Pollock returned to Frankfurt with Horkheimer after the war and worked in the re-established institute.

7. Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Alfred Schmidt and Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (eds) (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1988–96), vol. 1. These writings have not been translated. For an overview of them and their relation to Horkheimer's biographical and intellectual development at the time, see my *Max Horkheimer and the Foundations of the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 19–50.

would spearhead the Munich council republic in 1919.⁸ Horkheimer became close friends with Krull and presented his novellas and plays at social gatherings in her atelier, which were attended by prominent members of Munich's bohemia and literati, such as Rainer Maria Rilke, Ernst Toller, and Stefan Zweig. After the brutal suppression of the Munich council republic by the Freikorps in May 1919, Horkheimer decided that the possibility for a mass-based social revolution was foreclosed for the time being. Horkheimer's explorations of bohemia and his self-understanding as an artist were brought to an end by his decision to move to Frankfurt with Pollock in order to get a rigorous theoretical education, which he now viewed as the prerequisite for any serious social critique.

Although his first genuine philosophical interest was Schopenhauer, Horkheimer became interested in Marxist theory toward the end of the war. While he chose psychology and philosophy as his major fields of study at the newly founded J. W. Goethe University in Frankfurt, he continued to study Marx on the side with Pollock, who in 1923 would complete a dissertation on Marx's theory of money. In the fall of 1919, Horkheimer and Pollock met Felix Weil, with whom they shared the unlikely combination of a bourgeois family background and interest in socialist theory and politics. The sustained discussions between the three of them, along with the generous financial support of Weil's father Hermann, led to the formation of the Institute for Social Research in 1923. Although Horkheimer – unlike Pollock – was not involved directly with the institute during its early years, he did play an important role in conceiving the idea of the institute. Horkheimer's critical theory developed independently in the mid- and late 1920s and would not become the guiding force of the institute until 1931, when he became its director. In the early 1920s Horkheimer became acquainted with several of the other figures who would play an important role in the institute's later endeavors, such as Leo Löwenthal and Adorno.⁹

8. On Krull, see Kim Sichel, *Germaine Krull: Photographer of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

9. Leo Löwenthal (1900–1993) was born in Frankfurt and he became friends with Fromm and Adorno during the First World War. In addition to contributing numerous articles on the sociology of literature to the institute's journal, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Löwenthal also served as its copy-editor from 1932–42. During the Second World War, Löwenthal took a position at the Voice of America, while at the same time working on a study of authoritarian propaganda techniques – *Prophets of Deceit* – which was part of the institute's larger research project, *Studies in Prejudice*. Löwenthal went on to teach at the Stanford Center for the Advanced Study of Behavioral Sciences, before accepting a position in 1956 in the Sociology Department at the University of California, Berkeley, where he would remain for the rest of his life. For a fascinating and very readable account of Löwenthal's life and his relations to the other members of the institute, see Leo Löwenthal, *An Unmastered Past: The Autobiographical Reflections of Leo Löwenthal*, Martin Jay (ed.) (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987).

But neither played an important role in the development of Horkheimer's critical theory at this time. The most important figure in Horkheimer's academic studies at the University of Frankfurt in the early 1920s was Hans Cornelius, an idiosyncratic and polymathic professor of philosophy, whose primary interest was neo-Kantian epistemology. Horkheimer had impressed Cornelius early on with his thorough knowledge of Schopenhauer and Kant, which led Cornelius to take him under his wing, both academically and personally. In 1923 Cornelius sent Horkheimer and Pollock to Freiburg to study with his friend and interlocutor Edmund Husserl. While in Freiburg Horkheimer and Pollock also attended lectures by Martin Heidegger, but they were unimpressed.¹⁰ Horkheimer wrote both his dissertation and *Habilitationsschrift*¹¹ under Cornelius's guidance. Both works addressed Kant's *Critique of Judgment* and both criticized Kant – and implicitly German academic neo-Kantianism as well – from a standpoint that reflected Cornelius's philosophical arguments.¹² Although Horkheimer learned some important lessons from these academic writings, they remained within the horizon of Cornelius's philosophy of consciousness. Horkheimer's critical theory took shape in the period between 1925 and 1930 as an explicit critique, not only of Cornelius, but of consciousness philosophy as a whole.¹³ Horkheimer's move beyond consciousness philosophy proceeded along two different axes: the historical and the social.

In a remarkable series of lectures and unpublished essays from the late 1920s, Horkheimer developed a sophisticated materialist interpretation of the history of modern philosophy, from Bacon and Descartes all the way up to contempo-

10. In one of his later interviews, Friedrich Pollock relates a story that sheds light on his and Horkheimer's impression of Heidegger at this time. They attended Heidegger's lectures on "Introduction to Metaphysics." When, after the first three weeks of the course, Heidegger was still lecturing on the concept of "Introduction," Pollock and Horkheimer left a derogatory note on his lectern to express their dissatisfaction (Max Horkheimer Archiv [J. W. Goethe Universitätsbibliothek, Frankfurt], Document X 183a, 51).

11. A *Habilitationsschrift* is a second dissertation that one had to write in order to become a professor in the German university system.

12. For a summary of the arguments in Horkheimer's first and second dissertations, see my *Max Horkheimer and the Foundations of the Frankfurt School*, 65–84.

13. "Consciousness philosophy" refers here to the modern tradition of rationalist epistemology, which was inaugurated by Descartes, and continued through the work of Leibniz, Kant, the neo-Kantians, Husserl, and Horkheimer's academic mentor Cornelius. Consciousness philosophy attempts to provide a foundation for knowledge from within a reflective examination of the mental contents and/or necessary conditions of consciousness, mental experience, or cognition. [*] For detailed discussions of Husserl and neo-Kantianism, see the essays by Thomas Nenon and Sebastian Luft and Fabien Capeillère in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 3*.

rary schools such as neo-Kantianism, phenomenology, and vitalism.¹⁴ Implicitly following Marx, Horkheimer demonstrated how modern European philosophy represented a mediated expression of the uneven development of bourgeois society. For example, Horkheimer argues that the Enlightenment achieved its paradigmatic form in France rather than Britain or (what would become) Germany, owing to the particular constellation of social, economic, and political forces there. Whereas Britain had already carried out a bourgeois political revolution in 1688, and was well on the way to establishing a modern market society during the eighteenth century, the development of bourgeois political and economic institutions lagged behind in France and even more so in the Holy Roman Empire. Horkheimer interprets the basically affirmative character of British political economy and the resigned skepticism of David Hume as mediated expressions of a triumphant bourgeois society. Horkheimer views the lingering importance of theology and metaphysics (e.g. Kant's efforts to rescue a metaphysics of morality) in the German Enlightenment as an expression of the still relatively weak state of bourgeois society there. Only in France, where the spread of market relations – including the massive sale of offices and titles of nobility – in the eighteenth century testified to the growing strength of a bourgeois class eager to emancipate itself from the remaining constraints of the *ancien régime*, did Enlightenment ideals attain a self-consciously political form. Horkheimer believed that the critical and predominantly materialist principles of the *philosophes* – the right of all men and women to freedom, equality, and happiness in this life – were truly universal ideals, which were an expression of ascendant bourgeois society, but which also pointed beyond it. Horkheimer's lectures demonstrate that a critical concept of Enlightenment was crucial to his thought from early on. But perhaps even more importantly, Horkheimer placed the Enlightenment, along within the rest of modern European philosophy, within the larger context of the uneven development and subsequent transformation of bourgeois society. In so doing, he insisted that ideas could not be understood purely from the standpoint of consciousness, but were always *historically* mediated.

If Horkheimer's lectures represented a decisive step beyond consciousness philosophy along a historical or diachronic axis, then the theory of contemporary society, which he developed during the same period, represented its synchronic counterpart. Horkheimer forged a critical theory of contemporary society out of three main components: Marx's critique of political economy and ideology, empirical social research, and psychoanalysis. Horkheimer explored the continuing relevance of Marx's ideas in *Dämmerung: Notizen in*

*14. These schools are discussed in several essays in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 3*.

Deutschland,¹⁵ a collection of aphorisms that use micrological observations of the inequities of everyday life to demonstrate the concrete ways in which people experienced and unconsciously reproduced abstract social domination. The collection was published under the pseudonym Heinrich Regius¹⁶ in 1934, after Horkheimer had already fled Germany, but – as the subtitle suggests – it was written between 1926 and 1931 and many of the aphorisms address the social situation in the final years of the Weimar Republic. For example, in “The Impotence of the German Working Class,”¹⁷ Horkheimer analyzes the ways in which technological developments in production have altered the composition of the German working class. He shows, in particular, how a political and ideological divide had emerged between workers with stable jobs, who tended to support the Social Democratic Party, and the mass of unemployed, who tended toward the German Communist Party. Although his unflinching diagnosis of the deep divisions among German workers seemed to refute Marx’s predictions about the increasing pauperization, homogenization, and unification of the proletariat, Horkheimer did not as a result take leave of Marx’s theory altogether. Instead he recalled Marx’s argument that “there is a tendency in the capitalist economic process for the number of workers to decrease as more machinery is introduced,”¹⁸ in order to explain the rise of a large unemployed underclass and the resulting schism in workers’ social conditions and consciousness. He also took issue with the widespread belief that Marx had advocated a progressive, or even deterministic, philosophy of history. Horkheimer’s early study of Schopenhauer and the traumatic experience of the First World War had immunized him to the idea that progress toward a better society was inscribed in the very logic of modern capitalism itself, as many revisionists and Social Democrats had interpreted Marx. So he recognized that the rational tendencies introduced by capitalism had long since been eclipsed by the irrational tendencies identified by Marx, such as periodic crises and commodity fetishism. Progressive historical change could be brought about only through conscious intervention, not passive reliance on the “logic” of history or capital. As he would put it later, “as long as world history follows its logical course, it fails to fulfill its human

15. One possible translation of the title would be “Dawn and Decline: Notes in Germany.” “*Dämmerung*” means both “dawn” and “decline” (or “dusk”) in German, and while the latter, darker meaning of the term definitely dominates the aphorisms, the former meaning is also intended.

16. Regius (1598–1679) was a professor of medicine in Utrecht and a materialist student and critic of Descartes.

17. Max Horkheimer, *Dawn and Decline: Notes 1926–1931 and 1950–1969*, Michael Shaw (trans.) (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 61–5.

18. *Ibid.*, 61.

purpose.”¹⁹ Horkheimer’s rejection of progressive philosophies of history was one example of his efforts to revitalize Marx’s ideology critique. But, as his penetrating observations of the discordant state of the German working class made clear, he insisted that ideology critique and all of Marx’s other concepts be tested and reformulated, if necessary, in light of changed historical conditions.

This insistence on the importance of thorough knowledge of present social conditions explains Horkheimer’s early interest in empirical social research. Horkheimer’s interest in empirical scientific research was sparked during his university studies in the early 1920s and was soon extended to empirical social research in the late 1920s. In his lectures on the history of philosophy Horkheimer displayed more sympathy for the empiricist than the rationalist tradition. Furthermore, he believed that an empirical deficit existed in the young discipline of sociology in Germany, so he looked instead to the work of American sociologists, such as Robert and Helen Lynd’s *Middletown: A Study in American Culture*, as models for the integration of empirical social research into his own incipient critical theory. In 1929 – at a time when it was already apparent that he would become the next director of the Institute for Social Research – Horkheimer was able to put his ideas about empirical social research to the test for the first time. He and Fromm planned and carried out an empirical study designed to provide insight into the conscious and unconscious political attitudes of the German working class. Horkheimer and Fromm’s interest in psychoanalysis informed their conceptualization of the study. Like many Marxists in the 1920s, Horkheimer wondered why large sections of the German working class had initially supported the First World War and had proved to be such reluctant revolutionaries in 1918/19. With the rising threat of National Socialism, Horkheimer also wondered how the German working class would react if the Nazis attempted to seize power. With these concerns in mind, Horkheimer and Fromm used psychoanalytic techniques in their design of the questionnaires and their interpretation of the responses. Over 3000 questionnaires were distributed in 1929, and by 1931 over 1000 had been returned. Based on the preliminary results of study – which was never completed²⁰ –

19. Max Horkheimer, “The Authoritarian State,” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (eds) (New York: Continuum, 1982), 117 (translation modified).

20. Horkheimer had strong reservations about publishing the study in the US in the 1930s, allegedly because many of the questionnaires had been lost in transition to New York; in reality, the still rather unrefined methods of the survey and the explicitly Marxist political assumptions that guided it were probably of greater concern to Horkheimer, who was careful not to expose the institute’s politics in a way that could danger their fragile status as exiles in the US. Horkheimer’s unwillingness to publish the study contributed to growing tensions between him and Fromm, which would eventually lead to Fromm’s departure from the institute in 1939 (see below). The preliminary results of the study were published in 1980 by Wolfgang Bonß.

Horkheimer and Fromm discovered a divergence between workers' professed political views and their unconscious attitudes, which, in many cases, were deeply authoritarian. Horkheimer and Fromm's conclusion that the German working class would not offer substantial resistance if the National Socialists attempted to seize power was soon borne out by historical events.

Psychoanalysis was the third component of Horkheimer's theory of contemporary society. His interest in psychoanalysis was already apparent in 1927, when he underwent analysis with Karl Landauer (1887–1945), a Frankfurt-based psychoanalyst who had studied with Freud and become a member of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society in 1913. Horkheimer's analysis was motivated primarily by intellectual, rather than therapeutic, reasons. At about the same time, Horkheimer established a working relationship with Fromm, which would prove decisive for the further development of critical theory. After undergoing analysis in 1924 with his future wife, Frieda Reichmann, Fromm decided to become a psychoanalyst. He completed his training in Frankfurt with Karl Landauer. Soon afterwards he became an active participant in the Berlin Psychoanalytic Association, which was conducting pathbreaking discussions of the social and political implications of psychoanalysis.²¹ Horkheimer was drawn to Fromm intellectually not only because of his knowledge of psychoanalysis, but also because he had completed a PhD in sociology and was thus in a position to help Horkheimer integrate psychoanalysis into his critical theory of society. Fromm's later split with the institute and the subsequent acrimonious debates he had with Adorno and Marcuse have tended to obscure Fromm's crucial role in the early formation of critical theory. Horkheimer appointed Fromm as director of the empirical study on the attitudes of German workers and would soon offer him a permanent position at the institute. Furthermore, in the spring of 1929 Horkheimer and Fromm – along with Landauer and Frieda Fromm-Reichmann – founded the Frankfurt Psychoanalytic Institute, which was located in the same building as the Institute for Social Research. As Freud himself confirmed with gratitude in a letter to Horkheimer at the time, the founding of the Frankfurt Psychoanalytic Institute represented the first time that a German university had recognized psychoanalysis as a legitimate scientific discipline.

By the time Horkheimer was officially installed as the new director of the Institute for Social Research in January 1931, the basic components of his critical theory were already in place: a materialist interpretation of the history of modern philosophy as the mediated expression of the uneven development

See Erich Fromm, *The Working Class in Weimar Germany: A Psychological and Sociological Study*, Wolfgang Bonß (ed.), Barbara Weinberger (trans.) (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1984).

21. On the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute, see Heinrich Abraham (ed.), *Psychoanalyse in Berlin: Beiträge zur Geschichte, Theorie und Praxis* (Meisenheim: A. Hain, 1971).

of bourgeois society and a theory of contemporary society based on a critical synthesis of Marx, empirical social research, and psychoanalysis. The further development of Horkheimer's critical theory in the 1930s can be seen as an attempt to carry out, test, and refine these basic ideas. In his inaugural address as the new director of the institute, Horkheimer outlined "The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research" very much in these terms. Horkheimer argues that Hegel laid the groundwork for modern social philosophy with his critique of Kant's consciousness philosophy. Nevertheless, Hegel remained beholden to a metaphysical philosophy of history, which justified the newly emergent bourgeois society as part of a preordained process of the historical realization of reason. Since the emancipatory ideals of the bourgeoisie had given way to the reality of class conflict, economic crisis, imperialism, and social catastrophes, such as the First World War, Hegel's faith in the inherent rationality of history was no longer tenable – if it ever was – according to Horkheimer. But he also objected to the two main contemporary philosophical responses to this situation: a rejection of social philosophy in the name of "rigorous" positivist social research or a rejection of science in the name of metaphysics. As an alternative, Horkheimer insisted that social philosophy grasp bourgeois society as a totality, but not assume that this totality was rational. To this end, Horkheimer proposed an interdisciplinary research program that would rely on the "continuous, dialectical penetration and development of philosophical theory and specialized scientific praxis."²² Of particular interest for the institute's future work would be "the question of the connection between the economic life of society, the psychical development of individuals and the changes in the realm of culture."²³ By this time the study of the attitudes of German workers was already well underway; Horkheimer would soon initiate a second major empirical research project on the relationship between authority and family structure in Europe and the United States, which would be published in 1936.²⁴ In addition to these projects, Horkheimer would edit the institute's now famous journal, the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* (1931–41), which published essays by the remarkable group of scholars directly and indirectly affiliated with the institute, as well as a truly extensive array of reviews of recent publications in the social sciences and humanities.

In addition to directing these collective projects of the institute, Horkheimer continued to develop the philosophical and historical foundations of critical

22. Max Horkheimer, *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, G. Frederick Hunter et al. (trans.) (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 9.

23. *Ibid.*, 11. Horkheimer's emphasis here on the "relative autonomy" of the culture and psychic character structures illustrates the important difference between his critical theory and the mechanistic "base-superstructure" model advocated by many Marxists (if not Marx himself).

24. Max Horkheimer (ed.), *Studien über Autorität und Familie* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1936).

theory in a series of remarkable essays he published over the course of the 1930s. The main themes of Horkheimer's essays from this time were materialism, the anthropology of the bourgeois epoch, and dialectical logic. Let us examine materialism first before turning to the latter two. In the essays "Materialism and Metaphysics" and "Materialism and Morality," which were both published in the second volume of the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* in 1933, Horkheimer develops a thoroughly historical concept of materialism, in order to elucidate the philosophical foundations of critical theory. Horkheimer recognizes that materialism has usually been a pariah in the history of philosophy, a seemingly easily refuted metaphysical dogma that higher mental processes can be derived from "matter." Horkheimer argues that this definition contradicts the basic antimetaphysical tendency of materialism to locate reason within history and society and to see it as a means to improving the quality of human life, not an end in itself. Philosophical materialism is less concerned with absolute truths – such as the primacy of "matter" over "mind" – than with the possibilities of augmenting human freedom and happiness at a particular time and place. Materialism has practical, political implications and has often been associated with concrete freedom movements. Its aim and content are derived from the barriers to human freedom and happiness that exist at any given time and its efforts to comprehend and overcome them.

Horkheimer's 1936 essay "Egoism and Freedom Movements: On the Anthropology of the Bourgeois Epoch" contained the first comprehensive formulation of the theoretical results of his collaboration with Fromm in the early 1930s.²⁵ Although Horkheimer had already applied psychoanalysis to empirical studies of contemporary society, by this time he had integrated psychoanalysis into his theory of history as well. He had moved from the "history of bourgeois society" – which served as the foundation for his lectures on modern philosophy in the late 1920s – to the "anthropology of the bourgeois epoch." Horkheimer's use of the concept of anthropology must be distinguished from the tradition of philosophical anthropology, which maintains the possibility of determining fundamental characteristics of human beings outside history. Horkheimer, in contrast, analyzes the origins and function of the characteristics of man that have become dominant during the bourgeois epoch. Drawing on Fromm's efforts in the late 1920s and early 1930s to synthesize psychoanalysis and historical materialism,²⁶ Horkheimer demonstrates how common historical experiences can create similar psychic structures among members of the same social group. Since these psychic

25. For a more detailed discussion of the theoretical premises that informed this essay, see also his 1932 essay, "History and Psychology," in *Between Philosophy and Social Science*, 111–29.

26. See, for example, "The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, Arato and Gebhardt (eds).

structures are relatively autonomous from the dynamic economic base of society, they can play a crucial role in either advancing or – as is more frequently the case – retarding historical progress. Insofar as Marx’s theory of history presupposed a relatively straightforward interest psychology, it needed to be supplemented by the more sophisticated insights of psychoanalysis, which could account for the relative autonomy of psychic structures and the frequent willingness of the lower classes to act in ways that ran contrary to their own best interests.

Through a close historical examination of several typical “bourgeois freedom movements” in the early modern period – ranging from Cola de Rienzo and Savonarola to the Reformation and French Revolution – Horkheimer demonstrates how the bourgeoisie mobilized the masses as allies in their struggle against feudalism and absolutism, while at the same time never allowing their demands to progress to a point that would call into question bourgeois hegemony. The dominant character structures of both the bourgeoisie and the lower classes were formed in this historical process. Following Marx, Nietzsche, Weber, and others, Horkheimer recognized that both the bourgeoisie and the lower classes were subjected to historically unprecedented levels of socially mediated repression. But the function of this repression differed for the two groups, insofar as the self-repression of the bourgeoisie was at the same time its self-assertion, whereas the repression of the lower classes was sacrifice. Horkheimer illustrates various ways in which the lower classes were compensated for their sacrifices, from the reward of membership in the imagined community of virtuous citizens, to the tacitly sanctioned permission to persecute internal or external “enemies” who refuse – or merely appear to refuse – to make the sacrifices demanded of them. Horkheimer drew heavily on Freud’s notions of the mutability of libidinal drives and the baleful consequences of repression to make this last argument. He was particularly interested in overcoming Freud’s naturalization of aggression in a “death drive” by grasping the historically specific forms of cruelty in the bourgeois epoch.

The third key concept in Horkheimer’s critical theory at this time was dialectical logic.²⁷ It represented a much richer reformulation of his reflections on materialism from the early 1930s and a continuing effort to flesh out the philosophical foundations of a critical theory adequate to twentieth-century societies. In letters from the 1930s Horkheimer speaks repeatedly of his “long-planned work on dialectics,”²⁸ and makes it clear that he viewed the essays he was

27. Horkheimer’s concept of “dialectical logic” takes as its point of departure Hegel’s efforts to develop an alternative to strictly formal (i.e. analytic and deductive) modes of thinking, which take seriously the unavoidable complementarity of what otherwise appear to be opposed and self-contained categories or aspects of reality.

28. Here in a letter to Walter Benjamin from September 6, 1938 (Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 16, 476).

writing at this time as “in truth merely preliminary studies for a larger work on a critical theory of the social sciences.”²⁹ Horkheimer’s seminal conceptualization of critical theory in his most familiar and influential essay from this period, “Traditional and Critical Theory” (1937), should be seen as the culmination of the first stage of this larger project, which would eventually become – in a much different form – *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. This larger project can be understood only by examining the other substantial essays Horkheimer wrote during this period, including “Bergson’s Metaphysics of Time” (1934), “The Rationalism Debate in Contemporary Philosophy” (1934), “On the Problem of Truth” (1935), “The Latest Attack on Metaphysics” (1937), and “Montaigne and the Function of Skepticism” (1938).³⁰ When one re-examines these essays together, the contours of Horkheimer’s larger project on dialectical logic emerge. Horkheimer develops further his criticism of consciousness philosophy, with its reified notion of the ego, which exists outside history and society, and its static and dualistic concept of knowledge, which is unable to conceptualize qualitative change or the relationship of knowledge to society. Horkheimer also puts forth the argument that the philosophy of the bourgeois epoch as a whole is characterized by a recurring dichotomy between science and metaphysics. Horkheimer shows how this antinomy attains its most consequential formulation in Kant’s philosophy: for example, in his efforts to limit the natural sciences’ claims to absolute knowledge while at the same time preserving certain key metaphysical principles in the sphere of practical reason. According to Horkheimer, this antinomy appears in different forms throughout the history of modern philosophy: from Montaigne all the way up to vitalism and logical positivism. Although Hegel’s philosophy moved decisively beyond the static and dualistic character of traditional logic, he too ultimately reproduced the antimony of science and metaphysics, with his notion of history as the preordained self-realization of Absolute Spirit. Only with Marx’s materialist critique and appropriation of Hegel’s idealistic social theory, was the groundwork for a genuinely empirical and historical understanding of the contradictions of modern capitalist society laid. Horkheimer stresses, in particular, the way in which Marx integrated the findings of the most advanced bourgeois theories of society (Hegel and classical political economy), while at the same time developing a critical conceptual apparatus that also pointed beyond the existing social totality. Horkheimer’s dialectical logic project was an attempt to flesh out the philosophical foundations of Marx’s critical theory and, where necessary, to reformulate it in light of changed historical conditions.

29. *Ibid.*, 490.

30. An English translation of “Bergson’s Metaphysics of Time” by Peter Thomas appeared recently in *Radical Philosophy: A Journal of Socialist and Feminist Philosophy*, 131 (May/June 2005).

Whereas the concepts of the anthropology of the bourgeois epoch and dialectical logic marked the culmination of his early thought, the period 1938 to 1941 witnessed a significant shift in some of his most basic philosophical positions and set the stage for a new phase in the development of critical theory. This important theoretical shift cannot be fully understood without first examining certain crucial changes in Horkheimer's life during this time. Foremost among these changes was Horkheimer's split with Fromm and his increasingly intimate working relationship with Adorno. Fromm had been Horkheimer's most important theoretical interlocutor from their collaboration on the empirical study of German workers in 1929 through the publication of the *Studies on Authority and Family* in 1936. During this time Horkheimer remained distant from Adorno and, to a surprising extent, critical of his work.³¹ But when Fromm began to move away from his earlier, more or less orthodox psychoanalytic position in the mid-1930s, serious tensions began to develop between him and Horkheimer. As was already apparent in his 1935 essay "The Social Determinants of Psychoanalytic Theory,"³² Fromm had become increasingly critical of Freudian drive theory and Freud's insistence that the analyst maintain a neutral and distant relationship with his or her patients. Fromm began increasingly to privilege social over sexual factors in the formation of character and the etiology of neuroses; he also followed George Groddeck and Sandor Ferenczi in favoring a more caring relationship between patient and analyst. Adorno, who was living in exile in Oxford at the time, attacked Fromm's revisions of Freud in a letter to Horkheimer in March 1936, claiming that they represented a "genuine threat to the line of the *Zeitschrift*."³³ The final break between Horkheimer and Fromm was precipitated by a financial crisis at the institute in the late 1930s. Since Fromm had his own psychoanalytic praxis and was able to earn an independent living, Horkheimer and Pollock asked him in early 1939 to forego his monthly stipend. When Fromm

31. As a member of the Faculty of Philosophy of Frankfurt University, Horkheimer had read and evaluated Adorno's *Habilitationsschrift* on Kierkegaard in 1931. While praising Adorno's unconventional method of interpretation and his remarkable grasp of the history of modern philosophy, Horkheimer was skeptical of the strong theological moment in Adorno's work, which he had appropriated from Benjamin and which Horkheimer believed demonstrated "a philosophical intention that is radically different from my own" (Max Horkheimer, "Bemerkung in Sachen der Habilitation Dr. Wiesengrund," Archiv des Dekanats der Philosophischen Fakultät der J. W. Goethe Universität, Frankfurt a.M. [Section 134, Number 4], 5). As a result of his debate with Benjamin, an enthusiastic reception of Horkheimer's writings and a renewed study of Hegel in the mid-1930s, Adorno moved somewhat closer to Horkheimer. After his arrival in New York in February 1938 and the beginning of their intense collaboration – which would culminate in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* – Horkheimer also abandoned many of his positions in the 1930s and moved closer to Adorno.

32. Originally published in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 4 (1935).

33. Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 15, 498.

insisted on his pay, Horkheimer and Pollock offered him a lump sum of \$20,000 as a settlement for the termination of his contract as a lifetime member of the institute. In the meantime, Horkheimer had patched up his relationship with Adorno, who left Oxford in February 1938 and finally became an official member of the institute on his arrival soon thereafter in New York. Horkheimer's theoretical collaboration with Adorno in the following years would lead to a reconfiguration of his own thought of the tradition of critical theory as a whole, which found its first full expression in 1944 with the publication of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.³⁴

Horkheimer's theoretical shift in the late 1930s and early 1940s has been variously described as a "pessimistic turn,"³⁵ a "rephilosophization of Critical Theory,"³⁶ and a shift from "the critique of political economy to the critique of instrumental reason."³⁷ The most important overall factor in this shift was Horkheimer's adoption of a modified version of the "state capitalism" thesis, which had been worked out over the course of the previous decade by his long-time friend and institute colleague Friedrich Pollock. Pollock and Horkheimer viewed state capitalism as the logical conclusion of a process that had begun with the rise of liberal capitalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and continued with the transition to monopoly capitalism around the turn of the century. Whereas liberal capitalism had been defined by a large number of small and medium-sized privately owned firms, which competed with each other in both domestic and international markets and whose relations were regulated by formal law, under monopoly capitalism increasingly large corporations and cartels came to dominate domestic markets and compete with each other at the international level. State capitalism reinforced and completed these tendencies by bringing the large corporations and cartels under state control, for the purposes of more efficient, planned domestic production and distribution and more effective international competition. Horkheimer identified the "integral statism" of the Soviet Union as the purest form of state capitalism, but he viewed fascism and the new state-interventionist economies of Western Europe and the United States as different versions of the same basic form. What characterized state capitalism everywhere, according to Horkheimer, was the tendential elimination of the economic, social, and cultural forms of mediation peculiar to bourgeois society in its liberal phase. These included not only the market, the rule of law and

34. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was republished in a larger, revised edition in 1947. For a discussion of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, see Deborah Cook's essay in this volume.

35. Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 104ff.

36. Helmut Dubiel, *Theory and Politics: Studies in the Development of Critical Theory*, Benjamin Gregg (trans.) (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 106.

37. Andrew Arato, "Introduction," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, Arato and Gebhardt (eds), 20.

replacement of individual owners by shareholders or the state, but also relatively autonomous spheres of bourgeois cultural life, such as art, the family, and even the individual him or herself. Social domination had, in other words, become much more direct under state capitalism. The independent economic dynamism of capitalism had been replaced by the primacy of politics. The operations of politics came increasingly to resemble a common “racket”; survival and protection were secured through obedience to the most powerful groups. Capital and large labor unions collaborated in the planning of the economy and divided up the spoils between them. Insofar as surplus value continued to be produced and appropriated by a dominant social class, capitalism still existed, but the political and ideological integration of the working class eliminated the possibility of any serious opposition emerging in the future.

Horkheimer’s acceptance of the state capitalism thesis reflected the changed historical realities of state-interventionist economic models that arose in the mid twentieth century. From our contemporary post-Soviet, post-Fordist perspective, it is clear that “state capitalism” was not the “end of history” – as Horkheimer and Adorno feared at the time – but rather a new phase in global capitalist development that would begin to unravel in the early 1970s. But Horkheimer’s adoption of the state capitalist thesis brought with it a fundamental rethinking of many of the basic assumptions that had informed his critical theory in the 1930s. First, the focus of critical theory shifted from a historically specific critique of social domination within modern capitalism to a transhistorical critique of instrumental reason and the domination of nature.³⁸ Second, this shift was reflected in the increasing prominence of a negative philosophy of history, which Adorno had adopted from Benjamin in the late 1920s.³⁹ Third, Horkheimer became increasingly skeptical about the emancipatory character of the Enlightenment ideals that had guided his earlier work. While working on his project on dialectical logic, Horkheimer still believed in the possibility of a materialist reinterpretation and realization of basic Enlightenment principles. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* demonstrated clearly his new conviction that only a radical critique of these principles could create a new, self-reflexive concept of Enlightenment that could transcend its inherent limitations. Fourth, Horkheimer’s new-found pessimism about the Enlightenment also translated into a radical critique of science in its traditional forms. Whereas Horkheimer’s model of critical theory in the 1930s rested heavily on a critical integration of research from a wide variety of scientific and scholarly disciplines, in *Dialectic*

38. For a detailed examination of this important shift of emphasis, see Gerd-Walters Küsters, *Der Kritikbegriff in der Kritischen Theorie Max Horkheimers* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1980).

39. See, for example, Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute for Social Research, 1923–1950* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 253–80.

of *Enlightenment* Horkheimer and Adorno stated unambiguously that they had to abandon their trust in the traditional disciplines.⁴⁰

The principal tenets of critical theory, as it was practiced by the institute in the 1930s, were developed by Horkheimer, although he also benefited greatly from his collaboration with Fromm. The other members of the “inner circle” of the institute in the 1930s – Pollock, Löwenthal, and Marcuse – all made crucial practical and theoretical contributions to the institute’s work. We have already discussed Pollock’s ideas on state capitalism, which became so important for Horkheimer in the late 1930s. Pollock also served as the main financial administrator for the institute. Löwenthal published several key essays on the sociology of literature in the *Zeitschrift*, which reflected the institute’s Marxist principles and its concern with authoritarian ideology.⁴¹ Löwenthal also served as the principal copy-editor of the *Zeitschrift* throughout its ten-year existence. Nonetheless, in terms of their contributions to critical theory in the 1930s, one can say that Herbert Marcuse played a more significant theoretical role than did Pollock or Löwenthal. Marcuse’s contribution to the development of critical theory during this time is also worth examining more closely insofar as he remained loyal to this model of critical theory for the remainder of his life. Marcuse’s popularity as an exponent of critical theory in the 1960s and 1970s also justifies a more detailed analysis of his early trajectory and his contributions to critical theory in the 1930s.

II. MARCUSE AND EARLY CRITICAL THEORY

Herbert Marcuse was born in 1898 to a wealthy, assimilated Jewish family in Berlin. Just after finishing his final examination for the *Gymnasium*⁴² in 1916, Marcuse was drafted into the army where he served until the end of war, without ever facing active combat. As with so many others, Marcuse was radicalized politically by the war. He joined the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in 1917, but

40. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, Edmund Jephcott (trans.) (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), xiv. The fact that Horkheimer and Adorno continued to carry out empirical research projects in the 1940s (most notably, the five-volume *Studies in Prejudice*) and that empirical research remained a crucial aspect of the institute’s work after its re-establishment in Frankfurt after the war, demonstrated that Horkheimer never completely abandoned his early model of “interdisciplinary materialism.” Nonetheless, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* does represent a substantial break from Horkheimer’s position in the 1930s and a model of critical theory that is more consonant with Adorno’s overall philosophical trajectory.

41. See, for example, Leo Löwenthal, “Knut Hamsun,” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, Arato and Gebhardt (eds).

42. A *Gymnasium* is an elite German high school guided by the principles of classical humanism.

after the German defeat and outbreak of revolution in November 1918, he served in a revolutionary soldiers' council in Berlin. During this time Marcuse began to study seriously the writings of Marx and Engels; he also attended speeches and rallies led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. When they were murdered in January 1919, Marcuse cancelled his membership in the SPD, whose leaders he held responsible for their death. Although Marcuse admired the ill-fated attempt of the Munich Council Republic in the spring of 1919 to synthesize utopian aesthetic ideals with radical political principles, after his departure from the SPD he would not become directly involved in politics again until the 1960s.⁴³ He began his university studies in 1919 at the Humboldt University in Berlin and then transferred the following year to the Albert-Ludwig University in Freiburg. In Berlin Marcuse studied German literature for four semesters and also participated in discussions in a leftist literary group, which was attended by Benjamin and – less frequently – Georg Lukács. In Freiburg Marcuse continued his studies in German literature and supplemented them by attending lectures in philosophy and national economy.

Marcuse's dissertation, for which he was awarded a PhD *summa cum laude* in 1922, examined the German *Künstlerroman*, or artist-novel (a sub-genre of the *Bildungsroman*, or novel of development), from the theoretical standpoint of Hegel's aesthetics and Lukács' *Theory of the Novel*. According to Marcuse these artist-novels – such as Karl Phillip Moritz's *Anton Reiser*, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, and Gottfried Keller's *Green Henry* – illustrated the fate of the individual and art in a society being transformed by capitalist modernization. Following Lukács, Marcuse argued that in a society characterized by “transcendental homelessness,” the novel assumes the role of preserving the ideal of a less alienated existence.⁴⁴ The marginal social position of the antiheroes of the artist-novel embody the fate of art in a world that has become prosaic, and their mostly unsuccessful attempts to overcome their alienation highlights the “problematic” nature of society as a whole. Marcuse's dissertation introduces several themes that would figure prominently in his later work, such as the importance of the aesthetic dimension as a source of transcendent social critique, or the search for new forms of critical subjectivity among marginal social groups.

After a five-year interlude in Berlin, during which time he worked on an extensive bibliography of Schiller and immersed himself in the Weimar cultural

43. Unless one counts as “political” his intelligence work for the Office of Strategic Services during the Second World War. For this chapter of Marcuse's life see Barry Katz, *Herbert Marcuse and the Art of Liberation* (London: Verso, 1982), 111–35.

44. “The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem yet which still thinks in terms of totality” (Georg Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, Anna Bostock [trans.] [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971], 56).

scene, Marcuse returned to Freiburg to study philosophy with Heidegger, who had just published his magnum opus, *Being and Time*. Like many others of his generation, Marcuse was deeply impressed with *Being and Time*, which he saw as a breakthrough beyond the sterile positivism and neo-Kantianism that had dominated philosophical debates in German universities for several decades. Marcuse viewed Heidegger's existential analytic of Dasein as the most advanced attempt to bring the individual subject, in its full concreteness, back to the center of philosophical debate. He was also fascinated by Heidegger's stress on the historicity of Dasein, and his argument that Dasein could be authentic only if its actions were guided by a full awareness of its historical possibilities. But Marcuse never became a Heideggerian himself; his purpose from the beginning was to use the most advanced aspects of Heidegger's project to revitalize the reified Marxist theory of his day. Frustrated with the economist orthodoxy of the Second International, which provided ideological justification for the Social Democratic reformism, and no less satisfied with the vanguardism of the Bolsheviks, Marcuse wrote a series of essays while studying with Heidegger that sought to re-establish the importance of subjectivity and historicity in Marxist theory.⁴⁵ His efforts eventually led him down the same path Lukács had followed a few years before in *History and Class Consciousness*, namely to a re-examination of the philosophical origins of Marx's theory, particularly in the work of Hegel. Marcuse's *Habilitationsschrift*, which he wrote under Heidegger's guidance, was an attempt to recover the concepts from Hegel's work that he believed were necessary to put Marxist theory back on the right track. In this, his first full-length study of Hegel, and in his essays from this period, Marcuse developed a highly original, and often trenchant interpretation not only of several of Marx's and Hegel's central concepts – such as labor, alienation and the dialectical method – but also of *Being and Time*.⁴⁶

Heidegger's own political reading of *Being and Time*, which led him temporarily to pin his hopes on the National Socialists as the potential saviors of “fallen” German *Dasein*,⁴⁷ came as a shock to Marcuse and forced him to rethink his

45. For Marcuse's essays from this period see *Heideggerian Marxism*, Richard Wolin and John Abromeit (eds), John Abromeit *et al.* (trans.) (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

46. For an overview of Marcuse's relationship to Heidegger during this time, see my “Herbert Marcuse's Critical Encounter with Martin Heidegger, 1927–33,” in *Herbert Marcuse: A Critical Reader*, John Abromeit and W. Mark Cobb (eds) (New York: Routledge, 2004).

47. Heidegger's concept of “Dasein,” which he develops most fully in *Being and Time*, represents an attempt to overcome the tradition of subject–object dualism characteristic of modern consciousness philosophy (see note 13, above). Heidegger argues that human beings are always already located within the broader contexts or “worlds” of “involvement” and “meaning.” The traditional concepts of “subjectivity” or “individuality” are false insofar as they presuppose the possibility of the abstracting of human “Dasein” from the “worlds” in which it is *ontologically* embedded.

relationship to Heidegger's philosophy. Marcuse had the good fortune of being able to pursue this self-critical re-evaluation of Heidegger, and to contribute more broadly to the development of critical theory, through his collaborative work with Max Horkheimer's Institute for Social Research in the 1930s. After a brief stint at the institute's branch office in Geneva, Marcuse immigrated to New York to join Horkheimer and the other members of the relocated institute, whose former headquarters in Frankfurt had been confiscated by the Nazis. Marcuse's theoretical production in the 1930s converged with Horkheimer's on three main issues: the dialectic of bourgeois society, and the critique of positivism, and authoritarianism.

Marcuse adopted Horkheimer's model of a *dialectic of bourgeois society*, which can be summarized in the following way. With the historical transformation of the bourgeoisie from a revolutionary social force in the early modern period to the new ruling class in the nineteenth century, the progressive concepts and ideals, which it had used to justify its struggle against feudalism and absolutism, often assumed a repressive or ideological function. For both Horkheimer and Marcuse this historical dialectic posed critical theory with several tasks: the critique of the new, ideological function of these concepts and ideals, the recovery of their original, progressive content, and their transformation into a new, critical form adequate to the changed historical conditions. Two examples of the dialectic of bourgeois society, as it appeared in Marcuse's work at this time, can be found in his discussion of the concepts of *natural law* and *essence*. In his 1934 essay "The Struggle Against Liberalism in the Totalitarian View of the State," Marcuse shows how the historical transformation of bourgeois society brought with it a transformation of the basic understandings of nature and natural law.⁴⁸ Whereas natural law had provided bourgeois philosophers in the early modern period with an immutable transcendent standard, to which they could appeal in order to criticize the fixed hierarchies and inherited privileges of the feudal order, under fascism the "laws of nature" were used to justify irrational mythologies of blood and soil and to prevent any transcendent critique of the status quo. Whereas the new market economy had been justified as a natural and harmonious order, under fascism existing inequalities were concealed and justified by the pseudo-scientific theories of social Darwinism and inherent racial inequality. Similarly, in his 1936 essay "The Concept of Essence," Marcuse demonstrates how, at the beginning of the modern epoch, philosophers attributed the power to separate essence from appearance to the free and rational individual. With the help of their rational faculties and/or their

48. These two and the rest of Marcuse's main essays from the 1930s are available in Herbert Marcuse, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, Jeremy J. Shapiro (ed. and trans.) (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1968).

senses, each person had the ability to establish the truth on their own. But by the end of the epoch – signaled by the triumph of fascism – the concept of essence was used to bind unfree individuals to the status quo and to undermine their belief in the critical power of reason. In philosophy, the autonomous spontaneity of the concept was replaced by the heteronomous receptivity of the “intuition of essences.” In the new authoritarian ideology, essentialist concepts of gender and race were used to justify exploitative social relations.

But Horkheimer’s understanding of the dialectic of bourgeois society also implied recovering the progressive content of the philosophical ideals of the bourgeoisie during its “heroic” phase. In contrast to some of his later, more pessimistic positions – *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, for example – in the 1930s Horkheimer still believed that Enlightenment ideals were essentially critical and ultimately pointed beyond bourgeois society. At a time when the Enlightenment and the ideals of 1789 were being subjected to virulent criticism by theorists sympathetic to fascism, such as Giovanni Gentile (1875–1944) and Carl Schmitt, the defense and recovery of their progressive content became more urgent than ever. In contrast to Horkheimer, who became wary early on of the dangerous political implications of the widespread revolt against science, the Enlightenment, and rationality more generally in Weimar Germany, Marcuse’s work in the 1920s and early 1930s was still heavily influenced by phenomenological and vitalist critiques of reason. It was not until after Marcuse joined the institute in 1933 that he re-evaluated his earlier antirationalist positions and developed an explicit critique of the “political existentialism” of Heidegger and Schmitt. Marcuse’s new-found respect for the critical potential of rationalism came through clearly, for example, in the following passage on Descartes:

It is often asserted today that Descartes, by beginning with the *ego cogito*, committed the original sin of modern philosophy, that he placed a completely abstract concept of the individual at the basis of theory. But his abstract concept of the individual is animated by concern with human freedom: measuring the truth of all conditions of life against the standard of rational thought.⁴⁹

Marcuse’s continued re-evaluation of the critical potential of the rationalist tradition culminated in his 1941 study *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*. His earlier study *Hegel’s Ontology and the Theory of Historicity* was written under the guidance of Heidegger and developed an anti-epistemological interpretation of Hegel by reconstructing the concept of “life” in his early thought: that is, the same concept that vitalism philosophers such

49. Herbert Marcuse, “The Concept of Essence,” in *Negations*, 50.

as Nietzsche and Bergson had mobilized in their critiques of rationalism and positivism. *Reason and Revolution*, in contrast, emphasized Hegel's critical and dialectical rationalism in order to dispel the widespread Anglo-American view that his philosophy had somehow inspired the authoritarian ideology of the National Socialists.

Marcuse's first book written in English, *Reason and Revolution*, was intended to introduce the theoretical premises of the institute to a broader audience. It can still be read profitably today by anyone interested in nineteenth-century social theory or the intellectual historical foundations of critical theory. At the core of *Reason and Revolution* was a *critique of positivism*, which provided the historical background for arguments set forth by Horkheimer in the mid-1930s.⁵⁰ As with the key philosophical concepts of natural law and essence, the concept of reason had also undergone a decisive historical shift as a result of the dialectic of bourgeois society. The critical, transcendent, and dialectical notion of reason, which Marcuse had identified in the philosophy of Descartes and – to a much greater extent – Hegel, had devolved into an affirmative subordination of reason to the natural sciences, which denied the very distinction between essence and appearance. Whereas Horkheimer had been deeply concerned by the irrational reactions to positivism in Weimar Germany, after fleeing to the United States and being confronted with the increasing dominance of positivism in Anglo-American intellectual life – which was reinforced by the arrival of exiles from Austria and Germany who were sympathetic to positivism, such as the members of the Vienna Circle – the focus of his arguments began to shift.⁵¹ Horkheimer refused to accept the reduction of reason to the methods of “logical empiricism,” as Rudolf Carnap, Bertrand Russell, and others would have it.⁵² In his 1937 essay “Philosophy and Critical Theory,” which Marcuse wrote as a companion piece to Horkheimer's “Traditional and Critical Theory,” he extrapolates on Horkheimer's critique of positivism and defends both the role of speculative philosophy and the imagination in the determination of the truth against the restrictive limitations placed on reason by the logical positivists.

One last way in which Marcuse's theoretical work in the 1930s converged with Horkheimer's vision of critical theory was his *critique of authoritarianism*. We have already briefly examined Marcuse's analysis of authoritarian ideology in his essay “The Struggle Against Liberalism,” but Marcuse also contributed

50. See Max Horkheimer, “The Latest Attack on Metaphysics,” in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, Matthew J. O'Connell et al. (trans.) (New York: Continuum, 1992).

51. On the rise of positivism in the American Academy in the mid twentieth century see Carl Schorske and Thomas Bender (eds), *American Academic Culture in Transformation: Fifty Years, Four Disciplines* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

52. *Ibid.* [*] See also the essay by Michael Friedman and Thomas Ryckman in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 3*.

a lengthy and substantial intellectual historical introduction to the institute's *Studies on Authority and Family*, which was published alongside Fromm's social-psychological and Horkheimer's general introductory essays.⁵³ In his essay, Marcuse applies once again Horkheimer's model of the dialectic of bourgeois society, with a focus this time on the historical transformation of the concept of freedom. Beginning with a discussion of Luther and Calvin, Marcuse shows how the bourgeois concept of freedom was contradictory from the very beginning. Luther and Calvin's theology contained strong anti-authoritarian impulses, whose historical role was to emancipate the individual from his or her dependence on the centralized power of the papacy and the Church, and the feudal institutions they legitimized. But this emancipation remained partial and actually prepared the way for the uncritical acceptance of new forms of secular authority. Marcuse stresses, in particular, the *internalization* of freedom implied in Luther's writings and the compatibility of this pure, internal notion of freedom with external authority of almost any kind. Continuing with a discussion of Kant and Hegel, Marcuse argued that both men placed freedom at the center of their philosophies, albeit in an idealistic form, which led all too quickly and easily to accommodation with the unfree political conditions of the time. Marx's critique of the internalized, idealist concept of freedom represented a decisive step forward, insofar as he identified its social origins and linked the expansion of freedom to the transformation of existing social relations. Marcuse also examines the explicitly authoritarian doctrines of the counter-revolutionary theorists Edmund Burke, Louis de Bonald, and Joseph de Maistre. He attempts to demonstrate how their doctrines, which were originally a defense of feudal and/or absolutist institutions against the most progressive elements of the bourgeoisie, were in many cases adopted by the bourgeoisie as it consolidated its power in the course of the nineteenth century and was forced to meet the challenge of a militant workers' movement. Finally, Marcuse demonstrates how Georges Sorel and Vilfredo Pareto – despite their political differences – marked the transition to the new authoritarian doctrines of the twentieth century with their celebration of irrationality, discipline, and the necessity of ruling elites.

While there is no question that Marcuse eagerly adopted Horkheimer's model of critical theory and found it congenial to his own philosophical interests, he also continued to develop ideas of his own in the 1930s. Most important in this regard were Marcuse's abiding interests in concrete subjectivity and aesthetics. Although Horkheimer was also very much interested in developing a sophisticated theory of subjectivity – to supplement Marx's theory – he approached this problem by way of psychoanalysis. Like Horkheimer, Marcuse believed that

53. Herbert Marcuse, "A Study on Authority," in *Studies in Critical Philosophy*, Joris de Bres (trans.), 49–156 (London: New Left Books, 1972).

Marx's theory needed to be supplemented by a more sophisticated theory of subjectivity and his initial attraction to Heidegger was based in large part on his belief that his existential analysis of Dasein in *Being and Time* might be useful for this purpose. While Marcuse's philosophical reliance on Heidegger diminished greatly after the publication of Marx's *Paris Manuscripts* in 1932 and Heidegger's political debacle in 1933, he did not integrate psychoanalysis into his own thought until the 1950s.

In his 1938 essay "On Hedonism," Marcuse approached the problem of subjectivity instead from a historical and philosophical standpoint. After examining the philosophical doctrines of Cyrenaic and Epicurean hedonism and their ancient (Plato) and modern (Hegel) critics, Marcuse identified the critical moment in hedonism – and its affinity with critical theory – in its defense of individual happiness and pleasure against their internalization, spiritualization, and subordination to "higher" faculties or the demands of the community. Marcuse was not defending an anarchist or libertarian free for all; in fact, he praised both Plato and Hegel's critiques of hedonism for demonstrating that happiness has an essential *objective* moment and cannot ever be truly realized outside a well-ordered and just society. But insofar as the particular interests of everyone are not adequately contained in the social totality of modern capitalist societies, the hedonist demand for individual gratification retains critical truth-value. Marcuse demonstrates how the subordination of individuals' sensuous needs and desires in the society dominated by abstract labor is reflected in idealist concepts of rationality, morality, and freedom. He writes: "Insofar as the individual partakes of universality only as a rational being and not with empirical manifold of his needs, wants, and capacities, this idea of reason implicitly contains the sacrifice of individual."⁵⁴ Marcuse also points out how hedonism provides an important antidote to the debilitating effects of repressive forms of socialization. Hedonism counteracts the formation of authoritarian character structures, because a "man educated to internalization will not be easily induced, even under extreme wretchedness and injustice, to struggle against the established order."⁵⁵

Marcuse's first dissertation on the German artist-novel testified to an early interest in aesthetics that would remain a crucial aspect of his thought for the rest of his life.⁵⁶ His 1937 essay "The Affirmative Character of Culture" demonstrated that aesthetic issues continued to play a crucial role in his thinking. Marcuse argued that in modern, bourgeois society art had two primary and contradictory

54. Marcuse, *Negations*, 159.

55. *Ibid.*, 181.

56. For an interpretation that stresses the centrality of aesthetics for Marcuse's critical theory as a whole, see Katz, *Herbert Marcuse and the Art of Liberation*.

functions, both of which resulted from its separation from the material sphere of the production and reproduction of the necessities of life. On the one hand, the artistic expression of the deepest needs and highest ideals of humanity played an affirmative, ideological role, insofar as it concealed the social mechanisms that prevented their realization. On the other hand, by articulating and preserving these needs and ideals art provided a transcendent critique of the status quo, a *promesse du bonheur* of the possibility of better society.⁵⁷ Marcuse also demonstrated how the relative importance of these two roles shifted during the historical transformation of bourgeois society. During its early, revolutionary phase, the critical, utopian function of art was more important, while in the later, more repressive phase the affirmative character of art began to gain the upper hand. With the triumph of authoritarianism in the twentieth century, the transcendent, “aesthetic dimension” was completely eliminated, as art was forced into direct service of oppressive political regimes.

III. MARCUSE’S LATER WRITINGS

The primary purpose of this essay has been to provide a comprehensive overview of two of the three main currents that went into the formation of the “first-generation” Frankfurt School critical theory in the 1920s and 1930s. But since Marcuse went on to play an important role in the dissemination of critical theory, particularly in the Anglo-American world, and since he retained and developed many of the assumptions developed by Horkheimer and Fromm in the 1930s – even after they had abandoned them themselves – I shall also offer a brief overview of his later work.⁵⁸ Although Horkheimer played a crucial role in the re-establishment of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt in 1951, his theoretical production after the war was quite limited compared to that of Adorno and Marcuse. Since Horkheimer carried out his most important work in the 1930s and 1940s, an examination of his writings in the postwar period is not essential to understanding the main currents of critical theory.⁵⁹

57. Marcuse borrowed this expression (“promise of happiness”) from Nietzsche (*On the Genealogy of Morals*, Third Essay, §6), who had adopted it, in turn, from Stendahl.

58. For more detailed examinations of Marcuse’s life and work after 1940, see Douglas Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 154–375, and Katz, *Herbert Marcuse and the Art of Liberation*, 109–221.

59. For a sampling of Horkheimer’s essays from the postwar period, see Max Horkheimer, *Critique of Instrumental Reason: Lectures and Essays Since the End of World War II*, M. J. O’Connell (trans.) (New York: Continuum, 1996). For a sampling of the numerous unpublished notes he wrote, see *Dawn and Decline*, 115–239. For a brief overview of Horkheimer’s later work, see Alfred Schmidt, “Max Horkheimer’s Intellectual Physiognomy,” in *On Max Horkheimer: New Perspectives*, Seyla Benhabib et al. (eds) (Cambridge: Cambridge University

The early 1940s were an important transitional period for the critical theorists. During this time the operations of the New York office of the institute were drastically reduced, the last issue of the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* was published, and Horkheimer moved to Los Angeles to dedicate himself to completing his project on dialectical logic. While he had originally intended to collaborate with Marcuse on this project, Horkheimer had in the meantime developed a higher estimation of Adorno's theoretical ability and had chosen him as his primary collaborator. The shift in Horkheimer's position in the late 1930s had pushed him away from Marcuse and brought him closer to Adorno theoretically. This shift, combined with Adorno's new role as a full partner in the project, explains why *Dialectic of Enlightenment* represented something qualitatively new *vis-à-vis* Horkheimer's original plans for a dialectical logic. Marcuse remained committed to the theoretical position developed at the institute in the 1930s, but due to Horkheimer's increasing proximity to Adorno and the financial crisis of the institute, Marcuse chose to accept a job working for the Office of Strategic Studies (OSS) in Washington in the fall of 1942. The newly created OSS was dedicated to gathering intelligence for the war and the postwar reconstruction of Germany.⁶⁰ Marcuse worked there for nearly a decade and was joined at various times by several other influential émigré scholars, including his former institute colleagues Franz Neumann and Otto Kirchheimer.⁶¹ Although not a particularly productive period for Marcuse theoretically, it was not a period of intellectual dormancy either. Marcuse produced several important studies of National Socialist Germany, which have been published only recently, and

Press, 1993), 37–42. See also Peter Stirik, *Max Horkheimer: A New Interpretation* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 178–202.

60. On the OSS and the role foreign scholars such as Marcuse played in it during the war, see Barry Katz, *Foreign Intelligence: Research and Analysis in the Office of Strategic Services, 1942–5* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).
61. Franz Neumann (1900–1954) and Otto Kirchheimer (1905–65) both trained as legal scholars and both were actively involved in politics in Weimar on the left wing of the Social Democratic Party. After fleeing from the Nazis, both became associates of the Institute for Social Research. Kirchheimer joined the Paris branch of the institute in 1934 and continued working for the New York office after his emigration to the US in 1937. Neumann retrained himself as a political scientist at the London School of Economics, completing a PhD under the direction of Harold Laski in 1936. In 1942 Neumann published his massive study of National Socialism, *Behemoth*, which differed in important respects from the institute's core members' analysis of Nazism, but was nonetheless recognized by Horkheimer and others as a remarkable achievement. For an overview of Kirchheimer and Neumann's work and their relationship to the other members of the institute, see William E. Scheuermann, *Between the Norm and the Exception: The Frankfurt School and the Rule of Law* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

worked through a massive amount of empirical data on fascism, which would inform his later work.⁶²

Since his critical appropriation of Heidegger's existential analysis of *Dasein* in the late 1920s, Marcuse had been attempting to move beyond the abstract theories of subjectivity that had dominated Western philosophy. But in contrast to Horkheimer and Adorno, who both became interested in psychoanalysis in the 1920s, Marcuse did not seriously engage with Freud's writings until after the Second World War. The result was *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, which Jürgen Habermas has aptly described as Marcuse's "most characteristic" work.⁶³ In *Civilization and its Discontents* and elsewhere, Freud had argued that the levels of instinctual repression necessary to maintain civilization were more or less constant throughout history. But, following the path blazed by Fromm and Horkheimer in the 1930s, Marcuse sought to recover a hidden, emancipatory trend in psychoanalysis, through a historicization of Freud's categories. Although he does not mention Marx's name explicitly a single time in the text, Marcuse's main argument rests heavily on his dialectical analysis of modern capitalist societies. With his analysis of abstract labor and the ascetic character of the bourgeoisie, Marx had demonstrated that modern capitalism brought with it historically unprecedented levels of socially mediated repression. But, at the same time, by forcing the development of science and technology and increasing the material wealth of society as a whole, capitalism also created the possibility for a society in which levels of alienated labor – which Marcuse translates into Freudian terms as *repressive sublimation* – could be greatly reduced. The dominant place formerly occupied by wage labor would give way to new forms of *nonrepressive sublimation*, which would more closely resemble artistic creation or play. In a crucial theoretical supplement Marx's focus on objective historical factors, which draws on Horkheimer and Fromm's social-psychological investigations, Marcuse argues that the objective emancipatory tendencies in capitalism are thwarted subjectively by the internalization of repressive character structures. Marcuse draws, in particular, on Freud's speculative theory of the origins of society as a revolt against patriarchal authority followed by a restoration of an even stricter fraternal law, in order to demonstrate how the "archaic heritage" of "repression – revolt – restoration of repression at a higher level" is still at work in modern capitalist societies.⁶⁴ If, as Marcuse argues, increased

62. For Marcuse's writings during this time, see Herbert Marcuse, *Technology, War and Fascism*, Douglas Kellner (ed.) (New York: Routledge, 1998).

63. Jürgen Habermas, "The Different Rhythms of Philosophy and Politics: For Herbert Marcuse on his 100th Birthday," in Herbert Marcuse, *Towards a Critical Theory of Society*, Douglas Kellner (ed.), John Abromeit (trans.) (New York: Routledge, 2001), 235.

64. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1955), 55–77.

levels of repression attenuate the inherent tendency of Eros to form lasting social bonds and keep the destructive impulses of Thanatos in check, then this historical cycle becomes more ominous in modern societies. Auschwitz and the atom bomb leave no doubt about the catastrophic potential for the “scientific extermination of men”⁶⁵ that modern technology has brought with it. Thus, far from defending an optimistic social or technological determinism, *Eros and Civilization* draws attention to the subjective factors necessary to realize the objective possibilities of a “nonrepressive civilization” and a “pacification of existence” created by modern capitalism.

Although his next two books seem very different on the surface, *Soviet Marxism* (1958) and *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) have much in common. Both proceed from an analysis of technological rationality that, according to Marcuse, plays a dominant role in the organization of both Soviet state socialism and Western capitalist democracies. As always, Marcuse stresses the contradictory character of technological rationality. On the one hand, its development creates the possibility of overcoming the “primacy of industrialization over emancipation” in the Soviet Union and the “comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom” in the West.⁶⁶ On the other hand, technological rationality also conceals and perpetuates social domination in both contexts: that of the state and party bureaucracy over the rest of society in the Soviet Union and that of the ruling class and the “conservative popular base” over the “outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable” in the West.⁶⁷ What Marcuse says here of the Soviet Union, also holds true in the capitalist West:

The technological perfection of the productive apparatus dominates the rulers and the ruled while sustaining the distinction between them. Autonomy and spontaneity are confined to the level of efficiency and performance within the established pattern ... Dissent is not only a political crime but also a technical stupidity, sabotage, mistreatment of the machine.⁶⁸

In addition to analyzing the peculiar social forms of the state-centric forms of Fordist capitalism, which emerged around the globe in the mid twentieth century, Marcuse also devotes substantial attention in both works to the forms

65. *Ibid.*, 87.

66. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1964), 1.

67. *Ibid.*, 256.

68. Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 69.

of ideology that accompanied them. Through an “immanent critique” of Soviet ideology, Marcuse shows how Marx’s critical and historically specific categories were transformed into the affirmative, metaphysical doctrine of “dialectical materialism.” Through an analysis of the “closing of the universe of discourse” in the spheres of politics, philosophy, and art, Marcuse demonstrates how any critical tendencies, which point beyond capitalist social relations in the West, are also stifled or recuperated. The concept of one-dimensionality refers precisely to this elimination of transcendent impulses, which results in a society “without opposition.”

Despite the deeply pessimistic character of its analysis, *One-Dimensional Man* would soon become one of the most important theoretical texts for the New Left and the burgeoning protest movements of the 1960s. Selling over 100,000 copies in the late 1960s, *One-Dimensional Man* catapulted Marcuse out of his role as a relatively unknown philosopher and social theorist, to one of the most widely debated public intellectuals of the day. This changed role was also reflected in Marcuse’s writings from the time.⁶⁹ In 1965 he published what is certainly his most controversial essay: “Repressive Tolerance.” At a time when the liberal establishment was escalating the war in Vietnam and the civil rights movement was becoming increasingly militant owing to the violent backlash against its efforts to secure basic constitutional rights for African Americans, Marcuse’s essay was an explicit endorsement of the necessity of an “extra-parliamentary” opposition in the US. Echoing Horkheimer’s model of a dialectic of bourgeois society, Marcuse argued that tolerance had originally been a revolutionary value, intended to undermine the monopoly of the Church and absolutist state on the means of legitimate expression.⁷⁰ But after the historical triumph of the bourgeoisie, the concept of tolerance lost its critical and transcendent character, insofar as the informed and the uninformed, the progressive and the reactionary, the humane and the cynical were now all “tolerated” equally. On this basis, Marcuse proceeded to the following problematic conclusion:

Withdrawal of tolerance from regressive movements before they can become active; intolerance even toward thought, opinion and word, and finally, intolerance in the opposite direction, that is, toward the political Right – these anti-democratic notions respond to the actual development of the democratic society which has destroyed the basis for universal tolerance.⁷¹

69. For a sampling of Marcuse’s writings from this period, see Herbert Marcuse, *The New Left and the 1960s*, Douglas Kellner (ed.) (New York: Routledge, 2005).

70. Horkheimer made a very similar argument about tolerance in the essay, “Montaigne and the Function of Skepticism,” in *Between Philosophy and Social Science*.

71. *Ibid.*, 110–11.

Marcuse's tendency here to see democratic rights primarily as a form of ideology used to mask social domination, and not as a historical achievement that would need to be preserved in any future socialist society, points to a democratic deficit in his thought, which was also apparent in his tendency to place more emphasis on the similarities rather than the differences between Soviet and Western societies. In this respect, too, Marcuse continued the legacy of Horkheimer's critical theory in the 1930s, which had since been abandoned by Horkheimer himself.⁷²

Marcuse's next two works, *Essay on Liberation* (1969) and *Counter-Revolution and Revolt* (1973), were also products of the highly charged political conditions of the time. True to Marx's and Horkheimer's determinations of materialism and his own earlier insistence that philosophy play an active role in changing society, Marcuse saw no contradiction between theoretical reflection and political engagement.⁷³ Marcuse participated actively in many different political events in the late 1960s, including numerous teach-ins and marches against the war in Vietnam.⁷⁴ Marcuse was in France when the massive wave of student protests and workers' strikes erupted in May 1968 and he participated actively in political debates and actions. The strong sensual and aesthetic moment expressed in the utopian posters and slogans that appeared on the walls during the May "events" – such as "all power to the imagination" and "the restraints imposed on pleasure excite the pleasure of living without restraints" – resonated deeply with Marcuse's vision of an emancipated society.⁷⁵ In fact, Marcuse dedicated *Essay on Liberation* to the "young militants" and "rebels" of May 1968. The most important concept Marcuse introduced in *Essay* was the notion of a "new sensibility," which expressed once again his theoretical interest in the subjective conditions of social transformation in advanced capitalist societies. Marcuse argued that the strong erotic and aesthetic moment in the May events, and the 1960s counter-culture more generally, may anticipate the development

72. This is not to say that Horkheimer's trend toward an unreflective Cold War liberalism was unproblematic; instead, it points to the necessity for a re-examination and reintegration of the best aspects of the liberal-democratic political tradition into critical theory. This was a project that was already begun by Neumann in the 1930s and which was continued – in a much different way – by Habermas.

73. Max Horkheimer, "Materialism and Metaphysics" and "Traditional and Critical Theory," both in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*; Herbert Marcuse, "On Concrete Philosophy," in *Heideggerian Marxism*, 34–52.

74. For a humorous account of Marcuse's participation in an anti-war march in Oakland in 1965, see Carl Schorske, "Encountering Marcuse," in *Herbert Marcuse: A Critical Reader*, Abromeit and Cobb (eds), 256.

75. For a historical overview and a sampling of documents from the May '68 "events," see Andrew Feenberg and Jim Freedman, *When Poetry Ruled the Streets: The French May Events of 1968* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2001).

of new character structures, which pointed beyond what Horkheimer had earlier identified as the “anthropology of the bourgeois epoch.” Soon chastened by the ferocious backlash against the protest movements and the dissolution of the counter-culture into regressive and escapist forms, Marcuse was forced to admit in *Counter-Revolution and Revolt* that his hopeful analysis had been premature. The sado-masochistic character structure, which had originally taken shape among the bourgeoisie in the early modern period,⁷⁶ had since become dominant among the majority of the working class in the most advanced industrialized countries, which explained the *retour à la normale* in France and the reassertion of the “silent majority” in the US.⁷⁷ While Marcuse warmly greeted what he considered the two most important outgrowths of the 1960s protest movements, namely a revival of feminism and the birth of a substantial environmental movement, the prognosis for the present was on the whole rather bleak.⁷⁸ He called, in particular, for a re-examination of the link between capitalism and authoritarianism, as analyzed in the social-psychological and empirical studies of Horkheimer, Fromm, Löwenthal, and Adorno.⁷⁹

In his final work, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (1979), Marcuse completed a full circle that brought him back to his earliest concerns with aesthetics. As we have seen, in his earlier work on aesthetics, such as “The Affirmative Character of Culture,” Marcuse had placed more emphasis on the ideological character of bourgeois art than on its critical and transcendent qualities. Marcuse’s much less qualified defense of the autonomy of aesthetic form in *The Aesthetic Dimension* not only testified to the failed attempts in the 1960s to revive the program of the historical avant-garde of merging art and life, but also represented a gesture to Adorno’s posthumously published magnum opus, *Aesthetic Theory*, which reiterated his longstanding criticisms of such attempts.⁸⁰ The change of emphasis

76. See Erich Fromm, “Sozialpsychologischer Teil,” in *Studien über Autorität und Familie: Forschungsberichte aus dem Institut für Sozialforschung*, Max Horkheimer (ed.) (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1936); Max Horkheimer, “Egoismus und Freiheitsbewegung: Zur Anthropologie des bürgerlichen Zeitalters,” *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 5(2) (1936), published in English as “Egoism and Freedom Movements: On the Anthropology of the Bourgeois Era,” in *Between Philosophy and Social Science*.

77. Marcuse viewed the re-election of Richard Nixon in 1972 as a particularly telling instance of the latter phenomenon. See his analysis in “The Historical Fate of Bourgeois Democracy,” in *Towards a Critical Theory of Society*, 163–86.

78. Marcuse, “Marxism and Feminism” and “Ecology and Revolution,” in *The New Left and the 1960s*, 165–72, 173–6, respectively.

79. Herbert Marcuse, *Counter-Revolution and Revolt* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1972), 28; “The Historical Fate of Bourgeois Democracy,” 170.

80. For a clear articulation of Adorno’s reservations about this aspect of the historical avant-garde, see his exchange with Benjamin in *Aesthetics and Politics: The Key Texts of the Classic Debate within German Marxism*, Ronald Taylor (ed. and trans.) (London: Verso, 1977), 110–33.

in Marcuse's position and his greater proximity to Adorno come through clearly in the following passages:

In contrast to orthodox Marxist aesthetics I see the political potential of art in art itself, in the aesthetic form as such. Furthermore, I argue that by virtue of its aesthetic form, art is largely autonomous vis à vis the given social relations. In its autonomy art both protests these relations, and at the same time transcends them. Thereby art subverts the dominant consciousness, the ordinary experience.⁸¹

The more immediately political the work of art, the more it reduces the power of estrangement and the radical, transcendent goals of change. In this sense, there may be more subversive potential in the poetry of Baudelaire and Rimbaud than in the didactic plays of Brecht.⁸²

Marcuse's defense of aesthetic form and autonomy was also accompanied by a reconsideration of other "bourgeois" concepts, such as the individual and interiority.⁸³ Returning once again to Horkheimer's 1930s' model of a dialectic of bourgeois society, Marcuse argued that although these concepts had developed historically in modern bourgeois society, they were not *merely* ideological; they also pointed *beyond* this society. Marcuse had always defended the claims of the concrete individual to happiness against the ideological demands of abstract collectivities, but he emphatically reaffirmed this position at the end of his life. Recalling one of Marx's central categories from the *Grundrisse*, Marcuse wrote: "That is orthodox Marxism: the 'universal individual' as the goal of socialism."⁸⁴

81. Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Towards a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1978), ix.

82. *Ibid.*, xii–xiii.

83. Marcuse writes, for example: "Marxist literary criticism often displays scorn for inwardness [*Innerlichkeit*] ... But this attitude is not too remote from the scorn of the capitalists for an unprofitable dimension of life. If subjectivity is an 'achievement' of the bourgeois era, it is at least an antagonistic force in capitalist society. ... I have pointed out that the same applies to the critique of the *individualism* of bourgeois literature offered by Marxist aesthetics. To be sure, the concept of the bourgeois individual has become the ideological counterpoint to the competitive economic subject and the authoritarian head of the family. To be sure, the concept of the individual as developing freely in solidarity with others can become a reality only in a socialist society. But the fascist period and monopoly capitalism have decisively changed the political value of these concepts ... Today, the rejection of the individual as a 'bourgeois' concept recalls and presages fascist undertakings" (*ibid.*, 37–8).

84. Herbert Marcuse, "Protosozialismus und Spätkapitalismus: Versuch einer revolutionstheoretischen Synthese von Bahros Ansatz," *Zeitschrift für Sozialdiskussion* 6(19) (1978), 13.

Of the original critical theorists, survived only by Löwenthal and Fromm, Marcuse passed away in Starnberg, Germany in 1979.

MAJOR WORKS

*Max Horkheimer*⁸⁵

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- “Der neueste Angriff auf die Metaphysik.” *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 6(1) (1937): 4–51. Published in English as “The Latest Attack on Metaphysics,” in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, 132–87.
- “Traditionelle und kritische Theorie.” *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 6(2) (1937): 245–92. Published in English as “Traditional and Critical Theory,” in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, 188–233.
- “Montaigne und die Funktion der Skepsis.” *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 7 (1938): 1–52. Published

85. Since much of Horkheimer’s best theoretical work was published in essays, rather than books, I have mentioned several of his “minor” works as well.

- in English as “Montaigne and the Function of Skepticism,” in *Between Philosophy and Social Science*, 265–312.
- “Die Juden und Europa.” *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 8 (1939): 115–37. Published in English as “The Jews and Europe,” in *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader*, edited by Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas Kellner, 77–94. London: Routledge, 1989.
- “Autoritärer Staat.” In *Walter Benjamin zum Gedächtnis*, 123–61. Los Angeles and New York: Institut für Sozialforschung, 1942. Published in English as “The Authoritarian State,” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, edited by Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, 95–117. New York: Continuum, 1982.
- “Vernunft und Selbsterhaltung.” In *Walter Benjamin zum Gedächtnis*, 17–60. Published in English as “The End of Reason,” *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* [formerly *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*] 9(3) (1942), 366–88. Reprinted in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, 26–48.
- Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* (with Theodor W. Adorno). Amsterdam: Querido, 1947. Published in English as: (i) *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cumming. New York: Continuum, 1972; (ii) *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, translated by Edmund Jephcott. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002.
- Eclipse of Reason*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1947.

Herbert Marcuse

- “Beiträge zu einer Phänomenologie des historischen Materialismus.” *Philosophische Hefte* 1 (1928): 45–68. Published in English as “Contributions to a Phenomenology of Historical Materialism,” translated by Eric Oberle, in Marcuse, *Heideggerian Marxism*, edited by Richard Wolin and John Abromeit, 1–33. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005.
- “Neue Quellen zur Grundlegung des historischen Materialismus.” *Die Gesellschaft* 9 (1932): 136–74. Published in English as “New Sources on the Foundation of Historical Materialism,” translated by Joris De Bres and John Abromeit, in *Heideggerian Marxism*, 86–121.
- Hegels Ontologie und die Grundlegung einer Theorie der Geschichtlichkeit*. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1932. Published in English as *Hegel’s Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, translated by Seyla Benhabib. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987.
- “Der Kampf gegen den Liberalismus in der totalitären Staatsauffassung.” *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 3(1) (1934): 161–95. Published in English as “The Struggle Against Liberalism in the Totalitarian View of the State,” in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro, 3–42. Boston, MA: Beacon, 1968.
- “Über den affirmativen Charakter der Kultur.” *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 6(1) (1937): 56–94. Published in English as “The Affirmative Character of Culture,” in *Negations*, 88–133.
- Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1941.
- “Some Social Implications of Modern Technology.” *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* [formerly *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*] 9 (1942): 414–39.
- Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. Boston, MA: Beacon, 1955.
- Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1958.
- One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Boston, MA: Beacon, 1964.
- “Repressive Tolerance.” In Robert Paul Wolff, Herbert Marcuse, and Barrington Moore Jr., *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*, 81–117. Boston, MA: Beacon, 1965.
- Essay on Liberation*. Boston, MA: Beacon, 1969.
- Counter-Revolution and Revolt*. Boston, MA: Beacon, 1972.
- The Aesthetic Dimension: Towards a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*. Boston, MA: Beacon, 1978.

3

THEODOR W. ADORNO

Deborah Cook

When the Institute for Social Research opened in Frankfurt-am-Main in 1924, its benefactor Felix Weil could hardly have imagined that its diverse members would contribute significantly to the development of disciplines such as sociology, influence the methodology of empirical social research, reshape Marxist theory and Freudian psychoanalysis, and act as a powerful stimulus for political activism during the late 1960s and early 1970s. In the first years of its existence, the institute promoted interdisciplinary studies devoted to the theory and history of socialism and the labor movement. But after its first director, Carl Grünberg, resigned owing to illness, Max Horkheimer took his place in 1930 and gave the institute a decisively new orientation. Work funded by the institute under Horkheimer's leadership would analyze prevailing social tendencies with a view to developing a theory of contemporary society.¹ The institute would treat society as a complex totality comprising a variety of distinct but interacting factors. As Horkheimer explained in his inaugural address, institute members should examine

the connection between the economic life of society, the psychical development of individuals, and the changes in the realm of culture

1. I am paraphrasing the institute's description of its history in an in-house publication. See *Forschungsarbeiten* 10 (September 1999), 7, from the Institut für Sozialforschung an der Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität, Frankfurt-am-Main. Two very good histories of the institute are available in English: Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute for Social Research, 1923–1950* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996); Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance*, Michael Robertson (trans.) (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

... (to which belong not only the so-called intellectual elements, such as science, art, and religion, but also law, customs, fashion, public opinion, sports, leisure activities, lifestyle, etc.).²

To explore the connections between these aspects of social life amounted to rethinking “the connection of particular existence and universal Reason, of reality and Idea, of life and Spirit.”³

Horkheimer’s political radicalization began when he met Friedrich Pollock in 1911. Pollock helped Horkheimer to free himself from his conservative background, and became his lifelong friend and close associate at the institute.⁴ After the collapse of the Weimar Republic, the two young men studied in Munich where they came into contact with the socialism of Erich Mühsam, Ernst Toller, Gustav Landauer, and others. However, Horkheimer and Pollock eventually turned to Marx because he offered a historically grounded model for radical social transformation.⁵ Both Horkheimer and Pollock are communists, wrote their new acquaintance, twenty-one-year-old Theodor W. Adorno,⁶ in a letter to Walter Benjamin dated July 1924. After spending ten days with the two men in a house they shared in Kronberg, Adorno reported that they had had long and passionate debates about materialist conceptions of history, the relationship between philosophy and the modern sciences, and philosophy’s response to the growing evils of society.⁷ These politically engaged and philosophically informed discussions would continue for more than half a century.

Although Adorno was not associated officially with the institute until 1935, he and Horkheimer had initiated the productive philosophical partnership, and jealously guarded friendship, that would end only with Adorno’s death in 1969.

2. Max Horkheimer, “The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research,” in *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, G. Frederick Hunter *et al.* (trans.) (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 11.

3. *Ibid.*, 12.

4. Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, 42.

5. Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: A Biography* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 79. Müller-Doohm is paraphrasing a remark made by Horkheimer in “Die Sehnsucht nach dem ganz Anderen,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Alfred Schmidt and Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (eds) (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1988–96), vol. 7, 385.

6. Theodor W. Adorno (September 11, 1903–August 6, 1969; born in Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany; died in Zermatt, Switzerland) was educated at Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität (1921–24; 1926–27; 1929–31) and the University of Oxford (1934–37) and took his habilitation at Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität (1931). His influences included Benjamin, Freud, Hegel, Kant, Kierkegaard, Kracauer, Lukács, Marx, and Nietzsche. He held appointments at Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität (1931–33), Princeton University (1938–40), and Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität (1949–69), and was Associate at the Institute for Social Research (1935–58) and Director of the Institute for Social Research (1958–69).

7. Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: A Biography*, 75.

In the early 1930s, they both contributed to the institute's journal, the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* (later renamed *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*). However, with the victory of Hitler's National Socialist Party in 1930, the institute, nicknamed Café Marx,⁸ was closed and its property confiscated by the Gestapo on March 13, 1933, on the grounds of its communist leanings.⁹ Having taken the precaution of placing the institute's funds in the Netherlands in 1931,¹⁰ in 1934 Horkheimer had the resources needed to establish a branch of the institute at Columbia University, where he was soon joined by Pollock, Herbert Marcuse, and Leo Löwenthal. In its New York office, the institute initiated a number of empirical research projects, the most important of which examined the effects of unemployment on the authority structure of the American family.¹¹ This project, which was supervised by Paul Lazarsfeld and involved the collaboration of Marcuse and psychoanalyst Erich Fromm, would culminate in *Studien über Autorität und Familie*, which was edited by Horkheimer and published in Paris in 1936.¹²

As the institute settled in the United States, Adorno was studying at Oxford with the philosopher Gilbert Ryle, who agreed to supervise a thesis he proposed to write on Edmund Husserl.¹³ It was not until 1938 that Adorno decided to emigrate to New York with his new wife Gretel. Having studied composition with Alban Berg in the mid-1920s in Vienna, Adorno had already published a number of essays on music.¹⁴ Upon his arrival, Horkheimer arranged for him to work with Lazarsfeld in New Jersey as head of the music section of the Princeton Radio Research Project, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, where until 1940 Adorno was responsible for overseeing empirical research into the psychological value of radio music for listeners.¹⁵

8. *Ibid.*, 177.

9. Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, 128.

10. *Ibid.*, 110.

11. *Ibid.*, 168. As Wiggershaus also notes on the next page, parallel projects were initiated in the institute's European branches.

12. Institut für Sozialforschung, *Studien über Autorität und Familie: Forschungsberichte aus dem Institut für Sozialforschung* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1936).

13. *Ibid.*, 530. Adorno revised this unpublished (and undefended) thesis on Husserl and published it in 1956 in a book later translated into English as *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique: Studies in Husserl and the Phenomenological Antinomies*, Willis Domingo (trans.) (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983).

14. See, for example, Adorno's controversial essay "On Jazz" and "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," in *Essays on Music*, Richard Leppert (ed.), Susan H. Gillespie et al. (trans.) (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), both originally published in German in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*.

15. Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, 239. Wiggershaus notes (*ibid.*, 244) that Adorno later published essays connected with this project: "A Social Critique of Radio Music" and "On Popular Music."

By 1940, however, it was glaringly apparent to the émigrés, some of whose family and friends were suffering horribly under the Nazi regime, that anti-Semitism was virulent in many European countries. In the early 1940s, Adorno began to study anti-Semitism, following the lead of Horkheimer in “The Jews and Europe,” an essay published in the *Zeitschrift* in 1939. In 1941, the institute also published a series of articles on National Socialism in the newly renamed *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*; this special volume included articles by Marcuse and Pollock as well as Adorno’s essay “Veblen’s Attack on Culture,” and an article by Horkheimer entitled “The End of Reason.”¹⁶

Horkheimer declared that all his work in the 1930s was a prelude to a book he planned to write on dialectical logic.¹⁷ He considered Adorno the ideal collaborator for this project as early as 1935.¹⁸ By 1938, the project had become more concrete. In a letter to Benjamin, Adorno wrote that Horkheimer had spoken to him about “his eagerness to begin work on a book on the dialectic of the Enlightenment.”¹⁹ However, this work only started after the institute moved most of its resources from New York to Los Angeles in 1941. Some of its central ideas were outlined in Horkheimer’s *Eclipse of Reason*. Dedicated to Pollock to mark his fiftieth birthday, Adorno and Horkheimer finished the book in the spring of 1944; it first appeared in 1947 in the Netherlands under the title *Dialektik der Aufklärung*.

Dialectic of Enlightenment opens with a strident warning. If the modern deployment of reason was supposed to emancipate humanity, it is now the case that the “fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant.”²⁰ Drawing on Max Weber’s idea of the disenchantment of the world through rationalization, as well as on the dialectic of faith and enlightenment in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the first chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* purports to show that, for all its claims to supersede the mythic worldview, enlightenment is actually an outgrowth of myth and ends by reverting to myth. Manipulating and controlling objects in the interest of preserving the self against a nature that is perceived as hostile, enlightened reason confuses “the animate with the inanimate, just as myth compounds the inanimate with the animate.” Enlightenment and myth share a fear of nature – a fear that has reached such a pitch in enlight-

16. Adorno’s essay appears in *Prisms*, Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber (trans.) (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 73–94. “The End of Reason” was later published in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (eds) (New York: Continuum, 1982), 26–48.

17. Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, 177.

18. *Ibid.*, 160.

19. Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 254.

20. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, John Cumming (trans.) (New York: Continuum, 1972), 3; Edmund Jephcott (trans.) (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 1. Hereafter these translations will be referred to as C and J respectively.

ened thought that nothing is allowed to remain outside its conceptual purview.²¹ Compulsively forcing natural objects into explanatory schema in order to dominate them, reason continues to be driven by nature. Enlightened reason merely makes nature “audible in its estrangement” because the very attempt to master nature only enslaves reason all the more thoroughly to nature.²²

This theme, which is central to the later work of Adorno as well, is elaborated in subsequent chapters of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. For example, in the excursus on the *Odyssey* that follows the first chapter, Horkheimer and Adorno trace enlightened thought to the dawn of human history, when reason developed as a means to the end of thwarting the powers of nature, as exemplified in the cunning of Odysseus. They argue that control over nature was finally achieved only by delaying the gratification of instincts and needs, or by repressing them altogether. Driven by survival instincts, human beings denied nature in themselves in order to preserve themselves in the face of nature. Mastery over nature

practically always involves the annihilation of the subject in whose service that mastery is maintained, because the substance which is mastered, suppressed, and disintegrated by self-preservation is nothing other than the living entity, of which the achievements of self-preservation can only be defined as functions – in other words, self-preservation destroys the very thing which is to be preserved.²³

The idea that the instinct for self-preservation propels much of Western history helps to explain a remark at the end of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to the effect that the official history of Europe conceals a subterranean history. Europe’s underground history “consists in the fate of the human instincts and passions repressed and distorted by civilization.”²⁴ Although it is only implicit in this passage, this reference to Sigmund Freud (*Civilization and its Discontents*) is a distinguishing feature of first generation critical theory as a whole. Based on Marxism, the theory’s materialist account of capitalism encompasses not just economic factors but psychological ones as well.

Martin Jay explains that “the unexpected rise of an irrationalist mass politics in fascism, which was unforeseen by orthodox Marxists,” made it necessary to incorporate psychology into a critical account of society. Yet, even after the defeat of National Socialism, “psychological impediments to emancipation” remained in “the manipulated society of mass consumption that followed in its

21. *Ibid.*, C 16, J 11.

22. *Ibid.*, C 39, J 31.

23. *Ibid.*, C 55, J 43.

24. *Ibid.*, C 231, J 192.

wake.”²⁵ Concern about these impediments is forcefully expressed in a chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* called “Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” where the psychology underlying fascist propaganda is compared to the psychotechnology of the Hollywood-based culture industry; extensive use is also made of psychoanalysis in the following chapter on anti-Semitism.

However, it was not just the relevance of psychoanalytic theory for understanding fascism and the culture industry that made Freud indispensable. What particularly recommended Freud to Adorno was his recognition that nature and history have always been dialectically entwined. Originally attributing this idea to Georg Lukács in a 1932 lecture called “The Idea of Natural History”²⁶ (which was presented to the Kant Society in Frankfurt), Adorno would later cite *The German Ideology* in support of this claim.²⁷ But in “Die Revidierte Psychoanalyse” – a lecture given to the Psychoanalytic Society in San Francisco in 1946²⁸ – Adorno also defended Freud against revisionists such as Karen Horney, arguing that Freud is “not content to leave reason and socially determined behavior unexplained but attempts to derive even complex mental behaviors from the drive for self-preservation and pleasure.” Equally importantly, Freud did not deny that nature is historically conditioned; he never precluded the possibility that “the concrete manifestation of instincts might undergo the most sweeping variations and modifications” throughout history.²⁹ What Adorno draws from Freudian theory, then, enables him not only to explain phenomena such as Nazi Germany and the culture industry, but to elaborate in psychological terms on Marx’s speculative claims about the relationship between nature and human history.

Adorno also developed a psychological perspective on labor, observing that our participation in both production and consumption has historically been impelled by survival instincts. If Marx criticized capitalism for disrupting the metabolism between labor and nature,³⁰ as well as for alienating individuals

25. Martin Jay, *Adorno* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 85.

26. Theodor W. Adorno, “The Idea of Natural History,” Robert Hullot-Kentor (trans.), *Telos* 60 (Summer 1984), 117–18.

27. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, E. B. Ashton (trans.) (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), 358. Hereafter ND followed by the page number. Ashton’s translation may be modified.

28. This lecture, entitled “Social Science and Sociological Tendencies in Psychoanalysis,” originally appeared in *Psyche* 6(1) (1952); it was later translated by Rainer Koehne into German as “Die Revidierte Psychoanalyse,” and published in *Sociologica* 2 (1962). (In Theodor W. Adorno, *Letters to his Parents 1939–1951*, Christoph Gødde and Henri Lonitz [eds], Wieland Hoban [trans.] [Cambridge: Polity, 2006], 254 n.1, the editors supply the English title of this lecture, and the reference to its first German publication.) “Die Revidierte Psychoanalyse” was subsequently published in *Soziologische Schriften I* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), 20–41.

29. Adorno, “Die Revidierte Psychoanalyse,” 22.

30. John Bellamy Foster, *Marx’s Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999), 158–9.

from the products of their labor and the productive activity that characterizes their species life, Adorno not only adopted this view but gave it a Freudian spin. In *Minima Moralia*, dedicated to Horkheimer on the occasion of his fiftieth birthday, he remarked that individuals are both biological and social beings. Under capitalism, however, human beings increasingly become mere means to the end of production as human labor and its products are transformed into commodities. We can now survive only by subordinating ourselves completely to exchange relations. In this situation, the “will to live finds itself dependent on the denial of the will to live: self-preservation annuls all life in subjectivity.”³¹

Although he was neither an orthodox Marxist nor an orthodox Freudian, and he never fully addressed the problems connected with reconciling Marx and Freud, Adorno examined the impact of the capitalist system on the psychological development of individuals in most of his work, claiming that capitalism fosters widespread social and psychological pathologies such as authoritarianism, narcissism, and paranoia. However, Adorno had argued as early as 1927 (in his first *Habilitationsschrift* which he was forced to withdraw), that psychopathologies can be overcome, not by psychoanalysis, but only by completely transforming economic and social conditions. He also criticized Freud in *Minima Moralia*, charging that psychoanalysis encourages adaptation to prevailing conditions, and that it vacillates between “negating the renunciation of instinct as repression contrary to reality, and applauding it as sublimation beneficial to culture.”³² Still, Adorno was certainly not persuaded to jettison Freudian theory altogether. Even as he advanced these criticisms, he was discussing the psychology of anti-Semitism with Freudian social psychologists,³³ and he wrote two pieces substantially influenced by Freudian theory.³⁴ He elaborated on his ideas in *The Authoritarian Personality* which involved an extensive, empirically based, psychological account of fascist tendencies in the United States.

It was not simply his supplementation of Marxism by psychoanalysis that made Adorno a less than orthodox Marxist. For, in “Reflexionen zur Klassentheorie” (composed as a working document comprising nine theses in 1942³⁵), Adorno measured his distance from both Marx and the orthodox Marxism of the Soviet Union. Since Marx’s prediction about the concentration and centralization of

31. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, E. F. N. Jephcott (trans.) (London: New Left Books, 1974), 229.

32. *Ibid.*, 60.

33. Müller-Doohm, *Adorno*, 292.

34. Theodor W. Adorno, “The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas’ Radio Addresses,” *Gesammelte Schriften* 9 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975); “Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda,” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, Arato and Gebhardt (eds).

35. Müller-Doohm, *Adorno*, 266.

capital had been realized, the nature of capitalism changed, particularly with respect to the composition of classes. Consisting of relatively independent entrepreneurs during the earlier phase of liberal capital, the bourgeoisie lost much of its economic power as monopoly conditions developed. Today, the economically disenfranchised bourgeoisie and the proletariat form a new mass class that confronts the few remaining owners of the means of production.³⁶

In a Hegelian remark about the *Aufhebung* – the preservation and sublation – of classes under monopoly capital, Adorno writes that the concept of class must be preserved because “the division of society into exploiters and exploited not only continues to exist but gains in force and strength.” Yet the concept must also be sublated “because the oppressed who, as the theory predicted, are the vast majority of people today, cannot experience themselves as a class.”³⁷ So, while class stratification persists, classes themselves have changed, and the subjective awareness of belonging to a class has evaporated. Marx’s theory is no longer straightforwardly applicable to existing conditions precisely because he was right about the emergence of monopoly conditions.

In this essay, Adorno also takes issue with Marx’s theory of impoverishment, arguing that this theory can be confirmed only in a metaphorical sense because workers today have far more to lose than their chains. Compared to the situation of workers in nineteenth-century England that Marx analyzed, the standard of living of workers in the West has actually improved. The establishment of the welfare state, which Marx could not have foreseen, is partially responsible for this improvement. The work day is now shorter, and workers enjoy “better food, housing and clothing, protection of dependents and the aged, and, on average, a higher life expectancy.” It is now unlikely that “hunger would force them into an unconditional alliance and into revolution.”³⁸

Borrowing a phrase from *The Communist Manifesto*, Adorno argues that, with the welfare state, the “ruling class” effectively secures “for ‘slaves their existence within slavery’ in order to ensure its own.” In this new context, impoverishment refers to the “political and social impotence” of individuals who have become “pure objects of administration for monopolies” and their political allies.³⁹ Survival now depends on adaptation to a constantly changing and unstable economic system. Adaptation is reinforced by sophisticated psychotechnologies and the prevailing ideology that glorifies existing states of affairs. By these means, the needs of the new mass class are forced to harmonize with commodified offers of satisfaction. Conformity to socially approved models of behavior

36. Theodor W. Adorno, “Reflexionen zur Klassentheorie,” in *Soziologische Schriften I*, 380.

37. *Ibid.*, 377.

38. *Ibid.*, 384.

39. *Ibid.*, 386.

now appears more rational than solidarity.⁴⁰ This is another reason why prospects for revolutionary change have faded.

Adorno also observes that political power has increased in the West. However, he does not adopt Pollock's state capitalism thesis, which asserts that there has been a transition in Western countries "from a predominantly economic to an essentially political era,"⁴¹ thereby calling into question Marx's view of the primacy of economic forces within society. If the state now intervenes more frequently in the economy, direct political domination existed only in Nazi Germany. At most, Pollock's state capitalism thesis signals certain ominous tendencies in other Western countries.⁴²

What changed under monopoly capitalism was that the ruling class became anonymous: it disappeared "behind the concentration of capital." Today, the concentration of capital has reached such proportions that capitalism "appears as an institution, as an expression of the entire society." Indeed, Adorno sounds a profoundly Lukácsian note that resonates throughout his work when he criticizes the reifying effects of the capitalist economy on human beings. Since it now pervades almost every aspect of human life, "the fetish character of commodities, which reflects relations between people as those between things, ends in the socially totalitarian aspect of capital."⁴³ As Stefan Müller-Doohm observes, the pervasiveness of reification under monopoly capitalism also helps to answer the question posed in the preface to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; namely, why humanity is sinking into a new kind of barbarism, rather than entering into a truly human state.⁴⁴

The urgency of this question did not abate after Adorno returned to Frankfurt to teach again at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe Institute in 1949. Until his death,

40. *Ibid.*, 377.

41. Friedrich Pollock, "State Capitalism: Its Possibilities and Limitations," *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 9(2) (1941), 207.

42. I am restating criticisms raised in my *Adorno, Habermas, and the Search for a Rational Society* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 11–16. The view that Adorno adopted the state capitalism thesis in the mid-1940s is reiterated by Willem van Reijen and Jan Bransen in a commentary at the end of Jephcott's translation of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 252, where the authors state that Horkheimer and Adorno distanced themselves "definitively from a form of Marxism which assumed the primacy of economics." However, this view is false. In "Society," Fredric Jameson (trans.), *Salmagundi* 3(9–10) (1969–70), 149, Adorno repeats the claim he had already made in "Reflexionen zur Klassentheorie" that society remains class society. Three years later, in "Late Capitalism or Industrial Society," Fred van Gelder (trans.), in *Modern German Sociology*, V. Meja et al. (eds) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 242, Adorno states categorically that the economic system continues to predominate over the political system.

43. Adorno, "Reflexionen zur Klassentheorie," 380.

44. Müller-Doohm, *Adorno*, 267. See Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, C xi, J xiv.

almost all his work – including many of his books and essays on music and literature – deals with the related problems of fascism and monopoly capitalism. What concerns Adorno above all else is that conditions similar to those that accompanied the rise of Nazism in Germany persist in the West. Indeed he argues that little has changed since the end of the Second World War: “The economic order, and to a great extent also the economic organization modeled upon it, now as then renders the majority of people dependent upon conditions beyond their control and thus maintains them in a state of political immaturity.” In the interest of survival, individuals must “negate precisely that autonomous subjectivity to which the idea of democracy appeals; they can preserve themselves only if they renounce their self.”⁴⁵ Conformity to the interests of the ruling economic and political class is reinforced by psychological techniques similar to the ones used by Hitler. Hitler revealed what critical theorists had been saying for some time; namely, that “the appeal to the unconscious, the natural, to unconstructed nature, to the gifted personality, and whatever else propaganda highlights by way of irrational powers, only contributes to the ultimate strengthening of the hegemony of a dehumanized apparatus, and ends in complete inhumanity.”⁴⁶

After 1950 – the year *The Authoritarian Personality* appeared along with four other volumes in a series entitled *Studies in Prejudice* – Adorno wrote a number of articles dealing with research methodology in the social sciences.⁴⁷ While he was critical of empirical social research, arguing that social science must be guided by the normative idea “of a true society,”⁴⁸ Adorno nonetheless continued to engage in empirical studies throughout the 1950s. In 1952, for example, he returned to Los Angeles to work briefly for the Hacker Foundation, where, among other things, he drafted a qualitative analysis of astrology columns

45. Theodor W. Adorno, “The Meaning of Working Through the Past,” in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, Henry W. Pickford (trans.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 98.

46. Theodor W. Adorno, “Individuum und Organisation,” in *Soziologische Schriften I*, 440. This essay has not yet been published in translation.

47. Many of these essays appear in *Soziologische Schriften I*. See for example “Zur gegenwärtigen Stellung der empirischen Sozialforschung in Deutschland” (1952), “Teamwork in der Sozialforschung” (1957), “Zum gegenwärtigen Stand der deutschen Soziologie” (1959), “Meinungsforschung und Öffentlichkeit” (1964), and “Gesellschaftstheorie und empirische Forschung” (1969). More well known is *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, Glyn Adley and David Frisby (trans.) (London: Heinemann, 1976), which contains presentations that Adorno and Karl Popper gave at a workshop in Tübingen in 1961. Adorno’s essays “On the Logic of the Social Sciences” and “Sociology and Empirical Research,” first published in the 1969 German edition of *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, also appear in *Soziologische Schriften I*.

48. Adorno, *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, 27.

in the *Los Angeles Times*, as well as two sociological studies of television.⁴⁹ On his return to Germany, he took part in a project that examined the relationship between the manifest political opinions of Germans from different social strata and their latent attitudes.⁵⁰ Part of the study focused on the ways in which German citizens sought to deny their recent past. Here again Adorno used psychoanalytic theory to explore the interaction between the guilt feelings of the German people and the defense mechanisms that enabled them to assuage their guilt.⁵¹

According to Wiggershaus, however, Adorno abandoned empirical research at the end of the 1950s in order to devote himself completely to the elaboration of his critical social theory.⁵² Among the more important of his writings during this period is "Progress," a "preliminary study" that "belongs within the complex" of Adorno's major philosophical work *Negative Dialectics*.⁵³ Here, Adorno revisits an idea that was advanced as early as *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, when he states that what counts as progress today is the domination of external and internal nature, which, impelled by the instinct for self-preservation, now threatens to destroy what it is supposed to preserve. Progress worthy of that name would entail that humanity has become aware of its "own inbred nature" in order to put an end to "the domination that it exacts upon nature and through which domination by nature continues."⁵⁴ Catastrophe can be averted only if "a self-conscious global subject" develops and intervenes, using "technical forces of production" to abolish all forms of material deprivation on the planet, and rationally to establish "the whole society as humanity."⁵⁵

Adorno was developing new ideas in the work he wrote in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s. Among the more important of these are the ideas of identity and nonidentity thinking. Identity thinking had certainly been discussed as early as *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, even if it had not been given that name. As J. M. Bernstein observes, what Adorno and Horkheimer describe as the principle of immanence in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was later called identity thinking. The principle of immanence entails that an object is known "only when it is classified in some way," or "when it is shown, via subsumption, to share

49. See "The Stars Down to Earth: The Los Angeles Times Astrology Column," in *The Stars Down to Earth and Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture*, Stephen Crook (ed.) (New York: Routledge, 1994). See also "Prologue to Television," and "Television as Ideology," in *Critical Models*.

50. Müller-Doohm, *Adorno*, 380. See Friedrich Pollock (ed.), *Gruppenexperiment: Ein Studienbericht* (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlags-Anstalt, 1955).

51. Müller-Doohm, *Adorno*, 381–2.

52. Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, 496.

53. Theodor W. Adorno, "Introduction," in *Critical Models*, 125.

54. Theodor W. Adorno, "Progress," in *Critical Models*, 150.

55. *Ibid.*, 144.

characteristics or features” with other objects. Similarly, “an event is explained if it can be shown to fall within the ambit of a known pattern of occurrence, if it falls within the ambit of a known rule or is deducible from (subsumable by) a known law.” For their part, concepts, rules, and laws have a cognitive value only when they are “subsumed under or shown to be deducible from higher-level concepts, rules, or laws.”⁵⁶ Bernstein resumes: “[c]ognition is subsumption, subsumption is necessarily reiterable, and reiteration occurs through cognitive ascent from concrete to abstract, from particular to universal, from what is relatively universal, and thereby still in some respect particular, contingent, and conditioned, to what is more universal.”⁵⁷

Owing to this subsumption of objects and events under concepts and laws, and the higher-order subsumption of concepts and laws under explanatory systems, we have effectively dissociated ourselves from our lived experience of the world in order to dominate it. We substitute unity for diversity, simplicity for complexity, permanence for change, and identity for difference. Once particular objects are tethered to concepts, there is allegedly nothing more of importance to be said about them. Identity thinking consists in the claim that diverse objects fall under concept “X”; it thereby effectively obliterates the particularity of objects, their differences from one other, their individual development and histories, along with other distinctive traits they may possess. Classifying, ordering, and explaining the objective world by ranging it under concepts that are then organized systematically, identity thinking seeks – to quote Nietzsche, who interpreted this behavior as a manifestation of the physiological will to power – “to *make* all being thinkable,” to make it “yield and bend” for us.⁵⁸

The substitution of universal concepts for particular, nonconceptual objects is not problematic just on epistemological grounds; Adorno also claims that identity thinking reinforces stereotypical and schematic views of objects, while fostering conformity to the status quo. To solve these problems, he proposed a new cognitive paradigm: nonidentity thinking. Müller-Doohm claims that Adorno first publicly referred to nonidentity thinking in an essay on Hölderlin where he claimed that the poet had managed to surpass identity thinking; his is a poetry of the nonidentical.⁵⁹ Yet the idea of nonidentity thinking was advanced earlier in Adorno’s 1959 lectures on Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. Although identity thinking persists in Kant to the extent that he wants to “ground being in

56. Jay M. Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 87.

57. *Ibid.*, 88.

58. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “On Self-Overcoming.”

59. Müller-Doohm, *Adorno*, 362. This essay, “Parataxis: On Hölderlin’s Late Poetry,” was published in *Notes to Literature*, Rolf Tiedemann (ed.), Shierry Weber Nicholsen (trans.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, 1992), vol. II.

the subject," Kant begins to develop a nonidentity philosophy when he "attempts to restrict the claim to identity by insisting on the obstacle, the *block*, encountered by the subject in its search for knowledge." Nonidentity appears in the idea that not only do our "affections" "arise from things-in-themselves," but that these things are not reducible to our concepts and categories of them.⁶⁰ In fact, in *Against Epistemology*, Adorno had already praised Kant's view of the nonidentity of concept and object.⁶¹

Adorno's *magnum opus*, *Negative Dialectics*, is devoted to exploring the alternative cognitive paradigm of nonidentity thinking.⁶² In the introduction, he distinguishes Hegel's dialectics from his own, arguing that his version of dialectics involves "the consistent sense of nonidentity" (ND 5). Later remarking that identity thinking merely "says what something falls under, what it exemplifies or represents, and what, accordingly, it is not itself," Adorno contrasts it to nonidentity thinking, which "seeks to say what something is." By saying "it is," Adorno concedes that nonidentity thinking does identify; it even "identifies to a greater extent" than identity thinking. But nonidentity thinking identifies in "other ways" because it is not content merely to subsume objects under universal concepts with a view to manipulating and controlling them. Rather, nonidentity thinking tries to make its concepts consonant with nonconceptual particulars. In so doing, it reveals the "elements of affinity" between the nonconceptual object and our concepts of it: an affinity that makes concept formation possible in the first place (ND 149). This affinity exists because concepts themselves are thoroughly entwined in nonconceptuality; they are "moments of the reality that requires their formation, primarily for the control of nature" (ND 11). In nonidentity thinking, these "elements of affinity – of the object itself to the thought of it – come to live in identity" (ND 149).

Considerations like these on the affinity between concept and object may lend some support to Bernstein's assertion that identity thinking is parasitic on nonidentity thinking.⁶³ Concepts must be turned back toward nonconceptual particulars because they are generated in embodied contact with material things, and they continue to refer to these things by virtue of their meaning in which their mediation by the nonconceptual survives (ND 12). Yet concepts have a twofold relation to objects. On the one hand, they depend on the nonconceptual matter that provides their content and is the source of their power to name.

60. Theodor W. Adorno, *Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason,"* Rodney Livingstone (trans.) (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001) 66–7 *passim*.

61. Adorno, *Against Epistemology*, 146f., cited by Rolf Tiedemann in "Editor's Notes" in Adorno, *Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason,"* 278 n.14.

62. In the following discussion of nonidentity thinking, I am drawing from my "Thought Thinking Itself," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 38(3) (2007).

63. Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*, 279.

In order to convey “full, unreduced experience in the medium of conceptual reflection,” nonidentity thinking must immerse itself in things (ND 13). On the other hand, concepts also transcend the objective realm by heeding “a potential that waits in the object,” and intending in the object “even that of which the object was deprived by objectification” (ND 19). In this case, nonidentity thinking grasps objects by means of possibility (ND 52). It deploys possibility to indicate what an object would become if the damaged conditions under which it developed were altered.

If concepts approximate objects by virtue of their orientation toward the object’s material axis, the object in turn must approximate the concept. In the context of discussing the affinity between concept and object, Adorno speaks about the “longing” of the concept to become identical with the nonconceptual thing. This longing reflects the inadequacy of objects with respect to concepts. It is this inadequacy that nonidentity thinking also thematizes even as it attempts to forge a route beyond it. Adorno illustrates this point when he discusses the emphatic concept of freedom. Individuals are both more and less than the freedom that may be ascribed to them. They are always more than free because freedom is, at best, only one of their attributes. Yet they are less than free because “the concept feeds on the idea of a condition in which individuals would have qualities not to be ascribed to anyone here and now” (ND 150). In the latter case, nonidentity thinking reveals the inadequacy of individuals to our concept of them as free.

Adorno advocates this twofold orientation towards objects in *Negative Dialectics*. Nonidentity thinking involves the “[r]eciprocal criticism of the universal and of the particular.” It must judge *both* “whether the concept does justice to what it covers” *and* “whether the particular fulfills its concept.” These two critical operations jointly “constitute the medium of thinking about the nonidentity of particular and concept” (ND 146). To remain content with the judgment that the concept does (or does not do) justice to what it “covers” would amount to leaving “behind the medium of virtuality, of anticipation that cannot be wholly fulfilled by any piece of actuality.” Interpretation would be abandoned in favor of merely positing what exists; this would make thought “untrue.”⁶⁴ The nonconceptual particular would satisfy its concept only by making good on its own immanent potential – a potential that some emphatic concepts invoke or intimate. Nonidentity can be said to contain identity in the prospective longing of the concept to become identical with the thing (ND 149). In nonidentity thinking, concepts are given a speculative orientation by aiming “at what would be different” (ND 153).

64. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 127.

Nonidentity thinking therefore “contains identity” in a peculiar fashion. Attempting to make good on “the pledge that there should be no contradiction, no antagonism” between the object and the thought of it (ND 146), nonidentity thinking prospectively identifies the object with the concept. Its emphatically critical concepts point forward to changed conditions, such as the condition of a free society in which objects would be able to develop their possibilities unfettered. Evoking conditions that do not currently exist, these concepts “overshoot” what exists precisely in order to grasp it. (Parenthetically, Adorno shows in his posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory* that artworks share the proleptic orientation of nonidentity thinking when they anticipate “a being-in-itself that does not yet exist.”⁶⁵ Modern art “constantly works at the Münchhausean trick of carrying out the identification of the non-identical.”⁶⁶) Since nonconceptual particulars have been damaged under monopoly conditions and do not realize their potential, Adorno argues throughout his work that no particular is “as its particularity requires” (ND 152). He complains that the “substance of the contradiction between universal and particular” is that the nonconceptual particular “is not yet – and that, therefore, it is bad wherever established.” When it holds fast to what universal concepts usually rob from particulars, nonidentity thinking tries to retain the “‘more’ of the concept” as compared to these particulars (ND 151).

Inextricably entwined in nonconceptuality, concepts may evoke something more than what exists owing to their determinate negation of the existent. In fact, at the end of his 1965 lectures on metaphysics, Adorno claims that determinate negation is “the only form in which metaphysical experience survives today.”⁶⁷ Resembling labor in its inherent resistance to “mere things in being” (ND 19), thought’s resistance is all the more powerful when its concepts are forged in the crucible of its painful experiences of damaged life. For in such experiences, the negative conditions that give rise to suffering are themselves negated in ideas and concepts that evoke conditions under which pain and suffering may one day end. Pain and negativity are “the moving forces of dialectical thinking” (ND 202) because, through them, human beings may glean reality’s better potential. To cite Marcuse, whose remarks echo Adorno’s, emphatically critical concepts point to “potentialities in a concrete historical sense” to the extent that they synthesize “experiential contents into ideas which transcend their particular realizations as

65. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Robert Hullot-Kentor (trans.) (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 77.

66. *Ibid.*, 23.

67. Theodor W. Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, Edmund Jephcott (trans.) (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 144.

something that is to be surpassed, overcome.”⁶⁸ Through determinate negation, these concepts “conceptualize the stuff of which the experienced world consists, and they conceptualize it with a view of its possibilities, in light of their actual limitation, suppression and denial.”⁶⁹

Again, Adorno illustrates these ideas in his discussion of the concept of freedom: the shape of freedom “can only be grasped in determinate negation in accordance with the concrete form of a specific unfreedom” (ND 231). Because the idea of freedom emerges in the negation of the negative, unfreedom is not just “an impediment to freedom but a premise of its concept.” Ideas of freedom are derived from a negation of those aspects of reality that cause suffering by perpetuating unfreedom. Both freedom and unfreedom are therefore conceived in “relation to extramental things: freedom as a polemical counter-image to the suffering brought on by social coercion; unfreedom as that coercion’s image” (ND 223). Indeed, Horkheimer had made a similar comment about dignity in *Eclipse of Reason*: the idea of human dignity was “born from the experience of barbarian forms of domination.”⁷⁰ Although Adorno does not explicitly mention them, he invites us to think of emancipatory movements such as abolitionism, women’s liberation, and gay rights. In movements like these, the unfree conditions that cause suffering point to their possible reversal by giving rise to the idea of a condition in which oppression would cease to exist. Since an emphatic idea such as that of freedom arises within oppressive situations “as resistance to repression” (ND 265), what is possible – in this case, freedom from oppression – can be glimpsed historically only in experiences of unfreedom.

Emphatic concepts such as freedom must be deployed with other concepts in what Adorno calls a constellation. As opposed to identity-thinking, which dissociates itself from objects owing to its abstraction from them, Adorno claims that a constellation of concepts illuminates “the specific side of the object, the side which to a classifying procedure is either a matter of indifference or a burden.” Indeed, he praises Weber’s employment of ideal types, or of concepts that are “‘gradually composed’ from ‘individual parts ... taken from historic reality’” (ND 164). To illustrate this procedure, Adorno turns briefly to Weber’s discussion of capitalism in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, where Weber gathers diverse concepts around capitalism – concepts such as acquisitiveness, the profit motive, lucrateness, calculation, organization, bookkeeping – in order to express what capitalism “aims at, not to circumscribe it to operational ends” (ND 166). Conceding that constellations are the result of an entirely subjective

68. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1964), 214.

69. *Ibid.*, 215.

70. Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), 177.

process, Adorno thinks that this “subjectively created context” is “readable as a sign of objectivity,” or of the “spiritual substance” of phenomena (ND 165).

Adorno defines truth as “a constellation of subject and object in which both penetrate each other” (ND 127). Even in this form, however, truth is not something static. Rather, thought must constantly renew itself “in the experience of the subject matter,” a matter that, for its part, is first determined by subjective concepts themselves. Truth is therefore “a constantly evolving constellation.”⁷¹ At best, truth manifests itself in the progressive approximation of objects by concepts; this may help to explain why Adorno maintains that objects are “infinitely given as a task.”⁷² Moreover, Adorno again stresses the fallibility of emphatic ideas when he writes that “the truth of ideas is bound up with the possibility of their being wrong, the possibility of their failure.” That the truth derived from determinate negation can always be revised, overthrown, even lost, further demonstrates that the negation of the negation fails to yield something positive.⁷³

Devoting much of his later work to devising an alternative cognitive paradigm to overcome identity-thinking, Adorno also continued to criticize oppressive socioeconomic conditions. In fact, individuals now stand in relation to society in much the same way that material particulars stand to universal concepts. Adorno implies as much throughout his work when he refers to society as the “universal.” Whereas identity-thinking falsely maintains the primacy of concepts over objects, society reifies individuals by subsuming them under abstract exchange relations. In this respect, identity-thinking and exchange are isomorphic. Just as identity-thinking expunges particulars by identifying them with universal concepts in order to manipulate and control them with a view to ensuring our survival, exchange relations serve the same goal by making “nonidentical individuals and performances become commensurable and identical.” The exchange principle is “fundamentally akin to the principle of identification” because exchange is just “the social model” for this principle. In both its conceptual and social forms, the spread of the principle of identification now “imposes on the whole world an obligation to become identical, to become total” (ND 146).

Following Lukács, Adorno also argues that exchange relations currently encroach on areas of life that were formerly unaffected by them. Exchange plays such a dominant role in human life that activities other than labor have fallen victim to reification as well. Indeed, bourgeois individualism, which celebrates the individual as the substance of society, masks an entirely different reality: the predominance of exchange relations and their homogenizing and leveling effects on needs, behavior, thought, and interpersonal relations. Although we

71. Theodor W. Adorno, “Notes on Philosophical Thinking,” in *Critical Models*, 131.

72. Theodor W. Adorno, “On Subject and Object,” in *Critical Models*, 253.

73. Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, 144.

have always subordinated ourselves to economic conditions that determine whether we work, when, where and how we work, as well as our working conditions, today even our needs and instincts are manipulated and controlled to correspond to available offers of commodified satisfaction, and our behavior is molded to fit socially approved models. Forced to adapt to a world “whose law is universal individual profit,” individuals now submit to forms of integration so complete and so far-reaching that Adorno compares them to genocide (ND 362).

Under late capitalism, individuals measure their own self-worth and the worth of others in terms of the value of the goods they possess and the places they occupy within the economic system; their possessions and occupations serve as social markers that position them within groups and distinguish them from other individuals and groups. In other words, individuals relate to one another as mere “agents and bearers of exchange value” (ND 148–9). At the same time, they are isolated and alienated from one another precisely because their interpersonal relations are often cemented by nothing more substantive than these exchange-based relationships. Indeed, Adorno is especially concerned about the damage done to social solidarity under the reifying conditions characteristic of late capitalism. As the exchange principle becomes more pervasive, degrading relations between people to relations between things, the solidarity needed to surmount these relations has evaporated. In other words, exchange relations undermine the very social solidarity that is required to overcome them.

Economic conditions today are such that they also severely impair the autonomy of the family and the public sphere. Owing to the development of monopoly conditions, most individuals are now completely dependent for their survival on the often fickle largesse of the state and the economy. This has made it all the easier for public and private institutions and agencies to usurp the role the family once played as the primary agent of socialization. As the authority of experts and specialists replaces authority structures within the family, ego development suffers because individuals no longer acquire a degree of autonomy by measuring their strength against their parents through rebellion and resistance. The ego’s defenses against the instinctual forces of the id and the superego have become extremely weak. Ego weakness contributes to the marked increase in narcissistic pathologies that Adorno was among the first to diagnose; these pathologies are characterized by emotionally shallow and manipulative interpersonal relations, a diminished capacity for intimacy and social commitment, and fantasies of omnipotence – all of which are easily exploited by demagogues and political leaders.⁷⁴ Owing to the psychic economy of the reified and narcissistic personality, society “extends repressively into all psychology in the form of

74. See Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Warner Books, 1979).

ensorship and the superego.”⁷⁵ Regressive forms of solidarity have emerged in movements such as Nazism and neo-Nazism, where leaders attract followers by reanimating narcissistic superego introjects; these are formed in the image of “an omnipotent and unbridled father figure” that, bearing little or no resemblance to the individual’s real father, may be “enlarged into a ‘group ego.’”⁷⁶

Attempting to understand phenomena such as Nazism, Adorno found Freud’s work remarkably prescient.⁷⁷ In “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,” Freud had explained that, once individuals have identified with a leader, “what is heterogeneous is submerged in what is homogeneous” because the “mental superstructure, the development of which in individuals is so dissimilar,” is undermined “and the unconscious foundations, which are similar in everyone, stand exposed to view.”⁷⁸ As members of a group, individuals behave instinctually rather than according to their egocentric interests. Adorno also adopted Freud’s view that groups frequently act as a “negatively integrating force.” Negative emotions toward out-groups (Jews, blacks, communists, etc.) offer a narcissistic gain for followers of the in-group because they believe that “simply through belonging to the in-group,” they are “better, higher, and purer than those who are excluded.”⁷⁹ More generally, Adorno remarks that collective narcissism compensates for social powerlessness by enabling people to turn themselves “either in fact or imagination into members of something higher and more encompassing to which they attribute qualities which they themselves lack and from which they profit by vicarious participation.”⁸⁰

Whereas the family no longer serves as the primary agent for socialization, the public sphere fails to fulfill its role as “the most important medium of all politically effective criticism” because it has become so commodified that it currently “works against the critical principle in order to market itself.”⁸¹ Speaking about opinion formation in his 1960 lecture “Opinion Delusion Society,” Adorno also argues that public opinion is now imposed from above by “the overall structure of society and hence by relations of domination.”⁸² Opinions disseminated by

75. Theodor W. Adorno, “Sociology and Psychology,” Irving N. Wohlfarth (trans.), *New Left Review* 47 (January–February 1968), 79.

76. Adorno, “Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda,” 124.

77. “It is not an overstatement if we say that Freud, though he was hardly interested in the political phase of the problem, clearly foresaw the rise and nature of fascist mass movements in purely psychological categories” (*ibid.*, 120).

78. Sigmund Freud, “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,” in *The Penguin Freud Library, Vol. 12: Civilization, Society and Religion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 100.

79. Adorno, “Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda,” 130.

80. Theodor W. Adorno, “Theory of Pseudo-Culture,” Deborah Cook (trans.), *Telos* 95 (Spring 1993), 32–3.

81. Adorno, “Critique,” in *Critical Models*, 283.

82. Adorno, “Opinion Delusion Society,” in *Critical Models*, 121.

the privately owned culture industry merely reflect those of the economic and political elite: public opinion today is “indissolubly entangled” with particular interests in profit and power that only masquerade as universal.⁸³ Not only has truth been replaced by statistically generated opinions, but the public has lost the capacity for concerted reflection and self-reflection that is “required by a concept of truth.” Now a mere expression of prevailing opinions that reinforce the public’s narcissistic view that it is *au courant*, the average public opinion has become a fetish.⁸⁴ If the democratic principle of free speech, which includes “the right to propose, defend, and if possible successfully champion one’s own opinion, even when it is false, mad, disastrous,” presupposes a society that consists of “free, equal, and emancipated people,” it is currently the case that “society’s actual organization hinders all of that and produces and reproduces a condition of permanent regression among its subjects.”⁸⁵

This loss of individuality, autonomy, and freedom, which Adorno charts in all his work, can be traced to the surrender of the task of self-preservation to the welfare state and the capitalist economy. Acknowledging that this surrender was necessary to enable individuals to survive “in more highly developed social conditions,” Adorno nonetheless observes that Western societies now abstract from their living human substratum in their relentless pursuit of profit. Although necessary, the transfer of self-preservation to society has placed “the general rationality at odds with the particular human beings whom it must negate to become general, and whom it pretends – and not only pretends – to serve” (ND 318). To survive under capitalism, individuals are compelled to become the involuntary executors of the law of exchange (ND 312). As Simon Jarvis puts it in his introduction to Adorno’s work: “The more obvious it becomes that the economic basis of any individual’s life is liable to annihilation, and the more real economic initiative is concentrated with the concentration of capital, the more the individual seeks to identify with and adapt to capital.” To this Jarvis adds a chilling note: “For capital, however, the individual’s self-preservation is not in itself a matter of any importance.”⁸⁶

Adorno complains that even reflective people capable of criticizing society often have little choice but “to make an alien cause their own” (ND 311). But the vast majority of individuals remain the unconscious and largely helpless pawns of an economic system that uses and abuses them with the sole aim of promoting its particular interests in profit and power. Once the “self-preserving function” of their egos was “split off from that of consciousness” and subordinated to

83. *Ibid.*, 117.

84. *Ibid.*, 114.

85. *Ibid.*, 119.

86. Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 83.

economic and political agents and institutions, their attempts to preserve themselves effectively “surrendered to irrationality.”⁸⁷ Now that individuals are wholly dependent on society for their survival, late capitalism is able to dispense with “the mediating agencies of ego and individuality,” which it had originally fostered under the earlier stage of liberal capitalism. It thereby arrests “all differentiation,” while exploiting “the primitive core of the unconscious.”⁸⁸ Substantially weakened, few can resist the manipulation and exploitation of their instinctual drives.

Openly conceding that he was exaggerating the “somber side” of our contemporary predicament,⁸⁹ Adorno was attempting to describe objective tendencies in the West where “the immense concentration of economical and administrative power leaves the individual no more room to maneuver,” that is, where “the structure of such a society tends toward totalitarian forms of domination.”⁹⁰ Yet he did not believe that individuals were doomed to remain oblivious to the ways in which they perpetuate their own powerlessness. Although survival instincts have led human beings to do destructive things both to themselves and to the nature on which their very survival depends, things might have gone, and may yet go, differently. It may still be possible to direct self-preservation consciously to the goal that it implicitly contains: the preservation of the species as a whole. In fact, Adorno argues that reason “should not be anything less than self-preservation, namely that of the species, upon which the survival of each individual literally depends.”⁹¹ Reason can never be “split off from self-preservation,” not only because it owes its development to this drive but also, more emphatically, because the “preservation of humanity is inexorably inscribed within the meaning of rationality.” Self-preservation “has its end in a reasonable organization of society,”⁹² a society that would orient itself to the goal of preserving its subjects “according to their unfettered potentialities.”⁹³

EPILOGUE

The goal of establishing a rational society that will preserve and enhance the lives of every one of its members without exception was championed by all first

87. Theodor W. Adorno, “Sociology and Psychology,” *New Left Review* 47 (January–February 1968), 88; translation modified.

88. *Ibid.*, 95.

89. Adorno, “The Meaning of Working Through the Past,” in *Critical Models*, 99.

90. Adorno, “Discussion of Professor Adorno’s Lecture ‘The Meaning of Working Through the Past,’” in *Critical Models*, 298.

91. Adorno, “Marginalia to Theory and Praxis,” in *Critical Models*, 273.

92. *Ibid.*, 272.

93. *Ibid.*, 272–3.

generation critical theorists. Horkheimer and Adorno thought that this goal was currently within reach. Advancing a point that Marcuse also made in *One-Dimensional Man*, Adorno claims that “technical forces of production are at a stage that makes it possible to foresee the global dispensation from material labor, its reduction to a limiting value.”⁹⁴ If it was once necessary to “struggle against the pleasure principle for the sake of one’s own self-preservation,” it is now the case that labor can be reduced to a minimum and need no longer be tied to self-denial.⁹⁵ Adorno repeats this point in *Negative Dialectics*: the state of productive forces is currently such that much of our labor is superfluous. Consequently, “models of conduct which were formerly rational” have long since become “outdated.” Impelled by survival imperatives that continue to demand the sacrifice of internal nature and the domination of external nature even after technology has made self-preservation easy, the logic of history is logical no longer (ND 349).

To be sure, capitalism now appears to be second nature; it seems to have evolved naturally, and therefore to be unchangeable. Nevertheless this appearance is illusory because, as Adorno puts it, “[t]he rigidified institutions, the relations of production are not Being as such, but even in their omnipotence they are man-made and revocable.”⁹⁶ That Marx’s reference to the “natural laws” of capitalism should not be taken literally is “confirmed by the strongest motive behind all Marxist theory: that those laws can be abolished” (ND 355). Necessity in history must be recognized as “realized appearance,” and historical determination as “metaphysical accident.” On a more heuristic note, Adorno adds:

Only if things might have gone differently; if the totality is recognized as socially necessary semblance, as the hypostasis of the universal pressed out of individual human beings; if its claim to be absolute is broken – only then will a critical social consciousness retain its freedom to think that things might be different some day.

(ND 323)

The legacy of first generation critical theory lies not only in its diagnosis of conditions under which individual freedom and autonomy have been substantially undermined, but in its sustained defense of the need to envisage conditions that are fundamentally different from and better than these. Whereas second and third generation critical theorists, such as Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth,⁹⁷

94. *Ibid.*, 267.

95. *Ibid.*, 262.

96. Adorno, “Progress,” in *Critical Models*, 156.

*97. Habermas’s work is discussed in more detail in an essay by Christopher F. Zurn in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 6*. Honneth is discussed in Amy Allen’s essay on the third

have largely been content to promote the reform of existing economic, political and social institutions, their predecessors were far more radical: they wanted to overcome capitalism, along with the pseudo-democratic institutions and procedures that prop it up. Although they have certainly been criticized for failing to provide a blueprint for radical social change, Horkheimer and Adorno were convinced that such change was needed in order to foster the reconciliation of the individual and society that would enable individuals to develop freely outside economic constraints that have become as unnecessary as they are irrational. They were also convinced that critical reflection on our current predicament is the first step towards emancipation. Modifying Spinoza's claim that all determination is negation, Adorno declares that "the false, once determinately known and precisely expressed, is already an index of what is right and better."⁹⁸ To acquire a sense of what a more rational society might look like, we need to have a thorough grasp of the irrational conditions that continue to fetter us.

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4

WALTER BENJAMIN

James McFarland

Although Walter Benjamin¹ was recognized during his lifetime as one of the most adventurous and penetrating thinkers of the Weimar period in German cultural history, his career was marked by poverty, exile, and disappointment. His ideal intellectual position would have been the completely autonomous critical metropolitan engagement embodied by Karl Kraus² and his journal *Die Fackel* in Vienna, but his various attempts to institute a periodical of his own were unsuccessful. He worked at the margins of German academic philology, Brecht's political theater, the Institute for Social Research in its prewar incarnations, and was primarily a contributor on cultural matters to ephemeral German and French left-wing feuilletons. Setting aside his translations of Baudelaire and Proust, he was able to see only three of his books into print, and his magnum opus, the *Arcades Project*, remained a collection of obscure notes hidden in the national library in Paris when Hitler's advancing armies pushed Benjamin to suicide on the Spanish border.

And yet in the decades since his death in 1940, his reflections on the melancholy tenor of allegory, the emancipatory potential of anachronism, the political

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1. Walter Benjamin (July 15, 1892–September 26, 1940; born in Berlin, Germany; died in Port Bou, Spain) was educated at Albert-Ludwigs-Universität zu Freiburg/Br. (1912–13), Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, Berlin (1913–15), Ludwig-Maximilian-Universität, Munich (1915–16), and the University of Bern (1917–19). He wrote his dissertation at the University of Bern in 1919, and his habilitation was rejected by the University of Frankfurt am Main in 1925. His influences included Bergson, Brecht, Cohen, Kant, Kraus, and Lukács.
 2. Karl Kraus (1874–1936), poet, playwright and satirist, published his journal *Die Fackel* (The torch) in Vienna from 1899 to his death, for most of its run writing the entire publication himself. His satirical quotations of corrupt government officials and sycophantic journalists made *Die Fackel* a powerful and feared voice throughout the German-speaking world.

resilience of detritus, and the mnemonic dislocation of modernity have become touchstones of the contemporary intellectual landscape. His essay “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility” stands as a founding document of the discipline of media studies. The rehabilitation of allegory and fragmentation as signifying processes that he championed continues to inform deconstructive criticism in both Europe and America. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and the Frankfurt School’s cultural critique of the commodity form in late capitalism would be unimaginable without Benjamin’s theoretical inspiration. His notions of divine violence, bare life, and the inherent debility of sovereign authority nourish post-Soviet reflections on political theology by Giorgio Agamben, Jacob Taubes, and others. And beyond strictly theoretical discourse, in the music of Laurie Anderson³ or the architecture of Daniel Libeskind (whose Jewish Museum in Berlin reflects in its sixty broken sections the sixty shattered aphorisms of Benjamin’s *One Way Street*⁴), Benjamin’s writings continue to provoke a dizzying variety of responses. In paradoxical fashion, this peripatetic thinker of the scorned and the trivial at the end of civilization has come to preside in spirit over much of our contemporary theoretical self-awareness. By returning Benjamin’s multitudinous writings to the trajectory of his life as it unfolded, the following account does not aspire to reclaim an authoritative philosopher from even the most casual or outlandish appropriation of his work. The dispersed and discontinuous condition of his reception is far truer to Benjamin’s insights and their legacy than even the most careful and exhaustive paraphrase can be. Rather, a systematic reconstruction of Benjamin’s intellectual career is offered not as the conclusive explanation of its meaning but as a provisional renewal of the force of its emergence in service to subsequent encounters with the richness of his work by later readers, whose insights it cannot pretend to anticipate.

Walter Benjamin was born in 1892 in Berlin, Germany, the eldest son of Emil Benjamin, a prosperous antiquities dealer and auctioneer, and his wife, Pauline *née* Schoenflies. As the son of an assimilated Jewish *haute-bourgeois* family, Benjamin enjoyed a privileged education, taking his abitur in 1912 from the Kaiser-Friedrich-Schule in Charlottenburg, after having spent between 1905 and 1907 two academic years at the experimental *Landerziehungsheim* (rural residential school) in the tiny town of Haubinda, Thuringia. It was there that Benjamin first encountered the educational reformer Gustav Wyneken, who taught philosophy in Haubinda until 1906, when, in the midst of Benjamin’s

3. Laurie Anderson, “The Dream Before,” *Strange Angels* (sound recording) (Warner Brothers, 1989).

4. See Daniel Libeskind, “Between the Lines,” www.daniel-libeskind.com/projects/show-all/jewish-museum-berlin/ (accessed April 2010).

brief tenure, conflict with its founder forced him to leave. Wyneken's involuntary departure from the school interrupted any preliminary relationship with Benjamin, but his erstwhile pupil returned to the Kaiser-Friedrich-Schule a self-conscious representative of his teacher's reformist attitudes. Wyneken meanwhile went on to found the experimental Freie Schulgemeinde Wickersdorf (Wickersdorf Free School Community) to enact more directly his pedagogic theories.

Upon achieving his abitur, Benjamin left Berlin for Germany's Catholic south, enrolling in the Albert-Ludwigs Universität in Freiburg. The intellectual atmosphere in Freiburg was dominated by the neo-Kantian philosopher Heinrich Rickert and the historian Friedrich Meinecke, and Benjamin attended lectures by both men.⁵ But his interests, although intensely intellectual, were situated outside the lecture hall. He had soon become a prominent participant in the activism of the "Free Student Movement," an uncoordinated network of reform-minded groups poised against the traditional *Korporationen* or dueling fraternities of the German university system. Among the loose amalgamation of extra-curricular reform organizations was a "chapter" established the year before in sympathy with Wyneken and his Wickersdorf theories: the "Detachment for School Reform."⁶ This was the framework for Benjamin's thinking and writing in Freiburg throughout 1912, and continued to inform his sympathies when he returned to Berlin and enrolled in the Friedrich-Wilhelm-Universität late in 1913. In the months before the outbreak of the First World War, Benjamin moved back and forth between these universities, while consistently promoting the extracurricular Wickersdorf ideal, becoming one of the most prominent student activists of his day.

In later years, Benjamin would disavow the intellectual vacuity of the ante-bellum Youth Movement debates, and his later friends and eventual biographers have tended to share that assessment. But a scornful attitude toward the substantive goals of Youth Movement organizations – toward their shrill commitments to abstinence, coeducation, or Zionism, not to mention the darker nationalistic and anti-Semitic tendencies metastasizing through them – was in fact central to Benjamin's peculiar activism at the time, so his later disavowal is less straightforward than it might at first seem. Benjamin's involvement in the "Detachment for School Reform" throughout his student years was unconditionally emphatic, but his understanding of "Youth," the ideal for which he campaigned, was vested

*5. For a discussion of Rickert's philosophy, see the essay on neo-Kantianism by Sebastian Luft and Fabien Capeillères in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 3*.

6. Although the group abjured any overt confessional identity, a large percentage of its members were Jewish, despite Wyneken's own lack of interest in Jewish influences in German society (a lack of interest that would in turn offer his opportunism little moral resistance, despite his broadly left-wing political sympathies, when the Nazis came to power).

in such a generalized antithetical attitude toward the mature society and its recognized culture that any practical consequences of his efforts were difficult to distinguish from disengagement. “This constantly vibrating feeling for the abstractness of pure spirit is what I call Youth,” Benjamin wrote to his friend Carla Seligson in 1913. “For only then (if we don’t want to become mere workers for a movement) when we keep our view clear to perceive spirit wherever it may be, will we become those who realize it. Almost everyone forgets that *they themselves* are the site where spirit realizes itself.”⁷ Important for Benjamin were not the specific pedagogic recommendations implied by Wyneken’s theories, such as the prefect system or an emphasis on music education, but rather the confrontational attitude that Wyneken himself exemplified toward preexisting pedagogic frameworks. What Benjamin called “Youth” simply *was* this antithetical posture, logically prior to any objective issue that might occasion it, and so potentially conditioning any issue whatsoever. In lieu of a common object of concern that would define a movement externally, Benjamin’s activism aspired to the mutual recognition of those sharing that “youthful” posture as the precondition to an unspecific cultural renewal. The practical result was not a policy or program but a *site* in which programs and policies were already in contention: the *Sprechsaal*, or “discussion forum” he founded in Berlin.

What Benjamin would later recognize, and what would sever his mature thought irrevocably from this initial foray into cultural politics, was that a site from which such an unconditional critique of culture can be conducted never simply appears in the society as a specific condition, such as youth, or a specific locale, a *Sprechsaal*. Rather, such *topoi* are entirely unpredictable and tangential, “the most endangered, excoriated and ridiculed creations and thoughts embedded deeply in every present,” as he would say in his eventual farewell to the Youth Culture Movement, “The Life of Students.”⁸ Far from being an autonomous venue in which an ideal receptivity could reinterpret its entire social and cultural inheritance, the actual *Sprechsaal* was conditioned by all the moral inexperience and class myopia that characterized its attendees, and hence was intellectually irredeemable; this Benjamin would later insist on. But a receptive posture so sensitive to the elided authority of the past that it acts in the present as an example itself, and an attitude toward the contemporary world so antithetical

7. Walter Benjamin, letter to Carla Seligson, September 15, 1913, in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin, 1910–1940*, Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno (eds and annotated), Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (trans.) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 55; published in German in *Gesammelte Briefe*, edited by Christoph Gödde and Henri Lonitz (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1995–2000), vol. 1, 175.

8. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (eds) (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1977–92), vol. 2, 75; *Selected Writings*, Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (eds) (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1996–2003), vol. 1, 37.

to its collective evaluations that only a postponed transparency suspended in a permanent future perfect will have been able to recognize it: these recognitive, demonstrative, and anticipatory orientations remain fundamental to Benjamin's thought until the end.

In August 1914, twin catastrophes destroyed the context of Benjamin's student activism and catapulted him into his adult career. Germany plunged into the Great War with a flurry of martial enthusiasm that left Benjamin entirely cold but swept up Wyneken, alienating him from his leading disciple. Almost simultaneously, Benjamin's close friends Fritz Heinle and Rika Seligson committed suicide together in the Berlin *Sprechsaal* that had been the locus of their reformist efforts. The disaster destroyed both the masculine and the feminine paradigms of a "youthful" interlocutor and obliterated the site of conversation. Whatever the biographical or psychological repercussions of these events might have been, the theoretical shock explodes the elements of his youthful theorizing and starts Benjamin's efforts on their mature trajectory. And this is the fourth aspect of enduring relevance in Benjamin's youthful experience, along with the receptive position, demonstrative posture, and anticipatory attitude: thought, for Benjamin, unfolds always against the alternative of self-destruction.

I

With the *Sprechsaal* obliterated and the society it sought to reform plunged into war, Benjamin left Berlin for Munich and the Ludwig-Maximilian-Universität, and eventually concluded his studies in neutral Switzerland, at the University of Bern. During this time, he met his lifelong close friend the Cabbala scholar Gershom Scholem, and associated with various exiled artists and intellectuals, including the Dadaist Hugo Ball and his wife Emmy Hennings. As a scholar, he researched early German Romanticism, the writings of Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel, about which he would write his dissertation after the war, as well as the history of German drama, which would inform his central theoretical work, the *Origin of German Trauerspiel*. In addition to this philological orientation, Benjamin also subjected the literary canon to more personal and impassioned critiques in essays on Hölderlin, Dostoevsky, and Goethe. And he produced a number of dense hermetic reflections that not only provided a persistent orientation for his own further theoretical work but, in the decades since their formulation, have proved to be inexhaustible stimuli for subsequent theorists as well. Although Benjamin never aspired to articulate a philosophical system, the coherence of these texts founds the undeniable concinnity in his subsequent views across the remarkable variety of his cultural interests.

At the origin of Benjamin's thinking is an unyielding skepticism toward any supposed process of mediation. The topic is already central to his dissertation on the *Concept of Art Criticism in German Romanticism*. That treatise is organized around a derivation of what Benjamin calls the "Reflexionsmedium," or medium of reflection. A commitment to such a medium defines early Romanticism. The notion, if not the term itself, is illustrated, so Benjamin claims, by Fichte's metaphysics, which posits a subjective moment, the "I," through which all objectivity, the "Not-I," is necessarily mediated. What the early Romantics retained from this schema was not – despite the usual interpretation – its irreducible first-person subjectivity but the priority in it of active reflection over passive awareness. It is this activity and not the first-person orientation that Romanticism generalizes, and Fichte's concrete "I" becomes the abstraction of an active self. "The Romantics start from mere thinking-oneself, as a phenomenon; this is proper to everything, for everything is a self."⁹ Within this reflective process, an object is understood to be the unending potential to exhibit comprehensible form along a trajectory toward the infinite Absolute. An unlocalized reflective activity ends by constituting, so Benjamin thought, its unachievable Absolute not in an ideal identity of subject and object at the site of the subject, but as latently endless mediation at the site of the object. "In itself one would designate this Absolute most correctly as the medium of reflection Reflection constitutes the Absolute, and constitutes it as a medium."¹⁰ This mediating Absolute is what Romanticism means by art, and particular artworks are consequent centers of reflection in which this prior absolute self-relation comes to itself for us and we to ourselves for it.

This Romantic idea of a continuously self-reflecting medium within which individual artworks gesture toward an infinite philosophical truth is the inverse of Benjamin's own developing perspective on the relation between art and truth. In an appendix to the dissertation that he did not submit for the degree, Benjamin uses Goethe's aesthetic theory as a contrast that clarifies his own differences from this Romantic position he had just described. The idea of an infinite Absolute that mediates works of art is tantamount to the conflation of artistic and speculative expression under the common rubric of form. The meaning of an artwork, beyond its mere perceptibility, opens directly on to the process of its formal comprehension: this is what Benjamin means when he claims that the Romantic "idea of art" is "the a priori of a method." By contrast, Goethe's understanding of the artwork, and by extension Benjamin's own, relates it to a substantive ideal, "the a priori of a ... content." The ideal Goethe discerns in art is not an abstractly continuous formal process but a

9. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, 29; *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 128.

10. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, 36–7; *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 132.

discontinuous arrangement of concrete achievements. It “is not a medium that shelters in itself and builds out of itself the context of forms, but a unity of a different sort. It can be grasped only in a limited plurality of pure contents, into which it decomposes.”¹¹

The traditional plurality of the Muses suggests the irreducible plurality of these pure contents; Goethe calls them “primal images” (*Urbilder*). Like his hypothesis of the Ur-plant, a discrete botanical species the stages of whose life cycle would manifest directly the process common to vegetation in all its diversity, Goethe’s ideal of art distributed into primal images relates artworks substantively to a truth essentially distinct from them and resident in the shared world with which they contrast. Inasmuch as it opposes the conceptual mediation of aesthetic form with this indirect apprehension of historical truth, the position Benjamin attributes to Goethe is essentially his own. Benjamin, too, denies any objectively continuous medium that would guarantee the intact transmission of a durable abstract significance inscribed into the individual artifact. Rather, the artifacts themselves despite their ultimate impermanence and diversity have a logical priority over any abstract continuum. The permanent meaning of an artwork is not borne explicitly by its enduring content but inhabits the vicissitudes of its historical testimony as artifact; what matters is not the “spell,” as Benjamin calls it, of aesthetic artifice, but the contrast between that spell and the changing circumstances into which it is cast.

This means that ultimately, despite his critical focus on works of art, Benjamin is a historian and not an aesthete. The work of art is of interest not for its own sake but because it permits the indirect perception of a discontinuous *historical* counter-truth that the continuities of explicit historical traditions otherwise necessarily overwrite. The constant reference to the author’s name in the titles of Benjamin’s critical essays from this time is symptomatic of this perspective: “Two Poems by Friedrich Hölderlin” (1915); “Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot*” (1917); “Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*” (1922). The work does not appear alone but in the company of the transient human life against which it arose, and if its interpretation involves an imaginative projection into that prior authorial posture in all its estrangement from present concerns, this is only in order to relate that posture historically to a reimagined now-time. Benjamin captures this disillusioning theoretical movement in his correlated distinctions between *material content* and *truth content*, *commentary* and *critique*. The work is read scrupulously in order to reconstruct that original substantive statement in its material content; this is commentary, the enduring affinity of Benjamin’s literary theory with philological discipline. But the truth the work provides appears as the ability of that latent content to manifest a neglected urgency in the present. Discerning this truth content in the

11. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, 111; *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 179.

present is critique. Where the historical circumstances fixed by commentary and the eventual significance produced by critique have diverged sufficiently through time, philology is the science that governs the reconstruction of their relation. But even where no historical distance pertains in the intellectual engagement with contemporaries, the urgency of the critical present encounters a dispassionate positivist deference to the object; a material content becomes the occasion for an entirely heterogeneous truth content. Benjamin's philological essays on Dostoevsky, Hölderlin, and Goethe from this early period thus anticipate the dislocated portraits of his contemporaries Marcel Proust, Karl Kraus, and Franz Kafka through which Benjamin would triangulate his own mature position in the early 1930s. More generally, Benjamin's interpretive sensitivity to historical discontinuity and his theoretical commitment to truth's irreducible plurality have meant that his writings have resonated powerfully with many subsequent nontraditional approaches to culture in the post-Second World War world.

In addition to the academic work and the more personal literary essays, Benjamin was also writing explicitly philosophical articulations of his position. If his academic disquisition and his literary-historical critique pursue strategies of indirection, so too do these hermetic writings. Such early statements as "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" from 1916 or "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy" from the following year do not employ traditional forms of philosophical argument, with hypotheses ventured and defended against possible objections. Their rhetoric is categorical and apodictic, invoking overtly metaphysical and theological concepts to which it seems assent is simply expected. For the most part they circulated privately and operated in part as probes for a receptive consensus that has sometimes appeared to later readers as dogmatic. But this appearance of dogmatism is deceptive, and these writings do not fall outside the skepticism that defines Enlightenment discourse. The assertoric character of Benjamin's exposition and his recourse to exegetical techniques are all in the service of a radically disillusioning interrogation of received philosophical notions.

As in the dissertation, a principle of mediating continuity is consistently at issue in these early essays. Whether communicative language in "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," the neo-Kantian notion of the formal limits of experience in "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy," or the causal nexus in "Fate and Character" (1919), in each case Benjamin's expository strategy – his signature dialectical trope – is to confront a mediating continuity with a qualitative interruption. Thus, "bourgeois" human language as a medium of communication is disrupted by an utterly heterogeneous dimension in which Being as figured by God's creative *Logos* (i.e. "language as such") encounters human ontological openness as figured by Adam's responsive naming (i.e. the "language of man"). The program of the coming philosophy will be to

overcome the neo-Kantian equation between the formal limits of experience and the knowledge mediated by physical science with an alternative experience whose truth rests in something beyond the continuous synthesis performed by a scientific subject on a persistent natural object. And in “Fate and Character,” the intuition that the causal nexus could comprehensibly link a moral life to its natural circumstances is supplanted by an oblique perspective that sees the natural continuity of life already as a fatal imbrication of tragic conditions, the impersonal guilt-unto-death once typified in the Athenian theater, whose interruption is promised, perhaps, by the comedic fixity of human character as it appears on Molière’s stage.

II

With his dissertation behind him, Benjamin spent several productive months in Heidelberg, where he associated with the circle around Marianne Weber, the widow of Max Weber, a circle that included at various times Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, and Scholem. The naive dream of the *Sprechsaal* re-emerged in the far more sophisticated and promising shape of a critical journal, to be called *Angelus Novus* after the watercolor by Paul Klee which Benjamin had recently acquired, and which would eventually inform one of his most famous texts, the ninth aphorism in “On the Concept of History,” describing the angel of history. In the unstable economic atmosphere of Weimar Germany, the journal was never realized, but the exemplary independence it promised guided Benjamin’s engagement with political theory. He read carefully Ernst Bloch’s *Spirit of Utopia*, Franz Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption*, and Georg Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness*.

During this time Benjamin composed the difficult text on “The Task of the Translator” as well as the enigmatic fragments on “Capitalism as Religion” and on the relation of messianic to profane history, the so-called “Theological-Political Fragment.”¹² The task of the translator, Benjamin suggests, is not simply mediating between idioms but lies in arranging the very plurality of languages so that they resonate with the absence of an ultimate perfect communication, what Benjamin calls the “pure language.” “Capitalism as Religion” adopts Max

12. The dating of this fragment remains controversial. Graphological evidence from the manuscript is inconclusive, and Benjamin’s executors, Scholem and Adorno, differed as to whether it was a late or an early text. On the strength primarily of the reference to Bloch’s *Spirit of Utopia*, which Benjamin is known to have been studying at this time, Scholem dated the fragment to 1920–21, while on the strength of its explicit messianism and reference to happiness, both of which find an echo in the second aphorism in “On the Concept of History” of 1940, Adorno thought the text clearly a late one.

Weber's vocabulary to envision a specifically capitalist experience as a type of religious ritual stripped of both dogmatic authority and redemptive promise, a perpetual ceremony bestowing on its practitioners not salvation but a relentless indebtedness and guilt, or *Schuld*. Even in the ideologically diverse environment of Weimar Germany, these reflections on authority and history, couched in a theological terminology that places them beyond any localized partisan commitments, cannot be easily situated on a political spectrum. Rather, what characterizes them is their uncompromising extremism. Perhaps the epitome of that extremism is caught by the "Theological-Political Fragment," where, under the sign of "nihilism," the very self-destructiveness of happiness as such is embraced in order to solicit indirectly a Messianic transformation of the world. Benjamin would never mitigate this extremism, even as his relation to Europe's accelerating political collapse grew more self-conscious and tactical. Until the end of his life his political credo remained: "*immer radikal, niemals konsequent*," "always radical, never consistent," as he put it in a letter to Scholem.¹³

Benjamin's most overtly political text from this time is "The Critique of Violence," a daring synthesis of the anarchist-socialist Georges Sorel, whose *Réflexions sur la Violence* advocated "mythic violence" in the shape of the general strike, and the Catholic conservative Carl Schmitt, whose *Politische Theologie* linked sovereignty to legal exception and thus set limits to the justifiability of public authority. Benjamin's ideologically unclassifiable text further demonstrates his radicalism, and has garnered increasing attention as postwar ideological categories have seemed to lose their historical relevance. In Benjamin's essay, violence – his term is *Gewalt*, a word whose meaning includes more generally force or coercion – is congruent with the notion of *means* in a political context. A critique of violence thus calls into question the intentional means–ends schema that renders human action rationally comprehensible. Independently of its role as the effective means for realizing reasonable ends, Benjamin maintains that public violence exerts an irrational fascination that testifies to its mythic origins. Benjamin analyzes this mythic power, through which violence appears clothed in the inevitability of fate, into lawmaking and law-preserving violence, the former evident in military conquest and the latter in judicial punishment. These aspects of violence exist in dialectical tension, for law-preserving violence claims to be the legitimate continuation of the lawmaking violence that inaugurated it but that inevitably provokes an antagonistic lawmaking violence in reaction to its authoritative exercise. The mythic closure of this dialectic of violence could be interrupted only by violence of a totally different kind, a *Gewalt* that

13. Walter Benjamin, letter to Scholem, May 29, 1926, in *Gesammelte Briefe*, vol. 3, 159; *Correspondence*, 300.

overwhelms the instrumentality of law entirely and points toward an unprecedented social transformation. Benjamin calls this messianic notion “divine” violence, and how much it would look like the fascinating violence unleashed by wars and revolutions and deployed by policemen and executioners remains a point of interpretive contention.

Goethe, as well, continued to organize Benjamin’s theoretical work. The elaborate consideration of Goethe’s late novel *The Elective Affinities* dominates Benjamin’s writing in the first years of the 1920s. His long three-part essay uses Goethe’s tale of marital abdication and intertwined adulteries in service to a general characterization of the relation of life to appearance. The philosophical ambitions of the essay thus reach far beyond the meaning of a single literary work, whose role in the overall exposition is to exemplify the appearance with which actual human life in its mortal extremity contrasts. This essay represents the most densely imagined version of Benjamin’s dialectical critical method, drawn up at the outset of his mature career, and its methodological and thematic exemplarity justifies a slightly more detailed consideration.

As Benjamin reads it, Goethe’s novel has a material content anchored in its mortal origin, the historical circumstances from which it emerged, that can potentially reveal a consequent truth content to the moment of its surviving reception. Those original circumstances Benjamin identifies with the Enlightenment: Goethe’s novel appears at a historical moment singularly dismissive of supernatural traditions and with a particularly defiant attitude toward the superhuman forces that condition human life. Those superhuman forces in their relation to individual choice – the chemical metaphor of the title – is the material content of *The Elective Affinities*; Benjamin names this material content the Mythic. Despite the absence of anything overtly supernatural in Goethe’s story, a mythic condemnation pushes the emancipated spouses toward their eventual destruction beyond their hedonistic inclinations and rational agreements. Not the individual lovers but the superhuman forces on which they depend are in fact emancipated by the collapse of the marriage vow that had banned them, and those forces reveal their mythic nature in the inevitability of the death that they demand. This is the meaning of *The Elective Affinities* taken on its own. A material content, *mythic sanction*, reveals a truth content, *the inevitability of death*. In Benjamin’s reading, the significance of the novel verges on nihilism.

Yet the novel does not have the last word in the essay. Having produced in its first, philological section this somber literary acknowledgement of the limits of Enlightenment humanism, the second and third sections of Benjamin’s exposition confront this bleak vision with its vital antithesis. A novel as an aesthetic artifact is something other than a human life. Although both are historical phenomena, and so can be understood to have a material content and a truth

content, this does not mean that these material and truth contents are the same in both cases. If they were, if the material content of life were also mythic sanction, then the truth content of life would be the inevitability of death, as well. But if the material content of life were something other than subordination to the superhuman, then the truth content of life would be something other than inevitable death. This would mean, in short, that there is hope. This is the point of the second, existential section of Benjamin's essay: to show that the material content of life is something other than the material content of the artwork. These material contents are different because art is circumscribed by appearance, *Schein*, while life at least potentially can exceed what it appears to be.

In order to demonstrate this difference, Benjamin aligns human life not with an apparent element in *The Elective Affinities* but rather with an expressive discrepancy between episodes: the contrast between the action of the novel and the fairy tale "the Miraculous Neighbor Children" that it contains. The unrepresentable difference between life and art finds an analogy in the difference between the realistic narrative of a marriage surrendering to amorous passion and the embedded fabulous love story. The material content of human life, and so its potential truth content, is reflected from outside the artifact back into it as a contrast between its figures and the figures of the fable. This is ultimately a contrast between duplicitous choices and irrevocable decision. The fairy tale shows us a pure decision: the miraculous neighbor children's self-sacrificial leap for love into the surging water from which they are then rescued. This contrasts with the ambiguous choices made by the characters in the novel that lead eventually to the drowning of the infant from Eduard and Charlotte's hollow marriage. Both sets of figures are motivated by passionate love, but the miraculous children reach a redemptive, pure act of decision that breaks with the mortal world, while the novel's figures make choices on the basis of inclinations that bind them ever more completely to the world. The space between a pure act of decision from love and ambiguous choices from passion is the living space within which a material content is manifested. This space is governed not by representations but by its potential to host a pure decision, a fundamental interruption. The novel makes room for this possibility by opening a space between representable choices (the novel itself) and the artificial presentation of a pure act (the embedded fairy tale). Outside the artifice of a fable, such a pure decision is silent; its very purity precluding its *Schein* or manifest appearance, leaving it nothing but its truth. The truth content of human life appears when its material content is understood as pure decision, and it appears only paradoxically, in what Benjamin calls the "expressionless," the silent epitome of expression. The final section of the essay traces, in the consequent renunciation and fatal expiration of the beautiful Otilie after the child in her care has drowned, the extinction of philosophical appearance in its relation to truth. Truth never appears; it only occurs.

III

Benjamin's efforts to secure an academic post in Germany, although eventually unsuccessful, did produce his most fully realized theoretical statement, *The Origin of German Trauerspiel* of 1925. This treatise takes as its topic a relatively obscure literary object, *Trauerspiel*, the highly stylized allegorical dramas written in Catholic Germany in the seventeenth century, in the wake of the devastating Thirty Years War. In examining these Baroque plays with their unmotivated characters, extreme plots, and stilted allegorical interludes, Benjamin is not attempting to discover an overlooked aesthetic competence in them. Rather, precisely by relating their representational eccentricities to the political atmosphere in which they arose, Benjamin discerns in the discontinuities of these works an index of historical crisis that has once again become legible in modernity.

The treatise has two main sections: the first half sharply distinguishes *Trauerspiel* as an aesthetic object from the Greek tragedies whose traditional continuation their authors imagined them to be,¹⁴ while the second rehabilitates the signifying processes of allegory. Benjamin's theory of tragedy, which draws on Lukács and Rosenzweig as well as the work of his friend Florens Christian Rang, emphasizes the parallels between Greek theater and the Greek judicial court. The tragic hero stands accused of mythic transgression, and his response culminates in a defiant silence-unto-death that demonstrates his superiority to the powers that destroy him and allows him to exemplify a new and better community. But this tragic silence can appear on stage only in the uniquely propitious circumstances of Periclean Athens, for the elements from which it was composed – myth, hero, sacrifice – have never again arisen in comparable purity. What *Trauerspiel*, by contrast, demonstrates is the impossibility of a successful foundation of collective meaning. For, ideally, the poets of the German Baroque, like their Athenian predecessors, also wanted to redeem their shattered world in the light of a recognizable heroic sacrifice. But the world in which they worked could not in fact be made whole, and in their attempts to accommodate this blasted environment the dramatists were pushed out of the self-evidence of mythic conflict and sacrifice, and into artificial apparatuses of plot intrigue, overdetermined props, and most symptomatically, allegorical willfulness.

The second part of Benjamin's treatise is thus a re-examination of allegory as a method of signification. In contrast to the Romantic symbol, in which Benjamin

14. The centrality of this distinction to Benjamin's exposition makes John Osborne's English translation of the title, *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, untenable. Translating the treatise remains a heroic achievement, but the irreducible point of the entire book is that *Trauerspiel* is not tragic drama.

sees a disingenuous appropriation of religious dogma to resolve representational aporias, allegory acknowledges its discontinuous artifice and consequent dependence on an anticipated audience. The audience for *Trauerspiel* was not simply anyone, but the *Traurige*, the melancholy. “For these are not so much plays which cause grief [*Trauer*], as plays through which grief finds its satisfaction: plays for the melancholy [*Spiele vor Traurigen*].”¹⁵ The historical relevance of *Trauerspiel* is mediated to the present by the melancholy indigenous both to the Baroque and to today, an affinity that appears in the spark of comprehension struck by the sharp conjunction of the stilted, anachronistic citations with Benjamin’s theoretical prose. Eventually it is this melancholy attitude that can realize in the allegorical skull upon Golgotha the ephemeral truth borne by the very experience of semantic collapse: “The bleak confusion of Golgotha ... is not just a symbol of the desolation of human existence. In it transitoriness is not signified or allegorically represented, so much as, in its own significance, displayed as allegory.”¹⁶ This shift between representation and display, from communicating allegorical content to showing in itself the ultimate impermanence of any meaning, is the redemptive pivot that melancholic concentration performs within the allegorical emblem.

As a contribution to German philology, *The Origin of German Trauerspiel*, like Benjamin’s dissertation on the concept of art criticism in German Romanticism, has proved its scholarly value. But the treatise has exerted influence far beyond those concerned with questions of Baroque allegory in its middle-European context. This is in part the result of Benjamin’s existential generalization of the significance of allegorical tropes, as well as the incidental theories of sovereignty, tragedy, performance, melancholy, and natural history that emerge from his exposition. Nor should the aphoristic beauty and audacity of Benjamin’s style be underestimated in accounting for the book’s appeal. The virtues and frustrations of this elliptical and analogical expression are nowhere more in evidence than in the philosophical essay with which Benjamin introduced the treatise, the “Epistemo-critical Foreword.” The dense initial twelve paragraphs of this prefatory text are one of Benjamin’s most resonant discussions, although the exact nature of the claims he puts forth and the exact extent of his investment in the overtly idealist terminology in which they are couched remain contentious. The difficulties, despite appearances, lie less in any willful obscurity on Benjamin’s part and more in the consequent extremity of the position he is advocating. For the “epistemo-critical” foreword is not a critical epistemology but a critique of epistemology and its governing assumption: the possibility of human

15. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, 119; *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, John Osborne (trans.) (London: Verso, 1977), 298.

16. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, 232; *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 405–6.

knowledge. Just as the earlier theory of language in “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man” used an emphatic notion of superhuman presentation passing obliquely through human words in order to subvert our ordinary notion of language as a communicative medium, so here the foreword subverts the notion of knowable truth by contrasting it with a more emphatic truth of pure presentation latently situated beyond the intentions embodied in works of art, as their independent relation to eternal ideas. It is the paradoxical proximity of the philological reconstruction of forgotten textual content to a skeptical truth beyond representation that has lent Benjamin’s treatise its enduring fascination.

The Origin of German Trauerspiel is the culmination of Benjamin’s early efforts toward as direct an articulation of his concerns as possible. The foreword is the point at which the possibility of explicit communication passes into the necessity of implication. After this, the implicit significance of Benjamin’s writing takes ever more precedence over its explicit content. And even here, what can be explicitly stated is ultimately nothing but the negative impress of genuine insight. Operating on a boundary with expressive nihilism, the treatise could hardly have been acceptable to the academic standards of Benjamin’s day. This is something Benjamin seems to have anticipated, and his ambivalence about formal scholarship is reflected in the alternative book that he published along with *The Origin of German Trauerspiel*. On the Mediterranean island of Capri where Benjamin was working on his habilitation, he was also composing a series of brief aphorisms and reflections, a form Adorno would come to call the “thought-image,” with his close friends and associates in mind. These were the formal antithesis of continuous scholarly discourse, and when gathered together they would become his second book, *One Way Street*, published within weeks of *The Origin of German Trauerspiel*.

IV

An avant-garde text that challenges the very form of the book itself, *One Way Street* testifies to Benjamin’s increasingly radical perspective on the experience of modernity, and on the rhetorical sensitivity called for in addressing it.¹⁷ Sixty short texts ranging from accounts of dreams to descriptions of children’s

17. Michael W. Jennings has shown that the relation of *One Way Street* to aesthetic avant-garde movements of the time, in particular to Russian constructivism and German Dada, was by no means accidental but reflected at least to some extent Benjamin’s involvement with Hans Richter and the “G-Group,” and its publication *G. Zeitschrift für elementare Gestaltung*. See Michael W. Jennings, “Walter Benjamin and the European Avant-garde,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*, David S. Ferris (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

behavior to lists of similarities between books and prostitutes are coordinated with headings drawn from everyday placards and signs of the modern metropolis. For all its modernist polish, *One Way Street* demonstrates a challenge to theoretical expression whose implications could not be contained by a concept of the “work.” In the closely linked notions of the *Denkbild*, the linguistic thought-image, and the conceptual operation it registers, *Dialektik im Stillstand*, dialectics at a standstill, Benjamin discerned a basic methodological constraint on contemporary speculation: the limit-figure of a “dialectical image.”

The vast research project on the Parisian arcades, whose preliminary texts date from this time, pursues through this figure its aim of promoting into a tenuous if resilient visibility potential alternative conceptual affinities, an “Ur-history” of superhuman influences whose traces have been extinguished by the human history informing the bourgeois present in its self-evidence. As a principle of linguistic composition, the thought-image contrasts with the studied aphorism and the accidental fragment. It governs not only those texts Benjamin explicitly labeled “thought-images”¹⁸ but such varied discussions as the autobiographical *Berlin Childhood around 1900* or “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility” owe their presentational rhythm to this principle of lyrical concentration and abrupt transition. The disruptive effect on settled habits of thought these thought-images are meant to bring about has at its vanishing point the dialectical image itself. The language of the thought-image is meant to respond to a dialectical contradiction inscribed in the world. The figure in which two heterogeneous temporalities intersect is dialectical. The *flâneur* drifting idly across the surface of the industrious city, the child at play among the ruins of adult enterprise, the conspirator scheming toward the eventual destruction of established order – these figures assemble around themselves the dialectical energies unleashed by the incompatible temporal perspectives they embody, the trespass of forgotten past or alternative future into present self-evidence and automatism. These marginal figures are the dialectical shepherds in the artificial arcadia of Benjamin’s Parisian arcades. The “static dialectic” they bring into focus continues to refract the *now* into discontinuous constellations with the *then* as it proceeds down the inconceivable continuity of time. Discerning those particular constellations that appear across the specious sheen of the nineteenth-century Parisian commercial arcades in their ephemeral pomposity was the project that came to guide all of Benjamin’s explorations through and reflections on the experience of modern disintegration.

One Way Street thus represented a breakthrough in Benjamin’s theorizing of no less moment than its companion treatise, and one that would, in a paradoxical

18. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4, 428–33; *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, 723–7.

way, prove more directly relevant to Benjamin's subsequent irreducibly indirect expressive strategies. It moved Benjamin considerably closer to realizing in the thought-image the idiosyncratic element, the intellectual pulse of his writing. It also brought him immeasurably closer to his international political affiliations. The experience whose limits the thought-images were designed to illuminate, even when illustrated by German political conditions, was an urban disorientation in which historical contemporaneity overwhelmed any particular national situation. Only a political perspective militantly committed to overcoming those national conditions could accommodate the temporal urgency of this experience. That perspective was international communism, the organized destruction of the unjust bourgeois order. In Heidelberg, Benjamin had articulated a position suspended between anarchistic defiance and an absolute fatalism, in which the Marxism of Lukács and Bloch or Scholem's Zionism, not to mention any publicly accredited ideological faction, must appear as a provisional orientation within an eternal violent oscillation in authority: the justification of violence passing into the violence of justification. But in the increasingly polarized political atmosphere of inflation-wracked Germany in the 1920s, that merely radical position of pure critique was proving insufficient to the substantive demands of the day.

Although *One Way Street* was hardly the expression of an unambiguous political credo, its rejection of the form of the book marked a decisive recognition of the inevitability of a communist framework for the theoretical questions Benjamin was asking. This framework had been affectively illuminated by his intense attachment to Asja Lacis, an associate of Bertolt Brecht's and a fervent revolutionary, with whom he had fallen in love on Capri. Just as the breakthrough to which his Goethe essay testifies had been motivated by his passion for Jula Cohn, so in his captivation by Lacis's fusion of aesthetic integrity and political commitment, Benjamin sensed in himself the possibility of a pure revolutionary affinity between historical effectiveness and messianic radicality. For a time, then, his revolutionary commitment evinced this political optimism. But while his commitment persisted to the end, his optimism would soon fade. Toward the end of 1926 Benjamin traveled to Moscow in pursuit both of Lacis and an intellectual role in Bolshevik Russia. The melancholy diary his sojourn produced recounts the collapse of the love affair and of his hopes for the Soviet experiment. For the rest of his career, Benjamin would orient his cultural reflections not toward Russian communism directly but across the widening Franco-Prussian fissure in European politics toward the cosmopolitan affinities between Berlin and Paris. In the history of German and French cultural radicalism, Benjamin would seek the origins of a transformative politics that would point beyond the gathering darkness of twentieth-century culture.

As the Weimar Republic stumbled toward the end of the decade, Benjamin had abandoned any hope of an academic career, and was supporting himself as a freelance book reviewer and journalist, contributing travel reports and cultural criticism to major German periodicals, in particular Ernst Rowohlt and Willy Haas's *Literarische Welt* and the feuilleton of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, edited by his friend Siegfried Kracauer. In these venues he published with brief commentary various letters, puzzles, and anecdotes that his researches on nineteenth-century culture had unearthed, evidence not only of the eclectic range of his interests but of the theoretical scope that the thought-image and its crystallized dialectic could accommodate. In 1928, he presented the beginnings of a theoretical exploration of the dialectical image in his essay on the first wave of French surrealism.

What is at stake in the essay "Surrealism: The Latest Exposure of the European Intelligentsia" is not in the last instance the meaning of surrealism as an aesthetic movement but the role of a "European intelligentsia" in promoting revolution in historical circumstances. Like Lukács in his analysis of reification and class consciousness, Benjamin understands any awareness of society and its revolutionary potential to be conditioned by the standpoint from which society is perceived. Bourgeois consciousness, therefore, which takes its currently dominant position to be anchored in a universal human truth beyond any historical change, is inevitably blinded to the historical reality of the world that has produced it. But unlike Lukács, Benjamin does not imagine that an alternative proletarian perspective congruent with the objective historical dynamic is available in the present. That is to say, Benjamin denies the implicit assumption in Lukács that the philosophical distinction between material base and ideal superstructure coincides with the sociological antagonism between proletariat and bourgeoisie. The revolutionary intellectual is not a denizen of the superstructure anticipating the integrated culture of a victorious proletarian base. Rather, every position in bourgeois-dominated society is inherently partial and prerevolutionary, anchored in substantially exploitative relations and beholden to deceptively universal ideologies. When Benjamin insists that the problem of proletarian culture cannot be solved "contemplatively" by the revolutionary intelligentsia,¹⁹ he is implicitly criticizing any attempt to substitute for the bourgeois ideal of an ahistorical Absolute Knowledge a virtual proletarian consciousness that in the end is not praxis but a *concept* of praxis.²⁰

19. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, 309; *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, 217.

20. This difference between Benjamin's commitment to a necessarily partial practice mediating any accurate conception of the social whole and Lukács's commitment to a concept of totality

At the close of the surrealism essay, Benjamin deploys Henri Bergson's terminology from the first chapter of *Matter and Memory* to characterize his alternative perspective.²¹ Bergson starts his metaphysical reflections from a highly idiosyncratic concept of "image" as the fundamental category of reality, contrasting it with idealism's "representation" and realism's "thing [*chose*]." A thing, taken as an element of ultimate reality, cannot in vital practice exceed its knowability, its eventual image, while a representation is that aspect of an image relevant to a particular embodied human perspective, a "living center." In itself the domain of images has no center but is merely superhuman lawful movement. When Benjamin invokes the "image space," "the world of universal and integral actualities, where the 'best room' is missing,"²² to describe the field of political engagement, he is using Bergson's concepts to circumvent the Hegelian assumption of a metaphysically privileged perspective on historical reality from which a revolutionary outcome can be reliably anticipated. Materialism in Benjamin's sense just *is* the acknowledgment of the partiality of any human awareness of the shared world and the corresponding recognition that totality is always only intermittently accessible to the present. In contrast to the dogmatic insistence on the metaphysical primacy of matter, Benjamin calls this actual materialism "anthropological." The practical task of the intellectual is to reveal and transform the anthropological conditions of his own practice, even at the cost of his own existence, not to redeem proletarian labor culturally.

Benjamin's essay on surrealism inaugurates the central period of his philosophical practice, which corresponds to the decline of the Weimar Republic. These years are dominated by Benjamin's three great intellectual portraits of Proust, of Kraus, and of Kafka. His own theoretical position emerges indirectly through his recognition of these contemporaries. This is not to say that Benjamin imputes to Kraus or Proust positions that in fact he himself holds; rather, his own position appears negatively, as the displacement between the nominal object of the essay and the authorial attitude toward that object. Throughout his career, Benjamin's own position remains intimate with a principled silence that bears the full impress of truth but that by that very token can never emerge immediately. The parallax of Benjamin's eccentric perspective on Proust, Kraus, and Kafka converges on a fundamental dimension of historical becoming: what

mediating any accurate conception of a social element would reappear, *mutatis mutandis*, in the debate between Adorno and Benjamin on the methodology of Benjamin's 1938 essay on Baudelaire. For a helpful discussion of this latter debate, see Giorgio Agamben's "The Prince and the Frog: The Question of Method in Adorno and Benjamin," in *Infancy and History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience*, Liz Heron (trans.) (London: Verso, 1993), 107–24.

*21. For a discussion of Bergson, see the essay by John Mullarkey in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 3*.

22. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, 309; *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, 217.

in his final works Benjamin will come to call the “now of knowability,” or the now-time. Proust recognizes an elegiac happiness in resisting the suffocating legacy of the past by translating it into language; Kraus exemplifies a radical antithesis to the present in his demonic citational practice; and Kafka preserves in his ascetic vigil over primordial forces an irreducible relation to an unanticipatable redemption. At the risk of reductive schematization we can say that these three essays capture Benjamin’s mature historical philosophy of the superhuman image space, Proust illuminating its recognitive relation to the past, Kraus its demonstrative relation to the present, and Kafka its anticipatory relation to the future.

By the summer of 1932 Benjamin’s economic situation had deteriorated considerably, and in a hotel room in Nice on his fortieth birthday he made serious preparations for suicide. He did not carry through the intention, but this moment represents the nadir of his emotional existence until the fall of France to the Nazis eight years later. Around this time as well he forged a lasting friendship with the playwright Bertolt Brecht, who would offer him a refuge in Denmark in the difficult years ahead. Brecht, in his nomadic and ferocious practicality, served as the fourth of the contemporary heralds of the image-space, the destructive avatar of its *gestural* character. This limit to the meaning available in the image-space, in its inevitable affinity with insurrectionary attitudes, would grow in importance for Benjamin’s theory in the subsequent peripatetic years. For with the Reichstag fire of February 17, 1933, Germany had become impossible for him to survive. In March he began an exile in which death overtook him and so which has never ended.

VI

Living hand to mouth in Paris and with his ex-wife Dora in San Remo, Italy, with occasional stays in Denmark with Brecht, Benjamin continued to research the Parisian arcades and although irrevocably delivered to the occasion, produced a considerable number of enduring essays and studies. His main source of income was Horkheimer and Adorno’s exiled Institute of Social Research, which provided Benjamin with an indispensable stipend, as well as a largely sympathetic theoretical venue in their *Journal*. At the same time, Adorno’s commitment to a Hegelian concept of dialectical mediation did lead to fundamental misunderstandings of Benjamin’s late work, which Adorno found perilously close to mysticism and beholden to an undertheorized immediacy. And the deep hostility that the institute evinced toward Brecht and his partisan engagement would eventually distort the posthumous image of Benjamin that Adorno, together with Scholem, promoted in the postwar years. Nonetheless, it is not too

much to say that Horkheimer and Adorno saved Benjamin's life in these difficult times. And their requests for a publishable text from the *Arcades* material provoked Benjamin to write what would become his most famous text: "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility."

This essay, like much of Benjamin's later work, is subterraneously informed by the concept of an image-space. In nineteen dense aphoristic sections, Benjamin marshals a discontinuous multitude of descriptive frameworks to present what he sees as a contemporary mutation in the relation of cultural artifacts to the practices that give them meaning. This mutation can be perceived in the work of art in its historical exposure to technological reproduction. In extended considerations of the photographic and the cinematic image, Benjamin discerns as a consequence of this historical mutation what he calls "the decay of the aura" of the work of art and the rise of a new "reception in distraction." What film and photography as techniques of reproduction call into question is the singularity and uniqueness of an image beyond its function as a representation for human concerns. The boundary at which an image-as-representation-of-something-else meets the image-in-itself is what Benjamin calls its aura. In archaic times, the relation between human purposes and the independent reality of the image was held in place by supernatural ritual. The holy relic, whose mere presence exceeds the symbol it embodies and which organizes a sacred space of cultic ceremony, is the paradigm of an auratic object. Today, however, the aesthetic object defines a disenchanting exhibition-space entirely subordinated to human purposes. The museum, and even more typically the theater, host the desecrated version of auratic singularity. It is into this exhibition-space that cinema, according to Benjamin, introduces the antithesis to imaginary aura: the apparatus. A term suspended between the expressionist anguish of Kafka's "*eigentümlicher Apparat*" (peculiar apparatus) from "In the Penal Colony" and the constructivist euphoria of Vertov's "*Chelovek s kinoapparatom*" (Man with a movie camera), the apparatus inhabits the image-space in a way that comes to light in the distracted reactions of the masses to mass-reproduced representations, and exposes the deepest conservative vulnerabilities of auratic hierarchy. Mass reception in distraction is the Ur-manifestation of the material apparatus that the insurrectionary positions in society must conquer for the revolution.

Deutsche Menschen (*German Men and Women*), the last book Benjamin was able to see published in his lifetime, came together quickly in 1936. In the pages of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* Benjamin had published a series of letters to and from nineteenth-century German cultural figures along with his own introductions. The book assembled those letters and introductions into an eccentric recollection of the humane tendencies in bourgeois history that National Socialism was in the process of remorselessly extinguishing. Published in Switzerland by an ad hoc press and bearing a pseudonym – Detlev Holz – that disguised its exiled

Jewish and communist provenance (and echoed Kant's "*krummen Holz*," the "crooked timber" of humanity), *Deutsche Menschen* was Benjamin's attempt to refract the present through juxtaposed historical inscriptions and in so doing to preserve for the future an image of the German language as the occasion of a better alternative history. Although often misunderstood as a straightforward anthology, *Deutsche Menschen*, like Benjamin's two earlier books, is an experiment. Where *The Origin of German Trauerspiel* was conducted on the scale of a discipline and its genre, the treatise, and *One Way Street* on the scale of an experience and its instantiation in the book *per se*, *Deutsche Menschen* operates across the institutions of writing in any possible form, from the public newspapers that harbored Benjamin's original exposure of these letters to the private intimacies the archive shelters. This last book stages Benjamin's antihumanist position as the suspended *ad hominem* implicit in these surviving eccentric fragments. To this day *Deutsche Menschen* remains an elusive and underappreciated achievement.

As the 1930s drew to a close, Benjamin's reflections on European modernity and its origins came to focus more and more on the haunted figure of Charles Baudelaire. Benjamin found in Baudelaire's marginal existence and perfect lyrics an epitome of the critical orientation art takes toward the historical present, around which the vast material gathered for the *Arcades Project* could be organized. The relationship between the *poète maudit* and the city of Paris came to dominate Benjamin's understanding of the Ur-history of the European nineteenth century, and a planned reworking of the *Arcades Project* as *Charles Baudelaire, a Lyric Poet in the Age of High Capitalism* produced the studies "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," as well as "On Some Motifs of Baudelaire," Benjamin's final explorations of the antithetical role of art in history.

In February 1939 Benjamin's German citizenship was revoked. In September the Second World War ignited. Shortly afterward French authorities interred Benjamin for several weeks, on the basis of his revoked nationality, in a detention camp in the town of Nevers, before the intervention of French cultural figures brought about his release at the end of November. In the half-year before the fall of Paris to the Nazis in June 1940, Benjamin managed to bring to paper the most compressed and profound expression of his philosophical position, the aphoristic sequence "On the Concept of History." In these eighteen brief texts and two addenda, Benjamin claims for the thought-image its durable boundary with the modernist prose-poem. His subtle and evocative language challenges the intuition of a linear, progressive temporality underlying historical change. This notion of a neutral continuous time connecting past, present, and future in a predictable way was the *proton pseudos* or original flaw of those humanistic theories – in particular revisionist social democracy – that had so wretchedly failed to resist fascism. In contrast to a progressive "historicist" orientation toward history, Benjamin invokes a complex "historical materialist" temporality,

in which unpredictable conjunctions of past and present give rise to a volatile now-time whose future can never be entirely closed off. This now-time is the last surviving version of a Jewish transformational temporality for which “every second was the small gateway in time through which the Messiah might enter.”²³ Here, at the end of European culture, Benjamin takes its death mask in the concept of the now-time, as the ultimate vanishing point of the image-space he had explored his entire life, and that harbored its last most tenuous hope.

Benjamin fled Paris only hours ahead of the Nazis and made his way south. For months he had been negotiating a visa to the United States with the help of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Hannah Arendt, with whom he had been friends since 1936, and who would be instrumental in mediating his legacy to the English-language world.²⁴ It was issued to him in Marseilles in September, but he was not able to procure an exit visa from Nazi-complicit France. In the company of several other refugees, he attempted to cross into Spain illegally through a pass in the Pyrenees. They reached the border town of Port Bou on September 26, but were halted there by Spanish officials. As night fell outside his rented room, anticipating deportation back to hostile France, Benjamin killed himself with an overdose of morphine; on the next morning the remaining refugees were permitted to proceed to Lisbon. The site of Benjamin’s grave was lost.

VII. CONCLUSION

In the years after Benjamin’s death his memory was kept alive by his friends in exile, in particular Arendt and Adorno in the United States and Scholem in Jerusalem. Those of his papers that survived the Nazi catastrophe, after various relocations and consolidations, were preserved in three different archives, one assembled around Scholem’s collection in the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, another from the texts Adorno gathered together in Frankfurt after the war, and a third rescued from Vichy Paris and stored eventually in the literary archive of the East German Academy of Arts in Berlin. Adorno’s publication in 1955 of a two-volume collection of Benjamin’s essays, *Schriften*, in the Federal Republic of Germany, began his reintroduction to wider audience.²⁵ Arendt edited and

23. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, 704; *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 397.

24. A useful compendium documenting the underexamined relation between Arendt and Benjamin has been published: *Arendt und Benjamin: Texte, Briefe, Dokumente*, Detlev Schöttker and Erdmut Wizisla (eds) (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2006). The volume reproduces a fascinating variant of Benjamin’s “On the Concept of History” that he had sent to Arendt.

25. A detailed account of Benjamin’s publishing history (to which this summary is indebted) is provided by Detlev Schöttker, “Edition und Werkkonstruktion: Zu den Ausgaben der Schriften Walter Benjamins,” *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie* 116 (1997).

introduced an English translation of several of Benjamin's major essays in 1968 under the title *Illuminations*. The enormous influence on contemporary aesthetic and media theory in the English-speaking world exercised by Benjamin's essay on "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility" can be dated from its appearance in this edition.

The developing interest in Benjamin's work in the late 1960s and 1970s coincided with the conjunction of avant-garde aesthetics, revolutionary politics, and university reform that produced the Student Movement in West Germany and the New Left in the United States. Benjamin's revolutionary political commitments and his use of explicitly Marxist categories to express them were particularly appealing to a generation in rebellion against the legacy of genocidal Western European fascism. Philologically, this period in Benjamin's reception produced as well (and in a certain tension with the Student Movement) the ambitious German *Gesammelte Schriften* (*Collected Writings*), whose eventual seven volumes would be completed in 1989. By making most of the documents preserved in archives outside the Eastern bloc available to scholars, the *Collected Writings* gave a far more comprehensive picture of the scope and depth of Benjamin's theoretical interests, and demonstrated far more convincingly his philosophical sophistication than had the earlier eclectic publications.

It was this edition and the readings it made possible that brought Benjamin's work in the 1980s into the milieu of American poststructuralism. His delight in the arcane and obscure, reflected most vibrantly in his friendship with the scholar of mystical Cabbala Scholem, his sensitivity to the modernist dislocation of Baudelaire in the nineteenth century and Kafka in the twentieth, not to mention his rediscovery of Baroque allegory in the seventeenth century and the centrality of translation to his ontology, all made his work attractive to deconstructionist literary theory. At the same time, Benjamin's deeply skeptical attitude toward humanist traditions and his fundamental sympathy for the politically and socially marginalized elements of history lent his thought a profound affinity with postcolonial cultural critiques from a subaltern position.²⁶ The oft-cited sentence from the aphorisms "On the Concept of History" – "There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism"²⁷ – brings to a point the demystifying aspect of Benjamin's production that animated an important part of his reception in the 1980s and 1990s. This aspect only grew in relevance with the end of the Cold War and the reunification of Germany. A Marxist critical theory centered more on the capitalist

26. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* from 1983 bears an epigraph from Benjamin, drawn from the seventh aphorism "On the Concept of History"; just one indication of the profound influence Benjamin has exerted on critical cultural studies.

27. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, 696; *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 392.

commodity than on the historical class struggle appeared less compromised by the collapse of the Soviet system than did many other communist theories. And the rise of fundamentalist religious politics throughout the world at the end of the 1990s contributed to a rise in interest in the explicitly theological dimension of Benjamin's political theory.²⁸

The end of the 1990s saw, as well, the beginning of a more comprehensive English-language edition of his writings, the four-volume *Selected Writings* completed in 2003. Adhering to a strictly chronological organization, this edition gives a far clearer impression of Benjamin's simultaneous interests than does the awkwardly structured German edition that underlies it, introducing many untranslated texts while regularizing the translations that had appeared before. With the appearance of the material Benjamin assembled for the *Arcades Project*, first in German in 1982 and then in English translation in 2002, a concrete example of Benjamin's method for "redeeming" through dialectical juxtaposition fragments from across the entire range of a culture's manifestations became available to readers.

The ninth aphorism "On the Concept of History," which describes the Klee watercolor *Angelus Novus* as the angel of history, envisions the angel facing backward into "the one single catastrophe" that is human history. "The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed." The rapid and respectful canonization of Benjamin partakes of that desire, as well. Such simple satisfactions, though, are alien to Benjamin's thought. The storm of progress drives the angel of history "irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky."²⁹ No reading, however deferential and celebratory, can rescue Walter Benjamin from the destruction to which history drove him. It is rather his writings in their polyvalent inventiveness and passion that will continue to exert their "weak messianic power,"³⁰ their potential to rescue *us* from the barbaric collapse that always threatens our common future.

MAJOR WORKS

"Das Leben der Studenten." *Das Ziel: Aufrufe zu tätigem Geist*. Edited by Kurt Hiller. Munich, Berlin: Georg Müller, 1916. Published in English as "The Life of Students," in *Selected Writings*,

28. This is the context for Jacques Derrida's only extended discussion of Benjamin, in the second half of his political exploration "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, Drucilla Cornell *et al.* (eds) (New York: Routledge, 1992).

29. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, 697–8; *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 392.

30. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, 694; *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 390.

- Vol. 1: 1913–1926*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 37–47. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2000.
- “Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen” [written 1916, and unpublished in Benjamin’s lifetime]. Published in English as “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man,” in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, 62–74.
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- “Zur Kritik der Gewalt.” *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 47 (1920/21): 809–32. Published in English as “Critique of Violence,” in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, 236–52.
- “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers.” Published as the introduction to Charles Baudelaire, “*Tableaux parisiens*”: *Deutsche Übertragung mit einem Vorwort über die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*, von Walter Benjamin. Heidelberg: Verlag Richard Weißbach, 1923. Published in English as “The Task of the Translator,” in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, 253–63.
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- “Der Surrealismus.” Published in three parts in *Die literarische Welt* 5(5–7) (February 1, 8, and 15, 1929): 3–4, 4–15, 7–8. Published in English as “Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,” in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2: 1927–1934, edited by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, 207–21. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999.
- “Zum Bilde Prousts.” Published in three parts in *Die literarische Welt* 5(25–7) (June 21 and 28/July 5, 1929): 3, 4–5, 7–8. Published in English as “On the Image of Proust,” in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, 237–47.
- “Karl Kraus.” Published in four parts in *Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt* 75(138, 195, 202, 205) (March 10, 14, 17, and 18, 1931). Published in English as “Karl Kraus,” in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, 433–58.
- “Franz Kafka. Zum 10. Wiederkehr seines Todestags” [written 1934; complete text unpublished in Benjamin’s lifetime]. Published in English as “Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death,” in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, 794–818.
- Deutsche Menschen. Eine Folge von Briefen: Auswahl und Einleitungen von Detlef Holz* [pseudonym]. Luzern: Vita Nova, 1936. Published in English as “German Men and Women: A Sequence of Letters,” in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 3: 1935–1938, edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, 167–235. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002.
- “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit.” First published in French as “L’œuvre d’art à l’époque de sa reproduction mécanisée,” translated by Pierre Klossowski. *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 5(1) (April 1936): 40–66. Published in English as “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version,” in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 3, 101–33, and as “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility: Third Version [1939],” in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4, 1938–1940, edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, 251–83. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003.
- Das Passagen-Werk* [composed 1926–40 and unpublished in Benjamin’s lifetime]. Published in

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5

HANNAH ARENDT: RETHINKING THE POLITICAL

Peg Birmingham

Hannah Arendt,¹ one of the most important political philosophers of the twentieth century, saw that the fundamental task of political theory today is to radically rethink the concept of the political after the event of totalitarianism revealed the bankruptcy of our traditional categories of moral and political thought.

In the first volume of *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt asks the question, “What makes us think?” Nowhere is her answer more clearly given than in her 1945 essay, “Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought.”² While agreeing with the Greeks that philosophy begins with wonder at what is, Arendt harbors no nostalgia for recovering the Greek experience. Instead, she claims that whereas the Greek experience of wonder was rooted in the experience of beauty (*Kalon*), the experience of wonder today – if not engaged in a flight from reality – is rooted in the experience of horror at what humans are capable of, the speechless horror that must be philosophically comprehended:

It is as though in this refusal to own up to the experience of horror and take it seriously the philosophers have inherited the traditional refusal to grant the realm of human affairs that *thaumadzein*, that

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1. Hannah Arendt (October 14, 1906–December 4, 1975; born in Königsberg, Germany; died in New York) was educated at Marburg Universität (1924–25), Freiburg Universität (1925), and Heidelberg Universität, (1926–29). Her influences included Aristotle, Augustine, Heidegger, Jaspers, Kant, Marx, Montesquieu, and Nietzsche, and she held appointments at the University of California–Berkeley (1955), New School for Social Research (1955–75), University of Chicago, Committee on Social Thought, (1956–74).
 2. Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding*, Jerome Kohn (ed.) (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), 428–47.

wonder at what is as it is ... For the speechless horror at what man may do and what the world may become is in many ways related to the speechless wonder of gratitude from which the questions of philosophy spring.³

The differences between these two experiences of wonder have significant consequences for how Arendt understands the task of thinking politics today. The Greek *thaumadzein*, she argues, was wonder at the *kalon*, the beauty of appearances. This wonder extended into the realm of the public wherein the Greek concern was with the *kalon kagathon*, the public appearance of the actor. Wonder today at the horror of contemporary political events is wonder in the face of darkness. If wonder is the condition of thinking and, further, if it is now wonder in the face of obscurity, then the condition of thinking today is a fundamental darkness; it is a thinking that has as its condition the loss of the public realm. In other words, for Arendt, what makes us think today is the loss of the illuminating light of the public space.

The horrifying event of totalitarianism with its death camps and terror marks the extreme condition of this darkness. Indeed, Arendt argues that the first task in thinking politics today is to *comprehend* this unprecedented event. Comprehension, she argues, in the preface to the first edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*,

does not mean denying the outrageous, deducing the unprecedented from precedents, or explaining phenomena by such analogies and generalities that the impact of reality and the shock of experience are no longer felt. It means, rather, examining and bearing consciously the burden which our century has placed on us – neither denying its existence nor submitting meekly to its weight.⁴

While for Arendt the event of totalitarianism marks the complete destruction of the political, nonetheless, the political and moral order of Europe had in her view already crumbled before the death camps began their horrifying work. In other words, while the event of totalitarianism revealed the complete bankruptcy of traditional categories of political and ethical thought, the elements of totalitarianism were already present long before they suddenly crystallized into this event.

3. *Ibid.*, 445.

4. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1952), viii.

Arendt is very careful in her use of this image of crystallization, insisting that, like crystals, the elements of totalitarianism do not add up to a whole nor do they act as causes that inevitably lead to certain effects. Instead, crystallization describes the sudden and unpredictable ways in which these elements coalesced into this event. For Arendt, her analysis of totalitarianism in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was not strictly speaking a history of totalitarianism as such, but instead a philosophical examination of an event that marks “the very heart of our own century.” This event, she argues, “illuminates its own past; it can never be deduced from it.”⁵

There is perhaps no more important question for Arendt than this question of thinking, of facing up to and bearing the burden of the events of our own time. Certainly, her abiding preoccupation with thinking is at work in her well-known and often-cited phrase “the banality of evil.” For her, the “banality of evil” is the evil committed out of complete and utter thoughtlessness. Coined at the end of her trial report as Eichmann, standing at the gallows, utters his last cliché, Arendt grasps that evil today is often committed by functionaries and bureaucrats who conform utterly to the society in which they find themselves. At the trial, she is confronted with a person who was unable to speak without using clichés and stock phrases; he lacked any capacity for independent thinking or judging; he simply went along with the course of events in which he was immersed. Eichmann is not alone. For Arendt, thoughtlessness marks the condition of contemporary life. In the prologue to *The Human Condition*, she writes, “thoughtlessness – the headless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of ‘truths,’ which have become trivial and empty – seems to me among the outstanding characteristics of our time.”⁶ Thinking, then, is for Arendt the only remedy for the banality of evil. And for her, comprehension – the ability to face up to and bear the burden of reality – is the first order of thought.

Here it is worth noting that Arendt does not agree with those who think it enough to simply repair the traditional categories of political and ethical thought in order to prevent the worst from happening again. Indeed, she ends the preface to the first edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* by stating that the event of totalitarianism reveals a subterranean realm that renders all such rehabilitation projects futile: “The subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to the surface and usurped the dignity of our tradition. This is the reality in which we live.”⁷ The crystallizing event of totalitarianism allows us a glimpse into the subterranean realm, revealing that modern politics, rooted in the rise of the sovereign nation-state and its declaration of human rights, is deeply entangled in

5. Arendt, *Essays in Understanding*, 319.

6. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 5.

7. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, ix.

racism and an imperialism that call for something more than a restoration of the Enlightenment project; it calls for a radical rethinking of the concept of politics.

I. RETHINKING THE MODERN NATION-STATE:
ANTI-SEMITISM, RACISM, IMPERIALISM

For Arendt, the elements of totalitarianism are rooted in the rise of the modern nation-state with its inherent contradiction between the state as the instrument of law and the nation comprised of a homogeneous people. Nowhere is this contradiction more marked than in the nation-state's declaration of human rights, which declares that human rights are universal to all of humanity and at the same time claims that these rights belong only to nationals. Anti-Semitism, racism, and imperialism are all elements that emerge from this contradiction.

Hobbes and Rousseau are, for her, the principle theorists of the modern nation-state. While Hobbes denies the presence of free will in a world where all movement is causally determined, he nonetheless defines *jus naturale*, natural right, in terms of the *individual's* own power and movement to do what he can do to preserve his own life. In the state of nature, however nasty, brutish and short, each individual is sovereign, with the natural right to everything, including another's body. For Hobbes, liberty and power are synonymous terms: the natural right to self-preservation is understood as a kind of "natural power." As is well known, Hobbes defines power in *Leviathan* as the "present means to secure the future."⁸ Power is one's "present means" to secure one's future self-preservation, which means one's future security. As Arendt points out, this is power for the sake of power, power for the sake of itself.⁹ Everything – whether in the form of knowledge or wealth – is reduced to power: "Therefore, if man is actually driven by nothing but his individual interests, desire for power must be the fundamental passion of man."¹⁰

For Arendt, the sovereign commonwealth follows from Hobbes's reduction of natural right to the power of a sovereign, self-interested individual who initially has the right to everything. The sovereign power of the Commonwealth, she argues, is made up of private individuals solely interested in the desire for power; it embodies the sum total of private interests:

8. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Richard Tuck (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 62.

9. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 141.

10. *Ibid.*, 139.

Hobbes' *Leviathan* exposed the only political theory according to which the state is based not on some kind of constituting law – whether divine law, the law of nature, or the law of social contract – which determines the rights and wrongs of the individual's interest with respect to public affairs, but on the individual interests themselves, so that the “private interest is the same with the publique.”¹¹

Hobbes is for Arendt the perfect thinker for the rise of bourgeois political power during the imperialist era. He is, according to Arendt, imperialism's “great thinker” based as *Leviathan* is on the endless desire and accumulation of power. In Hobbes, imperialism's quest for “power for the sake of power” finds its theoretical underpinnings:

This new body politic was conceived for the benefit of the new bourgeois sketch for the new type of Man who would fit into it. The Commonwealth is based on the delegation of power, and not of rights. It acquires a monopoly on killing and provides in exchange a conditional guarantee against being killed.¹²

In the Hobbesian framework, she argues, natural right corresponds to the endless process of accumulating power. And the equality of human beings lies solely in their equality of cunning in obtaining more power. This equality therefore has no inherent worth. According to Hobbes, it is not the seller but the buyer who determines the worth of an individual, Arendt points out that for Hobbes the individual possesses no inherent dignity worthy of respect; instead, one's worth is dependent on one's power, which is determined solely in the eyes of others.

For Arendt, Hobbes therefore excludes in principle the idea of humanity, an exclusion that Arendt argues has disastrous effects in the nineteenth century when Hobbes's philosophy will provide the underpinnings of race ideology, a key element in the crystallizing event of totalitarianism:

The philosophy of Hobbes, it is true, contains nothing of modern race doctrines, which not only stir up the mob, but in their totalitarian form outline very clearly the forms of organization through which humanity could carry the process of capital and power accumulation through to its logical end in self-destruction. But Hobbes at least provided political thought with the requisite for all race

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, 141.

doctrines, that is, the exclusion in principle of the idea of humanity which constitutes the sole regulating idea of international law.¹³

Moreover, for Arendt the exclusion of the idea of humanity and the reduction of human rights to the self-interested power of a sovereign and isolated individual provides the theoretical underpinnings first to nineteenth-century imperialism in which “everything is permitted” and then to twentieth-century totalitarianism, with its race ideologies, for which “everything is possible.”

In her analysis of Rousseau, Arendt shows how the modern form of political anti-Semitism emerges out of the inherent contradiction between the state as an instrument of law and the nation as embodying the will of the people. Unlike earlier forms of anti-Semitism, which were based on religious differences, she argues that modern anti-Semitism is political insofar as the Jews were not considered nationals. With a history of financing the state’s business, the Jews came to be identified with the state itself. Thus, she argues, any group that found itself at odds with the state thought that it was at the same time at odds with the Jews:

For more than a hundred years, anti-Semitism had slowly and gradually made its way into almost all social strata in almost all European countries until it emerged suddenly as the one issue upon which an almost unified opinion could be achieved. The law according to which this process developed was simple: each class of society which came into a conflict with the state as such became anti-Semitic because the only social group which seemed to represent the state was the Jews.¹⁴

When the nation usurped the state at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the political status of the Jews became ever more precarious; having no status as nationals, the Jews had little or no political protection at all.

Arendt’s criticism of Rousseau focuses on his claim that the principle of freedom is found in the sovereign will of the nation. She argues that Rousseau’s turn to the unanimous will of the nation is motivated by the problem of the profound instability of all modern political bodies, which is the result of an elementary lack of authority.¹⁵ One way to solve the problem of legitimate authority, she argues, is to make the nation absolute. The legitimacy of power and the legality of the laws would reside in the sovereign will of the nation: the

13. *Ibid.*, 157.

14. *Ibid.*, 25.

15. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1963), 228–9.

general will of the nation that would reflect the innate, natural goodness of each individual heart and will. Because Augustine had already demonstrated that a divided will is impotent, unanimity is mandatory for the concept of a powerful, general will. Thus, Arendt contends, the notion of the general will *must* be based on unanimous consent: unanimity of opinion rather than a plurality of opinions. In other words, the unanimity of the general will, whose absolute sovereignty guarantees the stability of the political realm, depends on the individual wills giving up their particular interests and consenting to be ruled by a government whose power has become sovereign *precisely because* individuals have given up their individual power. As in Hobbes, the existence of an absolute sovereign in whom the identical origin of law and power is embodied, makes the law powerful and power legitimate. And this does not change when the absolute sovereign is the general will of the people.

Thus the act of consent combines the principle of absolute rulership and national principles “according to which there must be one representative of the nation as a whole, and where the government is understood to incorporate the will of all nationals.”¹⁶ Here we see the emerging form of the sovereign nation-state. Indeed, Arendt argues that the modern understanding of the self as a subject who is the bearer of inalienable rights is inseparable from the notion of the sovereign nation-state that gets its power from the sovereign general will of the people. Human rights, then, are tied up with the question of national emancipation: “Only the emancipated sovereignty of the people, of one’s own people, seemed to be able to insure them.”¹⁷ In this schema, power is always associated with sovereignty and unity – either the unified sovereign will of the individual or the unity of the general will embodied in the figure of the ruler. Napoleon is the exemplary figure: “I am the *pouvoir constituant*.”¹⁸

Arendt argues that the problem with this schema is twofold: first, rights are indistinguishable from the sovereignty of the general will of the nation-state, and this schema does not allow for the rights of those who are not recognized as part of the general will. This leads to the second problem: at the level of the individual, one must be a national in order to have rights. Indeed, Arendt’s critique of the modern understanding of “inalienable rights” is founded on this recognition that these rights were from the beginning tied up with national sovereignty. And, she argues, no group saw this more clearly than those who had lost the protection of the sovereign: “The rights of man, supposedly inalienable, proved to be unenforceable – even in countries whose constitutions were based on them – whenever people appeared who were no longer citizens of any

16. *Ibid.*, 171.

17. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 291.

18. Arendt, *On Revolution*, 163.

sovereign state.”¹⁹ Human beings become singular and concrete by the exercise of human rights tied to state sovereignty, and those who are deprived of them become human beings without portfolio, “human beings in general.”

Most devastating, she argues, is that the world found nothing sacred in the “abstract nakedness” of being human:

If a human being loses his political status, he should, according to the implications of the inborn and inalienable rights of man, come under exactly the situation for which the declaration of such general rights provided. Actually the opposite is the case. It seems that a man who is nothing but a man has lost the very qualities which make it possible for other people to treat him as a fellow-man.”²⁰

At the very moment when protection under the auspices of universal human rights was most desperately needed, no such protection was granted. Outside the law and not belonging to any political community, she and her fellow refugees were reduced to “mere naked human beings” in a “condition of complete rightlessness.”²¹ Contrary to Edmund Burke, for Arendt the abstraction is the abstract nudity of those who are nothing other than naked human beings, naked as the day they were born. She argues, it was in order to escape this “abstract nudity” that those who were stateless “insisted upon their nationality, this ultimate fact of their being citizens.”²²

Arendt’s relation to Burke is complicated. While she agrees with Burke’s critique of the notion of *natural* rights, she does not agree with his further claim that human rights belong only to citizens of particular nation-states. Indeed, Arendt places Burke in the group of thinkers who are the predecessors of modern state racism. Burke’s insistence on reducing rights to the rights of Englishmen, she argues, is dangerously tied to his notion of a “race of aristocratic blue bloods.” This is possible, she argues, precisely because of his dismissal of a principle of humanity at work in human rights. As we saw above in her critique of Hobbes, racial thinking depends on this dismissal. In her analysis of “race-thinking before racism,” which includes a long section on Burke, she points out that at the heart of race-thinking is the consistent denial of the “great principle upon which national organizations of peoples are built, the principle of equality and solidarity of all peoples guaranteed by the idea of mankind.”²³ Race, she argues, “politically speaking, is not the beginning of humanity but its

19. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 293.

20. *Ibid.*, 300.

21. *Ibid.*, 296.

22. *Ibid.*, 300.

23. *Ibid.*, 161.

end, not the origin of peoples but their decay, not the natural birth of man but his unnatural death.”²⁴

While totalitarianism destroys the legal and moral person, nevertheless, Arendt insists that these regimes are not lawless. A totalitarian regime, she argues, “claims to obey strictly and unequivocally those laws of Nature and History from which all positive laws always have been supposed to spring.”²⁵ Raging against the constraining and absent symbolic law, totalitarian politics “promises justice on earth because it claims to make mankind itself the embodiment of the law.”²⁶ Totalitarianism substitutes another law, a law that is incarnate and reassuring because the law can now be known; it literally dwells among us, having been brought down to earth.

The embodiment of the law is possible through the substitution of history for politics. More precisely, totalitarian regimes replace politics with its fundamental concern with freedom and action with an ideology that assigns reality “[to a] process that unfolds behind the backs of those who act and does its work in secret, beyond the visible historical process, and history comes to mean, in a very literal sense, the flow of history.”²⁷ Fascist ideology provides the fiction of a ready-made, unified world: fixed, static, without contradiction, and utterly reliable. Its hellish fantasies are characterized by a “strident logicity,” a logic through which the whole of reality is thoroughly and systematically organized with a view to total domination.

For Arendt the appeal of this fiction has its roots in the modern phenomenon of superfluousness. Radical evil, she writes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, “has appeared in connection with a system in which all men have become superfluous in some way.” It is the desolation of individuals who are “economically superfluous and socially uprooted” with its peculiar kind of loneliness that provides the conditions for totalitarianism:

Loneliness, the common ground for terror, the essence of totalitarian government, and for ideology and logicity, the preparation of its executions and victims, is closely connected with uprootedness and superfluousness which have been the curse of modern masses ... To be uprooted means to have no place in the world, recognized and guaranteed by others, to be superfluous means not to belong to the world at all.²⁸

24. *Ibid.*, 157.

25. *Ibid.*, 461.

26. *Ibid.*, 462.

27. Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, Jerome Kohn (ed.) (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 121.

28. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 475.

And the threat of totalitarianism is still with us as long as this condition of superfluousness continues: “The danger of the corpse factories and holes of oblivion is that today, with populations and homelessness everywhere on the increase, masses of people are continuously rendered superfluous if we continue to think of our world in utilitarian terms.”²⁹

Totalitarianism is the stripping away of everything that gives one a place in the world, from private property to personal relationships to the right of government protection. It is the stripping away of the legal and the moral person, leaving only the “naked human being.” Stripped down to bare existence, the conditions are set for mass murder: “Only in the last stage of a lengthy process is their right to life threatened; only if they remain perfectly ‘superfluous,’ if nobody can be found to ‘claim’ them, may their lives be in danger.”³⁰

If totalitarianism is marked fundamentally by the condition of worldlessness, whereby reality is replaced by a fiction, politics is reduced to the laws of history or nature, and masses of people are rendered superfluous and thereby murdered, then for Arendt our only remedy against the threat of totalitarianism is to recover a sense of reality and a place in the world. In other words, our only remedy is a return of the political. And this for Arendt requires first of all rethinking the fundamental categories of politics, namely, freedom, power, and action.

II. RETHINKING FREEDOM, POWER, AND ACTION

Arendt’s critique of Hobbes, Rousseau, and the modern nation-state is instructive not only for understanding the elements that crystallized into the event of totalitarianism, but also for understanding how her radical rethinking of freedom, power, and action allow her to offer a new theoretical framework for thinking the political. Only through a radical reformulation of power, freedom, and the public space, Arendt argues, is it possible to sever politics from the disastrous twin conceptions of sovereign agency and sovereign state power.

Indeed, Arendt’s rejection of sovereign power has its basis in her rejection of the dominant philosophical understanding of freedom, which, as we saw above, from Augustine onward has largely understood freedom as located in a subjective will. Her understanding of freedom, on the contrary, is political, located not in the “I will” but in the “I am able.” Indebted to Aristotle, she argues that freedom is always the freedom to move and is by definition worldly. Indeed,

29. *Ibid.*, 459.

30. *Ibid.*, 296.

she argues that the experience of “worldly freedom” is the condition of an inner sense of freedom:

Hence, in spite of the great influence the concept of an inner, non-political freedom has exerted upon the tradition of thought, it seems safe to say that man would know nothing of inner freedom if he had not first experienced a condition of being free as a worldly tangible reality.³¹

Freedom, she argues, is “experienced in the process of acting and nothing else”; this capacity to act and to move must be understood as the capacity to begin, to get a move on: “The Greek word *archein* which covers beginning, leading, ruling, that is, the outstanding qualities of the free man, bears witness to an experience in which being free and the capacity to begin something new coincided.”³² From the outset, Arendt’s understanding of freedom is inseparable from power, the ability to begin. And, to go further, the “I am able” must be understood as the ability to act in a public space, to move in a space of freedom with others.

Moreover, power according to Arendt must always be said in the plural. In other words, for power to exist there must be other centers of power: “Power comes into being only if and when men join themselves together for the purpose of action, and it will disappear when, for whatever reason, they disperse and desert one another.”³³ Domination, by contrast, is the loss of power that occurs only where there is a central ruling power. Thus the notion of sovereignty can denote strength but it can never denote power. The principle of federalism, she argues, illuminates the point. The establishment of the Union of the United States, as James Madison and Thomas Jefferson understood, did not take away from the power of the states, but instead provided a new source of power. Indeed, she argues that if the individual states had not existed, the Union would have had to erect them in order to have the power it did. This again suggests that power is generated by power and to be powerful one must be in relation to other powers. Here we see Arendt’s rejection of Rousseau’s identification of sovereignty with power. Arendt argues instead that action demands a plurality of actors; further, power must be understood as the only “human attribute which applies solely to the worldly in-between space by which actors are mutually related.”³⁴

Power therefore denotes not only the ability to act, but action in concert with others.³⁵ Thus Arendt insists that “the power structure itself precedes and

31. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 148.

32. *Ibid.*, 166.

33. Arendt, *On Revolution*, 175.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 44.

outlasts all aims, so that power, far from being the means to an end, is actually the very condition enabling a group of people to think and act in the means-ends category.”³⁶ This is why Arendt argues that full-blown terror, resulting in the complete atomization of the political, is the presence of an absolute violence without the presence of power. Power, present only when people act in concert, has completely disappeared. Charles Montesquieu already saw this problem: terror is ultimately impotent and self-destructive because it fears any and all organization, even turning against those in its own forces who might organize. Going further, Arendt argues that the difference between totalitarianism and tyranny is that the former turns even against the power of its friends.³⁷

How then can we think legitimate power? I submit that Arendt’s understanding of a noncentralized nonsovereign power, synonymous with public freedom and action, allows for rethinking a legitimate principle of power. Here we must grasp that the modern understanding of law, having its roots in Hobbes, is contractual; furthermore, the contractual understanding of law is inseparable from an understanding of power as sovereign. Arendt argues, however, that the contract is not the exclusive foundation for the law. In contradistinction to the contract, the law can be founded on the mutual compact. She points to compacts such as the Mayflower Compact, which were made prior to the American Revolution, and which were made with no reference to prince or king. The principle of the compact (or covenant) is the claim to power without the further claim to sovereignty. The principle was “neither expansion nor conquest but the further combination of powers.”³⁸ The compact, Arendt argues, understands the political bond in the old Roman sense of alliance: “Such an alliance gathers together the isolated strength of the allied partners and binds them into a new power structure by virtue of ‘free and sincere promises.’”³⁹ Again, she argues, this is very different from the contract wherein an individual person resigns his “power to some higher authority and consents to be ruled in exchange for a reasonable protection of his life and property.”⁴⁰ The difference between an act of covenant and an act of consent is that the first is based on an increase of power through the recognition of others inspired by the principle of plurality, while the second is based on the surrender of power in the recognition of sovereignty inspired by the principle of unanimity.

The notion of law that emerges out of the mutual covenant is one that understands the law as neither sovereign nor dominating, neither commandment nor imposed standard. Rather, following Montesquieu’s insight, Arendt suggests that

36. Arendt, *On Revolution*, 151.

37. Arendt, *On Violence*, 55.

38. Arendt, *On Revolution*, 168.

39. *Ibid.*, 170.

40. *Ibid.*, 169.

the law must be understood as regulator of different domains of power. Here there is a way to think multiplicity of power with rule. Arendt again looks to Montesquieu for whom the law, “never lost is original ‘spatial significance’ altogether, namely, ‘the notion of a range or province within which defined power may be legitimately exercised.’”⁴¹ And since the laws are no more than the relations that exist and preserve different realms of power, and are therefore relative by definition, Arendt argues that Montesquieu “needed no absolute source of authority and could describe the ‘spirit of the laws’ without ever posing the troublesome question of their absolute validity.”⁴²

Yet Arendt does not relinquish the problem of legitimate principles of power, and it is this that moves her from an analysis of power to the formulation of a principle of humanity that would be the basis for distinguishing legitimate and illegitimate forms of power. She accomplishes this through an analysis of the event of natality, drawing on the triple meaning of the Greek word *archē*, which she argues conveys the triple sense of principle, beginning, and common ground. The principle of action, she argues, lies in its beginning and it is this principle of *initium* that provides the inspiration for power and action. Now, if it is the case that power is synonymous with action and freedom, and, further, if all three terms denote the appearance of an actor among a plurality of actors in a space of freedom, then the principle that inspires power and political action, and which lends action its legitimacy, is the principle of publicness: “Because of its inherent tendency to disclose the agent together with the act, action needs for its full appearance the shining brightness we once called glory, and which is possible only in the public realm.”⁴³ Insofar as action and power are synonymous terms for Arendt, we can substitute power for action in the above passage. In other words, her analysis suggests that legitimate power is precisely power that allows the actor to appear in a public space with others. This principle of publicness is the principle that ought to inspire the constitution of the political space and all activities carried out therein: it demands that the divisions of power be such that all actors are able to appear and to act. In still other words, the principle of publicness demands that all positive, civil laws constitute and regulate the divisions of power in such a way that all the actors are empowered.

To go further, the principle of publicness also permits philosophically establishing a notion of “rights” that does not have its basis in an understanding of human nature as a sovereign subject endowed with inalienable rights. Arendt is able to reject the fiction of human nature and still think the inalienable right of the actor who in order to act must be able to appear in a public space of

41. *Ibid.*, 186–7.

42. *Ibid.*, 189.

43. *Ibid.*, 180.

freedom. Although stripped of state, stripped of a home, the actor must not be stripped of this fundamental right to be able to appear, because the first act, the act of beginning itself – the event of natality – contains both the beginning and its principle within itself.

The event of natality carries within it the principle of publicness, which restated as the law of humanity (humanity understood as the appearance of the actor among a plurality of actors in a public space of freedom), demands that the actor have the right to appear, or, as Arendt so succinctly states, have “the right to have rights.” Again, this is a right not predicated on a metaphysical understanding of the human being as having a nature, but instead, on an event, the fundamental event of human existence, that is, the event of natality. To be born is to appear on the globe. This is precisely the law of humanity articulated by Kant in his essay “Perpetual Peace” and quoted so approvingly by Arendt in her Kant lectures: “Humans have it by virtue of their common possession of the earth, whereas on a globe, they cannot infinitely disperse and hence must finally tolerate the presence of each other. [For] the common right to the face of the earth ... belongs to human beings generally.”⁴⁴ The new principle of humanity that grounds the “right to have rights” is the principle of publicness that demands that each actor by virtue of the event of natality itself has the right to appear; that is, the right to temporary sojourn on the face of the earth. Inseparable from the principle of publicness is the principle of plurality. As she argues in *The Human Condition*, appearance means to be seen and heard by others.⁴⁵ The fundamental condition of being human, she argues, “is that men and not man inhabit the world.”⁴⁶ In other words, “plurality is the law of the earth.”⁴⁷ Being and appearing are coincident, and appearance requires a spectator: “Nothing and nobody exists in this world whose very being does not presuppose a *spectator*. In other words, nothing that is, insofar as it appears exists in the singular; everything that is is meant to be perceived by somebody.”⁴⁸ Indeed, for Arendt “world” is constituted only through a plurality of perspectives. Again, since the fundamental event, the beginning itself, carries its principle within it, the event of natality, the event of appearance itself, carries the principle of plurality – with its inherent publicness – within it.

Moreover, for Arendt, “appearance” carries with it the notion of *significant* speech and action. It is not enough to give someone a place of refuge; instead, the

44. Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, Ronald Beiner (ed.) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1982), 75.

45. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 50.

46. *Ibid.*, 7.

47. Hannah Arendt, *Life of the Mind, Vol. One: Thinking; Vol. Two: Willing* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), vol. 1, 19.

48. *Ibid.*

principle of plurality, with its inherent publicity demands that there be a public place where one is truly seen and heard. Otherwise, she argues, one is simply the fool or idiot: one who speaks or acts without significance, which is just another kind of invisibility. Moreover, one must be able to *initiate* human action in concert with others; it is our “freedom to begin something new and unexpected that was not there before.”⁴⁹ And for Arendt, significant speech and action, as well as the capacity to begin something new, can occur only in a political space. In this context, Arendt’s approving reference to Pericles’s funeral oration receives added import: “Wherever you go, you will be a *polis*.”⁵⁰ Wherever one goes, one has the right to belong to a political space where significant speech and action, as well as the capacity to initiate, is possible. And this is because each human being is an appearance who requires a public space in order to truly appear: “To be deprived of it means to be deprived of reality, which, humanly and politically speaking, is the same as appearance.”⁵¹

More fundamental than the rights of justice and freedom, for Arendt, is the right to action and opinion, as well as the right to belong to a political community in which one’s speech and action are rendered significant:

We became aware of the existence of a right to have rights (and this means to live in a framework where one is judged by one’s actions and opinions), as well as the right to belong to some kind of organized community, only when millions of people emerged who had lost and could not regain these rights because of the new global political situation.⁵²

Arendt’s theoretical reformulation of the fundamental “right to have rights” emerges out of her reflection on the *initium* inherent in the ontological event of natality, an *initium* that makes every human being a beginner. On this point, Arendt is much indebted to Augustine’s insight, “*Initium ergo ut esset, creatus est homo, ante quem nullus fuit* [That there might be a beginning, man was created, before whom nobody was].”⁵³ This principle of *initium*, she argues, allows for a radical reformulation of the modern framework of human rights, such that the rights of freedom and agency are rooted in the more fundamental rights of action and speech. Moreover, the right of sovereignty, individual and collective, is replaced with the right to belong to an organized political space, with its inherent plurality of actors. Ultimately, for Arendt, federated political

49. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 151.

50. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 198.

51. *Ibid.*, 199.

52. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 296–7.

53. Arendt, *Essays in Understanding*, 321.

spaces with a plurality of power centers must replace the notion of the national sovereignty of a nation-state.

III. RETHINKING POLITICS: THE EVENT OF NATALITY

In her analysis of totalitarianism, Arendt claims that with the rise of the historical sciences, “the central position which the concept of beginning and origin must have in all political thought has been lost”⁵⁴ It is not too much to claim that Arendt’s rethinking of politics is an attempt to restore to central place the concept of “beginning.” If Heidegger is the thinker of mortality understood fundamentally in terms of being-towards-death, then Arendt is the thinker of mortality understood primarily in terms of natality, the fundamental event of beginning. Indeed, for her the political concern for immortality is rooted in this event of natality in which the beginner *appears* and as such desires endurance in time.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt begins her analysis of the *vita activa* with a distinction between eternity and immortality. While her discussion of immortality is often read as an argument for heroic deeds and speech that distinguish the actor in the public realm and, thereby, ensure through remembrance his or her endurance in time, close examination of Arendt’s argument reveals that she is not so much interested in the endurance of individual deeds as she is in the endurance of humanity itself. Immortality, she argues, is the concern of those beings who are mortal. Mortality marks the division between life and death; it marks a cut in time whereby human beings move “along a rectilinear line in a universe where everything, if it moves at all, moves in a cyclical order.”⁵⁵ This transformation of linear into rectilinear time distinguishes the human being from other animal species.

Arendt makes the same point early on in *The Human Condition* in her discussion of the meaning of mortality:

Men are “the mortals,” the only mortal things in existence, because unlike animals they do not exist only as members of the species whose immortal life is guaranteed through procreation. The mortality of men lies in the fact that individual life, with a recognizable life-story from birth to death, rises out of biological life.⁵⁶

54. *Ibid.*

55. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 19.

56. *Ibid.*

Mortality is the cut in the temporality of biological life, and yet mortality is not completely cut off from biological life. Instead, the cut of mortality introduces another temporality into biological life, thereby infusing biological life with mortality. Insofar as the event of natality is for Arendt also the event of mortality, it must be understood as always already introducing this mortal cut into biological life, thereby confounding any strict distinction between the biological and the mortal. Simply put, for Arendt, the mortal never possesses “bare life.”

The concern with immortality is inseparable from a political life:

Without this transcendence into a potential earthly immortality, no politics, strictly speaking, no common world and no public realm is possible ... But such a common world can survive the coming and going of the generations only to the extent that it appears in public. It is the publicity of the public realm which can absorb and make shine through the centuries whatever men may want to save from the natural ruin of time.⁵⁷

Immortality, therefore, is a political achievement that institutes an enduring, common world. Neither a religious sentiment nor founded in the fear of death, the desire for immortality is the desire for a common world that delivers us from obscurity; it is the desire to be visible, to be seen and recognized by equals; it is the desire for our own image granted only through the perspectives of others. Far from celebrating a politics of heroic individualism, Arendt's emphasis on immortality is rooted in the desire to appear, that is, the desire to be: “The term ‘public’ ... means, first, that everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody and has the widest possible publicity. For us, appearance – something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves – constitutes reality.”⁵⁸ The fulfillment of this desire depends on there being a plurality of others who share a common world. Citing Aristotle, she argues, “To men the reality of the world is guaranteed by the presence of others, by its appearing to all; ‘for what appears to all, this we call Being,’ and whatever lacks this appearance comes and passes away like a dream ...”⁵⁹ Indeed, our very sense of reality “depends utterly upon appearance” in a common world, the reality of which “relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself and for which no common measurement or denominator can ever be devised.”⁶⁰ It is clear in these passages that

57. *Ibid.*, 55.

58. *Ibid.*, 51.

59. *Ibid.*, 199.

60. *Ibid.*, 57.

Arendt is thinking the solidarity of humanity not as a solidarity that identifies with the other nor as one established in a reciprocity of identifications; rather, solidarity emerges out of the irreducible nonintegration of different standpoints wherein there is equality (not identification) in difference: “the sameness of utter diversity.”

Arendt goes so far as to call this desire to appear an “innate impulse” as compelling as the fear which accompanies the urge for self-preservation:

It is indeed as though everything that is alive – in addition to the fact that its surface is made for appearance, fit to be seen and meant to appear to others – has an *urge to appear*, to fit itself into the world of appearances by displaying and showing, not its “inner self” but itself as an individual.⁶¹

Looking to the research of the Swiss biologist and zoologist Adolf Portmann, Arendt argues that this “urge to appear” cannot be explained in functional terms; instead, she suggests, the “urge to appear” is gratuitous, having to do with the sheer pleasure of self-display. Human beings, who have a concern with an *enduring* image, transform this urge to self-display into a desire for self-presentation, which she argues involves a “promise to the world, to those to whom I appear, to act in accordance with my pleasure.”⁶²

The division between the natural and mortal/immortal being, therefore, coincides with the first division between the private and public realm. For Arendt the only way our individual and collective desires can avoid the fanaticism and madness of radical evil is by the *political institution* of a different form of time – the time of immortality – rooted not in religion or fear but in the desire for an enduring image and mode of appearance. This is a desire met only in a public space with an irreducible plurality of others with whom we promise our pleasures rather than assert our needs. Indeed, Arendt’s highly controversial distinction between the social and the political must be understood against the background of this transformation of temporality.

Finally, Arendt suggests that the political institution of the temporality of immortality must be accompanied by an affectivity that provides an animating or dynamic basis for the political bond or what Arendt calls “the solidarity of humanity.”⁶³ Indeed, one could read her “politics of natality” and its insistence

61. Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, vol. 1, 29.

62. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 36.

63. Insisting on an affective dimension to political life, Arendt is in the tradition of Montesquieu, who argues that the laws and institutions (the form) of any political regime is always animated by an *affective principle* (the spirit of the laws) that establishes the political bond. Thus the laws and institutions of a monarchy are animated by the love of honor, while the laws and

on the move from the natural to the mortal/immortal, from *zoe* to *bios*, as adding another properly *political* chapter to Hobbes's understanding of the human being. Contrary to Hobbes's natural position, Arendt's political understanding of the human being insists on the transformation of the time of self-interest to the temporality of public happiness with its promise of shared pleasures. This, in turn, allows her to reformulate the "solidarity of humanity" and its predicament of common responsibility.

In her essay *On Violence*, Arendt takes up the issue of whether "enlightened self-interest" can adequately resolve conflict and prevent violence. Using the example of a rent dispute between tenant and landlord, Arendt argues that

enlightened interest would focus on a building fit for human habitation; however, the argument that "*in the long run* the interest of the building is the *true* interest of both the landlord and the tenant," leaves out of account the time factor which is of paramount importance for all concerned.⁶⁴

Because of mortality, she argues, the self *qua* self cannot calculate in long-term interest:

Self-interest, when asked to yield to "true interest" – that is, the interest of the world as distinguished from that of the self – will always reply, "Near is my shirt, but nearer is my skin" ... it is the not very noble but adequate response to the time discrepancy between men's private lives and the altogether different life expectancy of the public world.⁶⁵

To move from self-interest to "world-interest" requires a move from fear to love of the "public thing."⁶⁶

Love of the "public thing" occurs only through the vigilant partiality of political friendship, which rejects from the outset any notion of truth, engaging instead in the practice of questioning and doubt that marks the secular ordeal of modern humanity.

institutions of a republic are animated by love of virtue. For Montesquieu's argument see *The Spirit of the Laws*, Anne M. Cohler, Basia C. Miller, and Harold S. Stone (eds and trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), especially part I. For Arendt's reading of Montesquieu on this point, see "On the Nature of Totalitarianism," in *Essays in Understanding*, 331–3.

64. Arendt, *On Violence*, 78.

65. *Ibid.*

66. *Ibid.*

For Arendt, Gotthold Lessing is the figure who embraces this secular ordeal:

He was glad that – to use his parable – the genuine ring, if it had ever existed, had been lost; he was glad for the sake of the infinite number of opinions that arise when men discuss the affairs of this world. If the genuine ring did exist, that would mean an end to discourse and thus to friendship and thus to humanness.⁶⁷

Lessing rejoices in that very thing that has caused so much distress, namely, “that the truth once uttered becomes one opinion among many, is contested, reformulated, reduced to one subject of discourse among others.”⁶⁸ Arendt goes on to suggest that Lessing was a “completely *political* person” because of this understanding of the relation between truth and humanity:

He insisted that truth can exist only where it is humanized by discourse, only where each man says not what just happens to occur to him at the moment, but what he “deems truth.” But such speech is virtually impossible in solitude; it belongs to an arena in which there are many voices and where the announcement of what each “deems truth” both links and separates men, establishing in fact those distances between men which together comprise the world.⁶⁹

This does not amount to tolerance; instead, “it has a great deal to do with the gift of friendship, with openness to the world, and finally with a genuine love of mankind.”⁷⁰

Lessing’s antimony between truth and humanity provides Arendt with a kind of thought experiment. She asks the reader to assume for a moment that the racial theories of the Third Reich could have been proved: “Suppose that a race could indeed be shown, by indubitable scientific evidence to be inferior; would that fact justify its extermination?”⁷¹ She asks the reader not to make the experiment too easy by invoking a religious or moral principle such as “thou shalt not kill”; she asks this in order to show a kind of thinking not governed by legal, moral, or religious principles (she asks this in the sober recognition that legal, moral, and religious principles did not prevent the worst from happening). This way of thinking without recourse to transcendent principles paradoxically gives rise to a fundamental political principle by which to judge our “truths”: “*Would*

67. Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968), 26.

68. *Ibid.*, 27.

69. *Ibid.*, 30–31.

70. *Ibid.*

71. *Ibid.*, 29.

*any such doctrine, however convincingly proved, be worth the sacrifice of so much as a single friendship between two men?*⁷²

The political principle is friendship: any doctrine that in principle barred the possibility of friendship must be rejected. Political friendship retreats from a notion of truth as “objective”; nonetheless, Arendt argues, it has nothing to do with a kind of subjective relativism where everything is viewed in terms of the self and its interests. Instead, “it is always framed in terms of the relationship of men to their world, in terms of their positions and opinions.” Lessing’s understanding of friendship, therefore, has nothing to do with the warmth of fraternity that desires above all to avoid disputes and conflicts. The excessive closeness of brotherliness, Arendt claims, obliterates all distinctions and Lessing understood this: “He wanted to be the friend of many men, but no man’s brother.”⁷³ Finally, while political friendship does not recognize any ultimate arbiter for its disputes and disagreements, nonetheless, it is guided by a fundamental exigency: we must assume responsibility for what is just and what is unjust, answering for our deeds and words.

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72. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

73. *Ibid.*, 30.

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6

GEORGES BATAILLE

Peter Tracey Connor

Georges Bataille¹ occupies an important if eccentric position in the history of continental philosophy. To the common understanding and practice of philosophy he opposed his own, rather idiosyncratic “method of meditation,” an approach to thinking that would take into account not only what a human subject can know, but also the experience of “nonknowledge” or “unknowing” (*le non-savoir*) that Bataille saw as the core of human existence. Respectful of erudition, he remained wary of anyone who “acquires his intelligence at the University,”² considering much academic philosophy to be pusillanimous (“that careful little man, philosopher!” he wrote of Bergson on finishing the latter’s *On Laughter*³). He identified his own project with that of Friedrich Nietzsche, whose writings, on his view, opened the way toward an understanding of man as a “bacchant philosopher”⁴: “What I teach,” Bataille writes, “is a drunkenness ... not a philosophy: I am not a philosopher, but a *saint*, maybe a madman.”⁵

1. Georges Bataille (September 10, 1897–July 8, 1962; born in Billom, France; died in Paris) was educated at the Séminaire de Saint-Fleur (1917), École des Chartes (1918–22), and École des Hautes Études Hispaniques, Madrid (1922). His influences included Hegel, Kojève, Mauss, Nietzsche, Sade, and Shestov, and he held appointments at the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris (1922–42), Bibliothèque de Carpentras (1949–51), and Bibliothèque d’Orléans (1951–62).

2. Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, Leslie Anne Boldt (trans.) (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1988), 179.

3. *Ibid.*, 66.

4. *Ibid.*, 28. [*] Nietzsche is discussed in detail in an essay by Daniel Conway in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 2*.

5. Georges Bataille, *Method of Meditation*, Michelle Kendall and Stuart Kendall (trans.), in *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 285–6 n.6.

While his writings address some of the canonical texts of Western philosophy, especially Hegel's, his engagement with these texts is so thoroughly critical that it would not be an exaggeration to say that Bataille sought, by philosophical means, to escape from philosophy. The cardinal concept of "inner experience" serves in his writings to highlight the limitations of philosophical inquiry and the ultimate "emptiness of intelligent questions."⁶ Attempting to move beyond what he considered the verbalism and intellectualism of phenomenology (in particular), inner experience represents an attempt to accede to the realm of nonknowledge, the perfect (although unrealizable) expression of which would be silence. Such a project, the repressed traces of which Bataille thought he detected in Hegel's dialectic,⁷ has obvious parallels in the Christian mystical tradition, a corpus that Bataille sometimes invokes; the proximity of his thought to currents of mysticism brought upon him the ridicule of "official" philosophers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre.⁸

Although Bataille would later claim that his lack of philosophical training was in part a matter of principle ("it was deliberately that I decided not to be a specialist in philosophy"⁹), his intellectual development was nonetheless influenced by encounters with two eminent philosophers, both of them Russian. Lev Shestov (Lev Izaakovic Schwartzmann, 1866–1938), who arrived in Paris in 1920 in flight from the Bolshevik Revolution, served the young Bataille as a "reliable" mentor in philosophical matters; for a number of years, he guided Bataille in his readings of Nietzsche and studied with him some of Plato's works (Bataille, a good linguist, was able to read Plato in the original). The young Bataille, who had considered entering the priesthood and had attended a Catholic seminary before losing his faith in 1922, was attracted above all to Shestov's embrace of the tragic side of existence. Author of *The Philosophy of Tragedy: Dostoevsky and Nietzsche* (1903), Shestov favored figures who stand on the threshold of philosophy and religion (Plotinus, Pascal, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche), and whose writings, issuing directly from their experience, place them in proximity to the very categories of "madness" or "saintliness" that Bataille later claimed for himself. Shestov's manner of writing philosophy also left its mark on Bataille. Aphoristic and often self-contradictory, Shestov's style reflects his conviction that reason and knowledge alone cannot adequately account for the totality

6. Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 8.

7. See Georges Bataille (with Raymond Queneau), "The Critique of the Foundations of the Hegelian Dialectic," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, Allan Stoekl (ed.), Allan Stoekl, with Carl R. Lovitt and Donald M. Leslie, Jr. (trans.) (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

8. See Peter Tracey Connor, *Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

9. Georges Bataille, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 8, 562, my translation.

of human experience. Bataille (who collaborated on the translation of one of Shestov's books into French) absorbed this fragmentary and deliberately paradoxical style of philosophizing, while the conviction that existence is irreducible to rational inquiry underpins his notion of nonknowledge.

Bataille began to distance himself from Shestov in the late 1920s when, in his own accounting, he turned along with the rest of his generation toward Marxism. He met Alexandre Kojève (Aleksandr Vladimirovič Koževnikov, 1902–68) in the 1930s when he attended Kojève's lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* at the École des Hautes Etudes.¹⁰ Kojève was slightly younger than Bataille. In his courses he read, translated, and commented on passages from Hegel that recur in Bataille's writings, notably in *Inner Experience* and *Guilty*, both of which are in part a response to Kojève's reading of Hegel. The encounter with Kojève allowed Bataille to focus his thinking about human activity in critical relation to phenomenology, and to formulate, in a sort of challenge to Hegel's philosophy of action, a notion he calls (in a letter to Kojève) "unemployed negativity": "If action ('doing') is – as Hegel says – negativity, the question arises as to whether the negativity of one who has 'nothing more to do' disappears or remains in a state of 'unemployed negativity.'"¹¹ The idea of remaining in a state of "unemployed negativity" appeals to Bataille; it is a state he theorizes in several essays and represents dramatically via his fictional characters, particularly Dirty and Troppmann in *Blue of Noon*. Throughout his life, Bataille remained deeply critical of the primacy in modern society of "the world of work," to such an extent that, in his eyes, criminals, poets, saints and idlers – who refuse the world of work and the principle of utility that governs it, who refuse "action" – represent a destabilizing, even revolutionary energy. More generally, Bataille included in the category of "unemployed negativity" everything that in a given society remains irreducible to assimilation: waste matter, criminality, excess, eroticism, madness, and *désœuvrement* – all that heterogeneous matter that a system (be it philosophical or political) cannot readily put to use and must expel in order to function smoothly. Bataille's encounter with Kojève is decisive in that he saw in Kojève's Hegel exactly what he wanted to refute: a worldview based on knowledge, and that excludes the turbulent, unmasterable experiences that Bataille equates with being human.

From early in his career, Bataille expressed reservations about philosophy's ability to reflect a reality that he felt to be essentially without form. "All of philosophy," he wrote in a brief article from 1929, "has no other goal [than that] of giving a frock coat to what is, a mathematical frock coat. On the other hand,

*10. Kojève's interpretation of Hegel is discussed in the essay by John Russon in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 4*.

11. Georges Bataille, "Letter to X, Lecturer on Hegel," in *The College of Sociology 1937–39*, Denis Hollier (ed.), Betsy Wing (trans.) (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 90.

affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only *formless* amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit.”¹² Since language, especially as it is used in philosophy as an instrument of enlightenment, tends to create the impression that human existence is knowable and obeys discoverable laws, it is not surprising that all of Bataille’s writings struggle with and protest against language’s form-giving powers. Bataille is indeed an important figure in what is sometimes called the “linguistic turn” in philosophy: his emphasis on the complex role of language in philosophical exposition has given rise to searching inquiries on the topic from Julia Kristeva to Jacques Derrida.¹³ His manner of writing – his way of insisting that language be made to divest itself of its rhetorical prowess – is a call to philosophers to be more attentive to the issue of how a thought is expressed, to be aware of the linguistic constructedness of a reality often presented as natural. “If it were necessary to give me a place in the history of thought,” Bataille wrote in 1953, “it would be I think for having discerned the effect, in our human life, of the ‘fading of discursive reality’ and for having drawn from these effects an evanescent light.”¹⁴ “Discursive reality” refers here to reality as it is construed in the texts of a number of philosophers for whom discourse and representation remain unproblematized categories. “Discursive reality,” Bataille believes, must not be taken to reflect the totality of existence (or the “whole person” as Bataille puts it). Hence every philosophical system must remain ultimately incomplete, because at its summit it will run up against a discursively untranslatable experience, an experience of “non-sense”: philosophy cannot have the last word.

Bataille is especially interested in those experiences and emotions – laughter, tears, extreme fear and pain, ecstasy, erotism, madness, drunkenness, and so on – that defy sense and resist translation into language. These states express themselves in shrieks, shudders, stammers, sobbing, silence – in some type of rupture with articulate speech. All of them, Bataille is convinced, indicate an absence of meaning; in speaking of them, or writing about them, Bataille is conscious of supplying a meaning they do not have. This is a paradox that Bataille never for an instant forgets; his books are shot through with avowals that his text is a necessary betrayal of a more perfect if impossible communication that would eschew words altogether:

Lautréamont said that the “intellectual bloodstain,” which is the mania for rationalizing, cannot be washed off. And in fact it cannot,

12. Georges Bataille, “Formless,” in *Visions of Excess*, 31.

*13. For a discussion of this “linguistic turn” in continental philosophy, see the essay by Claire Colebrook in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 6*.

14. Georges Bataille, “Post-scriptum to *Inner Experience*,” in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 5, 231.

I succumb to the use of words: *to be, effect, succumb, use*, all these words, assembled and chained together, proclaim my servitude; and it is not enough to recognize this in order to be rid of it. In fact, even the writer who is the most averse to discourse – to the “order of things” and to the servile language which expresses it – cannot be content with turning his back on it; he is himself forced to express himself on the level of discourse, forced to have an intellectual position. But this is painful to him: he does it against his will, with gnashing of teeth ...¹⁵

From this and dozens of similar passages throughout his *oeuvre* it emerges that Bataille is neither a Wittgensteinian, who would concede that there are things of which we cannot speak, nor a Romantic, lamenting language’s inability to capture ineffable experience. On the contrary, to the extent that there is something like a philosophy of language running through Bataille’s *oeuvre*, it is marked by a paradoxical, almost Beckettian sense of the simultaneous impossibility and necessity of speaking: his emphasis on an obligation (the writer is “forced” to use language) that is “painful” seems to suggest moreover an ethical dimension to writing.

The issue of language is thus for Bataille neither merely rhetorical, nor peripheral; it is primary, and it is intractable. While language defines us as human, we are not so naive as to imagine that language alone can envelop that nonmaterial “plenitude of being” of which every human has or can have a complete experience: “we are ... the expectation that no material response can satisfy, no tricks with words deceive.”¹⁶ This frank recognition of the limitations of language incites Bataille to write at the limits of language (he strains syntax beyond the point of comprehensibility, leaves sentences unfinished, uses ellipses to excess) in an attempt to forge a writing that he calls (again echoing Beckett) “impossible.” This impossible language can come about only through “the *liberation of the power of words*,”¹⁷ which paradoxically means also (in French he employs a double genitive) a “*liberation from the power of words*”;¹⁸ since “words ... serve *only to flee*”¹⁹ and “drain almost all life from within us,”²⁰ only a liberation from them can create the conditions for “profound communication,” which, Bataille

15. Georges Bataille, “Surrealism and God,” in *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism*, Michael Richardson (trans.) (London: Verso, 1994), 183, translation modified.

16. Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, Mary Dalwood (trans.) (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Press, 1986), 274.

17. Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 15.

18. *Ibid.*, original italics, emphasis added.

19. *Ibid.*, 13.

20. *Ibid.*, 14.

writes, “demands silence.”²¹ Only words that have been released from their condition of “servility,” from their “job” of producing meaning (of producing discursive reality), can communicate that moment when “existence gives way in a cry.”²²

“I cannot consider someone free if they do not have the desire to sever the bonds of language within themselves,” Bataille wrote.²³ Yet the resources of the writer who would turn against language – or try to turn language against itself – are limited (Bataille is prudent in writing of “the *desire* to sever the bonds of language”). One strategy Bataille adopted in his writing was to refuse to limit himself to a single discursive field or genre, allowing his text to be traversed by multiple discourses and various forms that are often held apart. Bataille juxtaposes poetry and prose, philosophical analysis and personal anecdote, text and image; he borrows examples and metaphors and from the lexicons of political theory, economics, archaeology, ethnology, numismatics, philosophy, theology. His thought relies on a network of key terms, many of which he has so marked that they are virtually synonymous with his name, drawn from these different discursive domains: transgression, expenditure (*dépense*), consumption, sovereignty, erotism, nonknowledge, atheology, ecstasy, the impossible, restricted/general economy, and so on. The overarching inquiry that links all of these terms is an economic one and concerns the question of *communication*. Communication, the foundation of social existence, is what allows the isolated individual to escape from the prison of the self and to share in the experience of community. Communication cannot take place between perfectly self-sufficient beings; for communication to come about, there must be on either side a wound – some fissure or opening that allows for one being to enter into contact with another.

Bataille’s ideas about communication and the sacred were influenced by ethnology, with which he came into contact through his friend Alfred Metraux. Marcel Mauss’s 1925 essay *The Gift*, “a magisterial study” in Bataille’s words, had the greatest influence.²⁴ In the early 1930s, Bataille was preoccupied with what he called “improductive expenditure” (*la dépense improductive*), meaning the expenditure of energy without reserve and without any expectation of return. Western capitalist societies are largely allergic to such spending, since the capitalist economy depends on its own endless expansion and this in turn depends on returns from spending and investments. Capitalist society, based on the values of prudence, calculation, and predictability, is produced by and

21. *Ibid.*, 93.

22. *Ibid.*, 119.

23. Georges Bataille, “On the Subject of Slumbers,” in *The Absence of Myth*, 49.

*24. Mauss is discussed in an essay by Mike Gane in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 3*.

reproduces a particular type of subject, the *Homo economicus*, who in Bataille's estimation is an "incomplete man," a fearful, isolated and rather pitiful creature who has relinquished his sovereignty in exchange for an illusory sense of security. Bataille believed that life is essentially a conflagration, a fundamentally useless consummation of energy that should not be harnessed for any productive end. In reading about the gift-giving ceremony of potlatch among American Indians of the Canadian Northwest, discussed by Mauss, and about sacrifice among the Aztecs, Bataille felt he had come upon the refutation of the very principle of capitalist economics. These rituals suggested to him the possibility of an economy based not on production and gain, but on expenditure and waste, on the destruction rather than the accumulation of wealth. In *The Accursed Share*, he invokes these examples in order to oppose to the restricted economy that prevails a general economy that answers more adequately to humanity's most fundamental needs.

The theory of general economy states that living organisms produce more than they need for their own survival; while some of the excess energy produced is channeled into expansion, an excess or "surplus" remains that must be expended in prodigious forms of waste:

When one considers the *totality* of productive wealth on the surface of the globe, it is evident that the products of this wealth can be employed for productive ends only insofar as the living organism that is economic mankind can increase its equipment. This is not entirely – neither always nor indefinitely – possible. A surplus must be dissipated through deficit operations: the final dissipation cannot fail to carry the movement that animates terrestrial energy.²⁵

Bataille's thesis challenged Marxist notions of economics, which tended to emphasize production and growth, shifting the ground of debate toward consumption and loss. If his thesis appears contrary to the logic of the economic market, and even to intuition, this is because the economy has not yet been considered "in general," but has been envisaged only in a restricted fashion, that is, as a series of "particular operations with limited ends."²⁶ One need only look to the history of economics in different cultures, Bataille argued, to find instances

25. Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. 1: Consumption*, Robert Hurley (trans.) (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 22.

26. *Ibid.* The theory is based at least in part on the ideas of the nuclear scientist Georges Ambrosino, who argued that "the energy produced [in a system] is superior to the energy necessary for its production"; cited in Allan Stoekl, "Excess and Depletion: Bataille's Surprisingly Ethical Model of Expenditure," in *Reading Bataille Now*, Shannon Winnubst (ed.) (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 255.

in which surplus energy is expended in a manner that does not seek a return or a profit. Bataille believed that human beings crave “deficit operations”; they are indeed “destined” for “glorious operation” and for “useless consumption.”²⁷ *The Accursed Share* thus urges us to take into account, in thinking about economics, a sovereign force running counter to the functional spending of traditional economic theory and that Bataille, trying to describe the object of inquiry of general economics, calls the “explosive character of this world.”²⁸

Bataille’s interpretation of the meaning of Aztec and North-American Indian rituals, it has been suggested, may have been somewhat lyrical. Christian Duverger for one contests Bataille’s citation of Aztec sacrifice as an example of unproductive expenditure, showing it to be linked instead to the extension of Aztec power. It appears further that, for the societies that practiced them, potlatch ceremonies served an important regulatory economic function.²⁹ But Bataille’s misreading is instructive insofar as it illustrates what he took to be the challenge facing his generation: to work out an economics based on some principle other than that of accumulation, and in so doing to release man from the alienating effects of unchecked capitalism. This is the major theme of his postwar work, but we can find its origins in the essays Bataille penned in the 1930s. “Perhaps the worst of all ills afflicting human beings,” he wrote in 1938, “is the reduction of their existence to the condition of slavish instrument.”³⁰ The predominance of work had in Bataille’s estimation resulted in a culture of “exhausting boredom”;³¹ the only adequate response, he believed, was “to refuse boredom and live only for fascination.”³²

It is important to note that while Aztec rituals, gift-giving ceremonies, and even the Marshall Plan fulfilled, on a grand scale, his vision of a society given over to joyous destruction and wastage, Bataille envisaged as well more modest ways of “living for fascination,” including meditation (of which he was an adept, having practiced some form of meditative techniques as early as 1922), the consumption of alcohol, and even smoking. Each of these activities represents a type of unproductive expenditure that in itself is mildly revolutionary in that the one who so indulges subtracts himself or herself from the cycle of useful, productive labor and manages to escape momentarily into “ecstatic time.”³³ Of smoking for example Bataille writes:

27. Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, Vol. 1, 23.

28. *Ibid.*, 40.

29. See Christian Duverger, *La Fleur létale: Economie du sacrifice aztèque* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1979), 227.

30. Georges Bataille, “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice,” in *Visions of Excess*, 13.

31. Georges Bataille, “Popular Front in the Street,” in *Visions of Excess*, 167.

32. Georges Bataille, “The Sacred Conspiracy,” in *Visions of Excess*, 179.

33. Georges Bataille, “Propositions,” in *Visions of Excess*, 200.

There is in the use [of tobacco] a hidden sorcery: whoever smokes is in harmony with things (things such as the sky, a cloud, light). It isn't important that the smoker know this: tobacco frees him for a moment from the need to act ... Smoke escaping gently from a mouth gives to life freedom, the idleness one sees in the clouds.³⁴

But perhaps the most pervasive instance of unproductive expenditure in Bataille's writings is eroticism (or erotism, as the French *érotisme* is sometimes translated). Bataille's writings begin and end in eroticism, starting with the pseudonymously published *Story of the Eye* (1928), a tale of erotic initiation, and ending with *The Tears of Eros* (1961), a study of *eros* in art from prehistoric times to the present. A number of his many reflections on the topic – from the place of eroticism in inner experience to an analysis of the Kinsey Report – are collected in *L'Érotisme* (1957; published in English as *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*), a wide-ranging set of essays that complements his *History of Eroticism* (volume two of *The Accursed Share*). As the English title of this collection of essays makes plain, eroticism for Bataille is intimately related to an awareness of death: it is, he writes, “assenting to life up to the point of death.”³⁵ Eroticism is linked to death in a first, rather literal sense in that it is not concerned with reproduction of the species: sex that does not seek a reproductive end is in a sense a refusal of life. But the link between sex and death lies also in the destruction and violence common to both; eroticism entails the “destruction of the structure of the closed being,” and the opening up of that “closed being” (“closed” in the sense that it is habitually confined to the profane world of work and necessity) to “an exuberance of life” that is however “not alien to death.”³⁶ When Bataille speaks of death in relation to eroticism, he is moreover thinking also in terms of the death of meaning, of a sudden, intense and absolute loss of sense comparable to that known in inner (or mystical) experience. (This is why poetry and eroticism are closely related: each involves a surpassing or a sacrifice of sense [“poetry is the sacrifice in which words are the victims,” Bataille wrote] and each leads to the same place: “Poetry leads to the same place as every form of eroticism, to indistinction, to the confusion of distinct objects. It leads us to eternity, it leads us to death ...”³⁷) And as in the case of inner experience, the experience of “non-sense” triggered in eroticism is violent. “‘Violence’ overwhelms us *strangely* in each case [i.e. in both death and eroticism],” writes Bataille; “each time, what happens is

34. Bataille, *La Limite de l'utile*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 7, 225.

35. Bataille, *Erotism*, 11. The same sentence appears as a section heading in the chapter devoted to Emily Brontë's fiction in *Literature and Evil*, Alistair Hamilton (trans.) (New York: Marion Boyars, 1983), 16.

36. Bataille, *Erotism*, 11.

37. *Ibid.*

foreign to the received order of things, to which this violence each time stands in opposition.”³⁸ Violence and eroticism are coterminous for Bataille: eroticism entails violence inasmuch as it involves the sacrifice of meaning, and in almost all cases in Bataille’s writings, violence is read in erotic terms.³⁹

This complex interweaving of death, eroticism, and violence is the very heart of Bataille’s thinking: his philosophy as well as his fiction emerge from the “strangeness” of the world they engender, a world that is incongruous, volatile, unknowable, at times ecstatic, and, like the other instances of improductive expenditure we have noted, potentially revolutionary. For to the extent that eroticism is linked to death and violence, Bataille conceives of the “the world of lovers” as a unit of political resistance: opposed in practice to the imperative to produce (or reproduce), opposed to “the primacy of work,” eroticism is an experience at once unknowable (the “tears” of Eros are the external sign that the mechanism of understanding is “overwhelmed,” to use his favored term) and unusable.

Eroticism is a key notion in Bataille’s *oeuvre* in two other, related domains. First, the part of Bataille’s philosophical project that consists in theorizing “nonknowledge” implicates thought in a process of eroticization in which thought finds itself pushed into zones where traditional forms of knowledge falter. The aim of much of Bataille’s philosophizing is to sacrifice thought, meaning at once to sacralize it and to put it to death, and his erotic theory serves this end. It is fair to regard *Inner Experience* and *Guilty* as works that seek to violate philosophy, to make it swoon, to open it up to the possibility of nonknowledge and *jouissance*. “Only *violent thinking* coincides with the disappearance of thought,” he wrote.⁴⁰ If at times Bataille insisted that lectures take place in brothels (see below), it is because he wanted to conceive of thought as a festival, or, better, an orgy leading to the “death of thought”: “the death of thought is the voluptuous orgy that prepares death, the festival held in the house of death.”⁴¹

Second, in Bataille’s writings eroticism is inseparable from religion. “The meaning of eroticism escapes anyone who cannot see its religious meaning,” he writes; “Reciprocally, the meaning of religion in its totality escapes anyone

38. Georges Bataille, *The Tears of Eros*, Peter Connor (trans.) (San Francisco, CA: City Lights, 1989), 32.

39. Bataille was fascinated by violent criminals, especially those whose crimes were sexual in nature. See *The Trial of Gilles de Rais*, Richard Robinson (trans.) (Los Angeles, CA: Amok, 1991), and *The Tears of Eros* (especially “Gilles de Rais and Erzébet Báthory” and “Chinese Torture”).

40. Georges Bataille, “Post-scriptum to *Inner Experience*,” in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 5, 232.

41. Georges Bataille, “Nonknowledge,” in *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, 204.

who disregards the link with eroticism.”⁴² The connection between eroticism and religion lies in their shared “sensibility”: as is the case with eroticism, “religious sensibility ... always closely links desire and fright, intense pleasure and anguish.”⁴³ So intimate is the link between eroticism and religion that Bataille, in trying to situate his book *Erotism*, presents his work as something akin to “theology”: “The determination of eroticism is primitively religious and my work is closer to ‘theology’ than to the scientific history of religion ... As for me, I speak of religion from the inside, like a theologian speaks of theology.”⁴⁴

Of course, the religious experience of which Bataille speaks, like the erotic experience or again the “inner experience,” entails an “inward cessation of all intellectual functioning,”⁴⁵ such that properly speaking there can be no “science” (or logos) about it. This is why Bataille’s “theology” is an “atheology.” *La Somme athéologique* (*Atheological Summa*) is the name Bataille intended for a collected version of a number of his writings. He worked on their arrangement from 1952 until his death, without ever settling on either the content or the order of the edition. We know however from paratextual notes that it was to include at least *Inner Experience* (including *Method of Meditation* and an important “Postscript”), *Guilty*, and *On Nietzsche*, plus (in another version of the plan) a work on *Pure Happiness* and another to be entitled *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*. These last two works were never completed, although numerous lectures, essays and aphorisms give us a sense of what they might have included.⁴⁶ The choice of *La Somme athéologique* as title for this sprawling, ultimately formless work can be seen as ironic or even parodic. It refers of course to Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica* (in his notes, Bataille situates his own endeavor “in the history of religions”⁴⁷). But whereas Aquinas took the existence of God to be irrefutable and expounded on divine knowledge and Aristotelian science, Bataille wrote in the Nietzschean, acephalic moment after the death of God, insisting on ignorance and the impossibility of knowledge in the absence of God. Atheology is indeed “the science of the death or destruction of God.”⁴⁸ With his special genius for orchestrating unlikely and promiscuous encounters, Bataille’s atheological *Summa* was meant to bring together saints and sinners, philosophers, mystics, criminals and poets in an immense parody of rational thinking.

42. Bataille, *The Tears of Eros*, 70.

43. Bataille, *Erotism*, 39, translation modified.

44. *Ibid.*, 31–2, translation modified.

45. Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 4.

46. See Stuart Kendall’s “Editor’s Introduction: Unlimited Assemblage,” in *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*. I am indebted to Kendall in what follows.

47. Georges Bataille, “Plans pour la Somme athéologique,” in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 6, 374.

48. Georges Bataille, “Aphorisms for the ‘System,’” in *The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge*, 166.

At the same time, however, Bataille shares common theological ground with Aquinas in that the object for each of them is God. As Bataille writes about the origins of his book *Erotism* “nothing has intrigued me more than the idea of once more coming across the image that haunted my adolescence, the image of God. This is certainly not a return to the faith of my youth. But human passion has only one object in this abandoned world of ours.”⁴⁹ Bataille’s subject would always remain a *homo religiosus*: eroticism (but also meditation and especially poetry) leads, like the God of the mystics, to a “surpassing of personal being and of every limit.”⁵⁰

While never completely abandoning either the lexicon or the canonical texts of philosophical inquiry, Bataille reserves a special place, in his *oeuvre* and in his criticism, for literature and for poetry. The author of numerous works of fiction (*Story of the Eye*, *Blue of Noon*, *Madame Edwarda*, *My Mother*) that have secured for him an important place in the history of French letters, he consistently refuses to partition philosophy and literature, conceiving of his fictional output as a way of engaging otherwise, and complementarily, themes he has explored also in a more philosophical (or at times sociological) idiom. Thus his philosophical reflections on Hegel and Descartes in *Inner Experience* stand cheek by jowl with passages on Proust or Rimbaud or with his own poetry, while Kant makes an unlikely appearance in the pornographic novel *L'Abbé C*. The issue is not simply one of a hierarchy of genres: the ability to approach the “formless” quality of human experience is not by any means an inherent prerogative of literature. This is why Bataille chose to entitle his major statement on fiction *The Hatred of Poetry*, meaning to suggest his hatred for the elegance and refinement with which poetry is sometimes associated, and to distance himself from polite or effete forms of literature that relish their form-giving powers. Rather, Bataille privileges “outsider” writers who have challenged conventional literary and social practices. Some of these writers count among the *poètes maudits* – “that race forever cursed by the powerful of the earth” in Alfred de Vigny’s phrase – such as Baudelaire, Lautréamont, Rimbaud; others lived as political, social, or sexual outcasts in the society of their time (Sade, Blake, Kafka, Genet). What they have in common, according to Bataille, is an intimate relation to “an acute form of evil.”⁵¹ Bataille thus conceived of literature in broadly ethical terms, as a space of absolute freedom, including freedom from morality itself (he spoke of literature as a “hypermorality” resulting only from “complicity in the knowledge of Evil”).⁵² Bataille’s conception of aesthetics is thus rigorously

49. Bataille, *Erotism*, 8.

50. *Ibid.*, 130, translation modified.

51. Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, viiii (*sic*).

52. *Ibid.*

and explicitly opposed to the idea of *littérature engagée* expounded by Sartre and which Bataille felt to involve a domestication of literature's subversive potential: "It is important to define what literature, which cannot be reduced to serving a master, brings into play. *Non serviam*, it is said, is the motto of the devil. In that case, literature is diabolical."⁵³

I. THE COLLEGE OF SOCIOLOGY

Michel Surya notes that of those attending Kojève's seminar on Hegel, only two – Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Eric Weil – can be considered "pure" philosophers.⁵⁴ The others – Bataille, Raymond Queneau, Jacques Lacan, Raymond Aron, André Breton – are of diverse intellectual backgrounds. Bataille was very much at home in this kind of mixed milieu. Convinced of the virtue of collectives devoted to the discussion of ideas, he devoted a great deal of energy to collaborative intellectual labor, beginning with his work on a number of journals and reviews in the late 1920s and 1930s (*Documents*, *La Critique sociale*, *Contre-Attaque*) and his participation in groups in the prewar years, most notably Acéphale and the College of Sociology, but also in the lesser-known Society of Collective Psychology (of which Bataille was vice-president in 1937 and 1938). This commitment to collective undertakings, which he pursued after the war by founding the journal *Critique*, is very much in keeping with the centrality in his work of notions of community and communication.

Acéphale names both a review that appeared between June 1936 and June 1939 (five issues in all), and a secret society associated with the review and about which we know relatively little. Meetings of the society were held variously at the café L'Univers in the Place du Palais-Royal, in a brothel on the rue Pigalle, or, at night, at the site of a blasted tree in a remote part of the forest of Saint-Nom-la-Breteche. This last venue was for the members of Acéphale (which included Georges Ambrosino, Roger Caillois, Pierre Klossowski, Patrick Waldberg, and perhaps half a dozen others) a place for ritualistic acts, including the burning of sulfur. More mundane, daytime rites included refusing to shake the hands of known anti-Semites and eating horsemeat at lunch.⁵⁵ Bataille's fascination during this period with the religion of the Aztecs and with rituals of sacrifice perhaps explains the interest in the ranks of the Acéphale group in the sacrifice of one of its members by another; this act, the *summum genus* of the lesser rites,

53. Georges Bataille, "Letter to René Char on the Incompatibilities of the Writer," Christopher Carsten (trans.), *Yale French Studies* 78, "On Bataille," Allan Stoekl (ed.) (1990), 34, translation modified.

54. Michel Surya, *Georges Bataille: la Mort à l'œuvre* (Paris: Séguier, 1987), 197 n.2.

55. *Ibid.*, 255–6.

was to bind the members indissolubly, making of them a sort of brotherhood or even a kind of Church, founded on an “irreparable ritual gesture.”⁵⁶

An article by Bataille published in the first issue of *Acéphale*, “The Sacred Conspiracy,” constitutes something close to a manifesto for the group. Appearing in the turbulent political context of France in 1936, it is remarkable for the untimeliness of its central message: “It is time to abandon the civilized world and its light. It is too late to be reasonable and educated.”⁵⁷ Skeptical of the value of political agitation, Bataille offers up in this article a form of religiosity that would facilitate, through a firmness that borders on violence, an escape from the vacuities and impasses of political debate: “we are ferociously religious, and, to the extent that our existence is the condemnation of everything that is recognized today, an inner exigency demands that we be equally impetuous. What we are starting is a war.” By “ferociously religious,” Bataille means anti-Christian (Bataille authored an unpublished work entitled *Manual of the Anti-Christian*), and above all Nietzschean: several of the issues of *Acéphale* are devoted to Nietzsche, to his madness and to Dionysus, but also to the highly political issue of the appropriation of Nietzsche’s work by fascists, which Bataille denounced and patiently deconstructed.⁵⁸

The *Acéphale* group was as much an experiment in community as an intellectual adventure (the two were indissociable for Bataille). The foundation of the College of Sociology was announced in a “Note” in the July 1937 issue of *Acéphale*; the activities of the two organizations were thus concurrent. Like *Acéphale*, the college was in part an attempt to create a community; unlike *Acéphale*, its membership was open and it had an explicit theoretical and scholarly agenda – to study the conditions underlying the creation of a community, and specifically the place of the sacred in contemporary society. Meetings began in October 1937 and continued until July 1939; the first took place at the Grand Véfour (at the time a “dusty café at Palais Royal,” according to Caillois), those after that at Les Galeries du Livre, a bookstore in the Latin Quarter. The college was managed by Bataille and Caillois along with Michel Leiris; it seems to have been Bataille and Leiris who together determined the agenda for the meetings and decided who would deliver the lecture that served as a basis for discussion (in spite of its name, the college had no didactic function). Kojève, whose seminar on Hegel Bataille was still attending, was approached early on as a potential ally, but had reservations. According to Caillois, he specifically objected that

56. The words are Caillois’s; see Claudine Frank, *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 30.

57. Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 179.

58. See Bataille, “Nietzsche and the Fascists,” in *Visions of Excess*, 182–96. [*] For a discussion of Bataille’s influence on French Nietzscheanism, see the essay by Alan D. Schrift in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 6*.

Bataille, in attempting to reintroduce the sacred dimension lacking in modern society, wanted to play at being a sorcerer's apprentice: "such a miracle-worker," he is reported to have said, "could no more be carried away by a sacred knowingly activated by himself than could a conjurer be persuaded of the existence of magic while marveling at his own sleight of hand."⁵⁹ Kojève foresaw, even before its inaugural lecture, the tension at the heart of the college between a scholarly inquiry into the sacred, on the one hand, and the desire (on the part of Bataille in particular) to arouse, incite, or even incarnate that sacred (a goal he was pursuing quite explicitly with *Acéphale*). Founding members, in addition to Bataille, Caillois, and Leiris, included Jules Monnerot, who quickly distanced himself, Ambrosino, Pierre Libra, and Klossowski. Participants included Denis de Rougemont, Georges Duthuit, René Guastalla, Anatole Lewitzky, Hans Mayer, Jean Paulhan, Jean Wahl, Kojève (who consented to speak), and (probably) Paul-Louis Landsberg. Walter Benjamin was in regular attendance, although plans for him to present his essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" did not materialize.

In keeping with the thesis that society had been "devirilized" on account of "the relaxation of society's ties, practically non-existent as a result of the development of bourgeois individualism,"⁶⁰ the college set about an analysis of elements in society that have a communifying value. The privileged but far from unique object of this analysis was the sacred itself; in an essay entitled "The Sacred," published in 1939, and which we can consider to have been stimulated by the college's agenda, Bataille writes: "the sacred is only a privileged moment of communal unity, a moment of the convulsive communication of what is ordinarily stifled."⁶¹ With his emphasis on heterogeneous matter that has historically been excluded ("stifled") as well as on the "convulsive" nature of the communication of the sacred, Bataille situates the overall project of the college as a critique of the hegemony of reason and science (or "knowledge"). This is also the dominant theme of "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," Bataille's response to Kojève's withering remark about the incoherence of the college's aims. Here, Bataille opposes to "dissociated existence" or existence "broken into parts"⁶² a vision of the "whole person"⁶³ and of the "totality of existence" that might once again become possible if only "simple, intense existence" were not "destroyed by a slavishness to function."⁶⁴ Once again, here as elsewhere Bataille seeks for human beings an emancipation from constraints imposed by the modern world of work, with its incitement to careerism and specialization, and more generally

59. Bataille, *The College of Sociology 1937-39*, 13.

60. *Ibid.*, 45.

61. Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 240.

62. Bataille, *The College of Sociology 1937-39*, 17.

63. *Ibid.*, 14.

64. *Ibid.*, 18.

from the pervasive utilitarianism that harbors a denial of what is truly human (“[I]t is human to burn ... On the contrary, it is inhuman to abandon existence to a series of useful acts”⁶⁵).

The cast of characters that make up the college includes a large number of emigrés (the Russians Kojève and Lewitzky, the Italian born Guastalla, the Germans Benjamin, Landsberg, and Mayer, the Swiss de Rougemont). Its members are from diverse intellectual backgrounds (Ambrosino had trained as a physicist, Duthuit was an art historian, Paulhan managing editor at the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Guastalla a Hellenist, etc.) and of differing political coloring (Bataille was a leftist but politically autonomous, Kojève was a Stalinist, Libra held some right-wing positions, Landsberg was close to Catholic currents of thought, de Rougemont was allied to Emmanuel Mounier’s personalism, etc.). Such professional and political (not to mention temperamental) diversity conforms to the aim of the college (as stated by Caillois on behalf of the founding members) to “develop a moral community” that would be “different from the one ordinarily uniting scholars”:⁶⁶ different, in other words, from the university. Wahl, who held a Chair in Philosophy at the Sorbonne since 1936, seems to have been the only university professor involved in the college, and he is moreover an exceptional figure: a specialist of Plato and Descartes and – of more immediate interest to the college – an expert on Hegel and Kierkegaard, he was also a poet (*Connaître sans connaître* [To know without knowing], the title of a volume of poems from 1938, suggests an affinity with Bataille) and translator of poetry (of Thomas Traherne among others). That he was able successfully to conjoin these disparate identities in a professional context resistant to any association between poetry and philosophy (institutional practices at the Sorbonne kept the two rigorously apart⁶⁷), makes of Wahl a champion in the struggle against institutional forces that seek to reduce existence to a series of rigidly compartmentalized activities. The college, in aiming to create a sort of community without unity, sought to counter the “tendential reduction of human character” and the “reduction of differences”⁶⁸ that Bataille had earlier identified as the state’s preferred mechanisms of social homogenization. The eclecticism of its membership seems moreover to have been willed; its directors explicitly reject the limitations of national, social, and political boundaries:

65. *Ibid.*, 21.

66. *Ibid.*, 10.

67. See Isabelle Kalinowski, “La littérature dans le champ philosophique français de la première moitié du XXe siècle: Le cas de Jean Wahl et de Hölderlin,” *Methodos: La Philosophie et ses textes* 1 (2001).

68. Georges Bataille, “The Psychological Structure of Fascism,” in *Visions of Excess*, 139.

The College of Sociology is not a political organism. Its members hold whatever opinion they please ... [I]t urges those, for whom the only solution anguish disclosed is the creation of a vital bond between men, to join with it, with no determining factor other than the awareness of the *absolute lie* of current political forms and the necessity for reconstructing on this assumption a collective mode of existence that takes no geographical or social limitation into account and that allows one to behave oneself when death threatens.⁶⁹

Death was indeed threatening when Bataille, Caillois, and Leiris collectively wrote these words (October 7, 1938) in a “Declaration” unequivocally condemning the Munich accords and France’s role in bringing them about. There is therefore a link between what the members of the college see as the “devirilization of man,” witnessed in the absence of a collective reaction in the face of war, and the creation of a “moral community” that would be “bound precisely to the virulent character of the realm studied.”⁷⁰ That “realm” was “Sacred Sociology,” especially “insofar as that implies the study of social existence in every manifestation where there is a clear, active presence of the sacred.”⁷¹ The emphasis placed by the college on “social existence” is in part a critique of surrealism (many of the college’s members were dissident surrealists), which, by overly privileging the individual and the unconscious, had obscured questions concerning the structure of collective entities and their relation to power. “The intention [of the college] is thus to establish the points of coincidence between the fundamental obsessive tendencies of individual psychology and the principal structures governing social organization and in command of its revolutions.”⁷² The lectures delivered at the college between November 1937 and June 1939 address these collective structures: Bataille spoke about “The Structure and Notion of the Army,” about “The Structure of Democracies,” and about “Hitler and the Teutonic Order”; Caillois spoke about “Animal Societies” and about “Brotherhoods, Orders, Secret Societies, Churches”; Mayer delivered a lecture on “The Rituals of Political Association in Germany of the Romantic Period”; Duthuit talked on “The Myth of the English Monarchy,” and so on.

Bataille’s interest in the dehumanizing effects of a society dominated by a principle of utility is to some extent in line with the critique of bourgeois rationality carried out at around the same time at Adorno and Horkheimer’s Institute of Social Research, especially to the extent that this critique emerged

69. Bataille, *The College of Sociology 1937–39*, 46–7.

70. *Ibid.*, 10.

71. *Ibid.*, 11.

72. *Ibid.*

from Weber's theses concerning rationalization and the disenchantment of the world. Indeed, as Michael Weingrad has shown, if Benjamin was present at the meetings of the college, this was at least in part because Adorno had asked him to seek out appropriate French co-workers for the institute with a view to "creating an intellectual homeland for Critical Theory in France."⁷³ But while Bataille at times entered the same orbit as Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, his response to the dehumanizing effect of Enlightenment thought is to reject dialectical thinking altogether in favor of his own brand of excess. Bataille's interest in sorcery, in coincidence, and in miracles around this period represents an attempt to get away from a scientifically explained world in which the values associated with the sacred play no part. Not content with uncovering and subjecting to analysis the processes that lead to dehumanization, Bataille actively urges a return of the forms of social effervescence (sacrifice, rituals, etc.) that modern capitalism has evacuated.

To the Frankfurt School, this looked rather like the kind of "irrationalist confusion" (Adorno's words) they had deplored in *Acéphale* and that they associated with a degenerate form of surrealism.⁷⁴ The celebration of the irrational irked others, including Mauss,⁷⁵ and troubled also Bataille's cofounders. The break-up of the college in 1939 is attributed by Bataille himself to fundamental differences between himself and Caillois; the latter felt that Bataille placed too much emphasis on mysticism, madness, and death. Wahl characterized their different approaches as follows: "Caillois is in search of rigor, Bataille appeals to the heart, to enthusiasm, to ecstasy, to earth and fire, to the guts."⁷⁶ Leiris for his part was concerned that the Maussian and Durkheimian principles to which the group purported to adhere had been traduced, and even that basic intellectual "rigor" had not been observed in the analyses undertaken. Although there had been a broad consensus that the college would consider "social existence" and "the problems of power, of the sacred, and of myths," Bataille was almost diametrically opposed to his cofounders as regards the method for carrying out such a study. The fact that the college had a more precise and scholarly agenda than *Acéphale*, an agenda that attracted many intellectuals into the group, did not in Bataille's mind mean excluding from its activities the passion and agitation of an existence "lived from within, lived to the point of a trance."⁷⁷

73. Michael Weingrad, "The College of Sociology and the Institute for Social Research," *New German Critique* 84 (Autumn 2001), 137.

74. *Ibid.*, 133–4.

75. Jean-Christophe Marcel, "Bataille et Mauss: Un dialogue de sourds?," *Les Temps modernes* 602 (December 1998–January 1999), 105–6.

76. Bataille, *The College of Sociology 1937–39*, 4.

77. Bataille, *Inner Experience*, 9.

II. BATAILLE'S INFLUENCE

In "From Work to Text" (1971), Roland Barthes cites Bataille as an example of a writer whose "text" subverts conventional notions of clearly defined, individualized works:

What constitutes the Text is ... its subversive force in respect of the old classifications. How do you classify a writer like Georges Bataille? Novelist, poet, essayist, economist, philosopher, mystic? The answer is so difficult that literary manuals generally tend to forget about Bataille who, in fact, wrote texts, perhaps continuously one single text.⁷⁸

Indeed, as much as for any of his individual works or ideas, Bataille is noted for having fashioned a highly original "text" that transcends disciplinary and generic boundaries. Bataille's style of philosophizing, which seeks to expose philosophy to its others (sociology, economics, literature, erotics, etc.) constitutes in itself an important part of his legacy and has opened up radically new paths in philosophy as well as in other disciplines.

Bataille has contributed significantly to the agenda of poststructuralist philosophy. His tireless promotion of Nietzsche contributed to a wave of re-readings of the German philosopher that form part of the genealogy of poststructuralism.⁷⁹ He is often cited as a precursor to thinkers who focus on *écriture* and on the aporia of language; almost all French intellectuals who came of age in the 1960s (Bataille died in 1962) acknowledge his role in "the linguistic turn." The notion of the "end of history," which originates in Kojève's reading of Hegel, is one key theme that obsessed Bataille and that comes back in the writings of the poststructuralists. Related to this is the more general idea of the "crisis of the subject" (which we could call the crisis of humanism; Kojève said that "The end of history is the death of Man as such"), also a prominent motif in Bataille's texts. The "crisis of the subject" refers to the preoccupation, shared by many of Bataille's successors (Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, Kristeva⁸⁰), with the instability of the philosophical subject inherited from Descartes. Foucault has written of Bataille's writings that they represent a "desperate and relentless attack on the

78. Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *Image – Music – Text*, Stephen Heath (trans.) (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1988), 157.

79. See Alan D. Schrift, *Nietzsche's French Legacy: A Genealogy of Poststructuralism* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

*80. These thinkers are discussed in various essays in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 6*.

preeminence of the philosophical subject.”⁸¹ Bataille consistently sought to open up the rational, thinking, humanist subject, constituted by knowledge, to the effects of that “nonknowledge” that in his view played an equally if not more important part in human experience and that seemed to him to be absent from philosophical accounts of man (with the exception of Nietzsche’s). The “crisis” that this operation engendered takes many forms: in Barthes, it is recognizable in “The Death of the Author”; in Foucault, it can be seen in the shift from the “author” to the less humanist “author-function” as well as in “the disappearance of man” that Foucault traces in *The Order of Things*; in Derrida, it informs the subject of *différance* and originary delay; in Kristeva, it recurs in the subject of abjection; Lacan’s split subject owes something to Bataille’s relentless assault on the integrity of the unified subject. The work of Derrida, perhaps as much as anyone’s, shows the pervasive, if at times subtextual, influence of Bataille on contemporary French philosophy. For if “From a Restricted to a General Economy” is rightly credited with having brought to the attention of French and anglophone readers the significance of Bataille’s model of economic thought in a philosophical context, and is known as Derrida’s major statement on Bataille, Derrida has also noted that in fact many of his own texts, including “The Double Session,” “Plato’s Pharmacy,” “White Mythology,” and “several others” are “situated explicitly in relation to Bataille, and also propose a reading of Bataille.”⁸²

The fact that Bataille did not emerge from and was never a member of the French academic establishment has surely been of significance to several of his admirers. He was and remains something of an outsider in relation to mainstream philosophy and as such he has come to serve as an example of resistance to institutionalized forms of thinking. Especially for those who may not have come to philosophy via the classical route, or who have aspired to practice a philosophy at odds with accepted norms (e.g. Derrida, whose philosophy was not easily accommodated in the French academy; Deleuze, who allied philosophy to literature and a radical form of psychoanalysis), Bataille’s work serves as a resource. More broadly, his inscription of everything and everyone that social forces try to expel (criminals, madmen, shit, sperm, tears, blood, etc.) has proved especially meaningful to those whom society has marginalized. Foucault’s essay “A Preface to Transgression” is an homage to Bataille and an enlistment of this serviceable concept; in his own work on criminality and on madness, and to the extent that his project is concerned fundamentally with mechanisms of social

81. Michel Foucault, “A Preface to Transgression,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, Donald F. Bouchard (ed.), Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (trans.) (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 42.

82. Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, Alan Bass (trans.) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981). 105–6 n.

constraint, he develops Bataille's thinking on the oppressive forces of social homogenization.

In France, Bataille's work as an editor of journals and reviews has inspired a number of important publications. *Critique*, the journal he founded in 1946, is still published and continues to be influential in framing public debate. *Tel Quel* (eighty-four issues between 1960 and 1982), under the direction of Philippe Sollers, has been influenced by Bataille and at the same time has done much to promote interest in his writings. The 1972 colloquium on Bataille and Artaud at Cerisy-la-Salle was organized by the members of the *Tel Quel* group and served to bring Bataille to the forefront of the French intellectual scene. *Tel Quel* published Derrida's "From a Restricted to a General Economy" as well as Kristeva's essay on inner experience. *TXT*, an important journal of poetry and poetics, edited by Christian Prigent, takes its cue from Bataille's notion of the "hatred" of poetry. Jean-Christophe Bailly's review *Aléa* is indebted to Bataille; allied with this review, we should mention that the most sustained philosophical reflection on Bataille is Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* (1982), which seeks to understand Bataille's (and our) experience of the ruptures and the continuities of community that mark the modern era. *Lignes*, a journal of analysis and opinion covering a wide variety of topics, founded in 1987 by Surya, the same year he published his authoritative biography of Bataille, was "born under the auspices" of Bataille.

It was partly because of references to Bataille in the essays of such important philosophers as Barthes, Kristeva, Foucault, and Derrida, that Bataille became a person of interest in the US, where academics were curious to study the intellectual genealogy of poststructuralist and deconstructive practices. Hence Bataille's writings began to be translated only after the writings of those who referenced him had appeared in English. Immensely important in this respect has been the translation of Bataille's essays from the late 1920s and 1930s by Allan Stoekl, entitled *Visions of Excess* and published in the University of Minnesota's Theory of History and Literature series in 1985. This series, which prior to publishing Stoekl's translation had published works by Tzvetan Todorov, Hans Robert Jauss, Paul de Man and Jean-François Lyotard, did more than any other to popularize theory in the American academy in the 1980s. The happy inclusion of Bataille boosted his prominence and led to further translations, notably an expanded English version of Denis Hollier's masterful reconstruction of the lectures of the College of Sociology in the same series. Over the next two decades almost all of Bataille's theoretical writings would be rendered into English. A great deal of his work has been brought out by trade publishers (City Lights Press, Zone Books, Paragon, Amok), suggesting that Bataille has a broad following among non-university-affiliated readers. Indeed, Bataille's writings remain difficult to assimilate in the university, where his profoundly interdisciplinary profile

and explosively a-systematic style upset existing paradigms of knowledge. His interest in ethnology has led to studies of his work in the field of anthropology;⁸³ his fascination with the sacred has generated interest in religious studies;⁸⁴ the art world has appreciated his questioning of form;⁸⁵ and in the field of literary studies, where his fiction is highly regarded, key notions such as transgression, excess, and the heterogeneous continue to have currency. In the field of philosophy, he has been, perhaps predictably, less influential. For principled reasons he did not produce a cohesive philosophy and his relentless insistence on meaninglessness and nonknowledge are not easily recuperable. The centrality of the eroticized body in his works has led to interest in his sexual politics (Kristeva had already associated Bataille with writing and *jouissance*). While some feminists take issue with his “obsession with virility,”⁸⁶ other writers see in Bataille a less orthodox mapping of sexuality (a “straight man with a twist” in the words of Carolyn Dean);⁸⁷ for others still his liberatory vision of sexuality proves helpful to queer theory.⁸⁸ Most recently, his economic writings, particularly *The Accursed Share*, have been the focus of renewed investigations, suggesting the continued pertinence of his theory of expenditure.⁸⁹

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FRENCH MARXISM IN ITS HEYDAY

William L. McBride

In order to put in proper perspective the significance of Marxism in French intellectual life during the period following the Second World War and continuing until, perhaps, as late as the watershed year of 1968, it is impossible to resist the temptation to cite one of Jean-Paul Sartre's most frequently cited assertions. It occurs in *Search for a Method* (*Questions de méthode*), an essay that he originally wrote for a Polish journal that, during the time of the so-called "Thaw" under Soviet Communist Party First Secretary Khrushchev, dedicated a special issue to the intellectual climate in France in that year, 1957. Near the beginning of this essay, which was later to serve as an introduction to the first volume of his *Critique de la raison dialectique*, Sartre offers a disquisition on great philosophers (philosophies) that dominate their historical periods. He names three such eras: those of Descartes, of Kant and Hegel, and, at present, of Marx. Within their respective time frames, he says, there is no going beyond the dominant philosophy: one either works, in one way or another, within its framework, or one tries to revert to an earlier one.¹

Much of the remainder of *Search for a Method* constitutes an attempt to argue for the integration of existentialism,² with its special concern for the individual human being, within the Marxist framework – an attempt made all the more urgent, Sartre contends, by the blockage or rigidification that has occurred within the official Marxism, then often self-servingly referred to as "orthodox Marxism," of the international Communist Party. Sartre is just as insistent on identifying and

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, Hazel E. Barnes (trans.) (New York: Knopf, 1963), 7.

*2. Existentialism, and Sartre, are discussed in several essays in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 4*.

criticizing this blockage as he is on asserting Marxism's intellectual dominance. This is an especially important point to stress at a time, half a century later, when some may still (or again) be inclined to make the assumption that both virulent communists and virulent anticommunists of that period wanted everyone to make, obviously for opposite reasons; namely, that Marxism is equivalent to the "official" communist ideology. But that was not and certainly is not the case, as the evolution of Sartre's own thought and ultimately the intellectual evolutions of most of the other major figures in the history of French Marxism in its heyday well demonstrate. This essay will focus on a few of those figures, Sartre included, with a view to illustrating the inevitable tension between the intellectual and the political, theory and practice, that prevailed even (or particularly) within a worldview that prided itself on overcoming that very tension – or, as Marx had expressed it in one of his famous *Theses on Feuerbach* (the one that is to be found, significantly enough, on his tombstone), on changing the world rather than, in traditional philosophical fashion, merely understanding it in various ways.

The French Communist Party already existed, to be sure, in the "period between the two wars," as it came to be called, and some serious philosophers were members of it. Among these were Henri Lefebvre, who was to outlive most members of his generation; Roger Garaudy, who joined the Party in 1933 as a young man who was a believer in both Marxism and Christianity; and Paul Nizan, who had been Sartre's classmate at the *École Normale Supérieure* during the 1920s. The Party was politically active, and it played a role in the formation of the short-lived (1936–38) "Popular Front," a Left-oriented coalition government. However, by virtue of its disciplined and unwavering commitment to the Soviet leadership, the Party suffered a severe setback, in terms of popularity and membership, when Stalin signed his infamous nonaggression pact with Hitler – a pact that was in effect, it should be noted, for twenty-two months until Hitler invaded Russia in mid-1941. It was during that time that Hitler's armies invaded Poland, thus triggering the state of war with France and Britain, and that France then surrendered to Hitler after a period of generally ineffective French military resistance, known as the "phony war." That war was real enough, though, for those who were its casualties; among them was the erstwhile communist Nizan, who had renounced his Party membership in the wake of the nonaggression pact and died in combat shortly before the French surrender. Then, beginning exactly one year after the armistice that ushered in the German Occupation of France, Hitler's attack on Russia enabled a reinvigorated French Communist Party to begin to play a major role in the clandestine Resistance. (At the same time, during the same war period, some Party members, including Garaudy, were imprisoned by the collaborationist Vichy government simply because they were communists and hence suspect.) It was in large measure because of this role that the Party emerged from the war with renewed popularity, even winning a plurality of votes

in the French elections of November 1946, and continuing for some time thereafter, despite fierce opposition from other parties, to enjoy the regular support of up to 25 per cent of the electorate. The atmosphere was one of great unrest, with the developing Cold War placing France in a precarious position between the two “blocs,” Soviet and American, even while its successive governments sided with the latter in the international arena; with African and Asian colonies seeking independence; and with a large industrial working class that was still generally poorly paid and at times seemed ripe for revolt. While the socialists as well as some Trotskyite parties claimed to support the interests of that class more authentically than the Communists, the latter remained relatively effective in arrogating to themselves the label “Party of the Working Class.” In short, the French Communist Party, despite its strict discipline and slavish adherence to the “Moscow line” (whatever that might be at any given moment), was very much a force to be reckoned with.

So much for the historical and political background concerning the Communist Party; now, what about Marxism? It is undoubtedly true that Marxist philosophy enjoyed some added prestige that was borrowed from the prestige of the Party, which claimed Marxism as its official ideology (just as, years later, Marxist philosophy lost this borrowed prestige when the Soviet bloc collapsed). However, other, more strictly intellectual, factors also entered into the postwar rise of Marxist thinking in France’s collective psyche. For one thing, there was a widespread revolt, within philosophy and related disciplines, against the abstract, frequently idealist, types of philosophizing that had predominated in the Academy earlier in the century. (The title of one of the earliest books by Jean Wahl, then a young professor at the Sorbonne and a great influence in helping to shape the growing awareness of existentialism as a philosophical movement even during the 1930s, is a significant indicator of this: *Vers le Concret* [Toward the concrete].) Specific examples of this spirit of revolt were the personalist movement of the religious Left (epitomized in the work of Emmanuel Mounier and the journal *Esprit*) and the immediate postwar fad of existentialism itself, which in France was most closely identified with Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, and Jean-Paul Sartre. The communists, of course, frowned on both of these currents, since both rejected dialectical materialism as the key to explaining the world. Yet both of them took the Marxist message very seriously as, like the Marxists, they advocated *engagement* with the real world and its problems and strongly opposed oppressive social relationships, relationships of dominance and subordination.

Among other influences deserving special mention is that of Alexandre Kojève,³ who introduced Hegel’s thought to French intellectuals in courses given

*3. For a discussion of Kojève and French Hegelianism, see the essay by John Russon in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 4*.

during the 1930s, and whose reading of Hegel, particularly of the famous dialectic of “lordship and bondage” or “master and servant” in the *Phenomenology of Mind*, was decidedly proto-Marxist – that is, it presented Hegel’s thought as anticipatory of Marx’s. Sartre, in the early pages of his *Cahiers pour une morale*, published only posthumously but written beginning in 1947, makes frequent reference to works by Kojève and by his student, Jean Hyppolite. A further, important stimulus to the burgeoning postwar interest in Marxism was the ever-increasing awareness of Marx’s remarkable *1844 Manuscripts*, excerpts of which had first been brought out in translation by Lefebvre in the 1930s, but which were only “discovered” by wider audiences, in France and in other Western countries as well, after the war. The *Manuscripts* revealed a younger, more “humanistic” Marx than the one previously known, the author of *Capital*. Finally, perhaps most importantly of all, it began to be recognized ever more widely that Marxism offered explanatory categories and concepts that were simply missing from the repertoires of liberal political theories – categories and concepts that fitted more adequately, for example, with the lived experiences of the colonial subjects from Indochina,⁴ North and sub-Saharan Africa, and the French West Indies, whose presence within the student bodies of the French universities was becoming increasingly significant. In short, it was no longer Papa’s France (“*la France de Papa*”), and the cosmopolitan worldview that was a central part of Marxism’s message provided a useful intellectual tool for coming to grips with the new realities.

In late 1945, there appeared the first issue of a journal in which many of the topics that were to dominate the thinking of at least the noncommunist French Marxists and quasi-Marxists during the ensuing years were to play themselves out: *Les Temps modernes*. Named after a film in which Charlie Chaplin, the famous comic actor with strong Marxist sympathies, played the lead, this journal was originally edited by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, and a number of other well-known theorists were listed as members of the original editorial board, including Beauvoir, Camus, and even Sartre’s erstwhile classmate, Raymond Aron, who was soon to establish himself as perhaps the leading liberal democratic theorist in France. Some, such as Aron and Camus, soon

4. Mention of Indochina conjures up the now somewhat forgotten name of Trần Duc Thao (1917–93), a Vietnamese native who was a student in France from the late 1930s into the 1940s, working with Maurice Merleau-Ponty, receiving high recognition for his treatises on first Hegel and then Husserl, and spending some years composing his outstanding Marxist critique of the latter, *Phénoménologie et matérialisme dialectique*, which was published in 1951 and was widely discussed at the time. In that same year, 1951, he returned to Vietnam and joined in the resistance to the French, eventually becoming the rector of the national university, but later falling out of favor with the regime; he spent most of the remainder of his career in comparative obscurity as a translator of philosophy books from French into Vietnamese. He died in France, where he had gone to seek medical aid.

dropped out of the editorial picture; others, notably Beauvoir, remained. The "Presentation" of the journal in the inaugural issue, signed by Sartre,⁵ declared the editors' intention to maintain an attitude of political engagement while not adhering to any particular political party. Many of Sartre's most important political essays, as his involvement with the noncommunist but still strongly Marxist-influenced Left grew, were first published on the pages of this revue.

One of the earliest and most significant of these was entitled "Matérialisme et révolution," which appeared in two successive summer issues (vols 9 and 10) in 1946. Sartre's core point in this essay is that while revolutionary change is desirable and the "orthodox" Marxists' political objectives are basically sound, and while materialism as a doctrine has the psychologically valuable property of making members of the proletariat who accept it see those in power as being no different from, no better than, they themselves, nevertheless materialism is a myth; a philosophy of revolution that upholds human freedom against doctrinaire materialism is needed to replace the communists' "diamat." Sartre there alludes to conversations that he has had with members of the Party, including Garaudy and the even more staunchly materialist thinker Pierre Naville,⁶ and refers to the work of Lefebvre as well. While he treats the latter with respect, he points to a "confusion" between Lefebvre's assertion, commenting on a text from the early Marx, that Marx sought to overcome the antinomy between idealism and materialism, and Garaudy's insistence (in an article printed in a journal of the Party) that Sartre, by rejecting materialism, could not avoid idealism despite his expressed wish to do so. In fact, Sartre displays a certain contempt for Garaudy's intellectual capacities, reporting, near the end of the essay, on a remark made by one of Garaudy's comrades to the effect that he is just a scientist and bourgeois Protestant, who, for reasons of personal edification, has substituted historical materialism for the hand of God.⁷ Sartre agrees with this comment, but points out that the Party still makes use of and endorses his work. Above all, he is appalled by Garaudy's rigid adherence to Party discipline whatever the cost, as in his continuing insistence on the rightness (at least within the context of that time) and historical inevitability of Stalin's pact with Hitler.

Such anecdotes are clear evidence that on a personal level, despite the constraints of Party discipline, dialogue was taking place between communists and noncommunists. But public appearances were of quite a different order, as

5. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Présentation," *Les Temps modernes* 1 (October 1, 1945).

6. Pierre Naville (1904–93) was a French sociologist best known for his psycho-sociology of work and studies of automation and industrial society. After an early association with surrealism, he passed through communist and Trotskyist parties before aligning himself with various socialist parties from the 1940s through the end of his life.

7. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Matérialisme et révolution," In *Situations, III* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 215.

evidenced by a book by Lefebvre, *L'Existentialisme*, that was published in 1946, the same year as Sartre's article. In this book Lefebvre, who in fact was the most original and profound of the Communist Party philosophers, charges Sartre with irrationalism, lack of rigor, and even intellectual dishonesty, asserting that for this reason "Sartre does not merit the title of philosopher."⁸ Lefebvre's precise argument here is a plausible enough one, based on his view – one that is central to much of his thought – that knowledge is possible only through the use of concepts, and hence that Sartre's claim that consciousness could intuit objects directly was unsustainable and self-refuting. But the level of vitriolic polemic, which is maintained more or less throughout this short book, is a reflection of the then-prevalent atmosphere, suffused with the Cold War spirit of what Stalin (and many others) called "the two camps," one that contrasts sharply with the calm, balanced, although still highly critical, tone of Lefebvre's later work, particularly after his dismissal from the Communist Party.

One of the most extraordinary works of this immediate postwar period – in many respects *the* most extraordinary – was *Humanism and Terror* (subtitled "*Essai sur le problème communiste*"), written by Sartre's then close friend and associate Merleau-Ponty, and published in 1947.⁹ Although less, let us say, histrionic than Sartre and less inclined to reveal personal conversations in print, Merleau-Ponty appears to have had closer personal ties with communist intellectuals at the time and indeed, while certainly not accepting the letter of Marxist doctrine (he who throughout his writings emphasized ambiguity and eschewed absolutist systems), to have begun by feeling greater sympathy than Sartre for the communist point of view. This is well illustrated by *Humanism and Terror*, which is an attempt to reach an understanding, one different from and, Merleau-Ponty hoped, more accurate than, the picture painted by Arthur Koestler, in his novel *Darkness at Noon*, of the infamous Moscow Purge Trials of 1937–38, through which Stalin had succeeded in liquidating Nikolai Bukharin and other former top Soviet officials. Merleau-Ponty shows – successfully, I think – how Bukharin could honestly have made the confession in which he admitted to having been objectively guilty of treason while not having subjectively intended to commit it. The book is an exercise in philosophical explanation and really not an apology for the actions taken by Stalin's agents, but in the hysterical atmosphere of the time it was regarded as being the latter by some perfervid anti-communists. Among them was Camus, who had himself been a Party member for a short time when a very young man in Algeria, and who decided to have

8. Henri Lefebvre, *L'Existentialisme* (Paris: Éditions du sagittaire, 1946), 65. [*] For a discussion of Lefebvre's book on Nietzsche, see the essay "French Nietzscheanism," by Alan D. Schrift, in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 6*.

*9. For a discussion of Merleau-Ponty, see the essay by Mauro Carbone in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 4*.

no further contact with Merleau-Ponty as a result of this book. This was not to be the last rupture between former colleagues over “the communist question.”

The tensions of those early Cold War times in Paris were probably best captured by Beauvoir in her novel *The Mandarins*, a work of considerable philosophical as well as historical and literary interest.¹⁰ Although Beauvoir always vehemently denied that it was a *roman à clef*, many of its characters bear striking resemblances to actual people in the real world that is reflected in it: Camus, Koestler (who was living in Paris at that time), Sartre, Communist Party members, and even Beauvoir herself as well as her erstwhile American lover, the novelist Nelson Algren, to whom the book was dedicated. Written over a three-year period (1951–54) during which many events of utmost importance for the future of French Marxism were taking place, this book focuses most centrally on a drama that closely resembles certain events that occurred immediately prior to its inception: to wit, the revelation of the existence of an extensive network of slave labor camps in the Soviet Union and the ensuing debate within the editorial board of a putatively fictitious noncommunist revue that has nevertheless striven to make common cause with the communists against Western imperialism and capitalism (called, with deliberate irony, *L’Espoir* in the novel) over whether to publish these revelations and thus risk a complete break as well as damage to the common political cause. An article entitled “Les Jours de notre vie,” jointly signed by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty but in fact written by Merleau-Ponty alone (and later reprinted in his essay collection, *Signes*, under the title “L’URSS et les camps”), which appeared in the January 1950 issue (vol. 51) of *Les Temps modernes*, was the actual outcome of the historical counterpart to Beauvoir’s tale. Among the novel’s other sub-themes with historical counterparts is the effort by some of the characters to develop a viable noncommunist Left political party. Merleau-Ponty and especially Sartre were in fact involved in just such an effort in 1948 and most of 1949; called the RDR (Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire), it collapsed when it was learned that its most prominent leader, David Rousset, had been receiving *sub rosa* financial assistance from the American labor unions, the AFL and the CIO, as well as from the American former Marxist philosopher turned vehement anticommunist, Sidney Hook.

Nineteen fifty was also the year in which military forces from North Korea invaded the South, initiating a state of war that is still technically in effect. Opinions in France varied as to whether it was a deliberate act of unprovoked aggression, or whether certain American provocations (in particular, a visit to the border by the American Secretary of State, Dulles) had been the real

10. See in particular *The Contradictions of Freedom: Philosophical Essays on Simone de Beauvoir’s The Mandarins*, Sally Scholz and Shannon Mussett (eds) (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005).

trigger. Merleau-Ponty was inclined to the first view, Sartre to the second, and this disagreement accelerated a movement of reversal of positions between them, at once political and philosophical, which culminated in the rupture of their friendship and eventually resulted in two important works with opposite tendencies: Merleau-Ponty's *The Adventures of the Dialectic* (1955) and Sartre's previously mentioned *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960, with the preliminary essay, "Questions de méthode," from 1957). *The Adventures of the Dialectic* is actually a collection of essays, in which Merleau-Ponty's theoretical disillusionment with Marxism and with the failure of Marx's aspiration to combine theory and practice, a point of view that still does not amount to a complete disillusionment with dialectical thinking as such, is interwoven into studies of Lukács, Trotsky, Max Weber, and, in the last and longest chapter, Sartre himself. In that chapter, entitled "Sartre and Ultra-Bolshevism," Merleau-Ponty alleges that Sartre's pattern of thinking is absolutist, incapable of taking adequate account of realities that are intermediate between individual human consciousnesses and things ("médiations": history, symbolism, etc.), and hence compatible with an atomistic and opportunistic conception of political action according to which spontaneous decisions of the Party express *eo ipso* the historically correct course. While Sartre himself never replied directly to this attack, Beauvoir did, in a long and excruciatingly well-documented polemical essay entitled "Merleau-Ponty and Pseudo-Sartreism," which in effect purports to show that Merleau-Ponty (who until the time of the Korean War, she says in her opening sentence, had confused Marx with Kant) simply has Sartre wrong. But one way of viewing Sartre's entire *Critique of Dialectical Reason* itself is as a very lengthy, detailed response to Merleau-Ponty's charges; about the *Critique*, more anon.

Meanwhile, prior even to the publication of *The Adventures of the Dialectic* and while the Korean War was ongoing, some developments on the home front were impelling Sartre to his period of closest collaboration with the communists. One was "the Henri Martin Affair," which began with the arrest of a young French sailor, a Communist Party member, who had fulfilled all his military obligations but had come to realize the injustice of the French war to maintain its control over Indochina as a colony, and therefore wrote and published pamphlets in protest against that war. Arrested and sentenced to five years in prison in 1950, he became the focal point of a campaign by the Communist Party in 1951, a campaign that Sartre agreed to join in early 1952. In connection with this Sartre eventually made a visit to the French president, who conceded that the prison sentence had been too harsh, and collected testimonials on Martin's behalf to which he added his own hundred-page commentary. Actual publication of *L'Affaire Henri Martin*, however, was for some reason delayed until just after Martin himself had been freed in mid-1953. (Martin, still vigorous and active as a septuagenarian Party member and occasional honored

visitor to Vietnam, was a guest speaker at the annual meeting of the Groupe d'Études Sartriennes in Paris in summer 2006. All the dramatic changes that have occurred since the heyday of French communism should not cause us to forget the many continuities.)

Of even greater importance than the Henri Martin Affair, however, was the Jacques Duclos Affair, which occurred during the momentous year of 1952. The Communist Party had organized a rally to protest the arrival in Paris of the new (American) commander of the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Powers in Europe (SHAPE), General Ridgeway, and had called for a general strike as well. A half hour after the demonstration, French police arrested Duclos, a Party official, on trumped-up charges (e.g. that the pigeons that they found in his car, which were already dead and had been bought to take home for dinner, were really carrier pigeons trained to fly secret messages to Moscow!); and the strike was not supported by the mass of workers. Sartre, on vacation in Italy at the time, was furious when he heard the news and learned of the ensuing triumphalist attitude of the French Right. Convinced that “an anti-Communist is a dog,”¹¹ he began composing what became a three-part article, in effect a short book, entitled “The Communists and Peace.” Among other points, Sartre claims here, ostensibly on the basis of his own principles and not theirs, that the communists, whatever their failings, are at present the authentic representatives of the working class; that the workers only failed to support the strike out of extreme discouragement; and of course that the communists are in favor of peace, not war. The third part of the essay, which deals in large measure with the history of class conflict in nineteenth-century France and the peculiar evolution of French industry and labor organizations and is both historically and philosophically richer than the first two, was published only in early 1954. But the first two parts appeared in the July (vol. 81) and October–November (combined vols 84–5) 1952 issues of *Les Temps modernes*, between which, in the August issue, there appeared a polemic that was no doubt much more widely discussed, in France and eventually worldwide, than anything written in “The Communists and Peace”: the public break between Sartre and Camus.

The occasion was the appearance, during the previous year, of Camus's *L'Homme révolté* (*The Rebel* in its English title).¹² Such a major essay by such

11. Sartre, “Merleau-Ponty”: “Un anticommuniste est un chien, je ne sors pas de là, je n'en sortirai plus jamais” (Jean-Paul Sartre, “Merleau-Ponty,” in *Situations, IV*, [Paris: Gallimard, 1964], 248–9; in English in *Situations*, Benita Eisler [trans.] [New York, George Braziller, 1965], 278). Like most of the essays in the *Situations* series, this account of the gradual rupture between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, part of a long, moving tribute to “Merleau” published shortly after the latter's early death in 1961, first appeared in *Les Temps modernes*.

*12. Camus's *The Rebel* is discussed in the essay “Existentialism” by S. K. Keltner and Samuel J. Julian in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 4*.

a renowned author clearly called for a review in *Les Temps modernes*, but for some time no one on the staff was willing to volunteer to write it, since there was general agreement that a negatively critical response to it would be the only appropriate one, and everyone realized that this would cause a furor. Camus's book is in fact, in my opinion, highly defective in a number of respects, certainly including the philosophical dimension.¹³ Its fundamental message, although this sometimes becomes obscured by the analyses of various individual writers and movements with which it is filled, is that, while individual rebellion can sometimes be of great cultural value, political revolution is bound ultimately to be counter-productive. Needless to say, this position – the product not only of Camus's strong disaffection with the communists but also no doubt of the growing torment in his soul over the future of Algeria, where he was born and his mother still lived, the ethnic majority of which was displaying increasing unrest that would soon lead to a bloody struggle for independence from France – found no resonance with the belief in *engagement* shared by all the members of the *Temps Modernes* "team." Eventually Francis Jeanson, who as a very young man still personally unacquainted with Sartre had authored an extremely perceptive account of the ethical implications, left untouched by Sartre himself, of the latter's early work (and who was later to become an active clandestine supporter of the Algerian revolution), offered to write the review. Published in the May issue with the title "Albert Camus, ou l'âme révoltée" (a pun, meaning "the soul in revolt"), it was scathing. Sartre offered Camus the opportunity to reply; what he wrote, in a very offended and distant tone (he addressed his remarks, impersonally, to "the director of *Temps Modernes*," i.e., Sartre, rather than to Jeanson himself, whom Camus treated as simply Sartre's "stooge"), together with Sartre's response (which opened with the assertion that their friendship had always been a difficult one, but that he would miss it) and a further essay by Jeanson, was the focal point of the August issue in question. The highly personal and mediatic aspects of this polemic aside, it served well to clarify the divide on the French Left (of which Camus continued to consider himself a part), in which, as usual, perceptions of the Communist Party and views on Marxist philosophy – especially concerning the nature of history and the possibility of fundamental social change – both had a part.

In December 1952 there was a much-publicized peace conference in Vienna, in the preparation of which the international Communist Party played a major role. Sartre was very supportive of it and participated in it. He was to continue to

13. For some detailed reasons for my saying this, see my "After a Lot More History Has Taken Place," in *Sartre and Camus: A Historic Confrontation*, David A. Sprintzen and Adrian van den Hoven (eds) (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2004). In the same volume other essays that take Camus's "side" can be found.

be on relatively friendly terms with some Soviet writers, such as Ilya Ehrenburg, throughout the rest of the 1950s and well into the 1960s, and his first trip to the Soviet Union in mid-1954, from which he returned offering a quite excessively positive report on its development, was followed by several more in the ensuing years. Stalin had died and Khrushchev had been named his successor in 1953; that was also the year in which Merleau-Ponty formally severed his connections with *Les Temps modernes* and finally broke with Sartre as well, although that break was not quite as decisive as their respective breaks with Camus, and Merleau-Ponty and Beauvoir apparently continued on relatively friendly personal terms even after she published her fierce defense of Sartre against his attack on Sartre's "ultra-Bolshevism" in *The Adventures of the Dialectic*.

Somewhat coincidentally, it was also in mid-1953 that Garaudy defended his Sorbonne dissertation, which was published that same year under the title *Théorie matérialiste de la connaissance*. When I read it some years ago, I was struck by its banality and especially by its dogged insistence on defending Lenin's so-called "reflection theory of cognition": the idea that all knowledge is in some way or other a reflection, although of course sometimes a very distorted one, of objectively existing empirical reality, as expressed in Lenin's most purely philosophical (and at the same time also, to my mind, philosophically least defensible) work, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. It is a dreadfully unsophisticated conception of epistemology, and its detailed elaboration by Garaudy seemed to me to be an excellent vindication of Sartre's criticism of so-called "orthodox Marxist" materialism in "Materialism and Revolution" and elsewhere. Somewhat to my surprise, but by way of well illustrating the hypocrisy and putrefaction of its "official" ideology that was, in retrospect, inexorably undermining the Communist Party during those years, one finds the same judgment pronounced by Garaudy himself in his autobiography of 1989. I shall cite just a few sentences, in my own translation, from the part of this text in which he discusses that book and the occasion of the formal thesis defense, for which a police guard had been required because of his reputation as a leading Party official:

Quite frankly, I think that *Théorie matérialiste de la connaissance* is the worst of my books, the only one I forbade to be republished when it went out of print, one year after its appearance, at the Presses Universitaires de France.

It is a conscientious synthesis of what was being written at that time about the philosophy of science in the Soviet Union and among intellectuals of various Communist Parties, from England to Brazil.

Despite some personal research, especially concerning scientific development, its general orientation is invalidated by the theory according to which knowledge is a *reflection* of the real. Greek,

Thomist, and 18th Century inheritance, and one-sided utilization of Lenin's book *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*.

I have no excuse, other than a false conception of "Party spirit" making it a duty to share the mistakes of others.¹⁴

He goes on to recount that some years later he encountered the kindly thesis advisor who had protected him at his defense, Gaston Bachelard, who had by then become quite famous for his work having virtually nothing to do with Marxism, and that in the course of this meeting Bachelard told him that he had completely disagreed with Garaudy's thesis, but that he had wanted to encourage him rather than to influence him.

Garaudy was somehow to "hang on" as a Communist Party official for many years thereafter: his formal expulsion from the Party finally took place at a meeting in February 1970, as a virtually inevitable sequel to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in late 1968 and the worldwide disgust that it provoked and that he shared and publicly expressed. I shall return to that event at the end of this essay. Garaudy's own quite curious later evolution eventuated in his conversion to Islam, which he found to be quite compatible with, and indeed supportive of, his strong commitment to peace movements. But in the intervening years of the late 1950s and the 1960s he managed, in part through the personal support and friendship of the French Communist Party leader, Maurice Thorez, not only to maintain his party membership but also to become the leading French figure in promoting a renewed dialogue between Marxists and Christians, as epitomized in his very popular book, *From Anathema to Dialogue*. A longtime admirer both of the philosophical work of the Jesuit anthropologist, Teilhard de Chardin, and of the "worker-priest" movement in the French Catholic Church, he received further encouragement from the ascendancy of John XXIII to the papacy and the short-lived but influential spirit of *aggiornamento* that the latter created during his reign. In pursuit of this dialogue, Garaudy even deigned, *mirabile dictu*, to make a brief speaking tour of the United States in 1966. There were protests, needless to say, but he received considerable publicity and survived. One has to wonder, in retrospect, whether this tour was more symptomatic of French Marxism's continued flourishing or of its decline.¹⁵

Lefebvre, on the other hand, had long since been ousted from the Party: in 1958, in reaction to the publication of his book, highly critical of contem-

14. Roger Garaudy, *Mon tour du siècle en solitaire* (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont, 1989), 140.

15. At the end of the century, Garaudy again received considerable publicity in response to his 1995 book *Les Mythes fondateurs de la politique israélienne* (*The Founding Myths of Modern Israel*), in which he denied that the Holocaust had occurred. On February 27, 1998, a French court found Garaudy guilty of "racial defamation" and of violating a law that prohibits the disputing of crimes against humanity, imposing a fine of 240,000 francs (roughly \$40,000).

porary thinking among communists, entitled *Problèmes actuels du marxisme*. (He, however, continued years later to be denied a visa to visit the United States because of his past Communist Party membership.) He had always, at least in the postwar years, been more of an outsider to the Party leadership than had Garaudy: despite his previously mentioned Party-line polemic against existentialism (for which he later expressed regret), he had already published some highly original, creative works on the borderline between philosophy and sociology, perhaps the most interesting of which is *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (1947). This was republished in the same year as that of his expulsion, 1958, and in the following year he produced a fascinating text combining autobiography with literary criticism, philosophy, sociology, and even some poetry entitled *La Somme et le reste*. Much more was to follow; his *Introduction à la modernité* (*Introduction to Modernity*) is especially well known in the domain of sociological theory, at once drawing on Marx's thought and yet dealing with many new problems in the daily life of a society that had obviously become quite different from that of Marx's time, the early Industrial Revolution, and that called for a new critical theory less exclusively focused on the structure of the capitalist economic system and the class struggle that it fostered. It should be little surprise, then, that Lefebvre's name loomed large during the French student uprising of May 1968, which began with sociology students at the University of Nanterre, on the outskirts of Paris, where Lefebvre was by then a professor. It was the decision of the Party not to support the students and the factory workers who had joined in solidarity with them that, together with the crushing of the so-called "Prague Spring" by Soviet forces a few months later, tolled the death knell of that Party's serious influence in France, as Garaudy at the time saw quite clearly that it would. But by that same time, the ever-widening gap between communism and Marxist theory, and the ever-growing dispersion of the latter into various novel shapes and forms, had already become quite apparent, as Lefebvre's intellectual liberation and development well illustrate.

Arguably the most prominent exemplification of both this gap and this dispersion, however, was Sartre himself during these same years of the late 1950s and the 1960s. His *Search for a Method*, cited at the beginning of this essay as a product of the period of the so-called "Thaw" that began with Khrushchev's detailed denunciation, given to a closed Party gathering but soon made public around the world, of Stalin's crimes, was actually published in its first, Polish version several months after the Soviet intervention in Hungary to crush workers' demonstrations there. Since Poland, for various complex reasons, had (narrowly) escaped the same fate, the special issue on French intellectual life of the journal *Twórczość* (which also, incidentally, included an article by Lefebvre) was still permitted to be published in April 1957. But by this time Sartre had vehemently denounced the Soviet action in Hungary and made it clear that, as

a result, he was giving up all efforts to make common cause with the French Communist Party, or at least with those who belonged to its still-Stalinist core. This position was first enunciated in an interview that he gave to the magazine, *L'Express*, immediately after the events in question, and soon thereafter in a special triple issue of *Les Temps modernes* on the Hungarian revolt to which Sartre contributed a long essay, "Le Fantôme de Staline" (*The Spectre of Stalin*). At the same time, it must be remembered that Sartre still continued to maintain the judgment expressed in *Search for a Method*, both in its Polish version and in the French version that first appeared a half-year later in *Les Temps modernes*, to the effect that Marxism remained the dominant worldview of the age, *despite* the sclerosis to which "official" Marxism had succumbed. This judgment continued to be an underlying assumption of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* itself, the 800-page first volume of which he wrote at a feverish pace between late 1957 and early 1960.

My summary here of this very interesting and, in my opinion, still not sufficiently well-known or well-respected work will be very brief and sketchy, intended primarily to single it out as a particularly salient illustration of what I have called the "dispersion of Marxist theory." Early on in it, Sartre asserts that not only is this critique of his dependent, obviously enough, on the writings of Marx and of Hegel before him, but also that it would have been impossible for anyone to undertake it

*prior to the abuses that have clouded the very notion of dialectical rationality and have produced a new split between praxis and the knowledge that illuminates it... It can only happen as the intellectual expression of the putting back in order that characterizes, in this one World which is ours, the post-Stalinist era.*¹⁶

This is as clear an acknowledgment as one can imagine of Sartre's belief that a historical corner had been turned – a turning that, as he then hoped, would allow for the re-establishment of Marxism itself on more solid ground. Accordingly, the *Critique* proceeds, at a level far more abstract, at least in its early phases, than *Search for a Method*, to fill in the outlines of an idea borrowed from Lefebvre that Sartre had discussed in that earlier work, to wit, the idea of a "progressive-regressive method." Whereas Marx had generally confined himself to the progressive reconstruction of history as it appeared in his time, saying

16. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique, Tome I: Théorie des ensembles pratiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 166, my translation; compare *Critique of Dialectical Reason I: Theory of Practical Ensembles*, A. Sheridan-Smith (trans.) (London: NLB/Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1976), 50.

little about the underlying, interactive structures of human society that would help explain the nature of history, Sartre proposes to devote his investigations in Volume I of the *Critique* to the latter (“ensembles pratiques,” in the words of its subtitle), that is, to the “regressive” part of the method.¹⁷

The starting-point of the *Critique* is the human being conceived as “*praxis*” (a term famously associated with the early Marx), living under conditions of scarcity (a notion that, as Sartre was to observe years later, plays much more of a role in the writings of Marx’s bourgeois political economist predecessors than in those of Marx himself), and forced to labor on “inert matter” in order to survive. The domain in which this interaction takes place is designated as the “practico-inert,” and the interaction itself results in a sort of reversal whereby the freedom that for Sartre is most fundamental to *praxis* comes to be thwarted and human beings are reduced to an alienated condition that he calls “the series” or “seriality.” Under certain conditions, however, often those of threats from outsiders, it becomes possible for some human beings at a given place and time to band together, reasserting their freedom through some common activity, in a type of formation radically different from the series, which he denominates the “group.” His chosen example of a group at its height (“in fusion”) is the residents of the Quartier St. Antoine in Paris in 1789 who, fearing a rumored attack on them by royal troops, decide to capture the fortress-prison, the Bastille, that commanded the entrance to their neighborhood. Success in such an enterprise, should it be successful, is likely to entail follow-up organizational measures in order to preserve it (e.g. mounting watch against the possible return of the troops), leading eventually to the swearing of an oath of loyalty to the group and, from there, to further institutionalization and finally bureaucracy. Sartre insists that neither the sequence in which he depicts these developments nor their rather negative outcome as I have just summarized it is inevitable, and the final part of Volume I is designed as a transition to his planned study of history, conceived as a vast “totalization” (a favorite word of Sartre’s here) in progress. Thus, there is some concession to Marxian optimism concerning the historical future, but only some: the overall impression left by the *Critique* is indeed far removed from that with which, let us say, *The Communist Manifesto* concludes.

One of the reasons for the lesser attention paid to Sartre’s *Critique* as compared with that which had been accorded to his earlier *chef d’œuvre*, *Being and Nothingness*, was the fact that by the time of its appearance philosophical

17. Volume II, only partially completed and published posthumously, consists in large measure of a detailed examination, in light of the theoretical conclusions of Volume I, of Russia under Stalin during a portion of the decade of the 1930s; it was to have been the “progressive” portion of the massive projected work, subtitled “the intelligibility of history,” with the Stalin study being only one of several from different eras and different types of sociopolitical organization.

voices of a later generation and of quite different orientations, some of which were soon to become very well known, had begun to be heard and attended to. Among these voices were those of Sartre's friend and severe critic, Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose very influential *Anthropologie structurale* had been published in 1958, and of Michel Foucault,¹⁸ whose *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (*History of Madness*) was published in 1962, but who had already established a certain reputation for his fresh approaches to philosophical analysis.¹⁹ "Structuralism," a blanket term that came to be applied to many thinkers of the next decade even though most, including Foucault himself, tended to express discomfort with it as a label for themselves, was becoming the new rage, whereas Sartre was still seen as being first and foremost an existentialist, albeit now a "Marxist" (or at least "neo-Marxist") existentialist. Structuralism, whatever else it meant, entailed a scientific approach to the understanding of human society, as Lévi-Strauss's attack on Sartre's *Critique* in the final chapter, "Histoire et dialectique," of his book *La Pensée Sauvage*²⁰ well illustrates.

To those outside France who followed these changes in intellectual currents in that country, by far the best-known figure associated at once with both structuralism and Marxism during the 1960s was, and still is, Louis Althusser.²¹ Younger than Lefebvre, Sartre, and Lévi-Strauss, and older than Foucault (whom he tutored in preparation for the latter's *agrégation* examination and influenced considerably, despite their ultimate disagreement about the value of Marx's thought), Althusser was a unique individual whose tortured life can be seen, in retrospect, as a living crossroads of the historical contradictions – a term dear to the Marxists themselves – of which the eventual outcome was the end of the Marxist era. Very shortly after completing his diploma, in 1947, at the École Normale Supérieure, he was invited to serve as an instructor there, a position that he still occupied when he famously killed his wife and longtime friend, Héléne Rytman-Legotien, in an episode of his frequently recurring madness, in 1980: at the time, the École Normale Supérieure was also their place of residence. He joined the Communist Party (of which Héléne had already been a member prior to the war, but from which she had then been excluded because

*18. For a discussion of Foucault, see the essay by Timothy O'Leary in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 6*.

19. His first book-length work, *Maladie mentale et personnalité* (*Mental Illness and Psychology*), had appeared in 1954, and exhibited considerable influence from, and references to, Marx; in a revised version of the same work, also published in 1962, there is a very significant shift away from these influences and references.

20. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962), 324–57; *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1966), 245–69.

*21. For a discussion of Althusser, see the essay by Warren Montag in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 6*.

of certain alleged “errors”) in 1948 as he became increasingly disillusioned with the Catholicism in which he had formerly believed. Never a member of the Party’s inner circle and on several occasions the object of its strong disapproval because of his publicly expressed criticisms of, for instance, its official acceptance of “humanism,” he nevertheless retained his Party membership until he chose voluntarily to withdraw in 1980, after which he still remained, as he put it citing Lenin, a “communist without party.” He gave courses on structuralism as early as the late 1950s but himself resisted the label because he did not wish to be identified with Lévi-Strauss’s more formalistic approach. Although his best-known book, at least outside France, is his essay collection *Pour Marx* (*For Marx*), which was first published in the same year as the four-volume work prepared in collaboration with his student Étienne Balibar and others, *Lire Le Capital*, he acknowledges in his strange, posthumously published autobiography, *L’Avenir dure longtemps* (*The future lasts a long time*; published in English as *The Future Lasts Forever*), that his own first reading of *Capital* only occurred in connection with the 1964–65 seminar that produced *Reading Capital!*²²

Not an original systematic philosopher, Althusser is likely to be best remembered as a theorist for his insistence on several debatable points of Marx interpretation. He believed that there was a sharp division between the earlier, “humanist,” Marx and the later one, a division that he famously denominated the “epistemological break.” The later Marx, for him, was the creator of a new science of history, with special emphasis on the word “science.” While history was determined, to be sure, by economic factors, the famous “forces of production,” Althusser took this to be true only “in the last instance,” for history was in fact “overdetermined.” And, while “ideology,” which Marx, unlike the later so-called “orthodox Marxists” of the Communist Party, had regarded as a pejorative term, was according to Althusser to be strictly distinguished from “science,” nevertheless the role of ideology in connecting individuals with the culture of their time and place was for him indispensable and would remain so.

But probably Althusser’s greatest historical significance lay in his influence on and through his students at the École Normale Supérieure,²³ and his reputation spread far beyond the walls of that elite institution. One of those students, Bernard-Henri Lévy, himself a strange case in many respects but certainly not in the same respects as Althusser, concludes a long, revealing, and far from unqualifiedly positive digression on him, in his own highly controversial book about Sartre, by asking whether we should forget Althusser and replies, “Non,

22. Louis Althusser, *L’Avenir dure longtemps; suivi de Les Faits* (Paris: Le Grand livre du mois, 1992), 233; *The Future Lasts Forever: A Memoir*, Olivier Corpet and Yann Moulier Boutang (eds), Richard Veasey (trans.) (New York: New Press, 1993), 208.

*23. The work of many of Althusser’s students are discussed in the essay by Patrice Maniglier in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 7*.

bien sûr. Justement non.” He goes on to say that it was Althusser who was and still is his master (and indeed the master of a whole generation), who taught him to write and to think, who taught him both his Marxism and his anti-Marxism, and much, much more.²⁴ It is clear that Althusser had become very much the rage among politically involved students during the period leading up to the confused and confusing events of May 1968. (Lévy was himself a member of the École Normale Supérieure class of '68.) As Althusser recounts it, many of the students whom he knew best had broken with the Communist Party's official youth wing, the Union des étudiants communistes (UEC), to form a new organization called the Union des jeunesses communistes (marxistes-léninistes) (UJC m-l), a move that he had in fact criticized. Nevertheless, his name remained a rallying point for many of the very large number of students who, disdaining all hierarchies and hence not clearly under the leadership of any single faction or individual, marched under red banners and erected barricades in the sequence of events that began, as I have already mentioned, in Nanterre, and then moved on to Paris's Left Bank, where both the old Sorbonne building and the École Normale Supérieure are located. The revolt seemed to gain momentum for some days, as workers at major factories joined in, and even Sartre gave his endorsement in a short talk (he was told in no uncertain terms, in a note, to be brief) at the student-occupied Sorbonne. But, as I have noted, the ever more enfeebled and rigidified Communist Party leadership refused to support the movement, and eventually President De Gaulle regained the upper hand, even though flare-ups and small street battles continued for a month thereafter, and occasionally even into the early months of the following year. As for Althusser himself, he was being taken by car to another one of his periodic psychiatric hospital commitments when he observed some marching groups that signaled the start of the May uprising.

The dramatic failure of that uprising, which had echoes of diverse kinds in diverse national contexts worldwide, can clearly be seen in retrospect as the end of an epoch, not just for the French Communist Party and other Western Communist Parties but also for Marxist theory itself. In France, since that is our focus here, its sequels included both the ultra-radical but in fact short-lived Gauche Prolétarienne (otherwise known as “the Maos”), to which Sartre lent his name and prestige, on the one hand, and the rise of anti-Marxism in various forms, on the other. Within a few years there developed an intellectual movement known as the Nouveaux Philosophes, the most prominent names among whom were Bernard-Henri Lévy and a former Gauche Prolétarienne

24. Bernard-Henri Lévy, *Le Siècle de Sartre* (Paris: Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle, 2000), 248; *Sartre: The Philosopher of the Twentieth Century*, Andrew Brown (trans.) (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 186.

leader named André Glucksmann; fiercely anti-Marxist and critical of modern systematic thinkers such as Hegel, Marx, and Sartre (“master thinkers,” in the words of the title of a book by Glucksmann), it was also short-lived in its original form, although it can be regarded as part of the evolution to what later came to be known as “postmodernism.”

A similar anti-Marxist drift occurred among former Trotskyite thinkers such as Cornelius Castoriadis, one of the originators of the movement known as *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (socialism or barbarism), which was also the name given to its journal. Estimates of Castoriadis’s importance both as a social philosopher and as one of the significant inspirations of the 1968 student revolt vary greatly. For example, David Ames Curtis, one of the foremost proponents of Castoriadis’s ideas, reports that a leading figure in that revolt, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, claimed to have “largely ‘plagiarized’ Castoriadis’s and *S. ou B.*’s views.”²⁵ However, as Castoriadis himself has made clear, the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group, having undergone several previous splits, suffered a decisive one in 1963 and had ceased to function by spring 1966. Castoriadis’s long, varied career, beginning with a brief period as a member of the Communist Youth in his native Greece, continuing with initial enthusiasm for, then disillusionment with, Trotsky’s ideas, followed by systematic repudiation of major tenets of Marxist thought (while at the same time he claimed still to adhere to the ideal of a “revolutionary project”), is a particularly noteworthy case study in the complex process of the dissolution of French Marxism.

One of the other well-known young figures from the May days of 1968, another student of Althusser’s (from the class of ’65), Benny Lévy, moved from being a “Mao” leader (the connection of this group with Mao Tse-Tung’s thought was quite superficial, involving above all the adoption of a provocative label, hence my avoidance of the adjective “Maoist”) to becoming Sartre’s secretary and confidant in his declining years as he went blind and then, after Sartre’s death, to being the leader of an orthodox Jewish commune first in Strasbourg and later in Israel. Sartre himself, in an interview conducted a few years before his death by three interlocutors in connection with the publication of a *Library of Living Philosophers* volume on him, declared that he no longer considered himself a Marxist – among other reasons because, after all, he no longer thought that Marxism was compatible with a philosophy of human freedom such as his own.

Of course, adherence to the Marxian tradition remains strong among some French philosophers – Balibar²⁶ continues writing along Marxist lines, for

25. David Ames Curtis, “Foreword,” in *The Castoriadis Reader*, David Ames Curtis (ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), vii.

*26. Balibar’s work is discussed in the essays by Simon Duffy and Patrice Maniglier in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 7*; his more recent work is also discussed in the essay by Rosi Braidotti in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 8*.

example – and Althusser in his autobiography (begun in 1985, some five years prior to his death) thinks of such adherence as having remained strong through the 1970s, even while admitting that as the inspiration of a political movement (and indeed of several movements) it did indeed die, slowly but surely, after 1968. As the title of that book of his correctly affirms, the future does indeed last a long time. But I have confined myself to the *heyday* period of Marxism in France, and no objective observer of France today could possibly claim that that period is anything but a now-distant memory.

8

BLACK EXISTENTIALISM

Lewis R. Gordon

Frantz Fanon,¹ the famed Martinican psychiatrist and philosopher, succinctly summarized the black predicament of the self: “the black soul is a white construction.”² Prior to the emergence of the modern world, indigenous or first peoples of Africa, Southern Asia, and the South Pacific had no reason to think of themselves as black. That construction is indebted to the anthropology of race and racism born of colonization and global practices of enslavement in the modern world. Black existential thought focuses, *inter alia*, on three themes occasioned by that construction: (i) what it means to be human; (ii) the meaning of freedom and liberation; and (iii) the degradation of reason in the modern world. Black existential thought brings the question of existence to these three problematics.

The first, which we could call philosophical anthropology, is raised by the challenges to the humanity of black people posed by colonialism, slavery, and racism in the modern world. In the case of slavery, the humanity of black enslaved people was challenged by virtue of their status as property. The status of property placed rights in the hands of their owners. One never technically harmed a

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1. Frantz Fanon (July 20, 1925–December 6, 1961; born in Martinique; died in Bethesda, Maryland, USA) studied medicine at the University of Lyon (1947–51). Among his influences were Césaire, Sartre, and Senghor. He served as Chef de service at the psychiatric hospital of Blida-Joinville, Algeria (1953–56) and on the editorial board of the Algerian liberation movement (Front de Libération Nationale, or FLN) newspaper *El Moudjahid*.
 2. Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), 11, my translation. There are two English translations available, both of which are published by Grove Press in New York; the first, by Charles Lamm Markman, was published in 1967, and the second, by Richard Philcox, was published in 2008. My references will be to the original French, and the translations will be my own.

slave but a slave owner's property. Philosophical anthropology comes to the fore when one questions whether any human being could properly be property. The enslaved could, for example, defend their humanity as being the same as those who have enslaved them, but the problem faced is the folly of justifying oneself in such terms in the first place. By what right is the humanity of enslavers, or for that matter those who contend their racial superiority, presumed? Who, or for that matter *what*, is the proper standard, if any, of the human? This question leads not only to the interrogation of those who challenged the humanity of black people but also to the questioning of the black self: if the black is a white construction, then what is the black left with who attempts to transcend that construction? The interrogation of black existence in this sense leads also to an inquiry into the meaning of the human being and, thus, human existence.³

Concerns with freedom and liberation make sense for a subject bearing the weight of enslavement and colonization. Problems of reason emerge through the kinds of justification offered for the anthropology of black existence and the discussion of freedom. An anthropology that degrades black existence, as found in the rationalizations of racialized slavery and colonization since the sixteenth-century expansion of Christendom into the formation of Europe and the Americas, uses reason to justify itself.⁴ The black existential critique of reason thus poses the question of whether reason is, in a word, reasonable.

Philosophical anthropology, concerns of liberation and freedom, and struggles with reason also come to the fore in black existential discussions of experience. Racialized slavery and racism offer conceptions of black people devoid of an inner life, experience, and the faculty of choice. For existentialists, an appeal to experience is thus a rallying cry against appealing to overdetermined conceptions of black people that precede what they encounter and do. Similar to Sartre's credo of existence preceding essence, experience is a lived reality that precedes the concepts by which it is understood. Experience cannot be understood, however, without interpretation, meaning, or thought. That being

3. For more on conceptions of and debates about slavery, see *Slavery*, Stanley Engerman *et al.* (eds) (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001); Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); and for an explicitly existential discussion, see my *Bad Faith and Antiracism* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities International Press, 1995) and *Existential Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

4. For discussion, see, for example, Lewis R. Gordon, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); *Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires*, M. R. Greer *et al.* (eds) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Walter Mignolo, "Philosophy and the Colonial Difference," *Philosophy Today* SPP Supplement 43(4) (1999); and Paul Taylor, *The Concept of Race* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

so, black existentialism also is the critical reflection on the conditions of black experience.

Black experience as a theme of black existential significance first emerges in black music and literature. The spiritual, as is well known, is an early aesthetic expression of black suffering.⁵ That suffering took transformed artistic expression in the blues, which focus on life's difficulties and bring existential reflection to the world of *feeling* or black suffering and joy. As an art form, the blues defies predictability and human closure. It welcomes improvisation, which makes it and its offsprings – jazz, rhythm and blues, and the subsequent forms of black popular music – exemplify the credo of existence preceding essence and its connection to the question of freedom. The worst condemnation one could make of black music is that it has become “predictable.” The blues also brings the absurdities of life into focus, which is a form of facing instead of avoiding it, the result of which is an adult sensibility. In a world where black men were called “boys” and black women “girls,” or worse, the blues stood as an important adversary of antiblack racism. It reminds them of being, in a word, “grown.” Yet in spite of such expressions of maturity, the blues were also testaments to ironic dimensions of life in the form of play. In existential thought from Nietzsche to Sartre,⁶ and even in some of the poststructural heirs such as Derrida, there is a critique of the spirit of seriousness, by which is meant the treatment of values as material features of reality. Their counsel is to transcend seriousness with play. The blues is a manifestation of this critique through its reminder, as ironic play, of not taking life too seriously. This performance of a suffering people is not, as some critics thought, the folly of a people incapable of understanding their situation. It was, in this reading, indication of their understanding the injustice and suffering they bore, the double standards imposed on them as mundane features of modern life.

The blues were first explicitly brought to literature in the writings of one of the most influential existential novelists of the twentieth century, Richard Wright (1908–60), and one of the most influential poets, Aimé Césaire (1913–2008). The former is the main source of the black Anglophonic literary genealogy, although Wright spent the last decade of his life in Paris, where his

5. This is an observation made by W. E. B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago, IL: A. C. McClurg, 1903). I discuss this question of suffering in the introduction and fourth chapter of *Existential Africana*. See also Terence Johnson, “‘My Soul Wants Something New’: Reclaiming the Souls Behind the Veil of Blackness,” in *The Souls of W. E. B. Du Bois: New Essays and Reflections*, Jason R. Young and Edward J. Blum (eds) (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009).

*6. For a discussion of Nietzsche, see the essay by Daniel Conway in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 2*. Existentialism and Sartre are discussed in several essays in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 4*.

impact on African diasporic thought in Europe was as influential as it was in North America, Africa, and the Caribbean. Césaire plays a similar role for black Francophonie literature, although his influence on literary development in the Caribbean crosses the linguistic lines. Let us turn to the first.

Wright was the son of sharecroppers in Mississippi. After an itinerant, poverty-stricken childhood, in which he did not complete high school, in spite of commencing his writing career at the age of fifteen, he made his way to Chicago, where he became a member of the Communist Party (CPUSA). His work with the CPUSA was primarily as an editor of various publications, which led to accusations of his having bourgeois sensibilities, in spite of his sub-proletariat background. He moved to New York, where he eventually broke from the party and published his acclaimed collection of short stories *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), and then his monumental novel *Native Son* (1940). Wright's politics was always too radical and left leaning for the United States. He moved to Paris in 1946, became a French citizen in 1947, and remained there until his death. In Paris, he was part of a community of intellectuals that included Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus, and he was instrumental in organizing forums for writers across the African Diaspora, such as the Black Writers Congress of 1956, which was held in Paris.⁷ That meeting included Césaire, Frantz Fanon, James Baldwin (1924–87), and George Lamming (1927–), among others.

Wright articulates black experience at the level of what existentialists such as Sartre and Beauvoir call a *situation*, which they typically describe as a conflict of freedoms. Human beings face their limitations in relation to each other, for another human being has the power of refusal, of being able to reject doing what one wants them to do. More, the resulting situation is also susceptible to manifesting meanings well beyond one's intentions. As we saw with the observation of the black as a white construction, what a black person *means* by his or her action is not necessarily the same as what the situation he or she is in allows others to understand. This observation is evident in Wright's short stories but it is most known through his novels. In *Native Son*, the protagonist Bigger Thomas finds himself "in a situation" when he helps his employer's drunken daughter to her bedroom after chauffeuring her and her boyfriend around town and realizes that he, with her in his arms, was at risk of being "discovered" as a "rapist." Wright provides reflections on the relationship between choice and options for those who are denied normality in the modern world; often lacking the power to set the conditions and thereby determine the social meaning of their situation, they find themselves constantly thrown into circumstances they would rather have

7. See Abdul R. JanMohamed, *The Death-Bound Subject: Richard Wright's Archaeology of Death* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), and Margaret Walker, *Richard Wright, Daemonic Genius: A Portrait of the Man, A Critical Look at His Work* (New York: Warner Books, 1988).

avoided. Ordinary situations such as seeking employment, spending leisure time with one's associates, and simply traveling from one part of a city to another are weighted down by possibilities of white racist inscription: an economic recession that allows black unemployment lines outside factories to be interpreted as a sign of black servility; a criminal justice system that presumes groups of black men at play to be involved in criminal behavior; blacks passing through white neighborhoods facing suspicions of being up to no good. Wright's novel outlines many of the classic existential problems of freedom and responsibility that follow. In "How Bigger Was Born," his famous introduction to the 1940 edition of *Native Son*, he argued that American society "makes" Bigger Thomases: people who, in attempting to assert their humanity, become its troublemakers to be forced back "into their place" while being held responsible for their actions. Wright is able to criticize a system for what it does to people while recognizing the importance of responsibility, even under unjust systems, as a necessary condition for human dignity and maturity. In his last novel, *The Outsider* (1953),⁸ this theme is explicitly made through the antihero Cross Damon, who finds himself incapable of experiencing responsibility because he lives in a world that inhibits his development into a man. His greatest fear is realized when he dies confessing a feeling of "innocence" after having killed several people.

Wright's work raises an important challenge to the understanding of death in existential thought. From Hegel through Heidegger, death formed one's subjectivity as a source of fear and anxiety and as an ontological limit that constitutes the self. Wright's work reveals, in a tradition that dates back to the thought of Frederick Douglass, that black subjectivity is constituted by an understanding of freedom as a premonition of early death or being imperiled by risking freedom in social life. But instead of simple fear of death there is the dread of bondage. The decision to live as a struggle for freedom forms, then, a subjectivity of presumed death.⁹

Another theme of black existential thought is invisibility, a subject that has become almost synonymous with the name Ralph Ellison (1913–94) since the publication of his novel *Invisible Man* in 1952. Here, black invisibility is a function of hypervisibility. It is a form of being what Fanon called a phobogenic object, an object that stimulates anxiety. Ellison laments the madness faced by educated blacks, who believe that their achievements will enable their inclusion (visibility) instead of heightened exclusion (invisibility) in US society. Baldwin also brings such questions to interracial, homosexual, and bisexual settings and

8. *The Outsider* was also the title of the British translation of Albert Camus's most famous novel *L'Étranger* (1942), whose American translation was *The Stranger*.

9. For more on this theme, see my *Existentialia Africana*, ch. 3, "Frederick Douglass as an Existentialist"; Abdul R. JanMohamed, *The Death-Bound Subject*; and *Frederick Douglass: A Critical Reader*, Bill Lawson and Frank Kirkland (eds) (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999).

looks at the question of suffering as a struggle to defend the possibility of genuine human relationships.¹⁰ The question of invisibility later takes on a unique form, as well, in the novels of Toni Morrison (1931–), particularly her first, *The Bluest Eye*.¹¹ There, Morrison brings out the peculiarity of notions such as “ugliness” and “beauty” that dominate women’s lives in general but black women’s in a profound way through their attempt to whiten their appearance. The expectation that black women should look like their white counterparts pressures them into a condition of bad faith and what Du Bois formulated as initial double consciousness: that is, seeing themselves through the eyes of hostile others.¹² They live by a standard that they can never meet. This theme of living by a standard that is not one’s own is taken to another level when Morrison writes of bad “mixture” in a world that creates liaisons between adults and children, the consequence of which is molestation, incest, and madness.

Unlike Wright, who was a US expatriate in France, Césaire was more directly linked, through his studies at the École Normale Supérieure, to the European tradition that received much criticism in his work. A native of Martinique, Césaire and his wife, Suzanne (also from Martinique), were married while both studied in Paris, wherein they were, with Léopold Senghor (1906–2001) and Léon Damas (1912–78), among the founders of the Négritude movement. The Césaires returned to Martinique, where they cofounded (with a collective that included René Ménil [1907–2004] and many other influential Martinican intellectuals) the journal *Tropiques* and taught in the island’s *lycée*.¹³ Among their students was Fanon, to whose thought we shall soon turn. Césaire then shifted to a career in politics, where he became mayor of Fort-de-France and *député* from Martinique to the French National Assembly. Under his leadership, Martinique became an overseas extension of France in 1946. Césaire continued his literary production throughout his career in public service, from which he retired in 2001.

Césaire’s contributions are many, but the most influential are his classics *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal* (*Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*)

10. These themes are powerfully explored in *Another Country* and his many essays. For discussion, see Jean-Paul Rocchi, “James Baldwin: Écriture et identité,” dissertation (Paris: University of Paris IV–Sorbonne, 2001).

11. See Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Random House, 2000). For discussion along these lines, see Gary Schwartz, “Toni Morrison at the Movies: Theorizing Race through *Imitation of Life* (for Barbara Siegel),” in *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*, Lewis Gordon (ed.) (New York: Routledge, 1997).

12. Du Bois offers this formulation in *The Souls of Black Folk*, but see also Paget Henry’s discussion, “Africana Phenomenology: Its Philosophical Implications,” *The C. L. R. James Journal* 11(1) (Summer 2005).

13. For a discussion of this group and the Négritude movement they inspired see T. Denean-Sharpley Whiting, *Négritude Women* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

(1939) and *Discours sur le colonialisme* (*Discourse on Colonialism*) (1953). The first was a long poem that grew out of his reflections on Martinique while preparing for his examinations at the École Normale Supérieure. Césaire drew on poetry to articulate the cultural contradictions of an educational system that demanded maximum assimilation while maintaining colonial segregation. He was concerned about a political anthropology that demanded him literally to become, to paraphrase Fanon's later formulation, a white man in a black skin. That a long string of cultural and economic relations was linked to that body raised the question of unjust relations that were protected by such erasure. Césaire took up that question in the *Discours*, which locates him in a long tradition of Africana writers on philosophy of civilization.

Although philosophers no longer speak of civilization in such terms, the debates in that area have continued in the social sciences and many areas of the academy, as the debate on Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis attests, and contemporary discussions of civil society in anthropology and political thought reveal.¹⁴ In Africana thought, the question was at the forefront of the thought of Alexander Crummell (1819–98), who founded the American Negro Academy in 1897.¹⁵ In Césaire's thought, colonialism was a brutal system of exploitation that jeopardized civilization by creating a binary system of rationalized violence through a racist anthropology. Efforts to de-link class exploitation and racism fail to understand their symbiotic relationship in colonial society. In effect, European colonialism only considered its practices barbaric, he argued, when applied against (white) Europeans. Thus, from Césaire's point of view, European outrage at the Holocaust against European Jews was not in fact an argument against genocide and brutal exploitation but about *whom* such activities should be committed against. Such practices were mundane features of life in the colonies and against blacks (and, although he does not mention them, Native American populations). This is because of the philosophical anthropology of dehumanization that governed everyday life under such a system:

colonization ... dehumanizes even the most civilized man; that colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt for the native and justified by that contempt, inevitably tends to change him who undertakes it; that the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other

14. For discussion, see, for example, Peter Burke, *Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa: Critical Perspectives* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000) and *What is Cultural History?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008).

15. See my *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy*, 51–3.

man as *an animal*, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform *himself* into an animal.¹⁶

Césaire advanced here a familiar argument in existential thought: that dehumanizing others dehumanizes one's self. He concluded the text with a demonstration of intellectual rationalizations of colonial relations whose effect is, in today's parlance, an evocation of a colonial *epistēmē* (or cultural paradigm of knowledge, authority, and power), and offered the following philosophical anthropological considerations: "One of the values invented by the bourgeoisie in former times and launched throughout the world was *man* – and we have seen what has become of that."¹⁷ By posing "man" as an invention, Césaire problematized theories of a transcendental anthropology. Man, in this formulation, becomes one among other possibilities of existence. Although he concluded the text in a more Marxist-oriented appeal to the proletariat as transcending another invention (the nation), the argument itself situates his reflections within an *existential* Marxist framework. Just as Sartre reflected on his own existential Marxism in *Search for a Method* – his famous preface to his *Critique of Dialectical Reason* – so Césaire reflected on his when he observed that "the salvation of Europe is not a matter of a revolution in methods."¹⁸

A curious feature of the *Discours* is the author's style. Although avowedly an essay, the sentences have poetic significance that challenges the norms of rationalization. Césaire's philosophy of existence was not only a matter of what he was arguing but also *how* he did it. Paget Henry has described this, in *Caliban's Reason*, as Caribbean poeticism, but when considered in the framework of existential philosophy, additional genealogical links to Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, both of whom challenged the norms of philosophical writing, are evident. Whether in the Africana tradition, where a similar point could be ascribed to Du Bois, or the European or Asian ones, it is clear that *writing* as an activity in which existentialists offer a metacritique of the white's cold and detached discourse of philosophical reason demands a commitment from existential writers against reductionist reflections on the human subject as an abstract, disembodied locus of pure identity.

Césaire's writings thus brought the semiological significance of colonization to the fore. His approach of offering a poetic reordering of the valuative signifiers, where the negative constructions of black existence are reordered in positive terms, influenced Africana scholars to the present. Along with the

16. Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, Joan Pinkham (trans.) (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 41.

17. *Ibid.*, 74.

18. *Ibid.*, 78.

Senegalese Senghor and the Guyanese Damas, this reordering was offered in the development of “Négritude,” a term coined by Césaire, whose basic tenet was to affirm blackness and the articulation of a uniquely African personality.¹⁹ These concerns were explored by Senghor, who also became a politician, but his efforts, unlike Césaire’s, led to the independence of Senegal and his becoming its first president. In *Liberté I: Négritude et humanisme* (1964), Senghor offered a critique of modern European notions of freedom by exploring the differences between conceptions of a healthy human being in the West versus those in Africa. His main target was Arthur de Gobineau (1816–82), whose *Essai sur l’Inégalité des Races Humaines* (1854) is one of the founding texts of modern European racism.²⁰ Gobineau, and many European writers, wrote under the presumption that being dominated by rationality was a source of health, which they contrasted with the African. Such European writers sought inspiration from (and a wished-for genealogical link with) the ancient Greeks, whom they saw as governed by reason. The result is the unfortunate dictum “Reason is Greek as emotion is Negro.” Senghor argued that a healthy human being is a mixture of reason *and* passion, and, in his brand of Négritude poetry, celebrated the African’s supposedly being at home in the world of affect.

Senghor’s work was well received in francophone regions of the African continent, where it was possible to assert black normativity in ethnic terms not readily available to Césaire, even with blacks being the majority population of Martinique. Although having experienced colonization, blacks in Africa were, and continue to be, more aware of their ethnic identity as an ongoing, lived narrative. The Caribbean black could often only speculate on the ethnic communities to which he or she is related in Africa. Césaire, however, brought race to the forefront with his assertion of a shared blackness that crossed the many ethnic divides in Africa. He did not know whether he was Asante, Yoruba, Igbo, Wimbun, or any of the many ethnic groups of Africa, but he offered those communities the presentation of a more esteemed version of the blackness he shared with the members of those groups. In the francophone Caribbean of Césaire’s younger years, where the only standards of human excellence that mattered were those of Europeans, such reflections were “scandalous” as the local population mocked the idea of a dark-skinned Martinican expressing pride instead of shame in his appearance.²¹ “What indeed could be more grotesque,”

19. For a recent discussion of Négritude, with a taxonomy that includes “Sartrean Négritude,” see Reiland Rabaka, *Forms of Fanonism: Frantz Fanon’s Critical Theory and the Dialectics of Decolonization* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), ch. 1.

20. Anténor Firmin, *Equality of Human Races: A Nineteenth Century Haitian Scholar’s Response to European Racialism*, Asselin Charles (trans.) (New York: Garland Publishers, 2000).

21. Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays*, Joseph Fanon (ed.), Haakon Chevalier (trans.) (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 21.

Fanon recalled of those times, “than an educated man, a man with a diploma, having in consequence understood a good many things, among others that ‘it was unfortunate to be a negro,’ proclaiming that his skin was beautiful and that the ‘big black hole’ [Africa] was a source of truth.”²² Césaire’s thought, as we have seen, demanded positive black identification with Africa and an aesthetic that subverted the notion of white Eurocentrism and white superiority over the African/black.

Césaire had an extraordinary impact on Caribbean writers who today include Lamming, Derek Walcott (1930–), Edouard Glissant (1928–2011),²³ Sylvia Wynter (1928–), Marise Condé (1934–), and Simone Schwarz-Bart (1938–). The most explicitly existential of these thinkers, however, is Lamming, whose work reveals the meeting of the genealogical lines of Wright and Césaire. His novel *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) stands as a correlate to Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*. Like Lamming, Fanon was also influenced by the convergence of Wright and Césaire. Lamming’s novel is an autobiographical exploration of problems of existence from the standpoint of a nine-year-old boy. Through the metaphor of rain, Lamming in effect explores Sartre’s famous observation of slime being “the agony of water” or the facticity of the past clinging to, and weighing down, revolutionary action and totalizing self-conscious choice to be “other.”²⁴ If slime is the agony of water, and if history moves like an unyielding river or, as it is often characterized, *tide*, then what might be the agony wrought by its recent, epochal flow? What, in other words, is the agony of modernity?

The little boy suffers in Lamming’s novel. He, with many in the community that constitutes the world of his childhood, suffers the agony of modernity. It is agonizing because it promises that which it is not prepared to give without a costly price. He faces this world promised to him by the British Empire, and he walks through it with faith in humanity that stimulates anyone who still believes in promises. But that world, he discovers, is a slimy one – imposing the determinism of white rationalistic order as a condition for “freedom.” Wright reflected on that world as one that constantly generates illicit humanity. Recall that for him, Bigger Thomas was its agony, and even the structural imposition of racial inferiority and denial of agency never entailed an absence of responsibility; there was always the sense that such responsibility was elusive at every moment the inner-man confronted a world that locked him in perpetual boyhood. Wright, as we saw, raised the question of the modern alienation that militated against responsibility through the constant force of innocence. Perpetual guilt takes

22. *Ibid.*

*23. For further discussion of Glissant, see the essay by Rosi Braidotti in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 8*.

24. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Hazel Barnes (trans.) (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), 774.

away agency, thereby mitigating guilt. It collapses upon itself and transforms such guilt into “innocence,” but this makes the black condition one of double jeopardy: the salvation of becoming a man or a woman promises the possibility of damnation, but remaining frozen into the form of an innocent child is a denial of adulthood, responsibility, and freedom.

Lamming also saw this as the paradox of colonization: “Barbados or Little England was the oldest and purest of England’s children.”²⁵ Lamming revealed an entire island that is a child whose native inhabitants were washed away by what the tide brought in from Europe. In that death was born, allegorically, the new: labor to maintain commerce, the economy, the identities, the peoples, the New World. And in spite of its age, the colony seemed never to grow up. Lamming thus brought to the fore a recurring existential problematic: whether, to paraphrase Kant, a black adult is possible.

I. THE THEORETICAL LINE

Although the literary black existentialists also wrote critical essays on colonialism, their ideas were often suggestive and have been subsequently studied more as a matter of literary interpretation than, in rare cases, philosophical reflection. The existential problematic of reason in an unreasonable world was made explicit, however, in the thought of the revolutionary psychiatrist Fanon, who was also most effective in bringing black existential thought to a variety of disciplines and movements. Fanon was born in 1925 on the island of Martinique. He and his siblings studied at the island’s *lycée*, where he was awestruck by his teacher, Césaire. He fought against the Germans in the Second World War as a member of the French resistance forces in North Africa and then in Europe, during which he was twice injured and decorated for valor. After a short return to Martinique, where he was active in the successful bid for Césaire’s becoming mayor of Fort-de-France, he went first to Paris to study dentistry and then to Lyon, where he completed his studies in psychiatry. He also studied philosophy in Lyon, where his teachers included Maurice Merleau-Ponty. It was during these years that he married Joséphe-Marie Dublé. His postdoctoral studies earned him the certification of *chef de service*, which qualified him as supervisor or chief medical officer of any psychiatric facility. His postgraduate training was with François Tosquelles (1912–94), a Spanish exile who grounded his approach to therapy in humanistic social terms. The main thesis of that approach, that there are also social causes of mental illness, became a mainstay of Fanon’s social

25. George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*, Richard Wright (intro.) (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 32.

thought. After a brief post in Norway, Fanon became Chef de Service of Blida-Joinville Hospital (now Frantz Fanon Hospital) in Algeria. He had written to Senghor in the hope of acquiring such a post in the new Senegalese state, but he had received no reply, so he accepted his first opportunity to return to Africa. His impact on Algerian psychiatry was immediate. He criticized head-on the prevailing “primitivist” view of Africans and Arabs, and he developed a series of initiatives to transform the structure and physical environment of therapy for such patients. His methods proved effective, and he had begun training another generation of young doctors, who included Alice Cherki, the author of the recent *Fanon: A Portrait*. By 1954 the Algerian war of independence had begun, and Fanon joined the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) that year. His professional work involved his treating both the torturers and the tortured while clandestinely training FLN forces in warfare and psychological techniques for surviving brutal interrogation. He resigned from his hospital post in 1956, moved to Tunisia, and continued work for the FLN as a representative to negotiate support from other African states. A man marked for death in France, he became somewhat of a Robin Hood figure, appearing in unexpected places (such as the Black Writers conferences in 1956 in Paris), while managing to elude assassination attempts, which included bombings and machine-gunning a hospital room, where his demand to be removed afforded him a narrow escape. By 1960, he was ill with leukemia. It was during this time that he wrote his last and most famous book, *Les Damnés de la terre*, for which he solicited Sartre to write the preface. The meeting in Rome with Sartre and Beauvoir is the stuff of legend. Fanon insisted on their having an unceasing exchange of ideas over the course of two days and was irritated by Beauvoir’s insistence on Sartre’s need for rest. After receiving an unsuccessful prognosis in the Soviet Union, Fanon went to Bethesda, Maryland, to secure treatment. He was detained for several days by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), during which time he developed pneumonia. He died on December 6, 1961, and was buried in Algeria. His widow, Josie Fanon, continued work as a journalist and intellectual in Algeria until her death in 1989.

Four of Fanon’s books, excluding his dissertation, are in print. Each of them is a classic in Africana existential and political thought. In addition to *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961), the others published in his life time were *Peau noire, masques blancs* (*Black Skin, White Masks*) (1952) and *L’An V de la révolution algérienne* (1959), subsequently available as *Sociologie d’une révolution: L’an V de la révolution algérienne*. His widow, Josie Fanon, edited *Pour la révolution africaine: Écrits politiques* (1964).

Les Damnés de la terre is inspired by the Haitian poet Jacques Roumain’s adaptation, in his book of verse *Bois-d’Ebene* (1945), of the first line of *L’Internationale* (1871) by Eugène Edine Pottier. Inspired by black struggles in the Caribbean and

Africa, and prefaced by Sartre, the most famous living intellectual at the time, this work eclipsed Fanon's other writings for nearly twenty years. It took nearly three decades for his earlier thought to acquire appreciation in the English-speaking world, and this was achieved primarily owing to the popularity of postcolonial studies and Homi Bhabha's Lacanian poststructural reading of *Peau noire, masques blancs*, in his famous foreword to the Pluto edition of the text published in London in the 1980s.²⁶ I shall from this point onward refer to the English title of the text, *Black Skin, White Masks*.

Black Skin, White Masks was published in 1952, when Fanon was twenty-seven years old. He had proposed a draft of it three years earlier as his doctoral thesis in psychiatry, which the members of his committee refused to consider. They preferred the "positivist" approach to the study of psychiatry, which called for rooting psychological phenomena in physics and biology. So Fanon wrote on another topic and submitted his dissertation at Lyon in 1951 under the title: "Troubles mentaux et syndromes psychiatriques dans Hérédo-Dégénération-Spino-Cérébelleuse: Un cas de Maladie de Friedreich avec délire de possession" (Mental illness and psychiatric syndromes in hereditary-degeneration-spinal-cerebellum: a case of Friedreich illness with possession delirium). He did not, however, regret rewriting and publishing *Black Skin, White Masks* after achieving his doctorate. As he reflected in the introduction:

Il y a trois ans que ce livre aurait dû être écrit ... Mais alors les vérités nous brûlaient. Aujourd'hui elles peuvent être dites sans fièvre. Ces vérités-là n'ont pas besoin d'être jetées à la face des hommes. Elles ne eulent pas enthousiasmer. Nous nous méfions de l'enthousiasme. [I would have written this book three years ago ... But its truths burned in me. Today, they have cooled. These truths don't need to be shoved in the face of everyone. They don't need enthusiasm. I don't like enthusiasm.]²⁷

In the Isaac Julien film *Black Skins, White Masks* (1996), Fanon's brother Joby Fanon recounted being told by his brother's colleagues that Frantz Fanon was "fireworks on the outside, fireworks on the inside." Although Fanon claims not to like enthusiasm, he did not appeal to an extinguished flame. The fire cooled in him, but this suggests, as he later makes clear in *Les Damnés de la terre*, a continued flame that threatens eruption. The purpose of his book, Fanon

*26. For a discussion of Bhabha as well as several other topics addressed in this essay, see the essay by Eduardo Mendieta in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 8*.

27. Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, 6, my translation.

announces on the first page, is to respond to the presence of “*trop d’imbéciles sur cette terre*” (too many imbeciles in the world).

Similarly to many existential writers before him, and in whose genealogy from Nietzsche to Sartre he welcomed affiliation, Fanon challenges the discursive limits of philosophical and other forms of analysis. He writes first as a thinker struggling with a problem instead of from a discipline such as psychology, history, or philosophy, although each joins the chorus of critical reflection. Although Nietzsche, Jaspers, Sartre, and Césaire receive special attention in the text, Kierkegaardian indirection, through the Afro-Caribbean affinities with the mythopoeitics of the trickster in slavery and precolonial lore, is evident in Fanon’s constant use of irony. Added are the metareflective and autobiographical aspects of the text, where Fanon is offered as a subject who suffers disintegration while a metanarrator (the critic) toys with him in a systemic and extra-systemic battle. Should the text’s protagonist succeed in his goal, which is no less than complete cohesion with the modern world, the critic, who is an advocate of revolutionary humanistic change, would face failure; but should the situation be otherwise, the demand is for an alternative social system. Crucial in this challenge is the search for agency, for the imposed realities as contingent features of social life. The protagonist, in other words, *should* be able to succeed precisely because he or she could also fail. He makes this clear at the outset by announcing that not everyone will be at home in the text. It is primarily for the afflicted.

Fanon offers a trenchant critique of the denial of antiblack racism in France and much of the modern world. Although other writers, such as Du Bois, Wright, Sartre, Beauvoir, and Césaire have criticized such denial, there are several unique features of Fanon’s analysis that have made his work endure beyond the twentieth century. First, he observes that the denial is also symptomatic of many black people. Second, he rejects the structuralist thesis, as we have just seen, by admitting the existential one of contingency and exceptions. In other words, Fanon does not make everyone into racists, and he does not make all black people into victims. Third, he explores the problem at its subterranean levels and in so doing brings out its significance for human study. Fourth, he addresses disciplinary questions and problems of domination at the epistemological level, at the level of knowledge, thereby deepening his social critique. Fifth, he offers novel discussions of the dynamics of freedom and recognition at the heart of human encounters. And sixth, he advances a set of rhetorical devices that *perform* the many ways of addressing the problem.

Fanon achieves all this by first pointing out that racism and colonialism should be understood as socially generated ways of seeing and living in the world. He calls this *sociogenesis*. This means, for example, that blacks are constructed *as blacks* by the societies in which they live. There was, in other words, no reason for people in Africa or Australia or other areas of the South Pacific to have

thought of themselves in racial terms. But society, Fanon argues, is not an independent reality. It requires human beings for its existence, although it is transformed in the complex web of intersubjective relations into that which produces the meanings by which human beings live and appear. To understand how such constructions occur, the logical route is to examine language. Language contains the construction of meaning and the promise of recognition; to master language is to put on the identity of a culture. This promise fails in the white-dominated modern world, however, when practiced by blacks, who are analytically structured in that world as the antithesis of language itself. Even when the language of the dominant white world is “mastered” by such blacks, what appears in such society is their illegitimacy; they are in a constant struggle with that language. Many blacks buy into their own illegitimacy and so repudiate their blackness by trying to pass as nonblack and at times, even worse, avowing themselves as opponents of black people. This black antiblack racism exemplifies a form of narcissism in which blacks seek the deception of mirrors that offer white reflection. They literally attempt to look without seeing, or to see only what they wish to see. This narcissism works at many levels. Many whites, who do not regard themselves as racist nonetheless discriminate against blacks in practice.

The question of language also raises more radical questions about its role in making human subjects. Fanon argued that colonization requires more than the material subordination of a people. It also yokes the means by which they are able to express and understand themselves. He locates this expressive and interpretative constraint in language and scientific methodology. This is epistemological colonialism. Early in the text, Fanon announced that he would like to transform the black into an *actional* being. This is important because of the impediments to freedom in colonial and racist environments. The problem is made acute in the sixth chapter on psychopathology, where Fanon shows that the modern world has no coherent notion of a normal black person or a black adult. Pathological behavior is often presented as “authentically” black. However, should a black not conduct himself or herself as a black person, that black would be considered “inauthentic,” which also amounts to a reassertion of pathology. The effect of this double bind is familiar in the days when grown black men and women were being referred to as “boy” or “girl,” or, in the French language, as *tu* instead of the impersonal and respectful *vous*. Fanon challenges the efficacy of therapy without a model of normality. If black psychology amounts to abnormal psychology – that is, if black existence amounts to abnormal existence or, more accurately, nonexistence – the black would cease to be actional because of having nowhere to go. There would be a nihilistic relationship with the social world.

Fanon here addresses the observation from Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* that most black people, including those in Africa, are obsessed with “fixing” themselves. This obsession, Fanon’s argument suggests, is a function of social

impotence even at the level of meaning. Since to be black is analytically equated with failure, could a black ever fix himself or herself enough to be successful *as a black person*? The effort yields a contradiction: that black would have to no longer be black. In much of Latin America and the Caribbean, the region of the world from which Fanon came, success by definition meant that an individual must not be black. This notion leads to an interrogation of standards. By what standard could an individual be successful and black? Take, for example, the contemporary association of blacks with athletic ability. There are many famous black athletes. Fanon argues that an athlete proper is a meeting of body and rationality (as, e.g., in the Greek Olympics). But the black athlete is understood as an instinctual creature, and this is reflected in the prevalence of whites occupying leadership roles in athletic venues where black athletes play a significant and even dominant role. The black athlete in this sense is not much above animals who are used for sport such as horses and dogs. Their skills, being supposedly instinctual and linked to their breeding, are entirely in their bodies. The *standards*, however, are made by the human beings who race them or pit them against each other, who use them for sport. Similar reasoning applies to blacks in music and dance. They live by standards of which they could never be a legitimating source.

Failing to have an impact on the social world, many, if not most, blacks turn inward. They hide from freedom even while seeking it. As Hannah Arendt notes, freedom requires a public, political appearance (the opposite of the confinement and concealment characteristic of prisons and private households), but one can only appear in a world of others. To turn away from the world sets one on a slippery slope that would eventually lead paradoxically to a loss of the self through too much investment in the self, of becoming the solipsistic world of one's own, for even self-recognition requires posing the point of view of another. This is a difficult truth, which Fanon makes clear by admitting, at the end of his fifth chapter, "L'Expérience vécue du Noir" (The lived-experience of the black; published in English as "The Fact of Blackness"), that he could not face it before having wept. He tells us, through his own offering of tears, that we must wash away our impediments to a courageous engagement with the difficulties of social reality.

Freedom requires a world of others. But what happens when others do not offer recognition? One of Fanon's provocative challenges to the modern world emerges here. In most discussions of racism and colonialism, there is a critique of alterity, of becoming the Other. Fanon, however, argues that racism pushes a group of people outside the Self-and-Other dialectic, a relationship that is, in European continental philosophy from Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer through to Heidegger and Levinas, the basis of ethical life. The consequence is that nearly everything is permitted against such people, and as

the violent history of colonialism, enslavement, and racism reveals, such license is often acted on with sadistic zeal. The struggle against colonialism and anti-black racism, given Fanon's argument, then, is not one against being the Other. It is a struggle to enter the Self-Other dialectic of ethical life. That struggle, being a pre-ethical situation, is a political struggle wrought with contingency, which is, in effect, Fanon's rewriting of Sartre's famous credo of existence preceding essence, except that the ethical hope could never properly be an essence but a commitment.

Fanon shows, as well, that such a struggle happens not only at the level of social interactions, but also in relation to knowledge and reason. In his words:

La raison s'assurait la victoire sur tous les plans. Je réintégrai les assemblées. Mais je dus déchanter. La victoire jouait au chat et à la souris; elle me nargait. Comme disait l'autre, quand je suis là je n'y suis plus.

[Reason was assured victory on every level. I was ushered back into the human world. But I became disenchanted. That victory played cat and mouse with me and scoffed at me. As the saying goes, when I'm present it is not and when it is present I am no longer.]²⁸

To paraphrase, when he walked into the room, reason walked out. Reason, in other words, was being unreasonable; Fanon, here exemplifying the black philosopher's plight, to which I alluded at the beginning of this chapter, struggles against the unreasonability of reason. We find here the neurotic situation and the melancholy of black people identified by black existential thought in the modern world. To reclaim reason, to seize it, would be to exhibit unreason, even in the face of reason being unreasonable. Fanon, here as the black, must reason with reason. This challenge, to be in effect more reasonable than whites (and Asians) are expected to be, situates the black as having lost before he or she has begun the plea for existence. It signals the melancholia of black existence. In effect, blacks are expected not to have been black in order to legitimate being black. It is an impossible task. Should the black wish for a premodern, or a preblackened state of being, it would require such a contradiction: a black that was not black. Blacks, in other words, face the problem of their relationship to reason and to the modern self. Such a self suffers from melancholia, a loss without which they cannot be what or who they are.

This seemingly dire situation is not, however, a call for pessimism. Fanon reminds us that part of our struggle involves understanding the critical dimensions of questioning, which he exemplifies by closing with a prayer to his own

28. Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, 96, my translation.

body to make of him a man who questions. By this, Fanon reminds us that the human being exceeds the bounds of declarations and is also an interrogative. As such, the human being, as a human being, is not a closed subject. This is Fanon's additional reformulation of the existential credo of human incompleteness.

In *Pour la révolution africaine*, especially the essay on racism and culture, Fanon attacks the blues in favor of written poetry. Yet his reflections in *Black Skin, White Masks* have an unmistakable blues structure. He goes through processes of repetition that lead, as we have seen, to tears through which he is able to face the pathologies of "reality," and the truth here is that Eurocentric society cannot seem to see black *adults* and does not seem to know what it means for black people to be "normal." Blacks seek to become men and women, but they find themselves locked at a level below that status in the white world. In *Les Damnés de la terre*, his search for healthy, active black agents takes the form of his counsel for each generation of blacks to find its mission, which means taking responsibility for humanity's future.

The theme of reason in an unreasonable world returns, then, in the onus of articulating one's normality in a world that has defined one as essentially abnormal. Fanon extended this analysis to the seeming allergic response of "reasonable whites" in relation to black people. To paraphrase his reflection in the fifth chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, reason takes flight when a black enters a room. Fanon showed, however, that to take flight into unreason would be unreasonable, and that the irony of black existence in the modern world is that blacks are compelled to become the champions of reason for reason's sake. In other words, reason cannot be *forced* to stay in the room. It must be *persuaded*, which affirms, in effect, its necessity. Carried further, the argument reveals a profound melancholic dimension of black existence. For this development of reason is concomitant with the development of the black as a category of reflection. In fact, both are indigenous to that world. That the black must use reason, that which has been used against blacks, in the service of black liberation, and that the black must be critical of the modern world, the world that created the identity with which, and often against which, blacks struggle, reveals a subjectivity – black subjectivity – that emerged from a series of losses from ancestral kidnapping, to the Middle Passage, to marooned existence, to post-slavery racism. Considered from the psychoanalytical perspective of growth through loss, the blues sensibility returns here as a form of generative loss: the loss suffered by blacks in the modern world constituted black subjectivity. Fanon's response is to think through this loss while searching for an affirmation (a "yes") to the form of life to live on the one hand and to the establishment of an interrogative (the question) through which that life could claim its humanity.

In *Les Damnés de la terre*, Fanon then returns to the colonial and decolonizing moments to illustrate a chilling point. The colonial condition forces the

colonized to question their humanity. This interrogation occasions alienation of the spirit in the face of loss of land and denigration of mature cultural identity. The decolonization process unleashes an array of violent forces that bring to the surface the many double standards of the colonial system and contingency in a world that once seemed to be absolute and necessary. At the heart of this “hell” is the classic direction of consumed hatred. As Virgil showed Dante’s protagonist two foes, one of whom is so consumed by hatred that he gnaws on the head of his enemy while frozen from the neck down near the cold center of Hell, Fanon presents the horrific implications of being consumed by hatred. There are some attachments, values, of which we must let go, and in so doing, we will find our way outside, where we could emerge, in the words of Dante, “to see – once more – the stars.”²⁹ This is what Fanon ultimately means when, echoing *L’Internationale*, he implores us all to “*développer une pensée neuve, tenter de mettre sur pied un homme neuf*” (to develop new thought, and set afoot a new man).³⁰

Fanon offers an ironic twist on *L’Internationale* here. The connection to *L’Internationale*, mediated by black struggles in the Caribbean and Africa, challenges a presumption of communist politics, which Césaire affirmed at the end of his *Discourse on Colonialism*, namely, that the revolutionary class must be the proletariat. By using the line from *L’Internationale* to discuss people in the Global South, Fanon both advances and challenges Marxist philosophical anthropology.

Many of the themes in Fanon’s thought can be found in the writings of Albert Memmi (1921–). Born in Tunisia of an Italian Jewish father and a Berber (possibly of Jewish descent) mother, his early biography is more like Césaire’s than Fanon’s. He received a French education and studied philosophy in Algeria before completing his studies at the Sorbonne. But where autobiographical reflection for Césaire meant thinking through being black and from a colony of black people, Memmi’s was about being a Jew from a more heavily multi-racial colony and being so with the tensions offered by the additional historic reality of Islam in North Africa. Whereas Césaire looked to Africa after having been immersed in European civilization, Memmi looked eastward to the Middle East from Africa following his European emersion and tried to reconcile all of his disparate cultural perspectives. And like Césaire, and many other existential writers, he drew on aesthetic resources, but in his case it was the novel, not poetry, and the essay that were his preferred conduits. His novel *La Statue*

29. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, vol. 1: Inferno*, Allen Mandelbaum (trans.) (Toronto: Bantam, 1982), XXXIII, line 139.

30. Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), 376; cf. *L’Internationale*: “C’est la lutte finale / Groupons-nous, et demain / L’Internationale / Sera le genre humain.”

de sel (A statue of salt; published in English as *The Pillar of Salt*, echoing the biblical story of Lot's wife) was published in 1953 with a preface by Camus. He is, however, best known for his theoretical essay on colonialism, *Portrait du colonisé, précédé du portrait du colonisateur* (Portrait of the colonized, preceded by a portrait of the colonizer; published in English as *The Colonizer and the Colonized*), which was published with a preface by Sartre in 1957. In that work, he makes a distinction between colonized, colonialist, and colonizer. The second, he argues, lives in the colony above the colonized people but below the colonizers. Memmi saw this as his situation as a Tunisian Jew. (He did not comment on the specific differences in situation separating darker African Jews and lighter Sephardic and Ashkenazi [European] Jews living in North Africa.) He argued, however, that the system was Manichaean, which meant that there was no real room for that second category. The dilemma facing him was whether to distance himself from the colonized by pushing himself closer to colonizers or to identify with the colonized, which increased his distance from the former. His conclusion was that such middle groups were in bad faith because they had the option of identifying with them as colonizers. Yet in spite of their bad faith, the social reality was less amenable to ambiguity. The system demanded the polarization of society into colonizers and colonized. Although this argument may appear to affirm Hegel's master-slave dialectic, Memmi argues that the interdependence of the two poles, colonizer and colonized, conceals more than it reveals. Colonialism, he contended, produces a unique *psychology* of inferiority, and like Fanon, he argued that the eradication of colonialism was a necessary condition for the transformation of the colonized into active men and women. Given that perspective, Memmi subsequently perceived an increase in agency during times when the colonized assumed leadership roles in decolonization movements and a corresponding decrease in agency following the overthrow of colonialism, in which war, genocide, extreme poverty, infrastructural deterioration, racism, and increased economic dependence continue on under postcolonialism.

II. INFLUENCE

Black existential thought from the 1940s through 1960s had considerable influence on black liberation politics well into the 1970s and several intellectual movements into the present. Black existentialists were a central part of debates in decolonial struggles that linked intellectual debates from Asia through Africa to North America, South America, and Europe. These intellectuals included Angela Y. Davis in the United States, whose "Unfinished Lecture on Liberation – I," pitted Sartre's conception of freedom against Douglass's, and Steve Bantu Biko in South Africa, whose theory of black consciousness drew on Fanon's thought.

Another South African, Noel Manganyi, also drew on Fanon and Sartre to develop an existential phenomenology of oppression. Black existentialism also influenced black liberation theological and religious thought (e.g. James Cone and William R. Jones), black cultural studies (e.g. Stuart Hall, bell hooks/Gloria Watkins, Manthia Diawara, Achille Mbembe), prophetic pragmatism (Cornel West), black poststructuralism (e.g. Sylvia Wynter and George Yancy), black queer studies (e.g. Jean-Paul Rocchi, Sara Ahmed, David Fryer), and Africana and black existential phenomenology (e.g. P. Mabogo More, Henry, Linda Martín Alcoff, Danielle Davis, and this author), and, of course, the authors in the anthology *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*.³¹ The exemplars in the parentheses are, in many ways, artificially located as such since, in true existential fashion, they also belong with the others and resist neat classification. In each of these developments, however, black existential concerns of philosophical anthropological, liberation, and metacritical questions continue to be explored as these writers pose to human study the centrality of contingency and meaning of human possibility.

31. Each of these developments is discussed in my *Existentialia Africana*, and in the fourth and fifth chapters of my *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy*. See also Danielle Davis, "A Conversation with Lewis Gordon on Race in Australia," *The C. L. R. James Journal* 14(1) (Spring 2008).

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9

FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE AND LINGUISTIC STRUCTURALISM

Thomas F. Broden

Along with psychology, sociology, and anthropology, linguistics figures among the human and social sciences established in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that have differentiated themselves as disciplines and have achieved widespread intellectual and institutional recognition, particularly since the First World War. Like the comparative grammar that launched modern linguistics in the early nineteenth century, the structuralist paradigm that marked the first half of the twentieth century concentrated on sound in language, and secondarily on morphology. But Ferdinand de Saussure¹ and like-minded linguists such as Émile Benveniste,² Louis Hjelmslev, Roman Jakobson, and Nikolai

1. Ferdinand Mongin de Saussure (November 26, 1857–February 22, 1913; born in Geneva, Switzerland; died in Château Vufflens near Geneva) was educated at the Universities of Geneva (1875–76), Leipzig (1876–78), and Berlin (1878–79), and received a doctorate from Leipzig (1880). His influences included the Neogrammarians Bréal and Whitney (see below), and he held appointments at the École des Hautes Etudes, Paris (1881–91), and the University of Geneva (1891–1913).

Trained by Bopp, Michel Bréal (1832–1915) held the Chair of Comparative Grammar at the Collège de France (1866–1905) and also gave courses at the École des Hautes Études as of its founding in 1868. He published on historical linguistics, comparative mythology, semantics, ancient Greek and Latin, educational policy, and orthography reform.

After studying in Berlin and Tübingen, William Dwight Whitney (1827–94) taught Sanskrit and comparative grammar at Yale. He published widely in both fields as well as in general linguistics, and wrote or edited a number of dictionaries, including the *Century Dictionary*.

2. Born in Moscow, Prince Nikolai Trubetzkoy (1890–1938) held academic appointments successively at Moscow University (1915–16), Rostov-on-Don University (1918), Sofia University (1920–22), and Vienna University (1922–38). One of the preeminent intellectuals in the Prague Linguistic Circle and the father of structural phonology, the linguist and philologist also published on folklore, mythology, and politics.

Trubetzkoy redefined their discipline in the spirit of their era's scientific epistemology, elaborating an explicit theory and methodology, emphasizing a holistic approach, and establishing a synchronic perspective on a par with historical perspectives. While steeped in the cultures and texts of the idioms they studied, most structuralists called for modern linguistics to distinguish itself from the wider philological arts by concentrating on the rigorous analysis of internal linguistic mechanisms. Among the scores of groundbreaking works, Saussure's 1916 *Cours de linguistique générale* (*Course in General Linguistics*) has made the biggest impact and generated the most debate, particularly outside linguistics. In modern continental thought, Saussure and structural linguists share certain affinities with Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche, the "masters of suspicion" who decenter rationalist and even existentialist models of man focused on the individual's conscious introspection. Where Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche drew attention to class interest, unconscious mechanisms, and the will to power, these linguists showed how language itself conditions thought and behavior in largely invisible ways, thereby undermining rationalist and Enlightenment thinkers' confident conjectures about the subject's ability to progress toward greater understanding and self-knowledge.

Influenced by the methods and principles of structural phonology and general linguistics, postwar intellectuals such as Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan, and Claude Lévi-Strauss fostered projects for qualitative "human sciences" based on observation, exacting anal-

Roman Osipovič Jakobson (1896–1982) was one of the most important linguists and intellectuals of the twentieth century. He successively cofounded or helped to found the Linguistic Circles of Moscow (1915), Prague (1926), and New York (1943). A published poet, he also participated actively in Russian and Czech avant-garde artistic movements, cofounding the St. Petersburg formalist poetics society *OPOJAZ*. Of Jewish origins, he taught at Masaryck University in Brno (1933–39) until Hitler's expansion forced him to relocate first to Scandinavia, then New York, where he held appointments at the *École Libre des Hautes Études* (1942–46) and Columbia (1943–49). He joined the faculty of Harvard (1949–67), and, concurrently, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1957–67). A Slavist grounded in philology, Jakobson published on Slavic phonetics, phonology, and morphology and on Russian folklore, literature, and film; he wrote seminal papers on general linguistics, phonology, poetics, language acquisition, and linguistic pathology, and helped launch the new fields of language typology, computational linguistics, cognitive studies, and communication studies.

Louis Trolle Hjelmslev (1899–1965) was the leading figure in glossematics, the Danish School's structural linguistics. He taught at Århus University (1934–37) and the University of Copenhagen (1937–65) and published on case theory and general linguistics.

Émile Benveniste (1902–76) studied comparative grammar under Meillet, then taught at the *École des Hautes Études* (1927–37) and the Collège de France (1937–70). He published on comparative Indo-European lexicology and grammar and wrote groundbreaking articles in general linguistics and pragmatics.

ysis, and interpretation.³ Taken together, the initiatives sketched a multiform structuralist approach that for a time asserted itself as an alternative to the dominant North American paradigm for the social and behavioral sciences founded on controlled experiments and quantitative data. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, then Paul Ricoeur, engaged modern linguistics and sought to define its relation to phenomenology and to reflexive philosophy, while Gilles Deleuze and Jean-François Lyotard worked through linguistic structuralism in developing theories of action and symbolic thought outside mainstream logic and metaphysics. After 1968, Saussure increasingly joined the ranks of the *maîtres à penser* to be critiqued and deconstructed by poststructuralists such as Jacques Derrida and Foucault, who were skeptical of science and critical of the links between knowledge and power.

I. FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE

Ferdinand de Saussure was born in Geneva into an affluent protestant franco-phone family celebrated for its generations of scholastic achievements. He learned German, Latin, and classical Greek in school, then taught himself Sanskrit. In 1876, he joined the Société de Linguistique de Paris, twelve years after its foundation, and enrolled at the University of Leipzig. There he studied comparative grammar, the most advanced linguistics of the day, with the cutting-edge group of young scholars dubbed the *Junggrammatiker* or “Neogrammarians.”

Whereas rationalism and pre-nineteenth-century linguistic inquiry present language as a stable intellectual instrument, the comparative and historical linguistics launched by Franz Bopp revealed the dynamic character of idioms and highlighted their material substratum in sound. Introducing the phonological concept of regularity, the Neogrammarians Karl Brugmann, August Leskien, Herman Osthoff, and their colleagues in Leipzig showed that sound changes occur in absolutely regular fashion throughout a language, while analogical formations account for apparent exceptions. The Neogrammarians developed a new model of linguistic history: whereas the Romantic founders Bopp and August Schleicher had described the formation of a perfect *Ursprache* that “decayed” and fragmented in Time, the Leipzig scholars contended that like all languages, the Proto-Indo-European they were reconstructing comprised a host of dialects that developed at what was simply one chronological moment

*3. Essays on Lévi-Strauss and Lacan can be found in this volume. Essays that address Althusser, Barthes, Foucault, and Kristeva, as well as several of the other thinkers mentioned in this paragraph can be found in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 6*.

among others. The new generation of linguists asserted strongly antiuniversalist views: whereas the early comparatists considered the historical development of Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin as an evolutionary model valid for all idioms, the Neogrammarians showed that individual languages change in unpredictable and at times idiosyncratic ways. Rejecting the characterization of idioms as natural organisms, they emphasized instead their social character. Adopting a materialist stance, they further argued that the grammatical categories traditionally used to describe classical and archaic tongues represent abstract fictions to be replaced by the more complex and nuanced patterns identified in language-specific analyses of actual forms. Their research produced massive quantities of such data, illustrating the positivist temper of the times. Saussure himself studied with the old master Georg Curtius (1820–85) and with the best young linguist of the day, August Leskien (1840–1916).

After two years in Leipzig, Saussure went to the University of Berlin to complete his training in historical linguistics. Precociously, during his university years he published four articles in comparative grammar in the journal *Mémoires* edited by the Société de Linguistique de Paris. Then in 1878, at the age of twenty-one, Saussure brought out an ambitious, closely argued monograph in the Neogrammatical vein, *Mémoire sur le système primitif des voyelles dans les langues indo-européennes* (Thesis on the original system of vowels in Indo-European languages). The only book he wrote in his lifetime, the *Mémoire* argues that a proper understanding of the “resonants” *l, r, w, y, m, and n*, which function either as consonants or vowels depending on adjacent sounds, illuminates the nature of the syllable, clarifies how words are divided into syllables, and leads to a radically new model of Proto-Indo-European’s entire vowel system. As required by the genre, the study nimbly integrates reams of data on the conjugations, declensions, and morphological categories of a number of archaic languages. Venturing into “the least explored regions” of the field,⁴ the essay boldly postulates the existence of two unattested vowels defined by their oppositional and combinatory properties rather than by their actual pronunciation, a move that enabled Saussure to consolidate into one elegant model the early vocalic system that had been viewed as comprising two separate patterns fraught with widespread irregularities.

The groundbreaking proposals in the *Mémoire* inaugurated a new subfield within Indo-European, which soon asserted three unattested laryngeal

4. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Mémoire sur le système primitif des voyelles dans les langues indo-européennes* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1879), 1. Translations throughout are mine or inspired by published versions when available, including *Course in General Linguistics* (hereafter *CGL*), (i) Wade Baskins (trans.) (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), (ii) Roy Harris (trans.) (London: Duckworth, 1983). Page numbers in *CGL* refer to the Baskins translation. Harris adds the standard French pagination in the margins.

consonants in the place of Saussure's two vowels, further consolidating the ancient vocalic scheme. The essay quickly established an international reputation for Saussure as a brilliant scholar. Fifty years later, one of the hypothetical sounds predicted by the *Mémoire* was identified when Sergei Karcewski deciphered Hittite – thus recalling the discovery of Neptune at the place in the heavens where Newton's laws had anticipated it. Today, the essay is considered a rigorous and prescient analysis whose novel conclusions required scholars two generations to fully comprehend and integrate.⁵ Unfortunately for the young Genevan, the scholar who formulated the most forceful and sustained response was Osthoff, the Neogrammarian most focused on generating empirical data, who condemned the revolutionary study as “failed” and “aborted,” as “a radical aberration.”⁶ Stung by the attacks, Saussure wrote and defended a short, uncontroversial doctoral thesis and left Germany for France.

In Paris, Michel Bréal assisted Saussure, having the Swiss linguist join him at the *École des Hautes Études* as a lecturer and work under him at the *Société de Linguistique de Paris* as its assistant secretary and the editor-in-chief of its journal *Mémoires*. Instead of collaborating with the Neogrammarian group in the capital, Saussure moved, taught, and published in Bréal's circle around the *École* and the *Société*, which remained open to other currents in the language sciences. Although his translation of Bopp's magnum opus had introduced comparative grammar to France, Bréal argued strenuously against the approach's preoccupation with sound changes, its assimilation of linguistics to then-supreme natural sciences, and its concomitant representation of an idiom as an object external to the individual. Instead, his research emphasized that each child learns language anew and that conscious individuals use words and grammar to express ideas, and also introduce changes in an idiom. As of the 1860s, Bréal lectured and published on the relations between mind and language and on linguistic meaning, coining the word semantics (*sémantique*) in 1883.

At the *École des Hautes Études*, Saussure taught the comparative grammar of Gothic and Old High German, Greek and Latin, and Lithuanian; his pupils included Antoine Meillet (1866–1936), the next generation's greatest comparatist. The once prolific student practically ceased publishing, however. Recent research shows that Saussure undertook a book project on phonetics, drafts of which continue the *Mémoire*'s exploration of the resonants, respond to Osthoff, and broach questions in theoretical phonetics, positing central

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5. Winfred P. Lehmann (ed.), *A Reader in Nineteenth Century Historical Indo-European Linguistics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1967), 218; James Clackson, *Indo-European Linguistics: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 54–6.
 6. Osthoff (1881) text cited in *Cours de linguistique générale* (hereafter *CLG*), critical edition, Tullio de Mauro (ed.), Louis-Jean Calvet (trans.) (Paris: Payot, 1967), 328. This and other annotations by de Mauro are not found in either of the English translations.

principles that later appear in *Course in General Linguistics*.⁷ The phonetics essay emphasizes the necessity to define a sound in a language as the convergence of at least three distinct perspectives: (i) “semiological” or “negative,” purely differential; (ii) “acoustic” or in relation to the listener; and (iii) “physiological” or articulatory, with reference to the speaker.⁸ The drafts underline the necessity for linguistics to recognize and define with precision such perspectives: “Most of phonetics’ objects are *beings of reason*, existing only by their definition. [He] who studies them . . . must surround himself with an extremely rigorous system of definitions.”⁹ For Saussure, Osthoff’s arguments beg the central questions at stake, and collapse under their own weight if concepts such as resonant and syllable are properly formulated.

In November 1891 Saussure returned definitively to his native city, accepting a Chair in the History and Comparison of Indo-European Languages at the University of Geneva. During his twenty-two years at the school, in addition to an annual course on Sanskrit, he taught a wide variety of subjects in comparative grammar, dialectology, linguistics, ancient inscriptions, and versification. Correspondence with and comments by colleagues indicate that he continued to follow developments in the field closely and reflected deeply on a wide range of linguistic issues. The return to Switzerland only modestly enhanced the linguist’s research productivity, however. He published a few articles on intonation and accentuation in modern Lithuanian, a “conservative” Indo-European language on which he had done fieldwork and geographical dialectology. Scholarship over the past four decades has revealed that during his Geneva years, Saussure pursued an active research program that progressively moved away from comparative grammar and struck out in three new areas: general linguistics, Germanic legends, and “anagrams.”

Saussure researched and gave talks on general linguistics from 1891 to 1894. His first three public lectures at the University of Geneva argue that the young approach called linguistics deserves to be an autonomous science in its own right, distinct from philology and poised between the particular and the general. On the one hand, in the face of the universal perspectives on language advanced by psychologists, logicians, philosophers, and physiologists, linguists must supply the radically sociohistorical perspective that only a positive study of diverse *languages*, their dialectal variations, and their transformations throughout history can bring. On the other hand, responding to what he considered his generation’s myopic accumulation of minutiae, the lectures

7. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Phonétique: il manoscritto di Harvard Houghton library bMs Fr 266* (8), Maria Pia Marchese (ed.) (Padua: Unipress, 1995).

8. *Ibid.*, 85, 91.

9. *Ibid.*, 155.

argue that linguists must “constantly endeavor to illustrate the general problem of language ... the universal laws and procedures of language.”¹⁰ Weeks after his first lectures in Geneva, Saussure began to write a book on general linguistics entitled *De l'essence double du langage* (On the double essence of language), of which a draft was discovered in 1996. Presaging the *Course in General Linguistics* in many ways, this text and related writings from the period argue that the linguist's activity and point of view are constitutive in the study of languages, and that one must distinguish notably between the historical, “diachronic” perspective and the speaking subject's “instantaneous,” “synchronic” perspective.¹¹ The drafts outline a “semiological” theory of linguistic value based on the differential “signifiers” and “signifieds” that constitute the sign *negatively*.¹² In 1894, for an article on W. D. Whitney, whom, along with the Polish linguists Baudouin de Courtenay and Karcewski, Saussure considered a brilliant pioneer in theoretical linguistics, he reread the American Sanskritist's works. Apparently Whitney's novel insights on language as a social institution persuaded Saussure that the existing principles and terminology of the field needed more radical reform than he was capable of crafting, and he lost heart, abandoned his book project, and lost track of the manuscripts. He only returned to the topic when called on to teach it more than a dozen years later. Those lectures generated keen interest on campus among students and colleagues in linguistics, but Saussure discarded each day the scraps of paper on which he scribbled his lecture notes.

From 1903 to 1911, Saussure worked on a book devoted to Germanic legends, producing over 800 pages of material, including polished drafts of sections virtually ready for publication. “The First Kingdom of Burgundy and the German Epic Legend: Contribution to the History of the Nibelungen Epic”¹³ was to argue that the popular traditional stories then considered the exclusive patrimony of the German *Volk* were inspired to a significant extent by what the Burgundians did, not when they occupied the Rhineland-Palatinate in the fifth century, but rather when they formed a Franco-Swiss kingdom centered in Lyon a century later – the period in which they bequeathed sundry place names to Savoy, adjacent to Geneva. Consonant with this revisionist history and geography, Saussure sought to demonstrate that the legends incorporate not just Germanic but also

10. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Writings in General Linguistics*, Carol Sanders and Matthew Pires (trans.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 96–7.

11. *Ibid.*, 6–9, 17–18, 30, 55.

12. *Ibid.*, 46–51, 69–72, 77–9.

13. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Le leggende germaniche: scritti scelti e annotati*, Marcello Meli and Anna Marinetti (eds) (Este: Zielo, 1986), 116; also Saussure, “La Légende de Sigfrid et l'histoire burgonde,” edited by Béatrice Turpin, in *Ferdinand de Saussure*, Simon Bouquet (ed.) (Paris: Cahiers de l'Herne, 2002), 351–429.

Romance sources, including the Greco-Roman story of Theseus. The research nourished the linguist's general reflections on signs:

A legend is composed of a series of symbols ... subject to the same vicissitudes and the same laws as all the other series of symbols, for example the symbols which are the words of a language. They are all part of *semiology* ... The identity of a symbol can never be fixed as of the moment at which it is a symbol, that is to say immersed in the social body which establishes its value at each moment ... Each of the characters is a symbol ... which can vary according to *a*) name, *b*) position vis-à-vis the others, *c*) temperament, *d*) function, acts.¹⁴

Among the sign mechanisms that affect the oral transmission of the legends across the miles and the generations, characters are added or dropped, substituted for one another, split in two, or melded into one – as are words and individual sounds throughout the evolution of a language.

Within the same period, from 1905 until 1909, Saussure also intensively investigated Latin, Homeric, Germanic, and Vedic poetry. Analyzing first funereal and ritual inscriptions, then a wide variety of genres, the linguist became convinced that beyond traditionally observed prosodic devices such as meter and isosyllabism, alliteration and acrostic, early poets respected a “strict arithmetic” of phonetics, systematically using every sound an even number of times, for example, and that they regularly wove into their verse anagrams of the names of personae invoked or implied in the text.¹⁵ His analyses filled ninety-nine notebooks, including sustained and publishable expositions.

Saussure fell ill in 1912 and died the following year. Colleagues intimately familiar with his work brought out the *Recueil de publications scientifiques*, which collects almost all of his published scholarship, as well as *Cours de linguistique générale*, a college textbook they meticulously prepared from multiple sets of notes, mainly students', on the Geneva courses that encompassed the topic.

II. COURS DE LINGUISTIQUE GÉNÉRALE

Saussure offered a course that combined comparative Indo-European and general linguistics in 1907, in 1908–9, and in 1910–11. He addressed general

14. Saussure, *Le leggende germaniche*, 30–31, cf. 312.

15. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Words upon Words: The Anagrams of Ferdinand de Saussure*, Jean Starobinski (ed.), Olivia Emmet (trans.) (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 31, cf. 46–57.

linguistic issues most amply on the last occasion, when he divided the year into three units: “1. Languages; 2. Language; 3. The language faculty and the individual’s exercise of language.”¹⁶ Unfortunately, summer vacation arrived part-way through the second unit, and the linguist never had the opportunity to develop the last topics. *Course in General Linguistics* presents the principles guiding the historical linguistics of its day, especially the methods of the Neogrammarians and of Friedrich Diez and Hermann Paul; “every part of language is subjected to change ... The stream of language flows without interruption ... At no time does an idiom have a perfectly stable system of units.”¹⁷ The work innovates by coloring and conjoining these established approaches with three strategies that Saussure adapted from newer trends in linguistics: it outlines and promotes synchronic description, describes language holistically as a *system* constituted by *relations*, and foregrounds the importance of thought and meaning to virtually all processes central to language. Following Bréal, a natural language and the human “linguistic faculty” that informs it represent not an external object but a cognitive phenomenon for a subject: “*Synchronic linguistics* will be concerned with the logical and psychological relations that bind together coexisting terms and form a system in the collective mind of speakers.”¹⁸ Arguing that in linguistics, “the viewpoint creates the object,”¹⁹ *Course in General Linguistics* highlights the “evolutionary” and “static” points of view, a distinction that organizes the book. Saussure contrasts sound changes and analogy, the two processes by which the Neogrammarians accounted for the evolution of idioms. The former happen unconsciously and over time, altering given phonic sequences, whether they be found in a vocabulary item, a grammatical ending, or a suffix, according to systematic processes specific to pronunciation such as accentuation, aperture, and point of articulation. By such mechanisms, Proto-Indo-European **aiwom* became *aevom* in Latin but *ew* in Old High German, and afterwards *eo*, then *je* (ever) in modern German, for example.²⁰ Saussure compares such a development to a game of chess that unfolds according to strict rules but where each move happens by chance, language acting like “an unconscious and unintelligent player.”²¹ The evolution of Latin to French is thus marked by transmutations in vowel qualities and accentuation that disjoined grammatical patterns and dislocated word families (e.g. Latin *decem* [ten] and *undecim* [eleven], but French *dix*

16. Robert Godel, *Les Sources manuscrites du Cours de linguistique générale de F. de Saussure* (Paris: Minard, 1957), 53–65, 77–81.

17. *CLG* 193, 234; *CGL* 140, 171.

18. *CLG* 140; *CGL* 99–100. Cf. *CLG* 128; *CGL* 90; and Saussure, *Writings in General Linguistics*, 85, 125, 135.

19. *CLG* 23; *CGL* 8.

20. *CLG* 208–9; *CGL* 152.

21. *CLG* 127; *CGL* 89.

and *onze*), giving French a more lexical and less grammatical basis than Latin.²² Diachronic research shows that time and perceptible form impinge on an idiom's signs and their meaning in ways radically foreign to logico-mathematical, analytical approaches to symbolic mechanisms. When sound changes disrupt the sensible bonds that unite the members of a lexical family, the words drift apart semantically, and when linguistic events lead to the coexistence of two or more similar forms for a given concept, either their meanings diverge over time (French *chaise* and *chaire*) or one or more of the terms disappears.²³

In the process of analogy, speakers create new expressions on the model of analyzable existing ones, as French used *il chante* (he sings), *nous chantons* (we sing) together with *il aime* (he loves) as a "construction rule" (*il chante : nous chantons :: il aime : ?*) to create *nous aimons*.²⁴ The less regular existing form *nous amons*, which played no role in the emergence of the new expression, eventually fell into disuse. Analogy "acts in favor of regularity," and all but a short list of words in French entail analogical alteration.²⁵ "Language is a garment covered with patches cut from its own cloth."²⁶

The strategic move of *Course in General Linguistics* is to say that while cumulatively and over time, "analogy occupies a preponderant place in the theory of evolution"²⁷ of languages, analogical creations as such illustrate not so much linguistic change but rather the synchronic functioning of language conceived as a virtual system and as *en-ergeia*, as a complex of "generative forms": "A newly formed word like *in-décor-able* already has a potential existence in language ... Language never stops interpreting and decomposing the units given to it."²⁸ If certain idioms such as Sanskrit and Esperanto evince word formations governed by roots, affixes, and stems, modern Western tongues frequently flaunt grammatical rules, whether historical or contemporaneous, analyzing words instead in multiple fashions; analogy thus ultimately remains unpredictable in its creations and "capricious" in the extent of its propagation.²⁹ For Saussure, whereas "ideas play no role" in sound changes, analogy entails an "unconscious comparison" and "interpretation" of existing forms as well as "the awareness [*conscience*] and understanding of a relation" in the actual creation of the new expression.³⁰

22. CLG 211–13, 184; CGL 153–5, 134.

23. CLG 167, 222; CGL 121, 162.

24. CLG 221–2, 183; CGL 161–2, 134.

25. CLG 222, cf. 235; CGL 162, cf. 172.

26. CLG 235; CGL 172.

27. CLG 232; CGL 169.

28. CLG 227, 232; CGL 166, 169.

29. CLG 229, 222, 238–41, 258; CGL 167, 162, 173–6, 188.

30. CLG 226–7; CGL 165–6.

Analogy exemplifies the “mechanism of language” that constitutes an idiom as a relational dynamic and as a living instrument for a community at a given time, and the sketch in *Course in General Linguistics* of a modern linguistic approach to the contemporaneous functioning of a language represents its most influential innovation in linguistics and for the human sciences. More precisely stated, the “*idiosynchronic*” perspective studies the speech of a social group living in a common space and milieu during a given period.³¹ Rather than invoking common linguistic categories, *Course in General Linguistics* identifies fundamental cognitive processes that function to constitute the signs and general components of any idiom. “Two forms of our mental activity” define *syntagmatic* and *associative* relations, respectively.³² The former designate the relations that terms contract “in discourse ... by virtue of being chained together, relations founded on the linear character of language.”³³ Giving examples such as “unpardonable,” “human life,” “God is good,” and “if the weather is nice, we’ll go out,” Saussure emphasizes that in any syntagm, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, that “The unit is a product, a combination of ... interdependent elements that acquire value only through their reciprocal action in a higher unit.”³⁴

Associative relations designate those that an expression entertains with other terms that “are associated in memory” because they “offer something in common.”³⁵ A word such as *delightful* evinces associative relations with lexemes such as *delight* and *delighting*, but also with *delirious* and *delimited*, *frightful* and *careful*, *lovely* and *enjoyable*, and so on: “the mind creates as many associative series as there are diverse relations.”³⁶ The syntagmatic relation links successive segments *in praesentia*, while the associative relation unites terms *in absentia*, and whereas a syntagm entails a fixed sequence, the “mental associations” do not occur in a definite order. Like the Neogrammarians, *Course in General Linguistics* analyzes the forms of each particular idiom from the “bottom up”; unlike them, however, Saussure asserts the reality of the symbolic categories which the patterned terms of each language define.³⁷

While analogy and “syntagmatic types built on regular forms” exemplify “regular patterns”³⁸ that can provide a certain motivation for numerous signs in an idiom (and cf. onomatopoeia),³⁹ comparisons among languages quickly

31. CLG 128; CGL 90.

32. CLG 170–71; CGL 122–3.

33. CLG 170; CGL 123.

34. CLG 170–73, 176; CGL 123–5, 128.

35. CLG 171; CGL 123.

36. CLG 173–5; CGL 125–7.

37. CLG 189–92; CGL 137–9.

38. CLG 173; CGL 125.

39. CLG 176–84, 101–2; CGL 127–34, 69.

reveal the extent to which their signs entail an undetermined character: in similar circumstances, speakers say *s'il vous plaît* (please) on one side of the border and *bitte schön* on the other.⁴⁰ *Course in General Linguistics* echoes Whitney in emphasizing the conventional dimension of languages, which represent “genuine institutions”: like the characters of the Germanic epics, linguistic signs are largely “arbitrary,” fixed at a moment in history through their use by a given community, ever subject to change in the process of their transmission through time and individual speakers.⁴¹ Rather than viewing idioms as ordered systems that harbor zones of illogicality, *Course in General Linguistics* inverts the proportion to say that their “naturally chaotic” and “irrational” character is limited or tempered by the “mechanism of language” comprising “syntagmatic solidarities” and “associative co-ordinations.”⁴² Chinese and English illustrate lexicological languages situated toward the purely arbitrary end of the spectrum, while Sanskrit and Esperanto approximate the opposite, grammatical pole.⁴³

The core of *Course in General Linguistics* ponders how to define a linguistic entity, reality, or identity, in the process underlining the specificity of linguistics as a discipline and the particularity of each language as an idiomatic configuration of sound and sense. In a synchronic perspective, and following Courtenay and subsequent research, Saussure emphasizes that a given physical disparity between two sounds may determine wholly distinct words in one tongue but only personal or regional accents in a second, and that a speaker may pronounce the “same” short phrase with as much phonic variation from one occasion to another as she does for different words in the idiom.⁴⁴ *Course in General Linguistics* further argues that linguistic meaning varies in similar fashion: the sense of an expression changes from one context to another, and languages exhibit significant semantic diversity in both grammar and vocabulary. English and Slavic verb systems thus make fundamental aspectual distinctions (e.g. *it is raining*, *it rains*, *it has rained*) absent from French; Hebrew does not distinguish between past, present, and future tense; and many Germanic and Romance languages observe critical contrasts between familiar and formal second-person pronouns that are lacking in English.⁴⁵

Whereas psychology may study pure ideas and physics raw sounds, linguistics investigates a phenomenon in which the two interact and condition each other at every turn.⁴⁶ In order to mark their interdependence, Saussure intro-

40. CLG 100–101, 148; CGL 67–9, 106.

41. CLG 110–11; CGL 76.

42. CLG 176–7, 182–3; CGL 127–8, 133.

43. CLG 228, 183; CGL 166, 134.

44. CLG 150–51, 163–6; CGL 107–8, 117–20.

45. CLG 150–62; CGL 107–17.

46. CLG 144–5; CGL 103.

duces a pair of neologisms: the sign comprises the *signifier* (cf. sound) and the *signified* (cf. concept), such that the Janus linguistic entity resembles the sides of a single sheet of paper, or “a chemical compound like water, a combination of hydrogen and oxygen; taken separately, neither element has any of the properties of water.”⁴⁷ Alongside the associative and syntagmatic relations among signs, *Course in General Linguistics* argues that signifiers are constituted diacritically *vis-à-vis* other signifiers, as signifieds are among signifieds: “The idea or phonic substance that a sign contains is of less importance than the other signs that surround it.”⁴⁸ While an “auxiliary” study can investigate the detailed physiological mechanisms and auditory impressions entailed in the syllable and its component sounds, from the perspective of the language system, “phonemes are above all else opposing, relative, and negative entities.”⁴⁹ Similarly, in the semantic sphere of an idiom, “synonyms ... have value only through their opposition ... [they] limit each other reciprocally”; historically, if one disappears, its content goes to its rivals.⁵⁰ Together, difference and the mechanism of language define synchronic linguistic units and identities through the concept of *value*, both use and exchange,⁵¹ and “the notion of value envelops the unit, concrete entity, and reality ... *language is a form and not a substance.*”⁵²

Value provides a conception of the sign entirely different from the linear definition central to traditional metaphysics, in which a word symbolizes a universal “affection of the soul” (Aristotle) or in which *vox* gets its value from *conceptus* grounded in *res*, as for Aquinas and the Scholastics (cf. Charles Ogden and I. A. Richards’s triangle *Symbol–Thought–Referent*⁵³). Instead of saying that a speaker chooses an expression simply “because it signifies what he wishes to express,” *Course in General Linguistics* emphasizes that the choice depends on the “whole latent system” of a particular idiom; “language is a system all of whose terms are interdependent and in which the value of one term arises only from the simultaneous presence of the others.”⁵⁴

The diachronic and synchronic perspectives define different linguistic realities. The diachronic identity represents the sequence of transformations that the linguist reconstructs to trace how a term or terms became one or more terms of different function, meaning, and pronunciation at a later time, possibly in other

47. *CLG* 145, 155–62; *CGL* 103, 111–17.

48. *CLG* 166; *CGL* 120.

49. *CLG* 164, cf. 63–95; *CGL* 119, cf. 38–64.

50. *CLG* 160; *CGL* 116, cf. Saussure, *Writings in General Linguistics*, 52.

51. *CLG* 159–60, cf. 114–17; *CGL* 115, cf. 79–81.

52. *CLG* 154, 169; *CGL* 110, 122.

53. Charles K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, 8th ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, [1923] 1946), 11.

54. *CLG* 179, 159; *CGL* 130, 114.

languages. Synchronic units correspond to all of the terms and only the terms of an idiom that effectively function as components for the members of a given linguistic community.⁵⁵ From a diachronic perspective, French *pas* (not) and *pas* (step) represent the same word, whereas from a synchronic perspective, they designate two distinct signs today, used in different contexts and with different meanings.⁵⁶ Popular but erroneous “folk etymologies” represent false explanations for diachronic linguistics but true associations for synchronic linguistics.⁵⁷ Synchrony by definition involves the *system* of the language, whereas for Saussure, diachronic changes always possess a particular, isolated, spontaneous, nongeneral character.⁵⁸ The *panchronic* perspective, finally, explores the general principles that are always true of any language, similar to the laws of physics or biology.⁵⁹

Course in General Linguistics strives to develop a definition of linguistics as a coherent, autonomous, rigorous science positioned in relation to other disciplines.⁶⁰ To this end, it endeavors to identify a “homogeneous,” “integral and concrete object” at its heart around which the field can be organized.⁶¹ The essay maps out the language sciences using a series of dyads or triads, privileging one term at the expense of the other(s) in each case. In keeping with already established linguistic orthodoxy, the popular spoken idiom trumps the prestige written form, as “internal” structure takes precedence over “external” phenomena tied to anthropology, sociology, political science, and human geography.⁶² *Course in General Linguistics* further distinguishes between an idiom’s *system* and its concrete manifestations, a distinction adopted in one form or another by the majority of linguists in the twentieth century. Among “the heterogeneous mass of facts entailed in *speech [langage]*,” the essay abstracts and promotes *langue* (language), “a self-contained whole and a principle of classification,” and contrasts it with *parole* (speaking).⁶³ “*Langue* ... is a fund accumulated by the members of the community through the practice of *parole*, a grammatical system existing potentially in every brain, or more exactly in the brains of a group of individuals; for *langue* is never complete in any single individual, but exists perfectly only in the collectivity.”⁶⁴ *Parole* in turn comprises notably

55. CLG 128; CGL 90.

56. CLG 129; CGL 91.

57. CLG 238–41; CGL 173–6.

58. CLG 129–34; CGL 91–5.

59. CLG 134–5; CGL 95–6.

60. CLG 13–54; CGL 1–32.

61. CLG 23, 32; CGL 7, 15.

62. CLG 40–43; CGL 20–23.

63. CLG 31, 25, cf. 23–39; CGL 14, 9, cf. 7–20.

64. CLG 30; CGL 13–14.

two activities, “the combinations by which the speaking subject uses the code of *langue* in order to express his personal thought,” and the “psycho-physical mechanism” of muscular articulation “that allows him to exteriorize those combinations.”⁶⁵ *Langue* thus contrasts with *parole* as social versus individual, virtual versus actual, whole versus part, psychological versus psycho-physical, finite versus infinite, and productive schemes versus realized utterances.⁶⁶ While Saussure’s 1910–11 lectures finally emphasize the solidarity between *langue* and *parole* and envision a linguistics that studies the latter, the *Course in General Linguistics* editors firmly position *langue* as the unique rightful object of the discipline. Thus, whereas *langue* and *parole* remain “closely connected and each presupposes the other,” and while subjects learn and change their idiom through *parole*, *Course in General Linguistics* declares the former “essential” and the latter “accessory,” “accidental,” and “secondary.”⁶⁷ Focused on the sign and on the mechanism of language as defined in *Course in General Linguistics*, *langue* highlights the conventional, contingent character of linguistic symbols, fixed by their use in a community through time. Saussure “assign[s] linguistics a place among the sciences” by describing it as the most typical system described by a new discipline he envisions, “*semiology* (from Greek *semeion*, ‘sign’) ... a science that studies the life of signs within society,” which would be “part of social psychology and thus of general psychology.”⁶⁸

More than thirty years after Saussure gave his last class in general linguistics, Jakobson stated of it that “No book in this century has exerted as wide and as deep an influence on international linguistics ... almost all of the essential problems of modern linguistics are sketched in this book.”⁶⁹ Quickly recognized as the principal text of reference for forward-thinking linguists, *Course in General Linguistics* served as the prime vehicle for the critical discussions in the field for almost half a century. Even after Noam Chomsky’s generative grammar achieved dominance toward the end of the 1950s, Saussure’s clear treatment of fundamental linguistic issues, freely illustrated with colorful metaphors, continued to exert great influence in the human sciences. Scholars welcomed its explicit discussion of theoretical topics and concurred with the centrality of its main principles, even as they bemoaned lacunae and disagreed with many of its precise formulations.

Indeed, the qualities and influence of *Course in General Linguistics* cannot hide its gaps, problems, and debatable proposals, which hosts of subsequent

65. CLG 31; CGL 14.

66. CLG 25–32; CGL 9–15.

67. CLG 30, 37–8; CGL 14, 18–19.

68. CLG 33; CGL 16.

69. Roman Jakobson, “La Théorie saussurienne en rétrospection,” 1942 text, Linda Waugh (ed.), *Linguistics* 22(2) (1984), 165, 193.

linguists have observed and endeavored to repair. The work never examines predication, parts of speech (e.g. verb, adjective, conjunction), sentence structure, or intonation, and contains only sketchy statements on syntax. It contradicts itself on occasion, including in its arguments for demoting the written language and external linguistics. Each of Saussure's fundamental paired concepts incorporates several components whose mappings fail to coincide. Thus while the *langue-parole* distinction has proved highly influential, Jakobson persuasively argues that it amalgamates three separate antinomies: potential and actual, social and individual, and conformity and nonconformity to a norm.⁷⁰ One of the virtues of the book is the clarity with which it articulates its central oppositions, yet that very precision often comes at the expense of nuance and qualification. The dynamism that *Course in General Linguistics* ascribes to analogy, to the mechanism of language, and to the propagation of innovations thus calls for a subtler interaction between old and new, between rule and event, than that provided for in the generally dichotomous formulations of *langue* and *parole* and of synchrony and diachrony.⁷¹ Eugenio Coseriu, Hjelmslev, André Martinet, and Jakobson formulated finer distinctions that mediate *langue-parole*, and show the extent to which *change* and *system*, far from functioning as dichotomies, in fact remain inextricably intertwined. At times, the mere choice of a term has generated confusion: the word "arbitrary" that *Course in General Linguistics* uses to designate the contingent, historical character of linguistic structures has often been interpreted as slighting the very mechanisms to which it is meant to call attention.

Viewed retrospectively, *Course in General Linguistics* seems to exaggerate the extent to which linguistics and its object of study can be defined as one, homogeneous, and neatly bounded and situated. The efforts deployed to this end effectively isolate language and its study from the rest of the social and natural world. Thus, after noting that "the linking of a name and a thing" is anything but "a very simple operation," *Course in General Linguistics* proceeds to bracket the issue without ever tackling its complexities.⁷² Similarly, while it founds its central "mechanism of language" on fundamental cognitive processes, the essay describes both thought and sound as "amorphous" before language as social convention constitutes each, thereby slighting the incidence of other sensory-motor processes and of mimetic learning.⁷³ Instead of foregrounding the Leipzig psychologist Wilhelm Wundt's idea of mental "images" of sounds and concepts, *Course in General Linguistics* might have done better to maintain

70. *Ibid.*, 172.

71. And see *CLG* 173, 194; *CGL* 125, 141.

72. *CLG* 97; *CGL* 65.

73. *CLG* 155–69; *CGL* 111–22. Cf. *CLG* 25–6; *CGL* 9–10.

Saussure's own 1891–94 view that language exists as process and event only, hypostatic representations of its dynamic remaining but didactic expository devices.⁷⁴ *Course in General Linguistics* avoids discussing language as interaction and conversation, which both common sense and scholarship available to Saussure place at the heart of speech, and the book never systematically treats linguistic semantics, although considerable historical research was available, including work by Bréal and Meillet.

III. LINGUISTIC STRUCTURALISM

A number of schools grew up that shared the orientations formulated in *Course in General Linguistics* even as they amended, extended, and developed its proposals, most notably the Prague Circle (Trubetzkoy, Jakobson, Karcewski) and the Copenhagen Circle (Hjelmslev). Trained in the philology and historical linguistics of a particular language group, these linguists elaborated the methods today called structural linguistics. They in turn inspired a younger generation of scholars, including Benveniste, Coseriu, Algirdas Julien Greimas, Martinet, Bernard Pottier, and Lucien Tesnière, who gave new impetus to structural linguistics after the Second World War, often applying the principles of phonology and general linguistics to syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Returning to the outline that Saussure announced at the beginning of his 1910–11 course, one can say that Hjelmslev and Jakobson further elaborated “2. Language” and broached the investigation of “3. The language faculty,” which Chomsky greatly expanded, while Benveniste founded the linguistic study of “3. . . . the individual's exercise of language.”

Hjelmslev, the leading exponent of Danish “glossematics,” adopted the concepts of *Course in General Linguistics* and its focus on internal structure, but removed the project from the psychological arena, shifting it toward the formal framework of analytical philosophy illustrated by Russell and Carnap. His 1943 *Omkring Sprogteoriens Grundlaeggelse (Prolegomena to the Theory of Language)* thus translates the cognitive and spatiotemporal associative and syntagmatic relations of *Course in General Linguistics* into logical disjunction and conjunction, then specifies nine syntactic “functions” among terms corresponding to three forms of implication (mutual presupposition, unilateral presupposition, and simple co-occurrence) obtaining in three modes (disjunctive, conjunctive, and disjunctive-conjunctive).⁷⁵ *Prolegomena* and subsequent

74. Saussure, *Writings in General Linguistics*, 55.

75. Louis Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, Francis J. Whitfield (trans.) (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1953), 33–41.

works formulate a highly abstract but complex and flexible instrument by further applying Saussure's founding insights on perspective, by analyzing the central paired concepts of *Course in General Linguistics*, and by extending the theory to the whole of science. The point of view adopted in a given analysis determines whether a term functions as signifier or signified in a given context: sensible qualities such as *front*, *rounded*, and *strong* serve as the semantic content of linguistic expressions in one situation, and as the differential characteristics constitutive of phonemes in the next.⁷⁶ Similarly, *Prolegomena* redefines form and substance as converses determined by positional criteria: the phonologist's substance becomes the acoustic physicist's form, as the anthropologist's form corresponds to the linguistic semanticist's substance.⁷⁷ Such reformulations enable Hjelmslev to downplay the focus in *Course in General Linguistics* on the unit sign as a two-sided sheet of paper, and to model instead the relative autonomy of local structures of sound (e.g. syllable) and local structures of meaning that combine in language. The new framework is also able to consider writing and speaking as two "connotators" alongside others such as nation, emotion, genre, and style, each of which may or may not determine a distinct norm within a linguistic system.

The most important and influential development in linguistic structuralism by far, however, was the phonology elaborated by the Prague Circle as of the 1920s. Developed in descriptions of hundreds of idioms, this methodology established the preeminence of linguistics among the human and social sciences of its day, positioning it as a "pilot science" for other disciplines and attracting the emulation of Lévi-Strauss⁷⁸ and the attention of Lacan, Althusser, and others. Elaborating the focus in *Course in General Linguistics* on value, relations, and system through exacting investigations, Trubetzkoy and his genial protégé Jakobson defined precise methods by which to isolate invariants and variants as well as minimal units and their combinatory rules; they identified levels of phonological analysis, types of relations, and mechanisms by which terms are neutralized in certain environments. The Prague linguists drew a sharp and principled contrast between concrete phonetic segments and abstract phonological models thereof (cf. "-etic" and "-emic" units), and formulated phonological universals and general laws.

The Prague School method was both structural and "functional" or teleological: synchronically, it viewed speech as directed toward definite ends that affected linguistic structure, including referential (communicative), expressive

76. *Ibid.*, 60, 77–78.

77. *Ibid.*, 47–60.

78. E.g. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale* (Paris: Plon, 1958), vol. 1, 43; *Structural Anthropology*, Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (trans.) (New York: Anchor Books, 1977), vol. 1, 31

(social, e.g. regional accent), and appellative (individual, e.g. style) objectives. Following Saussure, it thus distinguished carefully between the *phoneme*, which models the smallest phonic segment that effects distinctions of meaning in *langue*, on the one hand, and *allophones* that function as contextual, regional, or social variants in *parole*, on the other. Jakobson's explicit commitment to a concrete, phenomenological, and functional perspective contrasts with Hjelmslev's formal view that allows for autonomous structures not governed by meaning and intentionality. Diachronically, the Prague functional commitment embraced a Hegelian stance to assert that like all sociocultural phenomena, linguistic changes are "systematic and goal directed."⁷⁹ Martinet thus demonstrated that phonological economies contain both stable central phonemes and isolated phonemes susceptible to change, and that the schemes evolve in response to twin inverse and competing tendencies, toward concision-least effort, and toward diversification-redundancy that maximizes clarity and thus communication. The Prague linguists strenuously argued against the description in *Course in General Linguistics* of linguistic change as entailing an isolated, unpredictable character, in contrast to the synchronic *system*; they also further underlined the dynamic character of an idiom and its components.

Jakobson led the way in formulating the current definition of the phoneme as a bundle of distinctive features. Collaborating with Morris Halle and others in the United States, he further differentiated phonology from phonetics by drastically reducing the number of features to a universal set of twelve. Jakobson also convincingly argued that phonological, grammatical, and lexical oppositions are all structured by identical logical binary oppositions in which one of the terms is marked (salient or weighted) and the other unmarked (neutral), thus dispensing with Trubetzkoy's gradual and multilateral relations, including ternary contrasts among points of articulation (e.g. *p/t/k*). Jakobson's best-known findings in explanatory, universal laws concern the irreversible solidarities that govern how oppositions are distributed throughout idioms, such that if a language possesses nasal vowels, it also has correlative oral vowels, for example. His research in psycholinguistics revealed developmental corollaries: children learn nasal vowels only after they acquire the oral vocalic equivalents. In the late 1960s, Jakobson further investigated such issues when affiliated with the Harvard Center for Cognitive Studies and the Salk Institute for Biological Studies.

The prolific and versatile Jakobson's inclusive vision of linguistics – he was fond of paraphrasing Terence, "I am a linguist; nothing in language can be alien

79. Letter from Jakobson to Trubetzkoy, October 1926, summarized in Roman Jakobson, *On Language*, Linda Waugh and Monique Monville-Burston (eds) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 170.

to me” – sought to reverse the mainstream centripetal definition of the field illustrated by the *langue* of *Course in General Linguistics*. Developing Saussure’s associative and syntagmatic relations as *similarity* (equivalence) and *contiguity* (temporal and spatial proximity), Jakobson posited that the derived operations of *selection* and *combination* performed by the speaker distinguish two phases of language acquisition in psycholinguistics, determine contrasting types of aphasia in linguistic pathology, subtend metaphor and metonymy, respectively, in the field of rhetoric, and alternately inform symbolism and realism in art and literature.⁸⁰ Going beyond linguists’ focus on internal structure and analytic philosophers’ concentration on reference, he devised and illustrated a six-point model of communication and linguistic functions that also grants prominence to emotional, technological, and poetic dynamics.⁸¹ As early as the mid-1930s, seminal articles apply Prague methods to the analysis of grammar and morphology, describing signs for categories such as case and tense as invariant bundles of distinctive semantic features (e.g. singular–plural, masculine–feminine, subject–object) susceptible of contextual variation.⁸² Jakobson helped initiate the subfield of linguistic typology, or methods for classifying idioms synchronically by shared grammatical features, alongside established diachronic research in linguistic genealogy or shared origins.

Jakobson’s grammatical essays inspired American anthropological linguists to use similar “componential” analysis to describe kinship terminologies and folk taxonomies of flora and fauna, as his work on universal irreversible solidarities led to studies of categories such as color by anthropologists such as Brent Berlin and Paul Kay.⁸³ As of the late 1950s, the studies launched efforts to develop linguistic structural semantics, which matured in the research of Pottier, Coseriu, and Greimas in the 1960s. Exploring the syntagmatic dimension, Greimas posited the concept of *isotopy* or the repetition and continuity of semantic units that provide coherence in discourse, and developed the *constructed sememe* or cognitive unit of meaning, which the listener/reader creates in summarizing extended discourse.⁸⁴ Like Jakobson, Greimas and his student François Rastier have sought to widen linguistics and indeed to reassert

80. Roman Jakobson, “Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances” (1956), reprinted in *On Language*, 115–33.

81. Roman Jakobson, “Closing Statements: Linguistics and Poetics” (1958 lecture), partially reprinted in *On Language*, 69–79.

82. E.g. Roman Jakobson, “Shifters, Verbal Categories, and the Russian Verb” (1957) partially reprinted in *On Language*, 386–92.

83. Brent Berlin and Paul Kay, *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969).

84. Algirdas Julien Greimas, *Sémantique structurale* (Paris: Larousse, 1966), ch. 6, 69–101; *Structural Semantics*, Danièle McDowell et al. (trans.) (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 78–115.

the philological paradigm that integrates language into a broader study of texts and cultures; the investigation necessarily entails exploring the *interpretation* of discourse and no longer its mere analysis.⁸⁵ These extensions of structuralism into semantics paralleled J. R. Firth's contextual theory of meaning, and complemented the forays into a structural analysis of syntax elaborated since the early 1950s by linguists such as Tesnière.

Beginning in the 1940s, the Indo-Europeanist Émile Benveniste published influential articles in general linguistics that establish an exploration of *parole* and thus of pragmatics. Defining Saussurean *langue* as the "semiotic" mode of language that comprises the virtual system of differential and combinatory *signs*, Benveniste describes a parallel "semantic" mode whose main unit is the *sentence* spoken by an individual in a particular context.⁸⁶ Language passes from the semiotic to the semantic mode in the speech event, in which "speech [*langage*] bears reference to the world of objects ... in the form of sentences which relate to specific and concrete situations."⁸⁷ If the utterance (*énoncé*) represents the *product* of speech, the "enunciation [*énonciation*] is the very act of producing an utterance."⁸⁸ Benveniste studies enunciative processes by examining the linguistic mechanisms that effect and represent the speech event and its parameters. Pioneering articles thus analyze constructions for what is today called deixis, including personal pronouns, adverbs of time (e.g. *now, later, afterwards*) and place (*here, there, somewhere*), as well as the tenses, aspects, and moods of verbal systems.⁸⁹ From the foundational *I-thou* relation spring both speech and the subject; language no longer appears as an external instrument of communication which the individual freely manipulates, but rather as the symbolic and dialogic dimension in which subjectivity and especially intersubjectivity are constituted.⁹⁰

In the human sciences more broadly, structural linguistics is known for having inspired some of the most brilliant minds of the postwar generation in Europe to renovate their field through theoretical reflection and the development of explicit methodologies defined in precise terminologies. Althusser, Barthes, Lacan, Lévi-Strauss, and other structuralists sought to elaborate models grounded in formal mechanisms that identify distinct levels of relevance, invariants, minimal elements, and the syntactic rules by which components combine. Investigating social organizations, cultural practices, political

85. François Rastier, *Sens et textualité* (Paris: Hachette, 1989); *Meaning and Textuality*, Frank Collins and Paul Perron (trans.) (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

86. Émile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966, 1974), vol. 2, 63–5.

87. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 128.

88. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 80.

89. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 223–85; cf. Jakobson, "Shifters, Verbal Categories, and the Russian Verb," 386–89.

90. Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, vol. 1, 225–36 (1946 text).

systems, psychological disorders, film, literature, and advertising, they explored how the phenomena function as systems comprising networks of relations, and searched for general conditions and explanatory principles. The structuralists explored the new conceptions of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, and the novel views on the relation between mind and matter introduced by the new theory of the sign and of relational systems. They explicitly defined their field and mapped its relation to other disciplines.

American structuralism developed not through *Course in General Linguistics* but rather through a parallel and contemporaneous adaptation of Neogrammarian methods to the synchronic study of Native American idioms. Franz Boas reworked nineteenth-century Germanic philology into conjoined and complementary descriptive linguistics and anthropology. Maintaining the close alliance between linguistics and anthropology, Leonard Bloomfield and Edward Sapir integrated the Prague School's phonology, but not its teleological and communicative functionalism, nor its focus on holism, nor its poetics, nor its engagement with semantics; indeed, Bloomfield coated his theory with a veneer of antimentalistic behaviorism, and argued for fail-safe, sign-based discovery procedures that would guarantee the results of field studies. In the 1950s, Zellig Harris became the first American linguist of note to label his descriptive linguistics "structural," applying the term to his formal, mathematically based methods for studying discourse and for effecting distributional analyses comparable to computer-assisted concordances, the resultant form classes being considered the grammar of the language studied.

As of the late 1950s, Harris's brilliant student Chomsky began developing methods focused on syntax that continued but significantly transformed his teacher's approach: generative grammar analyzed individual sentences instead of corpora, employed newer mathematics, and formulated its descriptions as ordered formal processes rather than as taxonomic classes. Further reversing the American descriptive tradition but following Jakobson's lead, Chomsky explicitly argued against discovery procedures and instead for *explanatory* analyses; progressively integrated significant semantic analysis; and increasingly focused his theory on linguistic universals. Chomskian grammars and his followers' variants quickly replaced American structuralism as the leading linguistic paradigm in the United States, and the new issues in syntax and their associated debates in general linguistics either displaced or seriously rivaled continental structural linguistics as the leading approach in other countries.

At the same time, Chomsky engineered the triumph and even the sharpening of key *Course in General Linguistics* and structuralist principles over the Neogrammarian heritage maintained in American descriptivism: he ushered in an overwhelming concentration on the virtual linguistic system (competence, I[internal]-Language) and a concomitant demotion of actual usage (performance,

E[xternal]-Language); established an exclusive focus on internal linguistics as against external linguistics; and highlighted cognitive processes, emphasizing the affinity between linguistics and psychology while divorcing language from anthropology. Chomskian grammars attribute even more reality to symbolic categories than does *Course in General Linguistics*, to the point of reinstating traditional grammatical categories and dispensing with explicit language-specific bottom-up analyses of forms. Like Jakobson, Chomsky collaborated with Halle in phonology, bringing forward the central Prague project by proposing a small set of universal articulatory distinctive features, while foregrounding a novel generative approach that posits “deep” and “surface” levels. Like Hjelmslevian glossematics, Chomskian grammars grant significant autonomy to formal structures of syntax and of phonology. On the other hand, Chomsky largely maintained the positive stance of the Neogrammarians and American descriptivists, and never sought to model language as a system of interrelated, mutually constitutive terms.

After serving as the chief source of new linguistic ideas and debates internationally for three decades, Chomsky began to share that role with other approaches, especially embodied cognitive linguistics, as of the late 1980s. While the latter enterprise does not resurrect structuralist paradigms, it turns against Chomskian formalism to reassert and revitalize the phenomenological perspectives central to *Course in General Linguistics* and to Jakobson,⁹¹ and to reclaim the centrality of meaning, adopting the Saussurean definition of linguistic constructions and expressions as comprising closely interdependent phonological and semantic facets.⁹² On the other hand, the new cognitive linguistics emphasizes continuities between speech and nonlinguistic experience, both in language acquisition and in subsequent daily use, in ways that greatly expand the motivated character of speech and further qualify its arbitrariness. It also specifically foregrounds human phylogenetic factors that impinge on speech, restoring the dialogue between linguistics and the natural sciences, and qualifying the *conventional*, nonbiological foundations of speech.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS ON LINGUISTIC STRUCTURALISM: QUESTIONS AND LIMITS

Today *Course in General Linguistics* remains a historic, significant, and intriguing book, but it was never the comprehensive or definitive work on language

91. George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

92. See, for example, Ronald W. Langacker, *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar, Vol. 1: Theoretical Prerequisites* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987–91), 76–7, 93–4.

that some nonlinguists took it for in the 1960s–1970s. Like much of modern linguistics, the structural linguistics that it helped to inaugurate concentrated on phonology, devoting far less attention to syntax, semantics, or pragmatics. Structuralism's initial strategy of tackling the latter areas by transposing the phonological model produced limited results. Structural linguistics wrestled with issues that remain open-ended questions today in the language sciences and indeed throughout cognitive studies, notably how higher-level abstract categories are integrated with lower-level concrete signs, and how general phylogenetic structures are conjugated with particular historico-cultural processes.

The establishment of modern linguistics as a rigorous science has so often come at the price of restricting its compass, giving short shrift to the relation between language and rhetoric, communication, texts, society, and the nonverbal world; the narrow focus forms part of the last two centuries' trend toward increasing specialization and the fragmentation of knowledge. For the postwar scholars who looked to linguistics as a model, the quasi-mathematical character of phonology, its finite inventories, and its direct grounding in a differentiated material substratum project a model of scientific inquiry that cannot be emulated in all other pursuits. Similarly, the focus on internal mechanisms can be limiting, as Greimas's otherwise powerful semiotics illustrates.

MAJOR WORKS

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CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS

Brian C. J. Singer

In retrospect, it seems rather odd to include Claude Lévi-Strauss¹ in a history of continental philosophy. Although he had obtained a degree in philosophy, his turn to anthropology and his travels in the Amazon must be considered a flight from the philosophical tradition with which he was familiar. Moreover, his relation to philosophy was largely disdainful, culminating most notoriously in the violent attack on Jean-Paul Sartre that concludes *The Savage Mind*. Again, at the end of his massive work on myths, he writes: “I am averse to any proposed philosophical exploitation of my work, and I shall do no more than point out that, in my view, my findings can, at best, only lead to the abjuration of what is called philosophy at the present time.”² It is true that, on reading the *Mythologiques*, one may be left with the impression that the Amerindians were, unbeknown to themselves, very much concerned with philosophical issues. But if Lévi-Strauss can sometimes appear a philosopher in Amerindian disguise, no philosopher has ever read Lévi-Strauss to examine the contents of the myths he discusses. Philosophers read him for other reasons, reasons that now appear based on something of a misunderstanding.

The story begins during the Second World War, when, after brief ethnological expeditions into the Amazon region, Lévi-Strauss, in exile in New York City, met

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1. Claude Lévi-Strauss (November 28, 1908–October 30, 2009; born in Brussels, Belgium; died in Paris) was educated at the Sorbonne (1927–32), and received a *doctorat d'état* there in 1948. His influences included Boas, Durkheim, Jakobson, Mauss, Rousseau, and Saussure, and he held appointments at the University of São Paulo (1935–39), New School for Social Research (1942–45), École pratique des Hautes Études (1950–74), and Collège de France (1959–82).
 2. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Naked Man*, John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (trans.) (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981), 638.

Roman Jakobson, the leading figure of the Prague School of structural linguistics. By the 1950s, Lévi-Strauss had demonstrated that the method of structural linguistics and, more particularly, of phonology could be applied to cultural domains far beyond that of language proper. By the 1960s, “structuralism” had conquered *tout Paris*, laying claim to a number of leading intellectual figures. At the time, it appeared as if the key had been found that would allow the human sciences to be truly scientific without having to imitate the natural sciences. To this challenge, almost every philosopher, at least in France, was obliged to respond. Lévi-Strauss himself remained suspicious; he famously said that the only other structuralists in France besides himself were the linguist Émile Benveniste and the mythologist Georges Dumézil, pointedly excluding Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, and others. Moreover, unlike many of the latter, he remained, throughout his intellectual career, faithful to structuralism, understood as a method, and not as an *ersatz* philosophy. And as method, he had the good sense, at least in his substantive practice, to realize that structuralism was more applicable to certain object domains than others, more particularly to primitive societies and, within the latter, to kinship systems, totemic classifications, and myths. Once structuralism mutated after 1968 into poststructuralism, postmodernism and post-postmodernism, few philosophers still read Lévi-Strauss. By contrast, his anthropological legacy remains palpable (recognizing that his anthropological claims cannot be reduced to structuralism *per se*).

Lévi-Strauss was the twentieth century’s most famous anthropologist, but his career path was hardly typical of the discipline. He had no formal training in anthropology, and his stay among the Amazonian tribes was quite short. Indeed, his strictly ethnological writings, based on on-site observations, are among his least read and least published works. Admittedly, *Tristes Tropiques*, which relates his Amazonian peregrinations, was a tremendous success. It represents, however, a sort of “degree zero” of ethnological writing; for it does not recount the positive knowledge gained, but reflects on the “existential” difficulties and moral responsibilities of cross-cultural encounters with doomed, exotic societies. His “positive” contributions would be strictly theoretical, as brilliantly illustrated by his first important work, *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté*, a book that revolutionized the study of kinship, and still remains the most important work in its field.

The title clearly refers to Émile Durkheim’s *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*; but the work is better understood as an extension of Marcel Mauss’s classic *Essai sur le don*.³ As with Mauss, the exchange of gifts is understood not

*3. Durkheim and Mauss are discussed in an essay by Mike Gane in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 3*.

in economic terms, concerned with the individual calculation of profit and loss, but as constitutive of social bonds. Here, the “gifts” exchanged are brides, and the social bonds that result from the circulation of women are kinship relations, seen as the most determinant set of relations in primitive societies. In this manner, Lévi-Strauss shifted the emphasis in kinship studies from the vertical relations of filiation that ensure familial continuity between the generations, to the horizontal relations of alliance between families. When speaking of the simplest, “atomic” structure of the family, he thus includes the “*tiers donateur*,” the giver of wives (often the maternal uncle). Society supposes, by definition, relations between families, and the circulation of women that ensures such relations supposes the incest taboo. The latter, Lévi-Strauss argues, has no basis in nature; on the contrary, it is directed against natural inclinations, and so marks the movement from nature to culture – hence its universality. Two points should be noted, as they bear on the larger argument. First, the incest taboo is not consequent to the repression of individual desire (as in Freud’s Oedipal complex); it is imposed by the collectivity and, as such, suggests Durkheim’s “*conscience collective*” or, better, an “*inconscience collective*” (as it is not devised by conscious accord). Second, the circulation of women supposes what Lévi-Strauss terms “the principle of reciprocity,” that is, families give their daughters (or sisters) to other families because they expect to receive the latter’s daughters (or sisters) in return. Lévi-Strauss views society (or at least primitive society) as essentially *échangiste*, the exchange of women being completed by the exchange of goods and words. Reciprocity can entail antagonistic relations – insults, blows, vendettas – but antagonistic reciprocity still supposes relative equality. This immediately distinguishes Lévi-Strauss from many of his generation who sought the basic schema of the relation of self to other in that of master and slave. It also helps explain why there is little discussion of power or domination: not just domination within a group, but domination by the group (as, for example, with Durkheim’s discussion of the representation of the collectivity as sacred). Exchange concerns a movement beyond group frontiers, not their establishment or maintenance; and if exchange implies rules, Lévi-Strauss’s concern is with their unconscious functioning, not their conscious justification. As for the question of patriarchy, implied by “the circulation of women” (even in matrilineal or matrilocal societies), it is never really confronted.

The properly structuralist moment of the book concerns the analysis, relative to “elementary kinship structures,” of the terms of the exchange, that is, who is exchanged between whom. By “elementary” structures Lévi-Strauss is not referring to their degree of complexity; he is speaking of kinship systems where the rules concern not just whom one cannot marry (the incest taboo applies to our own “complex” kinship structures) but whom one ought to marry – which is more typical of primitive societies where kinship structures, being

of such commanding importance, are more robustly delineated. Only “elementary structures” provide the restricted number of terms on which structuralist analysis can establish a limited set of possible relations. Lévi-Strauss makes a first distinction between cross-cousins and parallel cousins (cross-cousins being the children of one’s maternal uncles or paternal aunts, parallel cousins those of one’s maternal aunts or paternal uncles), and restricts his analysis largely to the former. Not only is marriage between cross-cousins spread over a more disparate geographical area (thus resisting diffusionist hypotheses), but it better expresses the principle of reciprocity, as the tendency in marriages between parallel cousins is for women to circulate within the limits of a paternal clan. A second distinction is made within cross-cousin marriages between those where one marries the daughter of one’s maternal uncle, and those where one marries the daughter of one’s paternal aunt. Another distinction concerns whether the marriage preference refers to the daughters of, say, one’s maternal uncle’s family or one’s maternal uncle’s clan. And a further distinction distinguishes between “restricted exchange,” where families or matrimonial classes exchange brides directly, and “general exchange” where the exchanges are indirect (group A gives daughters to group B, which gives daughters to group C, while group A receives its brides from group D). In effect, Lévi-Strauss begins with a limited number of terms: father, mother, maternal aunt, paternal aunt, son of maternal aunt, and so on. These terms can be combined in different ways to form a limited number of different combinations, although sometimes the combinations prove quite complicated, and one has to resort to pencil and paper or even mathematical formulas to understand their inter-generational functioning. Some combinations are more common than others, presumably because they respond better to the problem that the principle of reciprocity seeks to resolve, that is, the maintenance of families in continuous relation with each other so as to form a coherent society. But the reason why a given society “chooses” a given combination, although not unaffected by local conditions, is ultimately arbitrary, and all the more arbitrary because “unconscious.” To be sure, a given “choice” may have tremendous “sociological” implications (as already suggested by the effects of parallel cousin marriages on clan formation). Structural analysis, however, is less interested in the analysis of these implications than in uncovering the underlying rules. The supposition of such an analysis is that all societies must respond to the same exigencies (as implied by the incest taboo), using the same range of “materials” (as given by the family’s atomic structure). In contrast to how most anthropologists and sociologists understand the term “structure,” it is viewed here as a model that shapes empirical reality, and not as part of that reality. In effect, one can deduce the possible combinations that form the different kinship structures before, and even without, finding empirical equivalents. Moreover, the empirical equivalents will always be messier than their models; matrimonial

rules can never be fully prescriptive, if only because the demographic facts do not always cooperate.

The next major work after the study on kinship (excluding *Tristes Tropiques* and the essays collected in *Anthropologie structurale*) was *Le Totémisme aujourd'hui*, which Lévi-Strauss claimed was an introduction to *La Pensée sauvage*, which can itself be considered an introduction to the multivolume *Mythologiques*. Totemism had been a key concept in anthropology, although one subject to considerable controversy since the 1920s. It was generally defined as the identification of an individual or group (usually a clan) with a totemic animal that, being deemed an ancestor of the individual or group, is considered sacred, and subject to a number of prohibitions. The problem is that the different elements do not always cohere: the totem need not be an animal (it can be a plant or household article); it can be an object of identification without being considered sacred, or can be considered sacred without being an object of identification. For Lévi-Strauss, the theory of totemism sought to include at once too much (a theory of primitive religion) and, more importantly, too little. Once denied a relation to the sacred, the totemic phenomena can be understood from within a larger, “epistemological” perspective, although this supposes the totems be considered, relative to a given society, in terms of their differential relations (and not individually). They will then be seen to form a classificatory system whereby different animal species are distinguished according to, say, different elements (such that turtles are associated with water, eagles with air, etc.), which system can be applied to establish, organize, and render intelligible social differences, notably in terms of clan distinctions. In this manner, the totem appears not as the object of a cult, but as a conceptual tool, an “*opérateur logique*,” by which the natural world, the social world, and the relations within and between the two, are rendered meaningful.

The work on totemism marks a shift in emphasis from institutional practices (as with bridal exchanges) to a concern with the operations of the “savage mind.” This should not be confused with a shift from a materialist to a mentalist perspective. Kinship structures entail a “mental” element relative to both its invisible rules and their visible effects on language (e.g. with marriage to cross-cousins, parallel cousins will likely be considered as brothers or sisters). This shift does, however, suggest a cognitivist turn, and promises to say something provocative about “thinking,” particularly as it places “thinking” in relation to the unconscious and the symbolic. As the use of these terms is not always clear, it is worth considering each in turn.

In his earlier works, Lévi-Strauss gestures to Freud and Marx when speaking of the unconscious, but such references are soon dropped. As noted, unlike the Freudian unconscious, Lévi-Strauss’s unconscious is collective, not individual. Moreover, although it is inclusive of the incest taboo, it is not particularly

associated with the repression of drives, sexual or otherwise. Similarly, if he speaks, on occasion, of myths as being ideological, he does not correlate the unconscious with a desire to avoid facing certain truths. The “unconscious” does not concern desire, but is strictly mental. The model remains phonology: when speaking, one is “unconscious” of phonemes and their differential relations, although one could neither speak nor, by implication, think without them. And what applies to the “material” level of signifiers or phonemes, also applies to the “mental” level of signifieds or “lexemes.” If one then pushes the analysis beyond the differential relations between specific signifieds and examines the different forms that these relations take independent of their content, the “unconscious” need no longer be tied to a specific code or culture. The “unconscious” becomes the inventory of all the forms that underwrite the content of all possible consciousness: the underlying structure of the human mind in its universality. This is why Lévi-Strauss is able to say that “man has always been thinking equally well.”⁴ And it is at the basis of Paul Ricoeur’s much quoted claim that Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism represents a “Kantianism without a transcendental subject,”⁵ with the proviso that Lévi-Strauss is referring not to the *a priori* abstract categories necessary to human reason, but to the set of “logical” operations that are prior to any distinction between rational and irrational thought. Lévi-Strauss does not believe that one can uncover such a structuralist unconscious by an act of introspection; one must examine a mind that is spontaneous and undomesticated, a mind associated with the origins of thinking – in short, a “savage mind,” largely, if not entirely, identified with primitive peoples. At this point, two qualifications need to be made, first a minor, then a major one.

One may think that the relation between signified and referent (here the outside, natural world) is completely arbitrary, as the unconscious forms are capable of underwriting multiple possible contents, which are then imposed on a passive, formless world. One may even claim that such arbitrariness is a condition of culture, and of the plurality of cultures, in opposition to nature. However, Lévi-Strauss believes that nature is not entirely without structure and, therefore, lends itself to certain distinctions that will continuously repeat themselves in different cultural areas. He even speculates that certain affinities between the structure of the mind and that of nature may help account for the technological breakthroughs of the “Neolithic revolution.” This raises a larger question: does the unconscious lie on the side of nature or culture? With the hard sciences increasingly discovering codes in nature, notably the genetic code, Lévi-Strauss

4. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (trans.) (New York: Anchor Books, 1977), 227.

5. Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, Kathleen McLaughlin *et al.* (trans.) (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 52.

tends to come down on the side of nature. At another level, however, his entire corpus can be said to revolve around the distinction between nature and culture, how it arises, and how it is represented.

The major qualification concerns the impression one might have that the forms do not think, but exist anterior to thought, as its condition or instrumentality. This would suppose that the forms are without activity, but for Lévi-Strauss the unconscious mind thinks, spontaneously as it were. What motivates such activity? One wants to say: the need to make sense of the world. Perhaps, but it is a curious sort of sense-making; for it appears devoid of intentionality, and exists in excess of the world it would make sense of. It is as if the mind ran by itself, with an independent will to *poesis*, not satisfied with attaching a specific content to a specific form, but seeking to continuously modulate the content in the most fantastic ways in order to explore the possibilities entailed by the form. It is such spontaneous mental activity that lies at the heart of the debate about “humanism.” When Lévi-Strauss famously claimed that “*les mythes se pensent entre eux*” (poorly rendered in English as: “how myths operate in men’s minds without their being aware of the fact”⁶), the implication is not simply that “men” are unaware of the underlying structures when thinking mythically, but that it is the structures, not the men, doing the thinking. Mythical thought is without a subject and without subjectivity; it is a completely objective, prereflexive, unthinking form of thought. Such, at least, is the methodological claim. It need not be confused with the more substantive claim that the mind is identical to its unconscious structures, or that certain societies think without thinking. The person narrating a myth, no doubt, is largely unconscious of its underlying structures. He is, nonetheless, conscious of what he is narrating; he probably has a sense of the appropriateness or inappropriateness of any elements he might add. He may even have his own interpretation of what the myth “really means” – although Lévi-Strauss would have us ignore the latter, as it plays no role in the actual construction of the myth.

Consider now the idea of the symbolic. Lévi-Strauss states that society is not at the origin of the symbolic, but the symbolic is at the origin of society.⁷ The symbolic would then be understood as all the systems of differential relations constituted on the basis of the mind’s unconscious activity, and which one associates with the idea of culture in its largest, most general sense. There is, however, also room for a more restricted understanding of the symbolic, an understanding best approached through an article entitled “The Effectiveness

6. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (trans.) (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 12.

7. Claude Lévi-Strauss, “Introduction à l’œuvre de Marcel Mauss,” in Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et Anthropologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950), xxii.

of Symbols,” which examines a shamanic cure for a difficult childbirth.⁸ The shaman’s chant, recited in the presence of the woman in labor, populates her uterus with good and bad spirits who struggle over the child’s progress down the birth canal. What is of interest here – without entering into the controversies the article has sustained – is the suggestion that the symbols employed by the savage mind cannot be equated with just any sign system and, by implication, the symbolic with just any culture. First, note that the symbols are insufficiently separated from percepts and affects to be considered concepts, the distinctions between ideas, sense impressions and feelings – and thus between the inner and outer world – being far more porous than we are accustomed to. Second, such porosity aids in the movement between diverse levels or codes – here between a psychic level (the different, battling spirits) and a physiological level (the movements of the uterus) – which constitutes the symbolic’s operativity. Such movement is constitutive not just of rituals, but also myths, although the latter remain purely mental phenomenon, unconcerned as to their “real effects.” The movement in myth is more akin to that discussed in totemism, with its move from differential relations between animals to those between clans; although in myth the movement between different strata or codes is infinitely more varied. Finally, the symbolic content saturates the world with sense. In the case of our woman in labor, her pain would make far less sense if she relied on a strictly scientific explanation; moreover, whatever the outcome of the cure, it will find a meaning within the shamanistic universe. The “domesticated mind,” because it would control sense-making in accord with a limited number of largely conscious rules, lacks the creative vivacity of the savage mind that, like the *bricoleur*, can draw on its material from numerous domains in order to fill all empty spaces. The symbolic order here concerns the “operativity” of sense, and not the sense of sense, which implies reflection.

After *La Pensée sauvage*, Lévi-Strauss dedicated all his efforts to the study of the myth, understood as exemplifying the spontaneous exuberance of the savage mind. The result was the four volumes of the *Mythologiques*, followed by three shorter works. Despite being termed an “Introduction,” the *Mythologiques* are a vast, sprawling, even obsessive work that tries the patience of its readers. Lévi-Strauss is interested in constructing a system of myth, which requires breaking myths down to their individual narrative elements, their mythemes, in view of establishing relations of similarity and difference between these elements both within a given myth, and between variations of that myth as it circulates not just in the tribe, but across different tribes and different linguistic groups. For example, the mythemes in the “bird-nester” myth are: son refuses initiation in big house / son rapes mother / father sends son to scale high cliff in search of

8. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 181–201.

eagle eggs / father removes ladder / stranded son is covered in bird excrement, and so on. One might note that the act of incest between generations and the scaling of the cliff both involve vertical relations. The significance of this parallel becomes evident when one realizes that, in a variation of the myth where the incest is “horizontal” (between brother and sister), a “horizontal” mytheme must be substituted for the scaling of the cliff. In effect, one looks for paradigmatic and syntagmatic changes, and their corresponding adjustments, which enable one to link different myths into larger mythical cycles. Most often the variations involve inversions, but other transformational relations are common (substitutions, permutations, symmetry, etc.). Sometimes these variations respond to local conditions (e.g. a tribe lives in an area without high cliffs); sometimes to the desire of one tribe to differentiate itself from other tribes; and sometimes simply to the different “logical” possibilities that inhere in a given mythical structure – that structure consisting, in principle, of all its possible transformations. Such variations are particularly relevant to the movement across different codes, whereby, say, zoological differences are related to climatological differences, which, in turn, are “translated” into different manners of cooking. The movements across different codes can give rise to whole new sets of transformations within or between different mythical cycles.

By tracing the variations and transformations across several, cross-cutting mythical cycles, Lévi-Strauss moves, in the course of the *Mythologiques*, from one initial reference myth (the bird-nester myth at the beginning *Le Cru et le cuit*) to over six hundred myths in both North and South America. The starting-point is arbitrary; the bird-nester myth does not constitute an Ur-myth. The transformations usually appear localized between neighboring tribes; but sometimes a mythical cycle appears with remarkable consistency throughout the Americas (such is the case with the bird-nester myth), causing Lévi-Strauss to speculate at times about archaic paths of diffusion, and at other times about transcultural associations presumably rooted in the circuits of the brain. Note that the analysis is not, and cannot be, complete, for there can be no closed mythical totality. The latter, in effect, would have to include every myth that is known, has been lost, or could have been created had the myth-creating societies survived.

What is the sense of the often exceedingly detailed analysis of this mythical corpus? Lévi-Strauss is not interested in myth in terms of, say, a theory of the sacred in primitive societies. If he sometimes claims that myths have a function – to blunt the effect of real contradictions by their progressive, imaginary mediation – this is not borne out by the bulk of his analysis. Nor does he seek the meaning of myth in its general characteristics (e.g. the absence of the distinction between efficient and ideal causality to describe the difference between the natural and human worlds), in its characteristic themes (e.g. the representation

of the difference between nature and culture, despite the titles of some of the books), or its characteristic characters (e.g. the trickster). He does not care to discuss the content of myth at this level of generality, but prefers to construct the sense of myths through their internal analysis. At the level of individual myths, it is clear that many of them seek to explain origins, for example how mountains were created, or how humans first came to use cooking fire. Such meanings, however, are too obvious to interest Lévi-Strauss; he searches for meaning in larger systems of similarities and differences. He is far more interested when, for example, a myth about the origin of fire contrasts terrestrial fire (domestic fire for cooking) with celestial fire (lightning), which is then related to terrestrial water (lakes and rivers) and celestial water (rain) – which suggests that a myth about the origins of domestic cooking is also about the opposition between heaven and earth. But it is not so much a matter of what such an opposition might mean, as of how it is made to signify in a way that produces new myths. Ultimately, Lévi-Strauss is not really interested in what myths mean, but how they come about, and what, relative to other myths, they can do. When he does speak of the meaning of myths, he tends to privilege their formal or, better, morphological content, thus presenting them with an apparently philosophical significance, as when he writes: “it is clear that the myths I am comparing all offer an original solution to the problem of the changeover from continuous quantity to discrete quality.”⁹ More generally, however, his analysis is not interpretive, but generative, as it seeks to demonstrate how myths, as a symbolic order, operate. As such, this work would seek to remain very close to the savage thought it describes, even as it seeks to orchestrate its own performativity. This is not really a theory of myth; rather, the science of myth, Lévi-Strauss writes rather impishly, is “a myth of mythology.”¹⁰

The materials of myth, and the possible content that results from the operations performed on these materials, are seemingly limitless, a trait that immediately distinguishes the analysis of myth from that of kinship, not to mention from phonological analysis proper. What appears limited, by contrast, are the operations that give form to the endless array of mythical narratives. Even before the *Mythologiques*, Lévi-Strauss presented what he claims is the canonical formula of mythical thinking: $F_x(a) : F_y(b) :: F_x(b) : F_{a-1}(y)$.¹¹ This formula describes a transformation in terms of a relation of equivalence between the elements of two myths (the double colon distinguishes between the two myths; while the single colon marks the syntagmatic articulation of the elements in each myth): the function x of term a is to function y of term b as function x of term b is to

9. Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 53.

10. *Ibid.*, 12.

11. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 225.

an inversion of both the term and function of *a* and *y*. Whether this formula constitutes the ultimate “grammar” of myth is highly debatable, although Lévi-Strauss makes occasional use of it until the very end. What it illustrates is the desire to move the analysis to the level of what he terms “general mythology,” a level of analysis so abstracted of all content that it would be inclusive of all myths. If the latter was to be the culminating moment of the project on myth, finally revealing the *modus operandi* of the human mind in its original state, suspended between nature and culture, this project came to appear increasingly hollow. For, at this level, it became evident that the analysis would result in an empty formalism, the endless illustration of the same, endlessly repeated operations. Moving the analysis down a notch to include content, if only at the level of form, proves potentially more rewarding. Thus in his last work on myth, Lévi-Strauss ends with a comparison of the Amerindian with the European mind. The comparison involves the question of difference in the same as illustrated by myths about twins. The native American myths suggest that no two terms can ever be exactly the same, the implication being that the Amerindians were more capable of accepting and incorporating difference.¹²

Lévi-Strauss always claimed to be engaged in the elaboration of a science. Yet there was always an interest in aesthetics, which was to become increasingly prominent, his last book being exclusively dedicated to such matters. Throughout his *oeuvre*, one finds structuralist analysis of works of art, both primitive and modern, and, consonant with the latter, a critique of modernist painting and music. The temptation is to search for the materials to develop a specifically Lévi-Straussian theory of aesthetics; but such a theory could not just be a theory of aesthetics as there is, in his work, a continuous criss-crossing of the realms of art with those of myth and (structuralist) science. Sometimes this takes the form of the establishment of differential relations, as with the claim that “art lies half-way between scientific knowledge and mythical ... thought.”¹³ Sometimes art and science seem to bleed into each other, the scientific analysis of the *Mythologiques* being organized in terms of musical metaphors, with the “finale” including a long discussion of how myth resembles music more than language. Such movements are possible only on the basis of deeper affinities. Art, myth and science are all concerned with the sensual qualities of objects (art and myth in an immediate sense, science at the end of its elucubrations); all three evince a concern with form and, therefore, privilege relations over terms; and they are all susceptible to analysis in terms of “double articulations,” whether

12. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Story of Lynx*, Catherine Tihanyi (trans.) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 225–42.

13. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, Anonymous (trans.) (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1966), 22.

between different axes of meaning or between the different senses. One can go further: art, myth, and science articulate structure and event (myth employs events to produce structure; science seeks the structure behind events; while art is sensitive to the structure in the event); all three seek to work up nature by placing it under the discipline of form (science in an effort to master nature, with myth and, traditionally, art being more contemplatively inclined); and they all, in their different domains and different manners, would point to human invariants. Ultimately, for Lévi-Strauss, the arts are a form of knowledge, one that entails an education of the senses, an appreciation of craft, and an appeal to what makes us most human, our cultural creativity as borne by – and here he differs from the individualizing heritage of Kantian aesthetics – the resonance of the underlying “psychological,” and even “physiological” structures on which communication depends.

Beyond the aesthetic moment, there is a strong moral moment, which accounts for some of the attraction of Lévi-Strauss’s work, although it confounds the conventional categories of left and right. This latter moment is rooted in a sympathy for, even an identification with, the primitive peoples among whom he sojourned. Thus he does not simply think about these peoples; he bears them an intellectual debt and would think with them, at times against his own society. Structuralism, one could say, bears an affinity with the statics of “cold societies” (societies that refuse to see themselves in historical terms), and Lévi-Strauss is horrified at their fate consequent to the “invasion” of America. Instead of being a representative of a colonialist or imperialist culture, the anthropologist is to be a witness to the terrible destruction wrought by our own “hot societies.” As such, he cannot be entirely at home within his own culture, even as he cannot be entirely without, and instead moves with genuine pathos between the modern and the primitive. Lévi-Strauss values diversity: all societies have their value because they cannot be measured against a single standard. What he abhors is the “ontological violence” of our own society, which, in the name of human progress, so arrogantly and pitilessly places itself at the center of the universe, resulting in an unparalleled destruction of peoples and cultures in their diversity, the prelude to the destruction of the diversity of nature. Lévi-Strauss sees himself as a “bearer of ashes,” sifting through the debris, seeking to preserve, as faithfully as possible, what is and has been lost. In a famous early essay, “Race and History,” originally written for UNESCO in 1952, he attacks all forms of ethnocentrism, upholding a vision of a new world civilization based on increasing cross-cultural communication, which would relativize the West.¹⁴ In a later essay, “Race and Culture,” he despairs of such communication, claiming

14. Reprinted in Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology 2*, Monique Layton (trans.) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 323–62.

that it serves to eliminate difference, and pleads instead for the maintenance of a distance between cultures, going so far as to honor the absolute xenophobia of primitive cultures, which refuses a human status to all cultures but their own.¹⁵ In this most Rousseauist of gestures, he pictures a time of origins prior to the catastrophe that is history, where humanity, stripped of all pretensions, still remains fully human, still lives in equilibrium with nature, and proves capable of surviving tens of thousands of years largely unchanged.

It is difficult to speak of Lévi-Strauss's philosophical legacy. He was the foremost exponent of structuralism, and when French intellectual life passed through its structuralist and poststructuralist phases, those influenced by such trends drew considerable inspiration from his work. It was, however, always difficult to speak of a specifically structuralist (if not a poststructuralist) philosophy.¹⁶ Lévi-Strauss himself spoke of structuralism as a science, one that would redeem the scientificity of the "human sciences" because tailored to the specificity of the study of the human mind. As such, structuralism was widely felt to represent a challenge to philosophy, particularly the dominant, phenomenologically oriented philosophy of the time, with its critique of scientific objectivism. This would only be confirmed with the publication of *La Pensée sauvage*, with its blistering critique of Sartre, who was accused of turning history into myth, reproducing the closure of the West relative to its others, and reviving the Cartesian distinction between subject and object (with the distinction between analytic reason, applied to things, and dialectical reason, applied to historical events understood as the aggregate projects of free individuals).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who was deeply uncomfortable with the Sartrean opposition between things that, in themselves, are meaningless, and persons who alone confer meaning on the world, was intrigued by Lévi-Strauss's anthropology.¹⁷ He saw in it, as well as in Saussurian linguistics, a way to thicken what he termed the "inter-monde" between subject and object, although from the perspective of structuralism this inter-monde cannot be adequately described through the experience of the living subject.¹⁸ Ricoeur also recognized that, with structuralism, individual sense (the *parole*) is possible only because, at a deeper level, beyond all questions of intentionality, there lies a largely autonomous order of differential relations and their transformations (the

15. Reprinted in Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The View from Afar*, Jonathan Neugroschel and Phoebe Hass (trans.) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 3–24.

*16. Patrice Maniglier argues for a *philosophical* legacy of structuralism in his essay in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 7*.

*17. For a discussion of Merleau-Ponty, see the essay by Mauro Carbone in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 4*.

18. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "From Mauss to Claude Lévi-Strauss," in *Signs*, Richard Calverton McCleary (trans.) (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964).

langue).¹⁹ In effect, structuralism pushes the analysis of cultural productions beyond hermeneutics, by extending the domain of an objectifying explanation into that of inter-subjective understanding (to employ Wilhelm Dilthey's classic distinction). While recognizing that structuralism has its uses, Ricoeur sought to retain a place for philosophical hermeneutics considered as "a part of self-understanding and of the understanding of being."²⁰ Ideally the two approaches can be conjoined, assuming each recognizes its own limits. Nonetheless, structuralism is deemed better suited to the study of societies whose myths are classificatory and synchronic, and hermeneutics to societies whose myths would narrate a common history, which entails traditions with reservoirs of meaning open to continuous reinterpretation. Moreover, hermeneutics appears better suited to societies whose traditions we share, while structuralism is more appropriate to the study of societies outside our hermeneutic circle. Still, there is one difference that cannot be subjected to an intellectual division of labor: where for Lévi-Strauss meaning is immanent to structures, for Ricoeur, meaning or, better, meaningfulness, the sense of sense, requires a relation to an interpreter.²¹

Jacques Derrida²² sees in anthropology a decentering of the West, and in structuralism, with its infinite play of substitutions, a decentering of the subject, the origin, the *telos*, the *archē*, and so on. In effect, Derrida sees Lévi-Strauss as also engaging in a critique of metaphysics, although like all such critiques, it too must borrow concepts from the tradition that it criticizes (e.g. those of nature and culture). One can, however, rigorously question these concepts and their history, or one can, like Lévi-Strauss, simply treat them, in the manner of the *bricoleur*, as momentarily useful, if not as ontologically valid. The danger with this second approach is that, while claiming to leave philosophy behind, one reintroduces, unknowingly, rather naive philosophemes. The most egregious of the latter concerns the presence of an unsullied, originary "presence." With its infinite play of substitution, structuralism should reject the latter; yet Lévi-Strauss retains a nostalgia for an archaic innocence, and a remorse for lost origins. If one must borrow from metaphysics, Derrida would prefer, to Lévi-Strauss's melancholic science, an affirmative, "gay science."²³

*19. Ricoeur is discussed in detail in the essay by Wayne J. Froman in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 6*.

20. Paul Ricoeur, "Structure and Hermeneutics," in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, 27–61, esp. 30.

21. *Ibid.*

*22. Derrida is discussed in essays by Samir Haddad, Claire Colebrook, Jeffrey T. Nealon, and Rosi Braidotti and Alan Schrift in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 6*.

23. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (trans.) (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), and "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, Alan Bass (trans.) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari contrast the indefinite repetition of static structures in the earlier Lévi-Strauss to the theory in the *Mythologiques* “of primitive codes, and of codings of flows and of organs, that goes beyond the exchangeist conception on all sides.”²⁴ Not only would this latter theory resist all limits, while refusing to be bounded by a notion of reciprocity, but it would suggest that Lévi-Strauss was a poststructuralist in spite of himself, even as *Anti-Oedipus*, as a generative, performative text, would exemplify a contemporary *pensée sauvage*.

Without the encounter of philosophy with Lévi-Strauss (and it was an entirely one-sided encounter), there could never have been the move to *post*-structuralism. And yet there was something “*malencontreux*” about this encounter, because it was often based on a misunderstanding. In retrospect, structuralism appears no more a science than a philosophy. Instead it is better understood as a method, even a heuristics, more applicable to some objects than others, and capable of genuine insights, but not hard truths. Once the turn to poststructuralism had been made, Lévi-Strauss ceased to excite the same interest or controversy among philosophers. This is not to say that, in recent years, there have not been a number of important, philosophically informed studies of his work,²⁵ but the days since his work was seen as holding an incisive challenge to philosophers’ self-understanding are over.

The anthropological legacy of Lévi-Strauss is much more assured, particularly in France. There are no orthodox Lévi-Straussians; but many an anthropologist finds himself employing one aspect of Lévi-Strauss’s thought against another, in an implicitly or explicitly critical fashion. Thus, to provide some of the more salient examples: Françoise Héritier seeks to rewrite Lévi-Strauss in a feminist mode;²⁶ Maurice Godelier questions the *échangiste* basis of society, while positing a theory of the imaginary based on objects that do not circulate;²⁷ Marshall Sahlins, to provide an American example, demonstrates the uses of structuralism for historical analysis through a study of Captain Cook in Hawaii;²⁸ Dan Sperber, while developing a critique of the structuralist method,²⁹ still seeks to uncover the formal mechanisms of the mind, but by drawing on the cognitivist

24. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Robert Hurley *et al.* (trans.) (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 185.

25. Marcel Hénaff, *Claude Lévi-Strauss and the Making of Structural Anthropology* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Christopher Johnson, *Claude Lévi-Strauss: The Formative Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Frédéric Keck, *Claude Lévi-Strauss, une introduction* (Paris: Pocket, 2005).

26. Françoise Héritier, *Masculin/féminin: La Pensée de la différence* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1996).

27. Maurice Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift*, Nora Scott (trans.) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

28. Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

29. Dan Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism*, Alice L. Morton (trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

sciences of a more Anglo-American provenance;³⁰ while Philippe Descola, in an important work, takes up the nature–culture distinction, rejecting the search for the fundamental structures of the human mind, in order to develop a structuralist analysis of four fundamental “ontologies” by which different cultures comprehend their relation to the nonhuman, natural world.³¹ One might say that Lévi-Strauss’s anthropological legacy not only lives, but lives as it were, dialectically. And there is much in this legacy, although it remains much more modest than some of Lévi-Strauss’s more programmatic claims, which can still be of interest to philosophy broadly considered.

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30. Dan Sperber, *Explaining Culture: A Naturalistic Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

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JACQUES LACAN

Ed Pluth

I. BRIEF STATEMENT ON LACAN AND PHILOSOPHY

Jacques Lacan¹ stated in 1964 that psychoanalysis is “governed by a particular aim, which is historically defined by the elaboration of the notion of the subject,” thereby allying psychoanalysis to one of philosophy’s central concerns since modernity.² But by adding that psychoanalysis “poses this notion in a new way, by leading the subject back to his signifying dependence,” Lacan in fact makes the subject into a point of contention between philosophy and psychoanalysis.³ Despite multiple and persistent uses of philosophical concepts in his works, Lacan ultimately holds that something about philosophy renders it constitutively unable to think the dependent and “split” subject that is the focus of psychoanalytic theory and practice.

Philosophy’s failure to think the subject proper to psychoanalytic theory lends it a necessarily illusory or ideological function. This is why Lacan can be thought of as an antiphilosopher, saying once that “Je ne fais aucune philosophie, je m’en méfie au contraire comme de la peste” (I don’t do philosophy at all, I

1. Jacques Lacan (April 13, 1901–September 9, 1981; born and died in Paris) was educated at the Hôpital Sainte-Anne (1927–31) and received a *doctorat d’état* in psychiatry at the Sorbonne (1932). His influences included Freud, Hegel, Heidegger, and Saussure, and he was affiliated with the Société psychanalytique de Paris (1934–40), Société française de psychanalyse (1953–64), and L’École Freudienne de Paris (1964–80).

2. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, Alan Sheridan (trans.) (New York: Norton, 1978), 77.

3. *Ibid.*

avoid it like the plague).⁴ Yet he would not be the first philosophically inclined thinker to take a strongly negative view of philosophy itself: on this point he was in agreement with many twentieth-century philosophers. What is it that makes philosophy constitutively blind to the psychoanalytic insight into the subject? Lacan stated his views on this on numerous occasions. In reply to a question from some philosophy students about his views on consciousness, he stated: “I say that philosophical ‘consciousnesses’ have no other function but to suture the abyss of the subject.”⁵ It is philosophy’s tendency to make consciousness not just a central but an often constitutive feature of human experience that Lacan finds dubious; according to him, it is an attempt to flee from a more fundamental truth about the subject (its opacity to itself) that, he feels, psychoanalytic theory is able to articulate.

It is worth keeping in mind that Lacan’s writings and oral teachings were primarily concerned with training psychoanalysts, and with laying out the theoretical foundations of psychoanalytic practice. They were not trying to chime in on philosophical questions. For a long time even his publications were not read by a philosophical audience. Indeed, they were not widely read outside the relatively small psychoanalytic school under whose auspices they were printed until they were bundled together and republished as the *Écrits* in 1966.

Yet philosophers and key philosophical concepts were of constant and significant help to Lacan in his battle over the Freudian legacy, which he touted as a “return to Freud.”⁶ This return involved purging some of the biologism out of Freud’s theory, in favor of what is, originally at least, a more philosophical approach. Later on, Lacan would affirm Freud’s “scientism” in his own attempt to “mathematize” psychoanalytic theory.⁷ References to philosophers are few and far between in Freud’s works themselves. Freud was no doubt eager to defend the scientific status of his new discipline, and he would have wanted his theory to be as uncorrupted by the metaphysical musings of philosophy as possible. For Lacan, things were quite different. Indeed, the works of philosophers are important supports for him whenever he is trying to work out the details of some concept for which he had not yet developed his own language. For instance, in the initial articulation of his theory of desire, he samples heavily from Hegel and Alexandre Kojève; in some of his initial attempts to express the claim that the

4. Jacques Lacan, “Conférence de presse du docteur Jacques Lacan au Centre culturel français,” in *Lettres de l’École freudienne* 16 (1975), 26.

5. Jacques Lacan, *Autres écrits* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2001), 204.

*6. For a discussion of Freud’s work and its appropriation by philosophers in the twentieth century, see the essay by Adrian Johnston in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 3*.

7. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), 857; translation from *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, Bruce Fink in collaboration with Héroïse Fink and Russell Grigg (trans.) (New York: Norton, 2002).

unconscious is structured as a language, he refers to Heidegger; when addressing the nature of the psychoanalytic cure he would sometimes speak of it in terms of being-towards-death.⁸ A close reading of Plato's *Symposium* is instrumental to Lacan when he is trying to understand the role of the analyst's desire in the psychoanalytic cure, and for clarifying the status of the "object-cause" of desire in psychoanalysis. Yet Lacan used philosophers primarily as mediators only: his view seems to have been that philosophers were sometimes working on issues similar to issues in psychoanalysis, but the latter would ultimately have to develop its own vocabulary because of philosophy's essentially mistaken orientation, positing the primacy of consciousness rather than the primacy of the unconscious.

II. PHENOMENOLOGY, DIALECTICS, AND DESIRE

Lacan's introduction to psychoanalysis in the 1930s required a break from certain aspects of his medical training. He wrote that the psychiatrist Gatian de Clérambault had taught him to pay attention to the "subjective text" of the patients he was treating at St. Anne.⁹ This attention entailed a rejection of an exclusively biological study of the symptoms and psychological problems he was treating, an approach that is evident in Lacan's earliest publications, which were usually coauthored and published in medical journals such as *La Revue neurologique* and *L'Encéphale*.

By the time he wrote his doctoral thesis, this interest in the "subjective text" of his patients became primary. In his study of a patient he called Aimée, who had stabbed a famous actress and was subsequently institutionalized, Lacan argues that the near murder was just as much an attempted suicide, since Aimée was striking at a woman who was her ideal self. With its close attention to the character of Aimée, her identifications and desires, the thesis reads like a psychoanalytic case study without much in the way of psychoanalytic vocabulary. A phenomenological orientation is just as present in this work as a Freudian one, and its writing drew from Karl Jaspers and Edmund Husserl.¹⁰

So initially, phenomenology and psychoanalysis are co-present in Lacan's thought. Yet an increasing interest in language would draw Lacan into other fields. In an essay a few years later, in what he describes as a "phenomenological description of psychoanalytic experience," he claims that language-use is the

8. *Ibid.*, 319–20.

9. *Ibid.*, 65.

10. Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, Barbara Bray (trans.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 49.

central thing about that experience.¹¹ Lacan notes that while much of what is said during an analytic session might not “want to say anything,” the *fact* that the analysand says it takes on an independent importance, he asserts, because in the analysand’s address to the analyst, the latter can discern how what is said is being said from a specific place or point of view. Lacan writes of this as an “intention,” which may consist of a demand, an accusation, a bit of aggression, and so on.¹² This intention, which is something like the position from which a statement is made, may furthermore be operating without the analysand’s conscious knowledge. The use of language in psychoanalysis thus reveals intentions of which the speaker is not aware, intentions that can be read between the lines of what is said, as it were: “intention thus turns out to be unconscious.”¹³

Lacan began his own analysis with Rudolph Loewenstein in 1932, and started to see patients under supervision in 1934. In this very Freudian decade for Lacan, he also began to attend Kojève’s famous seminar on Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*.¹⁴ The influence of Kojève’s reading of Hegel on Lacan is clear in an essay he wrote at the end of the 1930s on the “family complexes,” and in many essays that followed. For example, Lacan’s account of identification in the famous essay on the “mirror stage” from 1936 is informed by dialectics. There, identification is described as a dialectical process in which the infant “assumes” a “specular image,” which is initially other to the infant.¹⁵ In this process the infant takes herself to be the image/other, and is yet alienated by this identification because of the gap that remains, that is, because the infant is still not the image or other in question. Identity therefore is not only relational, and thus alienating (we identify with that which we essentially are not), but also a fragile thing, always threatened with dissolution. Consequently, identity itself is a major cause of aggression.

One other way in which dialectics informs Lacan’s thinking about psychoanalytic theory and practice is found in his theory of desire.¹⁶ Desire is a major concept in Lacan’s work, and its place may fairly be said to owe more to the philosophical tradition than to Freud, for desire is not a major Freudian concept. Lacan’s philosophical resources for the concept come from Kojève’s reading of Hegel too, although Lacan had also been interested in Spinoza’s work as a youth,

11. Lacan, *Écrits*, 82.

12. *Ibid.*, 83.

13. *Ibid.*

*14. Kojève’s Hegel seminar is discussed in the essay by John Russon in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 4*.

15. Lacan, *Écrits*, 94.

*16. For a discussion of various responses to Lacan’s theory of desire, see the essay by Rosi Braidotti and Alan D. Schrift in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 6*.

and was familiar with the philosopher's famous claim that desire is the essence of being human.

Kojève took desire in Hegel to be a desire for recognition by others: the pursuit of recognition of oneself as a free, self-conscious being by other free, self-conscious beings. Yet it also becomes a desire to be desired (thus, a desire "for" the desire of others) as well as a desire for what others desire: thus, desire is essentially intersubjective – it is something in which identities and objects get inexorably mixed up with each other and exchanged. Hence Lacan's fondness for an ambiguous definition such as "le désir, c'est le désir de l'Autre" (desire is the Other's desire), pointing out that the "de" should be understood as both the subjective and objective genitive. Thus, desire is *for* the Other (to be recognized by the Other, for example) and equally so a desire to desire *as* the Other, which entails an identification with the Other's desire – both with what it desires, and how the Other desires.

Since desire seems to involve, essentially, a relation to others, Lacan also found it helpful for shedding light on two crucial aspects of the psychoanalytic cure: the transference and the temporal structure of the cure itself, or its process. In 1951, affirming that "*psychoanalysis is a dialectical experience* and this notion should prevail when raising the question of the nature of transference," he commented on a series of "dialectical reversals" in Freud's case study of Dora.¹⁷ Each reversal (she recognizes her own libidinal investment in her troubles; she sees that she has identified with the one she professed to hate) is accompanied by a further advance on the path of her truth, which is attained with the recognition of her desire. In his seminar, Lacan spoke of the analytic process as a kind of see-saw, involving a series of flips and inversions that are ultimately spiraling toward a kernel, which would be the truth of the subject's desire as a desire for recognition, or as a desire for the Other's desire. At this time, Lacan's general view of the cure in fact is that "the subject should come to recognize and to name his desire."¹⁸

III. THE STRUCTURALIST TURN

The influence of Kojève's reading of Hegel is found not only in the role of dialectics and desire in Lacan's theory but also in his early views on language. Lacan noted the importance of language in Hegel as a source of negation: "thus the

17. Lacan, *Écrits*, 217.

18. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book 2: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis: 1954–1955*, Sylvana Tomaselli (trans.) (New York: Norton, 1988), 228–9.

symbol first manifests itself as the killing of the thing, and this death results in the endless perpetuation of the subject's desire."¹⁹ After the war, Lacan became more and more interested in the composition of language itself and the role that its structure plays in making us into the "speaking beings" we are. He would call language the "cause of the subject" in an essay from 1960.²⁰

His reflections on language led him to develop the famous thesis that the unconscious itself is "structured like a language."²¹ This claim should not be taken to mean that the unconscious *is* language, or that language is unconscious, or that the structure of the unconscious is identical to that of a linguistic structure. Rather, it means that there is an unconscious because there is language, because we are beings on to whom language is grafted, as it were. And furthermore, the way that the unconscious works – its creations of dreams, puns, fantasies, slips of the tongue, parapraxes, and so on – is due to the structure of language itself; in particular, by what Lacan finds to be the primary meaning-generating operations in language – metaphor and metonymy.

For Ferdinand de Saussure, from whose work Lacan draws, the basic linguistic unit was the "sign," conceived as a unity of a signifier (a sound-pattern) and a signified (the concept, roughly). The two together would make up the sign's meaning. Distinct from this, and more important, is a sign's value. It is the sign's difference from and relation to other signs that gives a sign its value. Thus, a sign's value cannot be discerned without an awareness of the overall linguistic system in which it is placed. *Meaning*, according to Saussure, is a function of the intrinsic link between a signifier and a signified; *value* is a function of the sign's overall position in a linguistic system.

Lacan gives differentiation an even more important status in language than Saussure does by giving the signifier priority over the signified, such that it is only by being linked up with other signifiers (in a signifying chain) that any particular signifier is able to take on something that should rightly be called not a signified but only a meaning- or signified-*effect*. Thus, Lacan severs the unity posited in the Saussurean sign. Borrowing from a study by Roman Jakobson, Lacan's name for the basic way in which the essentially elusive signified-effect is generated is metonymy, a figure of speech in which a part of something is used to refer to the whole. This mirrors the structure of any signifying chain, since it is never the case that we really "have" the whole chain before us, but only parts at any given time. Lacan argues that desire's very structure is metonymic too,

19. Lacan, *Écrits*, 319.

20. *Ibid.*, 830.

21. Lacan, *Autres écrits*, 333.

making it the case that the object of desire remains structurally out of reach. Consequently, desire ends up always being a “*desire for something else*.”²²

The other primary linguistic operation is metaphor, which differs from metonymy primarily by generating a signifier that acts a bit more like a classical Saussurean sign. Although signified and signifier are still not really knit together by it – indeed, a signified is always just another signifier – metaphor makes it seem as if this happens. This way, Lacan highlights the enigmatic status metaphors can have, working to convince us that there is a precise signified somehow contained in the metaphor, even though it is ungraspable (whence also the inexhaustibility of interpretation). He associates metaphor not with the creation of desire but with the creation of the subject-effect itself and the process of identification.

Lacan’s early views on identification were shaped by dialectics and phenomenology. Now a linguistic operation, metaphor, becomes the model for thinking about identification. This affects his understanding of the Oedipus complex and other basics about Freudian theory. For Lacan, then, not only is the unconscious structured like a language, but the formative stages and complexes posited by Freudian theory seem to be as well.

Crucial for the resolution of the Oedipal conflict, Lacan felt, is the role of the symbolic father, or the “name of the father.” This name or function substitutes for the child’s early relation to the mother’s desire in what Lacan calls the “paternal metaphor,” a metaphor that generates as an enigmatic signified-effect the phallus.²³ In Lacan’s account, the phallus is primarily a symbolic function, but there is also an imaginary version of it insofar as it is taken to be an object lost owing to castration, or an object of which one is deprived. The (symbolic) phallus turns out to be the signifier of the signified of the mother’s desire; in other words, it is the stand-in, the answer, as it were, to the child’s wondering about what the mother desires. This is different from an imagined object (the imaginary phallus), and of course different from a real object (the penis) too.

IV. THEORY OF THE SUBJECT

Lacan’s thesis that the unconscious is structured like a language also implies that the unconscious is autonomous and machine-like. This shapes quite strongly his view of the subject. The subject of psychoanalysis is seen by Lacan as an effect or product of the circulation of signifiers. Lacan wrote that game theory should therefore be of interest to analysts, since it “takes advantage of the thoroughly

22. Lacan, *Écrits*, 518.

23. *Ibid.*, 557.

calculable character of a subject strictly reduced to the formula for a matrix of signifying combinations.”²⁴ This “calculable” subject “must be as rigorously distinguished from the biological individual as from any psychological evolution subsumable under the subject of understanding.”²⁵ In other words, this subject is not the subject of philosophy, if that is understood to mean a conscious, autonomous agent. Lacan calls his subject the “subject of science”: a subject stripped of qualities, yet one that, despite its opposition to the philosophical subject, is still rooted in a Cartesian insight.

Indeed, Lacan expresses his ultimate understanding of the subject through a series of revisions of the formula for the Cartesian cogito. Early in his career, Lacan announced the need for a return to Descartes.²⁶ But this should not be misunderstood: the return consisted of a very unorthodox reading of Descartes, in which the cogito is stripped down to its bare minimum. This “subject of science” is not the constituting subject of idealism or phenomenology but a subject without qualities – the subject able to do nothing more than assert that it is thinking “therefore I am”: “in the test of writing *I am thinking: ‘therefore I am,’* with quotes around the second clause, it is legible that thought only grounds being by knotting itself in speech where every operation goes right to the essence of language.”²⁷ In other words, this revision of the Cartesian cogito makes the assertion of being by thought into simply a “thought of being.”

But what does the Lacanian subject have to do with thinking anyway, if it is not the subject of consciousness? In an early revision of the “*cogito ergo sum*,” Lacan wrote “I am thinking where I am not, therefore I am where I am not thinking,” and “I am not, where I am the plaything of my thought; I think about what I am where I do not think I am thinking.”²⁸ The point of these rewrites is to register the effects of what Lacan takes to be one of Freud’s basic claims about the unconscious: that it thinks. Thus, there is a thinking (in or of the unconscious) in which, or with respect to which, the I of consciousness does not situate or find itself. For Lacan, it should be clear, something crucial about our being is in the unconscious: it is the site of our most fundamental desires, identifications, fantasies, enjoyments, and so on, and since there is something like thinking that goes on there, it is also the case that we “think about what we are” there in the unconscious where we “do not think we are thinking.”

With these revisions, Lacan can contrast his theory of the subject not only to the Cartesian cogito but to Hegelian philosophy as well. On this view, any theory that posits a subject transparent to itself, whether in fact or as a goal,

24. *Ibid.*, 860.

25. *Ibid.*, 875.

26. *Ibid.*, 163.

27. *Ibid.*, 864–5.

28. *Ibid.*, 517.

becomes suspect: “The promotion of consciousness as essential to the subject in the historical aftermath of the Cartesian cogito is indicative, to my mind, of a misleading emphasis on the transparency of the *I* in action at the expense of the opacity of the signifier that determines it.”²⁹ As Lacan said in 1964, leading the subject back to its “signifying dependence” is at the root of the difference between a philosophical approach to the subject and a psychoanalytic one. The subject dependent on signifiers, caused by signifiers, is opaque to itself, and is not leading the charge as far as psychic organization goes. Thus, the Lacanian subject is properly seen as a split subject, as the gap or difference between these two ways of thinking about the unconscious and consciousness.

V. THE REAL, SEXUALITY, GENDER

Yet this is just one way to address how the subject is split. To put it briefly, this first way of discussing it posits the split subject as the aftermath of the inscription of the symbolic (which is not just language but also what Claude Lévi-Strauss had in mind with social structures) on the human individual, which renders us opaque to ourselves. But there is another way to express the split, and this is equally due to symbolic inscription or insertion, yet it involves what one would assume is important to any psychoanalytic orientation: the real and sexuality.

It is common to periodize Lacan’s work according to the three basic categories – the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real – that he uses to understand symptoms and many other things about psychic life. It is oversimplified to describe his work this way, but in some sense the early Lacan focused on the imaginary, the middle on the symbolic, and the late on the real. He first articulated these three terms and their interrelations in a paper given in 1953, right at the beginning of his seminar project. These terms can also be used as an easy way to think about the differing philosophical orientations Lacan had throughout his career, with the imaginary corresponding to his phenomenological period, the symbolic to his structuralist period, and the real corresponding to a period whose name is perhaps yet to be determined (poststructuralist would not be quite right for it, not least because it is not a term Lacan ever used for his thinking).

The imaginary in Lacanian theory should not be understood as a reference to imagination. Rather, it refers to images and their influence on consciousness and perception. The imaginary tinges psychic life with a kind of transitivity, a blurring of the boundaries between self and other. Yet it is also in the imaginary that others are seen as rivals as well as others with whom we identify. The symbolic,

29. *Ibid.*, 809.

by contrast, is obviously affiliated with language, but also social structures and institutions. It tends to have more dialectical and individuating connotations.

Lacan's thinking about sexuality is found in his discussions of a notion that ultimately prevents his theory from being characterized as a kind of linguistic idealism: the real. As a general heading under which a variety of different concepts can be placed – such as the Thing, the drive, *jouissance* (which is not simply enjoyment and pleasure, but more like a displeasurable pleasure or a pleasurable displeasure) – the real marks an insistent, obtrusive element in psychic structure. The real is something like what is left over from symbolic inscription, yet it too is modified by and influenced by language. For this reason, some commentators have argued for a distinction between the real that precedes language and the real that persists after the onset of language, as an “insistence” and as an impasse in and for signifiers.

One of Lacan's early forays into this dimension is found in a discussion of what he called “the Thing.” The Thing is described as the “first outside” and as the “absolute Other of the subject.”³⁰ It becomes the object pursued by desire, and yet it is not exactly a lost object: “although it is essentially a question of finding it again, the object indeed has never been lost.”³¹ It is not exactly a lost object because of the structural place it possesses in the psyche. Lacan spoke of the “intimate exteriority or ‘extimacy,’ that is the Thing,” an extimacy he initially thought of along the lines of a vacuole in cellular biology: an empty space, originally part of the outside, that is included in the structure.³² Lacan continues to work with this idea in subsequent seminars, through more complicated figures such as tori, cross-caps, Klein bottles, and Möbius strips, and even the empty set in set theory. All of these are intended to model a psychic structure in which inside and outside are mutually implicated in each other, which is supposed to reflect the way in which the real itself is included/excluded in psychic organization.

Understanding the strange status of the real in psychic structure is critical for understanding the nature of the drives and sexuality in Lacanian theory. Lacan hypothesizes that the earliest experiences with sexuality are traumatic, in large part, because of their resistance to or otherness to symbolization. It is interesting to note that according to Lacan there is no subject of *jouissance* (which is arguably a sexual satisfaction). It is an “acephalic” enjoyment, which can be understood in a few different senses. For one thing, there is no consciousness involved in it; but for another thing, it is something that is not “subjectified” – the subject does not come to be there where *jouissance* is. Nevertheless, symbolic repair

30. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book 7: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, Dennis Porter (trans.) (New York: Norton, 1992), 52.

31. *Ibid.*, 58.

32. *Ibid.*, 139.

work is needed with respect to it, and this occurs in a variety of ways, such as the development of a “fundamental fantasy” and also in the form of sexualization. What this will mean is that sexual difference itself is an attempt to, roughly, make sense of the impasse that sexuality itself represents for psychic structure.

On the topic of gender (often called sexualization by Lacanian theorists), Lacan is a nonessentialist. Masculine and feminine subject-positions are independent of biology. They are defined by their relation to the phallus, which, again, is symbolic and not real. The masculine subject-position identifies with possession of the phallic signifier: having, rather than being, the phallus.³³ This position is also defined by what Lacan calls a “phallic *jouissance*,” a *jouissance* focused on the sexual organ: again, this is a subject-position that may obtain for both males and females.³⁴ The feminine subject-position relates not only to the phallus as a signifier (identifying with “being” it rather than “having” it) but also to what Lacan writes as the signifier for the Other’s desire. This double relationship opens up for the feminine subject a dimension of *jouissance* that is not phallic. Lacan calls this a “feminine” or “Other” *jouissance*. Consequently, Lacan calls woman “not all,” in the sense that “not all” of her enjoyment is phallic; there is, additionally, an enjoyment that involves a different relation to language and the symbolic in general.

VI. MODELS OF THE CURE

Lacan’s early discussions of the cure portray it in Heideggerian and Hegelian terms as much as Freudian ones: either as a confrontation of the individual with his or her being-toward-death or as a recognition or realization of desire; finding oneself in an identification that was disavowed, or in a desire that was not acknowledged. In the early 1960s, after his initial arguments for the primacy of the signifier for psychic structure had been worked out, Lacan’s view of the cure starts to change. In a discussion of Sophocles’s *Antigone* that has been widely commented on, Lacan argued that Antigone remains a figure of fascination for audiences because of her status “between two deaths,” her impending real death and her “symbolic” death (in the sense that she is condemned and as if were symbolically excluded from the community, and not yet really dead). The appeal of her persistence in her desire to bury her brother despite Creon’s orders not to gets Lacan thinking about desire, transgression, betrayal, guilt, and their roles in the cure. A slogan from the end of this seminar has been taken by many

33. Lacan, *Écrits*, 693.

34. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge. Book 20: Encore: 1972–1973*, Bruce Fink (trans.) (New York: Norton, 1998), 7.

commentators to be an adequate expression of Lacan's ethic at this time: do not cede on your desire. Yet it is questionable whether this was meant to express the ethic of psychoanalysis and the goal of the cure. Lacan claims rather that the feeling of guilt, so common in neurotics, is connected to having ceded on desire. Antigone is fascinating then precisely because she is someone who has not ceded on her desire (to bury her brother, and/or to remain faithful to her family's curse), thus making her into an attractive figure of transgression, and hence an ideal to neurotics.

For this reason, her position is not necessarily the position to be attained at the end of analysis. Lacan finds that another model for the ethic of the cure (for neurosis anyway) is found in a series of plays by Paul Claudel (1868–1955) called the Coûfontaine trilogy, which tracks the history of an aristocratic family in the aftermath of the French Revolution. The initial character, Sygne, clearly does give way on her desire, by marrying the man who destroyed her family. The symbolic burden of this sacrifice is not resolved until we meet her granddaughter Pensée de Coûfontaine, whom Lacan speaks of as a “thought of desire.”³⁵ Blind, and apparently an object-cause of desire for many, she has identified with lack and loss, and in this manner provides a model for the end of the psychoanalytic cure.

A later view of the cure that has had an influence on philosophers, especially in ethical, social, and political theory, is Lacan's articulation of the psychoanalytic act in the mid-1960s. If the subject's relative determination by signifiers is understood in terms of the fundamental fantasy – a basic orientation or grid that structures relations to others, objects, and enjoyment itself – then the psychoanalytic cure could be thought of as the progressive uncovering of the fantasy, leading the analysand to the point where a choice can be made with respect to it: perhaps an identification with the fantasy, or a “traversing” of the fantasy in what Lacan calls the psychoanalytic act. This notion has been attractive to scholars in ethics and political philosophy because of its resemblance to the topic of authenticity in existential philosophy, and also because of its proximity to ideology critique, according to which the act resembles a classic revolutionary gesture.

VII. LACAN AND PHILOSOPHY

References to philosophers are widespread in Lacan's seminars and writings, and the following discussion is inevitably incomplete. Lacan's references to Pascal's wager are a regrettable absence. Major discussions of Plato's *Symposium* in his

35. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre VIII: Le Transfert (1960–61)*, Jacques-Alain Miller (ed.) (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1991), 364.

eighth seminar and Aristotle's ethics in his twentieth are also noteworthy for philosophers, but omitted here. The following will focus only on Lacan's relations to Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty.³⁶

In 1956, Lacan translated the first part of Heidegger's "Logos" essay and published it in his school's journal. Heidegger's text is about the famous Greek concept, which could be taken to refer to language or "the word," yet Heidegger reads it in such a way that it means letting beings be as they are: a rephrasing of the famous phenomenological principle "to the things themselves!" Heidegger's essay also discusses listening, and this might account for Lacan's interest in publishing it for analysts in training: listening is, of course, something an analyst is expected to do well. Here, the lesson to be gained from Heidegger's text would be learning to listen to the text of the analysand's speech, or letting that text speak itself without presumptuous interpretations, prejudices, and so on.

Considering this translation, as well as Lacan's modeling of the cure as a realization of being-toward-death in his 1953 Rome Discourse, and scattered, passing references to Heidegger's idea that humanity inhabits language, rather than vice versa, it would seem that Heidegger was a major influence on Lacan. Lacan even visited Heidegger, accompanied by Jean Beaufret (1907–82), in 1955, and invited Heidegger to stay at his country house during the 1955 Cerisy conference on Heidegger that Beaufret and Kostas Axelos (1924–2010) had organized.³⁷ But apart from what seems to have been a genuine respect for the philosopher, there does not seem to have been much in the way of real influence. Once Lacan had developed a vocabulary of his own for the expression of his key concepts, he no longer couched them in Heideggerian terms. Thus, in retrospect, Lacan's use of Heideggerian terminology was perhaps simply *faute de mieux*. He did make several references to Heidegger's view of truth as *alētheia*, which informs his own view that truth can only ever be "half-said." Yet this is arguably also a Hegelian or Freudian insight.

Lacan's references to Sartre are usually unflattering, yet there seems to have been something more of an influence in this case, albeit of a negative kind. Sartre's notion of a subject transparent to itself (for Sartre, consciousness was always also self-consciousness) was antithetical to Lacan's orientation, and many of Lacan's statements about the subject of psychoanalysis are articulated on purpose as strong contrasts to what Sartre posits. It would seem that Sartre represents for Lacan the pinnacle of the basic philosophical error about the subject. Also, Sartre's vigorous defense of freedom was held up for ridicule by Lacan. He

*36. Heidegger is discussed in essays in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volumes 3 and 4*; Sartre and Merleau-Ponty are discussed in essays in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 4*.

37. Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, 226.

wrote that “I am not one of those recent philosophers for whom confinement within four walls merely helps us attain the ultimate in human freedom.”³⁸ And in 1956 he linked the “discourse of freedom” – probably thinking of Sartrean existentialism – to delusion.³⁹ However, Lacan did find Sartre’s discussion of the gaze helpful for setting up his own theory of the gaze as one mode of “object *a*” in his eleventh seminar.⁴⁰

After the publication of the *Écrits*, Lacan would be asked in interviews about his relation to Sartre, and he was usually vexed by this question, protesting that there was no relation. Sartre had been critical of what he called Lacan’s “decentering” of the subject, and raised concerns about the possibly ahistorical theory Lacan was developing, a concern Sartre had about structuralism in general. Lacan in turn pointed out that “Sartre’s entire philosophy wants the subject and consciousness to be indissolubly linked. Well, in Freud this connection is broken.”⁴¹

Lacan was generally less critical of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy than of Sartre’s, finding more room for the unconscious in it. A rather detailed discussion of Merleau-Ponty’s late texts “Eye and Mind” and *The Visible and the Invisible* is found in Lacan’s eleventh seminar. Lacan also wrote an essay on Merleau-Ponty for publication in a special issue of *Les Temps modernes*. It seems that Lacan, while appreciative of Merleau-Ponty’s more nuanced view of consciousness, still found him to be essentially a philosopher, which again for Lacan means someone for whom consciousness was still too central, someone who was inclined to underplay the primacy of the signifier in psychic life.⁴²

Lacan’s influence on the major philosophers of his own generation was negligible. Merleau-Ponty refers to Lacan’s work on the mirror stage in his essay “The Child’s Relations with Others” from 1960, and to Lacan’s notion of the unconscious being structured like a language in *The Visible and the Invisible*.⁴³ Jean Hyppolite (1907–68) attended Lacan’s early seminars and found much interest in Lacan’s fusion of Freud and Hegel, but seems otherwise not to have been strongly influenced by Lacan’s work. Neither Sartre nor Heidegger seems to have read anything by Lacan at all.

38. Lacan, *Écrits*, 199.

39. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book 3: The Psychoses: 1955–1956*, Russell Grigg (trans.) (New York: Norton, 1993), 145.

40. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 84.

41. Interview, *Le Figaro Littéraire* (December 29, 1966).

42. Lacan, *Autres écrits*, 175–84.

43. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Alphonso Lingis (trans.) (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 126.

The situation is slightly different for philosophers who emerged in the 1960s.⁴⁴ In an essay called “Freud and Lacan” from 1964, Louis Althusser was drawn to Lacan’s promotion of psychoanalysis as a “science of the unconscious” rather than a hermeneutics.⁴⁵ The return to Freud by Lacan was also taken by Althusser to be much like his own return to Marx: a return, as he puts it, to the “maturity” of the thinker apart from early influences. Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) attended Lacan’s seminars for several years, although he later professed that he did not get much out of them. When his *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* was published, Lacan was dismayed to find that his work did not receive more attention in it.⁴⁶

Gilles Deleuze (1925–95) credits Lacan in *Difference and Repetition* for providing a helpful way of thinking about the distinction Deleuze was making between real objects and virtual objects.⁴⁷ In *Logic of Sense*, there is a similar discussion of Lacan’s work, referring this time to something Deleuze calls “Lacan’s paradox,” in which it is possible for an object to “lack in its place.”⁴⁸ According to Deleuze this means “the paradoxical entity is never where we look for it, and conversely ... we never find it where it is.”⁴⁹ Of course, Deleuze would later be rather critical of psychoanalysis in general, and even though Lacan is still extended some credit in *Anti-Oedipus* for having “saved psychoanalysis from the frenzied oedipalization to which it was linking its fate,” Lacan’s frequently unnamed “disciples” are strongly criticized.⁵⁰ In what is often thought to be a very anti-Lacanian text, it is even said there that “it is certain that he [Lacan] does not enclose the unconscious in an Oedipal structure.”⁵¹ And in fact Lacan “was the first ... to schizophrenize the analytic field.”⁵² Michel Foucault (1926–84) attended a few sessions of Lacan’s seminar in 1966 after the publication of *Les Mots et les choses* (translated as *The Order of Things*). Lacan had taken up his own study of the painting by Velazquez, *Las Meninas*, at the time and was giving his own spin on it, inspired by Foucault’s discussion.

*44. For discussions of the work of the French philosophers mentioned in the following paragraphs, see the essays in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 6*.

45. Louis Althusser, *Écrits sur la psychanalyse: Freud et Lacan* (Paris: Stock/IMEC, 1993), 46.

46. Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, 324.

47. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, Paul Patton (trans.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 102.

48. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, Constantin Boundas (ed.), Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (trans.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 40.

49. *Ibid.*

50. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Robert Hurley et al. (trans.) (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 217.

51. *Ibid.*, 310.

52. *Ibid.*, 363.

Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) read Lacan as something of a linguistic idealist, and as more of a philosopher than Lacan ever saw himself. Lacan’s discussions of “full speech,” truth, and the phallus as a transcendental signifier (Derrida’s way of describing it) placed him, according to Derrida, within the philosophical tradition of presentism and logocentrism. Derrida made these points in an interview published in *Positions* and in a reading of Lacan’s seminar on Poe’s “Purloined Letter.”⁵³ In 1990, Derrida delivered a text on Lacan for a conference on “Lacan avec les philosophes,” in which he reiterates his concerns that Lacanian psychoanalysis is itself too philosophical and even “neo-existentialist.”⁵⁴

Luce Irigaray’s (1930–) discussions of Lacanian psychoanalysis in such works as *This Sex Which is Not One* and *Speculum of the Other Woman* are concerned with the adequacy of Lacan’s attention to sexual difference, especially in Lacan’s claims about the status of feminine *jouissance* and women in general. Irigaray finds Lacan’s discussions of feminine sexuality rather patronizing in her “Così Fan Tutti,” especially for positing her enjoyment as unspeakable and inscrutable.⁵⁵ Her project of uncovering a language specific for each gender is nevertheless heavily influenced by Lacanian theory. Julia Kristeva’s (1941–) work is also very significantly informed by Lacanian theory. She has questioned Lacan’s emphasis on the symbolic over what she calls the semiotic, and his neglect of the importance of the pre-Oedipal stages.

When his seminar started to be held at the École Normale Supérieure, Lacan found a different audience, and his impact on intellectual life in Paris became much greater. A group of students, many of whom were contributors to the journal *Cahiers pour l’analyse*, took Lacan’s work in a different direction, linking it to ideas in set theory and Marxism. Thinkers such as Alain Badiou (1937–), Jacques-Alain Miller (1944–), and Jean-Claude Milner (1941–), whose works would not strongly influence anglophone readings of Lacan until the 1980s, were members of this group.⁵⁶

Lacan travelled to the UK after the war, visiting a clinic run by Wilfred Bion (1897–1979), which inspired him to write a paper on groups.⁵⁷ But his influence on intellectual life in anglophone countries really began in the 1970s, with

53. Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card*, Alan Bass (trans.) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), and *Positions*, Alan Bass (trans.) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 107–13 n.44.

54. Jacques Derrida, *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, Peggy Kamuf et al. (trans.) (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 56.

55. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (trans.) (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 97.

*56. For a discussion of these and other thinkers associated with *Cahiers pour l’analyse*, see the essay by Patrice Maniglier in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 7*.

57. Lacan, *Autres écrits*, 101–20.

some of the first studies of his works coming from literary and film theorists and continental philosophers. Early translations of Lacan's works focused on selections from the *Écrits*, a few selections from Seminar XX and other later seminars, and Seminar XI. Lacan made two trips to the US. He was invited to speak at a conference on structuralism at Johns Hopkins University in 1966, and he spoke at Yale University and Columbia University in 1975. With the ethical turn that much of continental philosophy took in the 1980s and 1990s,⁵⁸ Lacan's reading of Antigone, and related topics on desire and identity, were influential. In the 1990s, readings of Lacan emerged that began to take note of the centrality of clinical experience for his theory. Departing somewhat from the early emphasis on Lacan's readings of literary texts, his accounts of gender also received closer study, and his work began to be appropriated into social and political theory, for example by Slavoj Žižek (1949–) and Ernesto Laclau (1935–).

Lacan's work has a strange status for philosophers. It attracts philosophical inquiry because of the presence of obviously philosophical themes in it, yet it also repels such inquiry because of its completely nonphilosophical and nonacademic goals, which are to develop a doctrine for the training of psychoanalysts and models for the psychoanalytic cure. From a philosophical perspective, it is also hard to discern whether his work offers, on the one hand, a very flexible and inventive set of concepts that gives a unique and important perspective on contemporary psychic life, or whether, on the other hand, it is a more rigid system, pigeonholing the multiplicity of human life into strict types (neurotic, psychotic, perverse) in very simplistic, reductive terms (real, symbolic, imaginary). In addition, the potentially universalizing and ahistorical aspects of the theory may seem to render it insensitive to cultural and historical differences, unless the formalism of the theory is precisely its strength, allowing it to be applicable to a variety of contexts. It is fair to say that there may turn out to be something reminiscent of Hegel about Lacan's status and legacy for philosophers (Badiou has even called Lacan "our Hegel"), at least in the following sense: just as readings of Hegel's work are still divergent (is it an atheistic philosophy or not, for example), the status of Lacan's work will probably be similarly up in the air for some time to come. Aspects of Lacanian theory have already proved useful to philosophers of different stripes. The precise challenge Lacan thought psychoanalysis presents to philosophy – namely, its alternative theory of the subject, one whose status would have to fall outside the legacy of philosophical idealism – is still to be thought through.

*58. For a discussion of this ethical turn, see the essay by Robert Eaglestone in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 7*.

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LATE PRAGMATISM, LOGICAL POSITIVISM, AND THEIR AFTERMATH

David Ingram

Developments in Anglo-American philosophy during the first half of the twentieth century closely tracked developments that were occurring in continental philosophy during this period. This should not surprise us. Aside from the fertile communication between these ostensibly separate traditions, both were responding to problems associated with the rise of mass society. Rabid nationalism, corporate statism, and totalitarianism (Left and Right) posed a profound challenge to the idealistic rationalism of neo-Kantian and neo-Hegelian philosophies. The decline of the individual – classically conceived by the eighteenth-century Enlightenment as a self-determining agent – provoked strong reactions. While some philosophical tendencies sought to reconceive the relationship between individual, society, and nature in more organic ways that radically departed from the subjectivism associated with classical Cartesianism, other tendencies sought to do just the opposite. This is one way of putting the difference between the two major movements within Anglo-American philosophy that I shall be discussing in this essay.

American pragmatism, which achieved the pinnacle of its popularity prior to 1940, traces its lineage back to empiricism as well as German idealism. With the exception of William James, who is best known for his defense of radical empiricism, the other two important twentieth-century pragmatists, John Dewey (1859–1952) and George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), embraced a post-metaphysical version of Hegelian dialectics that was starkly antithetical to both Cartesian rationalism and atomistic empiricism. By contrast, logical positivism, which maintained a lively hold on Anglo-American thought as late as the 1960s, reacted against Hegelian philosophy in all its forms, and accordingly resurrected both the Cartesian method of conceptual (logical) analysis as well as its atomistic ontology.

In this respect, positivism is closer in spirit to Husserlian phenomenology and French structuralism, while pragmatism is closer in spirit to Heideggerian existentialism and its French progeny (the outstanding exception being Sartre's early Cartesian existentialism). As a general rule, the pragmatists' embrace of methodological holism served as counterpoint to the positivists' endorsement of methodological individualism. However, in contrast to their continental counterparts, pragmatists and positivists shared the naturalistic approach to philosophical explanation that had been the hallmark of Anglo-American philosophy since Francis Bacon.

I. PRAGMATISM

In order to understand the complex relationship between Anglo-American philosophy and continental philosophy during the interwar years, we would need to trace the genealogy of logical positivism and American pragmatism back to their late-nineteenth-century continental antecedents. This dimension has been so thoroughly explored by others that little need be said here about this fascinating chapter in Western philosophy.¹ Aside from some notable exceptions – such as Husserl's positive reaction to some of William James's earlier ideas concerning experiential psychology (including James's notion of an experiential "fringe," which Husserl credits as a precursor to his own notion of "horizon") – the reception of American pragmatism by English, German, and French philosophy in the early decades of the twentieth century was clouded by a prejudicial misunderstanding that was partly abetted by the very philosopher who gave this movement its name. The German translation of James's *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907) by Wilhelm Jerusalem in 1908 catapulted pragmatism into the central topic of discussion at the World Philosophical Congress held at Heidelberg that very same year. James's assertion in that book that "the true ... is only the expedient in the way of our thinking"² – led many of his German contemporaries to dismiss this "new fad in philosophy ... from the land of the dollar" as (in the words of one critic) a degradation of "the truth to the level of expediency, just as in days gone by, a similar way of thinking was imported to us from the land of shopkeepers [i.e. Britain] preaching the reduction of morality to utility."³ The crassest misrepresentations

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1. See Hans Joas, *Pragmatism and Social Theory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
 2. William James, *Pragmatism and Four Essays from the Meaning of Truth*, R. B. Perry (ed.) (New York: Meridian Books, 1969), 222.
 3. Constantin Gutberlet, "Der Pragmatismus," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 21 (1908), 437, 445, quoted in Joas, *Pragmatism and Social Theory*, 98.

of pragmatism spawned by this untimely reception have been the subject of a withering critique by Hans Joas. These include the view that pragmatism

reduces truth to utility;
 endorses Cartesian subjectivism; and
 represents a mishmash of Ernst Mach's empirico-criticism, Friedrich Nietzsche's perspectivalism and will to power, and German *Lebensphilosophie*.⁴

These misconceptions about pragmatism continued to inform German philosophy for the next four decades, as can be seen from Max Scheler's and Max Horkheimer's unsympathetic comments.⁵ Strikingly absent from this reception is any mention of the profound impact of Charles Sanders Peirce on James's thought.⁶ Indeed, Peirce's signal contribution to the social philosophies of James's most prominent successors in the pragmatist tradition (most notably Mead and Dewey) consists in his anti-Cartesian, antiphenomenalist linkage of meaning and knowledge to *action*. More precisely, it was Peirce's genetic linkage of *instrumental* action undertaken by a *single* intelligent being to *social* action undertaken by a *community of knowers* that would later inspire the progressive politics of Mead and Dewey. So central to the thought of Mead and Dewey (and, to a lesser extent, Karl Popper) is this linkage of reflective natural adaptation and social community that it would later ground their view that *free and fully inclusive democracy* is central to the full development of the kind of creative intelligence that is so necessary for *progressive* problem-solving of any kind.

Peirce expressly derived his notion of "pragmaticism" from Kant's use of *pragmatisch* in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (II, ch. 2, sec. 3) and the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (sec. II), where Kant equates it with *instrumental* (*prudential*) *action* guided by hypothetical (conditional) rules, in contrast with

4. Joas, *Pragmatism and Social Theory*, 99.

5. In his book "Erkenntnis und Arbeit" (1926), Scheler reduced pragmatism to a "knowledge of productivity," which he distinguishes from a knowledge of culture (*Bildungswissen*) and a knowledge of redemption (*Erlösungswissen*). More tellingly, he equated this knowledge of productivity with a "knowledge of domination" that in his mind was largely indistinguishable from the kind of narrow instrumentalism that characterized positivism. Scheler's interpretation of pragmatism served as the dominant reference point for Horkheimer's dismissive treatment of Dewey's philosophy in *Eclipse of Reason*, written almost twenty years later. Although Horkheimer takes note of the "many schools of thought" that have criticized pragmatism, he himself cites only Hugo Münsterberg's *Philosophie der Werte* and Scheler's "Erkenntnis und Arbeit," in Scheler's *Die Wissenformen und die Gesellschaft* (Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1947], 42).

*6. For further discussion of Peirce, see the essay by Douglas R. Anderson in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 2*.

moral (practical) action guided by categorical (unconditional) imperatives. Peirce himself was mainly interested in showing how the *meanings* of many if not most general ideas (or *signs*) could be interpreted in terms of general (counterfactual) *conditionals*. Such conditionals prescribe the performance of an indefinite number of instrumental (experimental) actions that achieve definite consequences. Thus, the meaning of “this diamond is hard” would be explicable by a statement of the sort “If one *were* to scratch, illuminate, etc., this substance, then consequences such as failure to scratch, darken, etc. *would* occur.”

Especially important for later pragmatists is the way in which Peirce connects this account of meaning to an account of knowledge, truth, and logical probability. According to Peirce, the meanings of our words are constant because they signify *fixed beliefs*. These beliefs are acquired and confirmed in experimental situations in which the outcomes are at best statistically probable but not absolutely certain. Probability, in turn, designates a relative frequency, the average deviation from which diminishes in proportion to the number of trials. The upshot is that the constancy of a sign’s meaning is also relative to experimentally confirmed statistical frequencies produced over time. Indeed, so is truth. For on Peirce’s account, it is the experimental method – not tenacity, authority, or a *priori* reasoning – that enables us to approximate a *lasting consensus* in the fixation of belief and thereby eliminate deviations that produce doubt. More importantly, it is the experimental method as applied by an indefinite *ideal community* of inquirers that gradually enables us to approximate (if not reach) a true and lasting consensus over time regarding all of our beliefs, moral as well as cognitive.

Peirce’s insights regarding knowledge and meaning proved seminal for Dewey and Mead. Dewey began his career as a Hegelian. During the period from 1890 to 1900, his embrace of Hegelian idealism, with its notion of conceptual holism and conceptual dialectic (or development) traversing stages of contradiction (analytic opposition and distinction) and resolution (synthetic unification and identification), underwent a profound naturalistic transformation. Under the influence of Darwin’s theory of evolution, Dewey translated this dialectic into the idiom of biological organism and growth as a progressive process of environmental adaptation and change. His deeper exposure to Peirce’s and James’s pragmatism around the turn of the century added a third element to this equation: *instrumentalism* (or “experimental idealism” as he then formulated it). As we shall see, Dewey’s instrumentalism bears a striking resemblance to certain aspects of Martin Heidegger’s existential phenomenology in its emphasis on the holistic and situational nature of human understanding (or *inquiry*, as Dewey dubbed it). For Dewey, human understanding involves an embodied attunement to an environment that is already meaningful (circumscribed by language and community) but never determinately so, thereby calling forth an ongoing

process of active interpretation (*reconstruction*) in light of new questions, new problems, and new possibilities.

While Dewey was interested in working out the implications of instrumentalism for a theory of democracy and education, Mead was chiefly preoccupied with applying Peirce's anti-Cartesian insights about the communal genesis of knowledge and meaning to the new fields of developmental and social psychology. As with Dewey's pragmatism, Mead's *symbolic interactionism*, which he also called *social behaviorism*, owes a great deal to Hegel's dialectical philosophy, especially its account of self-certainty, conceived as a process of acquiring recognition from (internalizing the viewpoint of) another. For Mead, one becomes a full self – an “I” who as *subject* can reflectively relate to itself as *object*, or “me” – only in the course of proceeding through progressive stages of social and *symbolic interaction*. As socialization proceeds, so does individuation. Ultimately, the capacity of the self to internalize the impersonal and abstract linguistic perspectives of first-, second- and third-person – signified by the human community (or *generalized other*) – enables the self to critically free itself from the particular social roles constitutive of itself as a nexus of social habits (or “me”), thereby enabling it to become a uniquely creative inventor of its own values and beliefs – in short, of its own identity as an “I.”

II. GEORGE HERBERT MEAD

Mead's⁷ entire career was informed by the Hegelian insight that “the whole is more concrete than the part.”⁸ The rather meager corpus of essays and fragments that constitute Mead's *oeuvre*, most of which have been posthumously published in various collections, repeatedly attest to the power this idea had on his thought. Once again, it is Peirce's notion of a community of interpretation as pivotal for understanding meaning and belief that links this idealistic notion to an account of social behavior. Darwin's *Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* provided Mead with an evolutionary model for understanding the

7. George Herbert Mead (February 27, 1863–April 26, 1931; born in South Hadley, Massachusetts; died in Chicago) received his BA from Oberlin College (1879–83) and began doing graduate work at Harvard in 1887, although he never wrote a dissertation. In 1893 he was appointed professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago, where he served in that capacity until his death. His main intellectual influences included Darwin, Hegel, and Adam Smith. Among his most important books are *The Philosophy of the Present* (1932); *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934); *Philosophy of the Act* (1938); *Selected Writings: George Herbert Mead* (1964); and *The Individual and the Social World: Unpublished Work of George Herbert Mead* (1982).

8. George Herbert Mead, *Selected Writings: George Herbert Mead*, Andrew J. Reck (ed.) (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), 166.

rudimentary social psychology of animal behavior. Meanwhile, Dewey's important work on the reflex (stimulus response) arc, which in many ways anticipated Gestalt psychology as well as the phenomenology of perception and behavior developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty a half-century later, provided him with a nonatomistic (nonmechanistic) model of organic behavior, understood as an interpretative response that internalizes and reconstitutes a stimulus within a learning arc.⁹

Mead is chiefly concerned to show how mind and self emerge in the course of traversing logical phases in the development of social and symbolic interaction. The most primitive phase – “the conversation of gestures” – can be observed in animals, as when a dog growls in order to ward off another dog. Darwin regarded such gestures as expressions of inner emotional states, not as forms of social interaction. For Mead, the gesture possesses significance for the dog toward whom the gesture is directed. The gesture's capacity to stimulate behavior causally depends on its being *significant* to its recipient. As with Dewey, the stimulus becomes effective only by being constituted and interpreted as significant. Here, however, the significance in question is established socially, as a type or pattern of response (coordination) that comes to be shared.

So construed, there need not be anything like a “consciousness of meaning” on the part of the dogs in question regarding the significance of their growling. Meaning and language first emerge when the gesture becomes a “significant symbol.” That happens when the dogs learn how to use their growling gestures purposefully. The gesture of growling becomes mutually meaningful once each dog “internalizes” the fact that growling calls forth a specific behavior in the other dog. In order for this to happen, each dog must take the attitude of the other dog toward his own behavior. That is, as a dog I imagine myself being the other dog.¹⁰ In imagining myself thus, I learn to respond to my own act, to reflect on *myself*.

Mead's fascinating account of infantile role-playing connects the interactive genesis of meaning with the social, moral, and cognitive development of the self. In *play* a child imagines herself playing the roles of her parents or other significant others. She conducts a conversation with herself, playing different roles, the meaning of which she herself more or less freely constitutes (albeit, with the

9. In 1942 a committee of seventy psychologists named Dewey's “The Reflex Arc Concept in Psychology,” *Psychological Review* (1896) the most significant contribution ever published in the journal.

10. Mead's reference to the act of seeing oneself through the eyes of the other not only paraphrases Hegel's famous account of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology* but also recalls Adam Smith's belief that in moral matters “[w]e suppose ourselves spectators of our own behavior, and endeavor to imagine what effect [our own passions and conduct] would, in this light [i.e. as regards our feelings of approval or censure] produce upon us” (Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie [eds] [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976], 112).

guidance of some incipient models). When play becomes a *game* involving other children, the child has less freedom to improvise, for here the roles have to be negotiated and agreed on. In order to do this, the child has to learn to take up the attitude of all her playmates. The game of tag, for example, only works if the child who is “it” simultaneously adopts the attitude of all the other players (in effect, playing out their assumed roles in the interiority of her mind).

It is this reflexive role-playing and attitude-taking competence that founds the ability to participate in all other social groups, from the most local of neighborhood clubs to the most all-inclusive humanity. In becoming social, the child learns to adopt the standpoint of the *generalized other*. Ultimately, it is by internalizing the attitude of the community in which she belongs that she internalizes the moral responses of that community and becomes a “principled” person. But the self does not lose its individuality in becoming so socialized. On the contrary, the capacity to adopt an abstract point of view (that of the community or of humanity at large) enables one to critically objectify and freely distance oneself from the multitude of particular roles one has internalized as “me.”

Individuals, then, are the outcome of freely reconstituting and reinterpreting the various habituated social roles within their repertory. *Qua* “me,” the individual is a unique (and in that sense individual) confluence of sedimented social roles that one can recall to memory (as a part of one’s already scripted autobiography). However, once recalled to memory and made an object to oneself through adopting the attitude of a *second-person*, the “me” can be set in dialogue with a more abstract aspect of the self, which is formed by taking the role of a *third-person* observer: the *generalized other* (representing the attitude of the social group taken as a whole).

In contrast to the “me,” which is the unconscious repository of social norms, the “I” represents that part of the self who reacts almost impulsively against (or toward) the attitude of the community and tries to change it. Unlike the “me,” the “I” cannot be reflectively known as an object from the perspective of the second-person. Instead, as a kind of instinctual or imaginative spontaneity, it deploys the critical admonitions of the conventional generalized other (the superego, in Freudian parlance) and projects these on to the image of an ideal, utopian community in which the “I” along with all other “I”s achieves perfect freedom and fulfillment. So construed, the “I” is the source of two kinds of moral demands: a demand for *moral autonomy*, which finds expression in the individual’s assertion of its rights against the conventional norms and laws of the community, and a demand for *self-realization*.

In sum, the self is a dialectical movement, in that it becomes increasingly free and individuated only to the extent that it expands the circle of recognition from the second-person to the third-person, and from the conventional third-person to the ideal (universal) third person. In this respect, individuation

and socialization mutually condition one another through the inextricable identity linking social dependency and individual autonomy. Society and individual realize one another.

III. JOHN DEWEY

Although logic and epistemology form the core of Dewey's¹¹ pragmatism, they acquire a distinctive social and political significance in his writings that recall Mead's analysis of the ideal trajectory of socialization and individuation, embeddedness and emancipation. For Dewey, inquiry necessarily involves a process of critical evaluation that engages all aspects of our social being. As with Peirce, experimental inquiry is a communal activity whose full potential is realized only in democracy, understood as a critical, egalitarian communication of the experimental inputs of each and every member of the community. So construed, community and democracy primarily function as social instruments for problem solving.

A brief glance at some of Dewey's major works – *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938), *Art as Experience* (1934), *Democracy and Education* (1916), *Experience and Nature* (1925) – confirms this assessment. What Dewey means by logic is a general theory about the rules governing the formation of concepts, judgments, and inferences in experimental situations; it is a complete theory of human thought and reasoning conceived in instrumental terms. From an evolutionary point of view, instrumental activity is the means by which humans adapt to and change their environment (and thereby change themselves). Phenomenologically speaking, humans are not just spatially inserted into the world as if they were things. Rather, they constitute the world they inhabit; that is, their interests and concerns provide selective reference points for interpreting their surrounding situation as a contextual, meaningful whole. Inquiry is initiated when the situation no longer presents itself as a determinate and coherent whole. Biologically speaking, the human organism experiences a disruption of adaptive functioning, a disequilibrium with respect to its environment as well as with respect to itself. Re-establishing harmony requires *reconstituting* the situation (and therewith

11. John Dewey (October 20, 1859–June 1, 1952; born in Burlington, Vermont; died in New York) received his BA from the University of Vermont (1875–79) and received his PhD from Johns Hopkins University in 1884. He was appointed Professor of Philosophy at the University of Michigan until 1894, when he accepted an appointment at the University of Chicago. He finished his career at Columbia University in New York City (1905–39). Peirce (whose lectures on logic he attended while at Johns Hopkins) and the neo-Hegelian idealism of George Sylvester Morris were early influences during his graduate studies. Later influences included James and his colleague at the University of Chicago, Mead.

oneself and one's experience) in a logical succession of developmental stages. Stage one involves reinterpretation (thoughtful redescription) of a problematic situation that determines what might or might not be relevant; stage two consists in formulating solutions to the problematic situation that take the form of instrumental hypotheses; stage three concretizes (further determines and delimits) the range of possible solutions by sifting through factual observations that in turn suggest new "ideas" or ways of resolving the problem; stage four deploys "reasoning" to articulate and define ideas in relationship to one another by means of propositions and inferences; and the fifth and final stage culminates in an experimental testing of the ideas so developed. If they prove successful, then we are warranted in asserting them as "true" judgments just so long as they continue to effect an operationally successful (existential) correspondence between the questions posed by the situation and the answers posed by the inquirer.

The nature of inquiry not only incorporates critical evaluation of what, in a problematic situation, is important to us – relative to our needs, desires, feelings, and interests – but also provides a mechanism for reconstituting these very concerns. In other words, inquiry constitutes the very contents of our moral life, and it constitutes them within a continuous process of education and growth. The reference to growth has teleological import: indeed, for Dewey, "growth itself is the only moral 'end.'"¹² The proper aim of education is thus to facilitate growth, by enabling the formation of intelligent habits of thought and behavior. These, in turn, are teleologically directed toward the resolution of conflicts – social as well as natural. While complete integration with one's environment is never achievable, it does point to the importance of joining with others in peaceful democratic community in furthering the social and political conditions that conduce to mutual growth. Social and political arrangements that are premised on a false individualism (or false totalitarianism) violate these conditions; as do any arrangements that generate social inequalities and conflicts (or authoritarian solidarities).

Dewey's own faith in a new liberalism reconstructed along the lines of a democratic and scientific socialism recalls Mead's discussion of the "emancipatory" trajectory of *genuine* socialization. In many respects, Dewey's liberalism – as developed in *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935) and *Individualism: Old and New* (1929) – harks back to John Stuart Mill's appeal to Wilhelm von Humboldt's romantic paean to "individuality," which in turn recalls the Feuerbachian Hegelianism of the young Marx that proved so compelling to members of the Frankfurt School of critical theory. Central to this understanding is a belief that traditional liberalism and theoretical science are caught up in a "dialectic of enlightenment," to use Theodor Adorno and Horkheimer's

12. John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt, 1920), 177.

expression. According to Dewey, the classical liberalism of Locke emancipated the individual from absolutist forms of government, but only at the expense of dissolving the individual into an “atomistic” ego, whose liberty was seen as an innate endowment cut off from society. Such atomistic individualism informed the second, utilitarian wave of nineteenth-century liberalism, where, following Bentham’s teachings (adopted from Adam Smith), it entrenched itself in the form of *laissez-faire* economic liberalism. The result, correctly diagnosed by Marx, was a contradiction between a socially and scientifically organized form of industrial capitalism, on one side, and an individualistic legal conception of private property, on the other. Here, the individual is but an alienated, fragmented, and truncated self: a mere cog in a capitalist machine that operates according to an equally one-sided (socially detached and anarchic) instrumental rationality, dominated by scientific, technological, and managerial specialists who have no connection with the “social whole.”

In Dewey’s opinion, the emergence of a new corporate (industrial) capitalism signals a crisis of liberalism, in which the full flowering of liberalism’s own ideals of freedom, individualism, and reason run up against a new form of economic, political, and social domination. Exit from this crisis will come from neither piecemeal reform nor violent revolution. Salvation, for Dewey, will rather come from harnessing the older method of democratic discussion to the newer method of scientific experimentation, now conceived as an all-inclusive activity of social intelligence. Properly conceived, social science does not merely discover and apply timeless social laws for purposes of prediction and control, but clarifies concrete social problems with the aim of critically evaluating and altering existing social patterns. Its criticism of social ideologies (old habits and prejudices) serves to raise social consciousness and enlighten transformative democratic practice. Reconstructed as a radical social(ist) democracy, the new, scientifically enlightened liberalism will critically integrate and reconstitute the material needs of producers and consumers in the direction of fulfilling higher-order social and spiritual needs.

IV. POSITIVISM

Given Rudolf Carnap’s dismissal of Heidegger’s philosophy and Bertrand Russell’s negative caricature of German philosophy *in general* (not to mention his sharp criticism of James’s philosophy), we might be forgiven the all too easy temptation to oppose logical positivism and analytic philosophy to pragmatism.¹³ Yet,

*13. For a discussion of the Carnap–Heidegger relation, see the essay by Michael Friedman and Thomas Ryckman in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 3*.

despite the fact that positivism and pragmatism have somewhat different pedigrees (British empiricism versus German idealism), methods (individualism versus holism), and projects (analyzing abstract concepts with universal scope versus interpreting concepts against the background of concrete historical practices, establishing the indubitable certainty/truth of beliefs versus describing their social and historical genesis), their respective practitioners share much in common. Both embrace some form of naturalism; preferring scientific and logical approaches, they disdain the use of transcendental methods of philosophical introspection that proved so indispensable to their continental counterparts. They also incline towards experimentalist accounts of meaning and knowledge. Given this convergence, we should not be surprised that positivist and post-positivist thinkers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein, Karl Popper, Wilfrid Sellars, Nelson Goodman, and W. V. O. Quine characterized themselves (or were characterized by others, such as American pragmatist Charles W. Morris) as pragmatists. Indeed, Dewey himself coedited a book with several noted logical positivists and even contributed an article to that volume;¹⁴ and as they migrated to the United States, logical positivists tried to enlist Dewey's philosophy in their own cause.

Logical positivism is an expression coined by Herbert Feigl and A. E. Blumberg in 1931 to describe the ideas of the Vienna Circle, whose most important associates – including Carnap, Feigl, Otto Neurath, Hans Reichenbach, and Gustav Bergmann – later immigrated to England (where they were sympathetically received by the reigning analytic philosophy made popular by Wittgenstein, Russell, and A. J. Ayer) and the United States (where they transformed or undermined the prevailing pragmatist ethos). Logical positivists were strongly motivated by a quest for logical clarity and epistemic certainty. These logical and empirical concerns were brought together under a single program: the so-called “verificationist” theory of meaning that had been advanced by Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus* (1921). Wittgenstein intended his theory as a criticism of any philosophy that deviates from the narrow logical task of “showing” how our language means, or “pictures,” a world of “atomic facts,” but its immediate effect was to condemn all nonfactual propositions (propositions whose truth or falsity could not in principle be verifiable by observation) as “meaningless.” The results were deeply disturbing and paradoxical: not only were the evaluative and expressive statements of ethics, religion, metaphysics, and aesthetics suddenly consigned to practical irrelevance, but (as Wittgenstein ironically noted) so were the propositions of philosophy that asserted the verificationist theory of meaning. Indeed, the specter of Hume's skepticism regarding induction that the school had sought to exorcise reappeared with a vengeance once it became clear that the general

14. See John Dewey, “Unity of Science as a Social Problem,” in *Encyclopedia and Unified Science*, vol. 1, O. Neurath *et al.* (eds) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1938).

lawlike propositions of science whose truth, as pragmatists had taught, could never be fully verified, were equally meaningless on this account.

Despite the challenges that verificationism posed to philosophy and science (see below), logical positivists believed that the nomological method of causal explanation and the inductive method of causal discovery were, taken together, the only methods for grounding knowledge and meaning. Consequently, they subscribed to a reductive, unified view of knowledge that sharply contrasted with the logical distinction between natural and human sciences that neo-Kantians such as Dilthey had popularized a generation earlier. In short, positivists maintained that the historical, sociological, and psychological sciences must not deviate from the experimental and nomological (or “covering law”) methods of causal explanation exemplified by the natural sciences on pain of being rendered totally “unscientific” and meaningless.

Verificationism and reductionism – the two shibboleths of logical positivism – would eventually come under attack from philosophers, such as Wittgenstein, Popper, Sellars, Goodman, and Quine¹⁵ – who had considered themselves to be sympathetic to some aspects of the positivist cause. Carnap and Neurath had argued (against Moritz Schlick) that scientific laws were not merely inferential rules connecting singular factual statements but were themselves factual claims subject to potential verification or falsification. But how? Were such generalizations verified (falsified) by experience, as many positivists thought? As Neurath (followed by Sellars and Quine) pointed out, only a proposition can verify (justify) a proposition. Were such generalizations then translatable

15. Wilfrid Sellars (1912–89) firmly rejected epistemological foundationalism. One of the first philosophers to integrate Anglo-American analytic philosophy and Austro-German logical positivism with American pragmatism and Hegelian thought, he devoted much of his life to reconciling the naturalist, “scientific image” of reality with the common-sense (or “manifest”) image of the same held by average persons. Key to this attempt was his distinction between the (naturalistic) space of causal experience and the (linguistic or propositional) space of belief formation and reasoned justification.

Nelson Goodman (1906–98) made significant contributions to mathematic logic, the theory of induction, and aesthetics. He held, against Hempel, that causal (lawlike) generalizations could not be distinguished from accidental generalizations (thereby reformulating the Humean problem of induction), at least in everyday contexts in which the use of predicates is not sharply fixed by formal stipulation. Finally, Goodman’s most famous work – in the area of aesthetics – showed how art and the aesthetic could be understood as creating new ontological worlds (or vocabularies for perceiving and describing reality) in a way that converged with Heidegger’s own views about the ontological import of the work of art.

Willard Van Orman Quine (1908–2000) is most famous for attacking the analytic–synthetic distinction and, with it, the verificationist theory of meaning, the two pillars of logical positivism (see below). His most important books include *From a Logical Point of View* (1953), *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (1969), and *The Ways of Paradox and Other Essays* (1976).

as sets of first-person observation statements (protocol statements), as Carnap suggested? If these statements were formulated as dated observations of physical objects, such as tables and rooms, then such reports would be an unreliable basis for confirmation or falsification, since it might be doubted whether these observations were veridical. On the other hand, if they were formulated as dated observations of private sensory experiences (“here, now, blue” as Schlick insisted), then their subjective certainty would be purchased at the cost of their untranslatability into objective statements.

V. POST-POSITIVISM

For post-positivists such as Quine and Popper, the paradoxes surrounding verificationism were best resolved by jettisoning the theory. Like the pragmatists, they argued that scientific generalizations are not constructed out of particular experiences (induction) but are experimental hypotheses formulated by prior theories, which are themselves the products of imagination. Quine’s attack on the analytic–synthetic distinction in “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” (1951) was especially effective in undermining the positivist distinction between necessary (analytic or identity) statements concerning logical meaning and contingent (synthetic or empirically informative) statements concerning experience and behavior, a distinction Dewey himself had vigorously criticized many years earlier in his 1938 *Logic*, where he observed that “[w]hen a linguistic form is separated from the contextual matter of problem inquiry it is impossible to decide of what *logical* form it is the expression.”¹⁶ Accordingly, the dogma of a theory- (concept- or meaning-)independent experience that could stand as an independent standard for constructing and testing a theory was laid to rest.

VI. KARL POPPER

For his part, Popper held that induction could not confirm scientific hypotheses because (as Peirce had seen) they refer to an indefinite number of counterfactual tests. The “necessary connection” that distinguishes causal relations from non-necessary but relatively invariant correlations of past events – the problem of induction diagnosed by Hume – can be articulated only when such hypotheses are formulated as counterfactual conditionals of the form: “Had *y* not happened, *z* would not have happened.” Because scientific hypotheses are counterfactual, they cannot be definitively verified by past and present experiences (events) but

16. John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt, 1938), 290.

can be falsified only with reference to present and future experiences. Hence, for Popper, the true test for the meaningfulness of a scientific theory is its capacity to generate potentially falsifiable hypotheses. But this attempt to save positivism – by replacing verification with falsification – also fails, since as Quine later argued (and Popper himself conceded), disconfirming tests do not suffice to falsify a given hypothesis so much as place in doubt a system of interconnected supporting hypotheses. Which hypothesis we choose to eliminate in order to restore coherence is thus not determined exclusively by our observations. Our epistemic commitments – for instance, how central a hypothesis is within the web of our otherwise workable belief system – also play a role. This pragmatic insight would later inspire Thomas Kuhn's conception of scientific revolutions,¹⁷ in which changes in scientific paradigm are stimulated by anomalous test results only when a potentially more fruitful (if inarticulate and as of yet unconfirmed) paradigm has gained support from most of a scientific community.

Popper's criticism of verificationism did not extend to positivism's other defining postulates: unificationism and fact–value dualism. Along with Carl Hempel, he insisted that the historical and social sciences yield meaningful hypotheses only insofar as their explanation of events and actions are capable of being framed in terms of general (or statistical) laws of behavior. Such causal explanations could be useful to the formation of public policies aimed at piecemeal social reform. In contrast with these hypothetical technical predictions, the grandiose revolutionary experiments undertaken by such totalitarian movements as fascism and communism are not guided by scientific knowledge, despite contrary claims offered by their proponents.

Popper's two-volume magnum opus *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945), and his shorter treatise *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957), link this narrow scientific claim to a broader conception of morality, action, and politics in a manner that merits closer scrutiny. To begin with, Popper argues that the laws of historical development and social evolution that defenders of total revolution advocate – what he referred to as “historicism” – are ultimately meaningless, since they do not yield falsifiable hypotheses.¹⁸ Such laws as inform Marx's historical materialism, which ostensibly postulates an inevitable progression of social formations (modes of production) culminating in communism, Plato's views about the inevitable decline of well-ordered politics into tyranny, or fascist doctrines about the fateful struggle and victory of master races are all examples of unscientific (and

17. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

18. Popper's notion of historicism must not be confused with the concept of historicism that was used by Husserl, Dilthey, and other (mainly neo-Kantian) thinkers at the turn of the century, for whom the term referred to a kind of historical relativity in the understanding of distinctive historical epochs and cultural worldviews.

irrational) ideologies. The architects who use such ideologies to construct their revolutionary societies cannot allow any actions that deviate from the predicted outcome, so they insist on totalitarian controls that transform modern societies that are otherwise open, liberal, and democratic (or on the cusp of becoming so) into societies that are primitive, closed, and tribal.

According to Popper, the critical rationalism inherent within science demands an open society. Persons must be free to imagine new hypotheses; ultimately, the values (moral and nonmoral) that guide the inventive formulation of hypotheses are themselves the outcome of existential decisions that are entirely unpredictable. The fact that the consequences and meanings of actions transcend the intentions of actors and that the latter are themselves critically generated and revised within the context of multivocal and open-ended conversations means that the predictions of predetermined outcomes made by revolutionary social engineers must come to naught. As another contemporary Kantian, Hannah Arendt, astutely noted in her criticism of totalitarianism, the revolutionary spirit underlying utopian moral idealism inevitably shatters against the hard fact of moral freedom.

VII. THE CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCE OF AMERICAN PRAGMATISM AND LOGICAL POSITIVISM

As I noted earlier, once logical positivism became transplanted on to American soil by German and Austrian émigrés fleeing Nazi Germany it was vigorously promoted as a more analytically rigorous – and ostensibly superior – way of doing philosophy than its pragmatist counterpart. Hence the virtual disappearance of pragmatism in major PhD-granting philosophy departments during the 1950s and 1960s. There is also some anecdotal evidence, assembled by John McCumber, that political motivations may also have contributed to this change.¹⁹ Although positivists such as Carnap and Neurath had left-wing sympathies, their philosophy had the distinct merit of being untainted by the left-leaning, social progressivism that marked Mead's and Dewey's pragmatism. Limiting philosophy to the singular task of conceptual clarification and epistemological foundationalism, logical positivists eschewed normative ethics altogether in favor of metaethical ruminations on the meaning of “ought,” “good,” and the like. As a worldview that promoted skepticism of any holistic or global historical (or totalizing) understanding of social and economic structures, even

19. John McCumber, *Time in a Ditch: American Philosophy in the McCarthy Era* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000).

Popper's critical rationalism could at best promote piecemeal reform of a system that was largely taken for granted.

During the McCarthy era, Popper's relatively weak vision of an open society of free inquirers was not to be found among American philosophy departments. Yet despite the near total eclipse of pragmatism, post-positivist tendencies that drew from (or otherwise replicated) ideas developed by pragmatist philosophers gradually supplanted positivist shibboleths. The Anglo-American world was thus well prepared for the renaissance of neo-pragmatist thought that was ushered in by Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* in 1979 and alternatively taken up by such notable philosophers as Hilary Putnam and (more recently), John McDowell and Robert Brandom.²⁰

Oddly, despite the affinities between pragmatism and continental philosophy – notably Heideggerian phenomenology and Frankfurt School neo-Marxism – there was virtually no productive interchange between these currents of thought until the 1970s. I mentioned the utter failure of Horkheimer and other first generation critical theorists to read the works of Dewey seriously.²¹ Therefore, in concluding this essay, I would like to recall how the Frankfurt School's own struggle with positivism led it to eventually recover the legacy of American pragmatism well before it became fashionable in the English-speaking world.

The positivist postulates of scientific unificationism and fact–value dualism were strenuously resisted by philosophers influenced by the linguistic philosophy of the late Wittgenstein and, on the continent, by critical theorists. Critical

*20. These developments are discussed in several essays in the following volumes. See the essays by David R. Hiley in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 6*, José Medina in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 7*, and John Fennell in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 8*.

21. Dewey is the philosopher most often mentioned by Horkheimer in *Eclipse of Reason*. Yet James Schmidt ("The Eclipse of Reason and the End of the Frankfurt School in America," *New German Critique* 34 [Winter 2007]) points out that Horkheimer's discussion of Dewey and pragmatism in the second of the Columbia University Lectures he gave in 1944 that would later form the core of his book was an afterthought. Indeed, Horkheimer was prompted to correct the interpretation of pragmatism contained in the lecture only when he wrote his manuscript, which was critically reviewed by C. Wright Mills, who believed that Horkheimer had grasped pragmatism "in a rather vulgar form" and without apparent familiarity with the primary texts. Although Horkheimer told Leo Löwenthal that he felt he had become "an expert" on American pragmatism, having read "not a few of these native products" (M. Horkheimer, Letter to Löwenthal, December 21, 1944 [Folder 20], bMS Ger 185 [47]; from the Leo Löwenthal Papers, Houghton Library of Harvard University; cited by Schmidt, "The Eclipse of Reason," 65), his belief that pragmatism and positivism were virtually indistinguishable, save for the latter's "phenomenalism" ("sensualistic idealism"), belies this judgment. In Horkheimer's opinion, pragmatism, no less than positivism, identifies philosophy with scientism, which by its very nature is subjectivistic in that "true judgments on objects, and therewith the concept of the object itself, rests solely on 'effects' upon the subject's action" (Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, 45).

theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer saw positivism (including Popper's critical rationalism) as fundamentally uncritical and reactionary. The positivist dismissal of evaluative language, its insistence on defining truth and meaning in terms of correspondence with atomic facts or subjectively given sense experiences – in total abstraction from the broader historical, economic, political, and sociocultural context conditioning perception, thought, and language – struck them as a false and ideological affirmation of the status quo. While they did not deny the epistemic value of predictive and technically useful knowledge within the behavioral sciences, critical theorists regarded such knowledge as but a subordinate aspect within social science taken as a whole, the proper aim of which, they maintained, was not instrumental prediction and control of human behavior but the critique of “naturalizing” ideologies that depict society as a realm of rigid, unchanging laws.

The so-called “positivist dispute” of the early 1960s that pitted Popper and his followers against Adorno and his former assistant Jürgen Habermas brought the issue of “critical social knowledge” into stark relief. Popperians defended a unified scientific method as the only empirically responsible approach to social critique and impugned the holistic hermeneutical methods of critical theorists as an uncritical recrudescence of Hegelian dialectical metaphysics. Critical theorists responded that social scientists could not causally explain human behavior without first interpreting it as meaningful and norm-governed in a way that referred to interests, ideas, and utopian ideals that simultaneously corresponded to and conflicted with the laws of capitalist accumulation. Furthermore, they bridled at the fact–value distinction upheld by the Popperians, which consigned critical evaluations to the irrational status of existential decisions. This was a “decisionism,” they believed, that could all too easily degenerate into a resolute acquiescence to the powers that be, as exemplified by the illustrative fate of Carl Schmitt and Heidegger.

Habermas enlisted none other than Wittgenstein himself in arguing against the unified science postulate maintained by the Popperians. Wittgenstein's late philosophy of language, the most mature expression of which is expounded in his posthumous work *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), develops a pragmatist account of meaning that is completely antithetical to the positivist view he had earlier developed in the *Tractatus*.²² In the mature work, Wittgenstein argues that the meaning of language is holistic and contextual (syncategorematic) and linked to observable use rather than to ostensive reference. Language games comprise speech acts that, in the parlance of Wittgenstein's follower John Austin, accomplish illocutionary (social-action-oriented) aims and have perlocutionary

*22. For a discussion of Wittgenstein's turn against his own earlier views in the *Tractatus*, see the essay by Bob Plant and John Fennell in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 3*.

(behavior-modifying) effects. Such games, in turn, circumscribe rule-governed “ways of life” that are inherently public and shared.

As developed by Peter Winch in his pioneering manifesto *The Idea of Social Science* (1958), the implication of this Wittgensteinian theory of meaning for explaining human action was nothing less than momentous, in that it reaffirmed the dualism between natural and human science that formerly had been defended by neo-Kantians. According to Winch, meaningful action is distinguished from brute behavior in being essentially structured and identified by the intentions of the actor. Such intentions are therefore not discrete psychic causes that precede physical action as Popper, Hempel, and other advocates of the so-called “covering law” model of social and historical explanation had maintained. On the contrary, intentional actions cannot be causally explained with reference to social laws but can only be understood and interpreted within the context of a rule-governed language game, or way of life. More precisely, the intentions of the actor – what it is he or she intends to do by his or her action – implicitly refers to norms of speaking and acting. To explain an action is therefore to understand it as a meaningful instance of a norm that could, in principle, be creatively applied or even violated.

The Wittgensteinian revolution in philosophy of language proved pivotal for the development of later critical theory. It enabled the most notable exponents of this theory, Karl-Otto Apel and Habermas, to recover the lost insights of the pragmatist tradition, above all Peirce’s operationalist theory of meaning and Mead’s social behaviorist account of mind, in the 1960s and 1970s – well in advance of the renaissance of Anglo-American neo-pragmatism.²³ This appropriation of classical pragmatism has continued apace under third generation critical theorists Axel Honneth and Joas, whose use of Dewey and, above all, Mead, to develop new theories of recognition and democracy has taken critical theory more deeply into the heart of social progressivism.²⁴

In the hands of Habermas and Apel, pragmatism was used to construct a transcendental theory of knowledge-constitutive interests as an alternative to positivist “objectivism.” Following Habermas’s formulation of this new program

23. Apel’s epochal introduction of American pragmatism (principally Peircian semiotics) to the German public appeared in his two-volume study *The Transformation of Philosophy* (1973), which also displays a great debt to the neo-Kantian tradition of Dilthey and the post-positivist philosophy of the late Wittgenstein. Habermas’s indebtedness to Peirce is evident in his earlier work, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1968), while his use of Mead later appears in the second volume of his *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981).

*24. For discussions of these developments in the second and third generations of critical theorists, see, respectively, the essays by Christopher F. Zurn and James Swindal in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 6*, and Amy Allen in *The History of Continental Philosophy: Volume 7*.

of critical pragmatism, different interests that have emerged in the course of the natural history of the human species determine distinctive frameworks of action and knowledge. Corresponding to a technical interest in controlling nature-like processes is instrumental action – articulated in experimental methods – that serves to stabilize successful beliefs about cause and effect. Corresponding to a practical interest in understanding ourselves and (reaching) understanding (with) others is communicative action – articulated in historical interpretative methods – that serves to stabilize right beliefs about identities, norms, values, and ends. Corresponding to an emancipatory interest is critical reflection – articulated in psychotherapeutic methods combining causal explanation and holistic understanding – that serves to expose distortions in self-understanding caused by the effects of domination.

Since the late 1970s, Habermas's critical theory has evolved into a full-blown theory of communicative action whose debt to pragmatism – especially to Mead and Wittgenstein – is evident in the name he gives his philosophy of language: universal pragmatics. If anything, the newer generation of critical theorists has sought to wrest the materialist spirit of pragmatism even further from the Kantian dualisms that still define Habermas's theory. Needless to say, all of this testifies to the continuing impact of pragmatism on the future of German critical philosophy.

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CHRONOLOGY

	PHILOSOPHICAL EVENTS	CULTURAL EVENTS	POLITICAL EVENTS
1620	Bacon, <i>Novum organum</i>		
1633		Condemnation of Galileo	
1634		Establishment of the Academie Française	
1637	Descartes, <i>Discourse on Method</i>		
1641	Descartes, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i>		
1642		Rembrandt, <i>Nightwatch</i>	English Civil War begins
1651	Hobbes, <i>Leviathan</i>		
1662	Logique du Port-Royal		
1665		Newton discovers calculus	
1667		John Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i>	
1670	Pascal, <i>Les Pensées</i> (posthumous) Spinoza, <i>Tractatus theologico-politicus</i>		
1675		Leibniz discovers calculus	
1677	Spinoza, <i>Ethics</i>		
1687		Newton, <i>Philosophiae naturalis principia mathematica</i>	
1689	Locke, <i>A Letter Concerning Toleration</i> (-1690) Locke, <i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> and <i>Two Treatises of Civil Government</i>		

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	PHILOSOPHICAL EVENTS	CULTURAL EVENTS	POLITICAL EVENTS
1695		Bayle, <i>Dictionnaire historique et critique</i> , vol. I	
1714	Leibniz, <i>Monadologie</i>		
1739	Hume, <i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i>		
1742		Handel, <i>Messiah</i>	
1748	Hume, <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i>		
1751	Diderot and D'Alembert, <i>Encyclopédie</i> , vols 1 & 2		
1755	Rousseau, <i>Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes</i>		
1759		Voltaire, <i>Candide</i>	
1762	Rousseau, <i>Du contrat social and Émile ou de l'éducation</i>		
1774		Goethe, <i>Sorrows of Young Werther</i>	
1776	Death of Hume	Adam Smith, <i>Wealth of Nations</i>	American Declaration of Independence
1781	Kant, <i>Kritik der reinen Vernunft</i>		
1783	Kant, <i>Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik</i>		
1784	Kant, "Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?"		
1785	Kant, <i>Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten</i>		
1787			US Constitution
1788	Birth of Arthur Schopenhauer Kant, <i>Kritik der praktischen Vernunft</i>	Gibbon, <i>The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire</i>	
1789	Death of d'Holbach	Adoption of <i>La Déclaration des droits de l'Homme et du citoyen</i>	French Revolution and the establishment of the First Republic
1790	Kant, <i>Kritik der Urteilskraft</i>	Edmund Burke, <i>Reflections on the Revolution in France</i>	
1791		Mozart, <i>The Magic Flute</i> Tom Paine, <i>The Rights of Man</i>	
1792	Mary Wollstonecraft, <i>Vindication of the Rights of Woman</i>		
1794		Creation of the École Normale Supérieure	Death of Robespierre

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	PHILOSOPHICAL EVENTS	CULTURAL EVENTS	POLITICAL EVENTS
1795	Schiller, <i>Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen</i>		
1797	Schelling, <i>Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur als Einleitung in das Studium dieser Wissenschaft</i>	Hölderlin, <i>Hyperion</i> , vol. 1	
1798	Birth of Auguste Comte	Thomas Malthus, <i>Essay on the Principle of Population</i>	
1800	Fichte, <i>Die Bestimmung des Menschen</i> Schelling, <i>System des transcendentalen Idealismus</i>	Beethoven's First Symphony	
1804	Death of Kant		Napoleon Bonaparte proclaims the First Empire
1805		Publication of Diderot, <i>Le Neveu de Rameau</i>	
1806	Birth of John Stuart Mill	Goethe, <i>Faust</i> , Part One Reinstatement of the Sorbonne by Napoleon as a secular university	Napoleon brings the Holy Roman Empire to an end
1807	Hegel, <i>Die Phänomenologie des Geistes</i>		
1812	(–1816) Hegel, <i>Wissenschaft der Logik</i>		
1815		Jane Austen, <i>Emma</i>	Battle of Waterloo; final defeat of Napoleon
1817	Hegel, <i>Encyclopedia</i>	Ricardo, <i>Principles of Political Economy</i>	
1818	Birth of Karl Marx	Mary Shelley, <i>Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus</i>	
1819	Schleiermacher, <i>Hermeneutik</i> Schopenhauer, <i>Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung</i>	Byron, <i>Don Juan</i>	
1821	Hegel, <i>Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts</i>		Death of Napoleon
1823		Beethoven's Ninth Symphony	
1830	(–1842) Auguste Comte, <i>Cours de philosophie positive</i> in six volumes	Stendhal, <i>The Red and the Black</i>	
1831	Death of Hegel	Victor Hugo, <i>The Hunchback of Notre Dame</i>	
1832	Death of Bentham	Clausewitz, <i>Vom Kriege</i>	
1833	Birth of Wilhelm Dilthey	Pushkin, <i>Eugene Onegin</i>	Abolition of slavery in the British Empire

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PHILOSOPHICAL EVENTS	CULTURAL EVENTS	POLITICAL EVENTS
1835	The first volume of Alexis de Tocqueville's <i>Democracy in America</i> is published in French	
1837	Louis Daguerre invents the daguerreotype, the first successful photographic process	
1841	Feuerbach, <i>Das Wesen des Christentums</i> Kierkegaard, <i>On the Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates</i> R. W. Emerson, <i>Essays: First Series</i>	
1842	Death of Stendhal (Marie-Henri Beyle)	
1843	Kierkegaard, <i>Either/Or</i> and <i>Fear and Trembling</i> Mill, <i>A System of Logic</i>	
1844	Marx writes <i>Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts</i> Alexandre Dumas, <i>The Count of Monte Cristo</i>	
1846	Kierkegaard, <i>Concluding Unscientific Postscript</i>	
1847	Boole, <i>The Mathematical Analysis of Logic</i> Helmholtz, <i>On the Conservation of Force</i>	
1848	Publication of the <i>Communist Manifesto</i>	Beginning of the French Second Republic
1851	Herman Melville, <i>Moby Dick</i> Herbert Spencer, <i>Social Statics</i> The Great Exhibition is staged at the Crystal Palace, London	
1852		Napoleon III declares the Second Empire
1853		(–1856) Crimean War
1854	H. D. Thoreau, <i>Walden</i> Walt Whitman, <i>Leaves of Grass</i>	
1856	Birth of Sigmund Freud	
1857	Birth of Ferdinand de Saussure Death of Comte Charles Baudelaire, <i>The Flowers of Evil</i> Gustav Flaubert, <i>Madame Bovary</i>	
1859	Birth of Henri Bergson, John Dewey, and Edmund Husserl Mill, <i>On Liberty</i> Charles Darwin, <i>Origin of Species</i>	(–1860) Italian Unification, except Venice (1866) and Rome (1870)
1861	Johann Jakob Bachofen, <i>Das Mutterrecht</i>	Tsar Alexander II abolishes serfdom in Russia
1863	Birth of George Herbert Mead Édouard Manet, <i>Olympia</i>	

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	PHILOSOPHICAL EVENTS	CULTURAL EVENTS	POLITICAL EVENTS
1863	Mill, <i>Utilitarianism</i>		Abraham Lincoln issues the <i>Emancipation Proclamation</i>
1865		(–1869) Leo Tolstoy, <i>War and Peace</i> Premiere of Richard Wagner’s <i>Tristan und Isolde</i>	Surrender of General Robert E. Lee signals the conclusion of the American Civil War
1866		Fyodor Dostoevsky, <i>Crime and Punishment</i>	The Peace of Prague ends the Austro-Prussian War
1867	Marx, <i>Das Kapital</i> , vol. I		
1868	Birth of Émile Chartier (“Alain”)	Birth of W. E. B. Du Bois Creation of the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE)	
1869	Mill, <i>The Subjection of Women</i>	(–1870) Jules Verne, <i>Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea</i> (–1876) Wagner, <i>Der Ring des Nibelungen</i>	Completion of the Suez Canal
1870			(–1871) Franco-Prussian War Establishment of the Third Republic
1871	Lachelier, <i>Du fondement de l’induction</i>	Darwin, <i>The Descent of Man</i> Eliot, <i>Middlemarch</i>	Paris Commune Unification of Germany: Prussian King William I becomes Emperor (<i>Kaiser</i>) of Germany and Otto von Bismarck becomes chancellor
1872	Nietzsche, <i>Die Geburt der Tragödie</i>		
1873	Death of Mill	(–1877) Tolstoy, <i>Anna Karenina</i>	End of German Occupation following France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian War
1874	Birth of Max Scheler Émile Boutroux, <i>La Contingence des lois de la nature</i> Brentano, <i>Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt</i>	Birth of Karl Kraus First Impressionist Exhibition staged by the Société anonyme des peintres, sculpteurs et graveurs (Cézanne, Degas, Guillaumin, Monet, Berthe Morisot, Pissarro, Renoir, and Sisley)	
1877		Henry Morton Stanley completes his navigation of the Congo River	
1878			King Leopold II of Belgium engages explorer Henry Morton Stanley to establish a colony in the Congo
1879	Frege, <i>Begriffsschrift</i>	Henrik Ibsen, <i>A Doll’s House</i>	

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	PHILOSOPHICAL EVENTS	CULTURAL EVENTS	POLITICAL EVENTS
1879		Thomas Edison exhibits his incandescent light bulb Georg Cantor (1845–1918) becomes Professor of Mathematics at Halle	
1883	Birth of Karl Jaspers and José Ortega y Gasset Death of Marx Dilthey, <i>Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften</i> (–1885) Nietzsche, <i>Also Sprach Zarathustra</i>	Death of Wagner Cantor, “Foundations of a General Theory of Aggregates”	
1884	Frege, <i>Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik</i>	Mark Twain, <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i>	
1885	Birth of Gaston Bachelard and Georg Lukács		
1886	Nietzsche, <i>Jenseits von Gut und Böse</i>		
1887	Nietzsche, <i>Zur Genealogie der Moral</i>		
1888	Birth of Carl Schmitt and Jean Wahl		
1889	Birth of Martin Heidegger, Gabriel Marcel, and Ludwig Wittgenstein Bergson, <i>Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience</i>	Birth of Siegfried Kracauer	
1890	William James, <i>Principles of Psychology</i>		
1891	Birth of Antonio Gramsci		
1892	Birth of Walter Benjamin Frege, “Über Sinn und Bedeutung”		
1893	Xavier Léon and Élie Halévy cofound the <i>Revue de métaphysique et de morale</i>		
1894			Captain Alfred Dreyfus (1859–1935), a Jewish-French army officer, is arrested and charged with spying for Germany
1895	Birth of Max Horkheimer	The Lumière brothers hold the first public screening of projected motion pictures Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen discovers X-rays	
1896		Athens hosts the first Olympic Games of the modern era	

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	PHILOSOPHICAL EVENTS	CULTURAL EVENTS	POLITICAL EVENTS
1897	Birth of Georges Bataille		
1898	Birth of Herbert Marcuse	Zola, article "J'accuse" in defense of Dreyfus	
1899			Beginning of the Boer War
1900	Birth of Erich Fromm and Hans-Georg Gadamer Death of Nietzsche and Félix Ravaisson (-1901) Husserl, <i>Logische Untersuchungen</i>	Freud, <i>Interpretation of Dreams</i> Planck formulates quantum theory	
1901	Birth of Jacques Lacan		
1902	Birth of Karl Popper		
1903	Birth of Theodor W. Adorno and Jean Cavaillès	Du Bois, <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i>	
1904	(-1905) Weber, <i>Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus</i>		
1905	Birth of Raymond Aron and Jean-Paul Sartre	Einstein formulates the special theory of relativity	Law of separation of church and state in France
1906	Birth of Hannah Arendt and Emmanuel Levinas	Birth of Léopold Sédar Senghor	The Dreyfus Affair ends when the French Court of Appeals exonerates Dreyfus of all charges
1907	Birth of Jean Hyppolite Bergson, <i>L'Evolution créatrice</i>	Pablo Picasso completes <i>Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)</i>	
1908	Birth of Simone de Beauvoir, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and W. V. Quine		
1910	(-1913) Whitehead and Russell, <i>Principia Mathematica</i>		
1911	Victor Delbos publishes the first French journal article on Husserl, "Husserl: Sa critique du psychologisme et sa conception d'une Logique pure," in <i>Revue de métaphysique et de morale</i>	The Blaue Reiter (Blue Rider) group of avant-garde artists is founded in Munich	
1913	Birth of Albert Camus, Aimé Césaire, and Paul Ricoeur Husserl, <i>Ideen</i>	Marcel Proust (1871-1922), <i>Swann's Way</i> , the first volume of <i>Remembrance of Things Past</i> First performance of Stravinsky's <i>Rite of Spring</i>	
1914			Germany invades France
1915	Birth of Roland Barthes	Franz Kafka, <i>Metamorphosis</i>	
1916	Publication of Saussure's <i>Cours de linguistique générale</i>	James Joyce, <i>A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i>	

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	PHILOSOPHICAL EVENTS	CULTURAL EVENTS	POLITICAL EVENTS
1917	Death of Durkheim		Russian Revolution
1918	Birth of Louis Althusser Death of Georg Cantor and Lachelier		Proclamation of the Weimar Republic First World War ends
1919		German architect Walter Gropius (1883–1969) founds the Bauhaus School	
1920	Lukács, <i>Die Theorie des Romans</i>		Ratification of the 19th amendment to the US Constitution extends suffrage to women
1922	Birth of Karl-Otto Apel Wittgenstein, <i>Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus</i> Bataille begins his twenty-year career at the Bibliothèque Nationale	T. S. Eliot, <i>The Waste Land</i> Herman Hesse, <i>Siddhartha</i> James Joyce, <i>Ulysses</i>	
1923	Lukács, <i>Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein</i> Institut für Sozialforschung (Frankfurt School) is founded	Kahil Gibran, <i>The Prophet</i>	
1924	Birth of Jean-François Lyotard Sartre, Raymond Aron, Paul Nizan, Georges Canguilhem, and Daniel Lagache enter the École Normale Supérieure	André Breton, <i>Le Manifeste du surréalisme</i> Thomas Mann, <i>The Magic Mountain</i>	Death of Vladimir Lenin
1925	Birth of Zygmunt Bauman, Gilles Deleuze, and Frantz Fanon	Franz Kafka, <i>The Trial</i> First Surrealist Exhibition at the Galerie Pierre, Paris	
1926	Birth of Michel Foucault Jean Hering publishes the first French text to address Husserl's phenomenology: <i>Phénoménologie et philosophie religieuse</i>	The film <i>Metropolis</i> by German director Fritz Lang (1890–1976) premieres in Berlin The Bauhaus school building, designed by Walter Gropius, is completed in Dessau, Germany	
1927	Heidegger, <i>Sein und Zeit</i> Marcel, <i>Journal métaphysique</i>	Virginia Woolf, <i>To the Lighthouse</i>	
1928	Birth of Noam Chomsky Verein Ernst Mach (Vienna Circle) founded The first work of German phenomenology appears in French translation: Scheler's <i>Nature et formes de la sympathie: Contribution à l'étude des lois de la vie émotionnelle</i>	Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) writes <i>The Threepenny Opera</i> with composer Kurt Weill (1900–1950) The first television station begins broadcasting in Schenectady, New York	

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	PHILOSOPHICAL EVENTS	CULTURAL EVENTS	POLITICAL EVENTS
1929	<p>Birth of Jürgen Habermas</p> <p>Heidegger, <i>Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik</i> and <i>Was ist Metaphysik?</i></p> <p>Husserl, <i>Formale und transzendente Logik</i> and “Phenomenology” in <i>Encyclopedia Britannica</i></p> <p>Wahl, <i>Le malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel</i></p> <p>Husserl lectures at the Sorbonne</p>	<p>Ernest Hemingway, <i>A Farewell to Arms</i></p> <p>Erich Maria Remarque, <i>All Quiet on the Western Front</i></p>	
1930	<p>Birth of Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Derrida, Félix Guattari, Luce Irigaray, and Michel Serres</p> <p>Levinas, <i>La Théorie de l’intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl</i></p>	(–1942) Robert Musil, <i>The Man Without Qualities</i>	
1931	<p>Death of Mead</p> <p>Heidegger’s first works appear in French translation: “Was ist Metaphysik?” in <i>Bifur</i>, and “Vom Wesen des Grundes” in <i>Recherches philosophiques</i></p> <p>Levinas and Gabrielle Peiffer publish a French translation of Husserl’s <i>Cartesian Meditations</i></p> <p>Husserl’s <i>Ideas</i> is translated into English</p>	<p>Pearl Buck, <i>The Good Earth</i></p> <p>Gödel publishes his two incompleteness theorems</p>	
1932	<p>Birth of Stuart Hall</p> <p>Bergson, <i>Les Deux sources de la morale et de la religion</i></p>	<p>Aldous Huxley, <i>Brave New World</i></p> <p>BBC starts a regular public television broadcasting service in the UK</p>	
1933	<p>University in Exile is founded as a graduate division of the New School for Social Research</p> <p>Arendt and Horkheimer emigrate to the US</p> <p>(–1939) Alexandre Kojève lectures on Hegel at the École Pratique des Hautes Études</p>	<p>André Malraux, <i>Man’s Fate</i></p> <p>Gertrude Stein, <i>The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas</i></p>	Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany
1934	Frankfurt Institute moves from Geneva to Columbia University		

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	PHILOSOPHICAL EVENTS	CULTURAL EVENTS	POLITICAL EVENTS
1934	Fromm and Marcuse emigrate to the US		
1935		Penguin publishes its first paperback	
1936	Husserl, <i>Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie</i> Sartre, "La Transcendance de l'Égo" in <i>Recherches philosophiques</i>	Death of Karl Kraus Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" First issue of <i>Life Magazine</i>	(–1939) Spanish Civil War
1937	Birth of Alain Badiou and Hélène Cixous Death of Gramsci	Picasso, <i>Guernica</i> (–1941) Theodor W. Adorno is Music Director of the Radio Project social research project	
1938	Death of Husserl Adorno emigrates to the US	Sartre, <i>La Nausée</i>	
1939	Establishment of Husserl Archives in Louvain, Belgium Founding of <i>Philosophy and Phenomenological Research</i> (–1941) Hyppolite publishes his translation into French of Hegel's <i>Phenomenology of Spirit</i> Alfred Schutz emigrates to the US	Joyce, <i>Finnegans Wake</i> John Steinbeck, <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>	Nazi Germany invades Poland (September 1) and France and Britain declare war on Germany (September 3)
1940	Death of Benjamin	Richard Wright, <i>Native Son</i>	
1941	Death of Bergson Marcuse, <i>Reason and Revolution</i>	Arthur Koestler, <i>Darkness at Noon</i> Death of James Joyce	Japan attacks Pearl Harbor, and US enters the Second World War Germany invades the Soviet Union
1942	Birth of Étienne Balibar Camus, <i>L'Étranger</i> and <i>Le Mythe de Sisyphe: Essai sur l'absurde</i> Merleau-Ponty, <i>La Structure du comportement</i> Lévi-Strauss meets Roman Jakobson at the École Libre des Hautes Études in New York		
1943	Death of Simone Weil Farber, <i>The Foundation of Phenomenology</i> Sartre, <i>L'Être et le néant</i>	Herman Hesse, <i>The Glass Bead Game</i> Ayn Rand, <i>The Fountainhead</i>	

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	PHILOSOPHICAL EVENTS	CULTURAL EVENTS	POLITICAL EVENTS
1944		Jorge Luis Borges, <i>Ficciones</i> Jean Genet, <i>Our Lady of the Flowers</i>	Bretton Woods Conference and establishment of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Paris is liberated by Allied forces (August 25)
1945	Merleau-Ponty, <i>Phénoménologie de la perception</i> Popper, <i>The Open Society and Its Enemies</i>	Sartre, Beauvoir, and Merleau-Ponty begin as founding editors of <i>Les Temps modernes</i> George Orwell, <i>Animal Farm</i>	End of the Second World War in Germany (May); atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki; end of war in Japan (September) Establishment of the United Nations
1946	Hyppolite, <i>Genèse et structure de la "Phénoménologie de l'esprit" de Hegel</i> Sartre, <i>L'Existentialisme est un humanisme</i>	Eugene O'Neill, <i>The Iceman Cometh</i> Bataille founds the journal <i>Critique</i>	Beginning of the French Indochina War Establishment of the Fourth Republic
1947	Adorno and Horkheimer, <i>Dialektik der Aufklärung</i> Beauvoir, <i>Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté</i> Heidegger, "Brief über den Humanismus"	Camus, <i>The Plague</i> Anne Frank, <i>The Diary of Anne Frank</i> (posthumous) Kracauer, <i>From Caligari to Hitler</i> Thomas Mann, <i>Doctor Faustus</i>	Creation of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) (-1951) Marshall Plan
1948	(-1951) Gramsci, <i>Prison Notebooks</i> Althusser appointed <i>agrégé-répétiteur</i> ("caïman") at the École Normale Supérieure, a position he holds until 1980	Nathalie Sarraute, <i>Portrait of a Man Unknown</i> Debut of <i>The Ed Sullivan Show</i>	The United Nations adopts the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
1949	Birth of Axel Honneth Beauvoir, <i>Le Deuxième sexe</i> Lévi-Strauss, <i>Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté</i> Heidegger's <i>Existence and Being</i> is translated The Institut für Sozialforschung returns to Frankfurt	Arthur Miller, <i>Death of a Salesman</i> George Orwell, <i>1984</i> Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort found the revolutionary group and journal <i>Socialisme ou Barbarie</i>	Foundation of NATO
1950	Ricoeur publishes his translation into French of Husserl's <i>Ideas I</i>	Adorno <i>et al.</i> , <i>The Authoritarian Personality</i>	Beginning of the Korean War
1951	Death of Alain and Wittgenstein Adorno, <i>Minima Moralia</i> Arendt, <i>The Origins of Totalitarianism</i> Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism"	J. D. Salinger, <i>The Catcher in the Rye</i> Marguerite Yourcenar, <i>Memoirs of Hadrian</i>	

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	PHILOSOPHICAL EVENTS	CULTURAL EVENTS	POLITICAL EVENTS
1952	Death of Dewey and Santayana Merleau-Ponty is elected to the Chair in Philosophy at the Collège de France	Samuel Beckett, <i>Waiting for Godot</i> Ralph Ellison, <i>Invisible Man</i>	
1953	Wittgenstein, <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> (posthumous) Lacan begins his public seminars	Lacan, together with Daniel Lagache and Françoise Dolto, founds the Société française de psychanalyse Crick and Watson construct the first model of DNA	Death of Joseph Stalin Ceasefire agreement (July 27) ends the Korean War
1954	Lyotard, <i>La Phénoménologie</i> Scheler, <i>The Nature of Sympathy</i> appears in English translation	Aldous Huxley, <i>The Doors of Perception</i>	Following the fall of Dien Bien Phu (May 7), France pledges to withdraw from Indochina (July 20) Beginning of the Algerian revolt against French rule
1955	Marcuse, <i>Eros and Civilization</i> Cerisy Colloquium <i>Qu'est-ce que la philosophie? Autour de Martin Heidegger</i> , organized by Jean Beaufret	Vladimir Nabokov, <i>Lolita</i>	
1956	Adorno, <i>Prismen</i> Sartre's <i>Being and Nothingness</i> appears in English translation		Hungarian Revolution and Soviet invasion The French colonies of Morocco and Tunisia gain independence Suez War
1957	Chomsky, <i>Syntactic Structures</i> Founding of <i>Philosophy Today</i>	Camus receives the Nobel Prize for Literature Jack Kerouac, <i>On the Road</i>	Rome Treaty signed by France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg establishes the European Economic Community The Soviet Union launches <i>Sputnik 1</i> , the first man-made object to orbit the Earth
1958	Arendt, <i>The Human Condition</i> Lévi-Strauss, <i>Anthropologie structurale</i>	Chinua Achebe, <i>Things Fall Apart</i> William S. Burroughs, <i>Naked Lunch</i> Elie Wiesel, <i>Night</i> (–1960) The first feature films by directors associated with the French “New Wave” cinema, including, in 1959, <i>Les Quatre Cent Coups (The 400 Blows)</i> by François Truffaut (1932–84) and, in 1960, <i>A bout de souffle (Breathless)</i> by Jean-Luc Godard (1930–)	Charles de Gaulle is elected president after a new constitution establishes the Fifth Republic

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1958		The Sorbonne's "Faculté des Lettres" is officially renamed the "Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines"	
1959	Lévi-Strauss is elected to the Chair in Social Anthropology at the Collège de France	Günter Grass, <i>The Tin Drum</i> Gillo Pentecorvo, <i>The Battle of Algiers</i>	
1960	Death of Camus Gadamer, <i>Wahrheit und Methode</i> Sartre, <i>Critique de la raison dialectique</i>	Harper Lee, <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> First issue of the journal <i>Tel Quel</i> is published The birth control pill is made available to married women	
1961	Death of Fanon and Merleau-Ponty Fanon, <i>Les Damnés de la terre</i> , with a preface by Sartre Foucault, <i>Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique</i> Heidegger, <i>Nietzsche</i> Levinas, <i>Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité</i> (-1969) <i>Die Positivismusstreit in der Deutsche Soziologie</i> (pub. 1969)	Joseph Heller, <i>Catch 22</i> Alain Robbe-Grillet and Alain Resnais, <i>Last Year at Marienbad</i>	Erection of the Berlin Wall Bay of Pigs failed invasion of Cuba
1962	Death of Bachelard Deleuze, <i>Nietzsche et la philosophie</i> Heidegger, <i>Being and Time</i> appears in English translation Thomas Kuhn, <i>The Structure of Scientific Revolutions</i> Lévi-Strauss, <i>La Pensée sauvage</i> Merleau-Ponty, <i>Phenomenology of Perception</i> appears in English translation First meeting of SPEP at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois	Rachel Carson, <i>Silent Spring</i> Ken Kesey, <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i> Doris Lessing, <i>The Golden Notebook</i>	France grants independence to Algeria Cuban Missile Crisis
1963	Arendt, <i>Eichmann in Jerusalem</i>	Betty Friedan, <i>The Feminine Mystique</i> The first artificial heart is implanted	Imprisonment of Nelson Mandela Assassination of John F. Kennedy
1964	Barthes, <i>Éléments de sémiologie</i> Marcuse, <i>One-Dimensional Man</i>	Lacan founds L'École Freudienne de Paris The Beatles appear on <i>The Ed Sullivan Show</i>	US Civil Rights Act outlaws discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin

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	PHILOSOPHICAL EVENTS	CULTURAL EVENTS	POLITICAL EVENTS
1964	Merleau-Ponty, <i>Le Visible et l'invisible</i> (posthumous)		Gulf of Tonkin Incident
1965	Death of Buber Althusser, <i>Pour Marx</i> and, with Balibar, <i>Lire "Le Capital"</i> Foucault, <i>Madness and Civilization</i> appears in English translation Ricoeur, <i>De l'interprétation: Essai sur Freud</i>	Truman Capote, <i>In Cold Blood</i> Alex Haley, <i>The Autobiography of Malcolm X</i>	Assassination of Malcolm X
1966	Adorno, <i>Negative Dialektik</i> Deleuze, <i>Le Bergsonisme</i> Foucault, <i>Les Mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines</i> Lacan, <i>Écrits</i>	Alain Resnais, <i>Hiroshima Mon Amour</i> Jacques-Alain Miller founds <i>Cahiers pour l'analyse</i> Johns Hopkins Symposium "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man" introduces French theory to the American academic community <i>Star Trek</i> premieres on US television	(-1976) Chinese Cultural Revolution Foundation of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale
1967	Derrida, <i>De la grammatologie, La Voix et le phénomène, and L'Écriture et la différence</i>	Gabriel Garcia Marquez, <i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i>	Confirmation of Thurgood Marshall, first African-American Justice to the US Supreme Court
1968	Deleuze, <i>Différence et répétition</i> and, Spinoza et le problème de l'expression Habermas, <i>Erkenntnis und Interesse</i>	The Beatles release the White Album Carlos Castaneda, <i>The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge</i> Stanley Kubrick, <i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i>	Events of May '68, including closure of the University of Nanterre (May 2), police invasion of the Sorbonne (May 3), student demonstrations and strikes, and workers' occupation of factories and general strike Prague Spring Assassination of Martin Luther King Tet Offensive
1969	Death of Adorno and Jaspers Deleuze, <i>Logique du sens</i> Foucault, <i>L'Archéologie du savoir</i> Paulo Freire, <i>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</i>	Kurt Vonnegut, <i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i> Woodstock Music and Art Fair Neil Armstrong is the first person to set foot on the moon	Stonewall riots launch the Gay Liberation Movement
1970	Death of Carnap Adorno, <i>Ästhetische Theorie</i> Foucault, <i>The Order of Things</i> appears in English translation	First Earth Day Millett, <i>Sexual Politics</i> Founding of <i>Diacritics</i>	Shootings at Kent State University

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	PHILOSOPHICAL EVENTS	CULTURAL EVENTS	POLITICAL EVENTS
1970	Husserl, <i>The Crisis of European Philosophy</i> appears in English translation Ricoeur begins teaching at the University of Chicago Founding of the <i>Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology</i> Foucault elected to the Chair of the History of Systems of Thought at the Collège de France		Salvador Allende becomes the first Marxist head of state to be freely elected in a Western nation
1971	Death of Lukács Lyotard, <i>Discours, figure</i> Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice</i> Founding of <i>Research in Phenomenology</i>	Reorganization of the University of Paris	End of the gold standard for US dollar
1972	Death of John Wild Bourdieu, <i>Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique</i> Deleuze and Guattari, <i>Capitalisme et schizophrénie. 1. L'Anti-Oedipe</i> Derrida, <i>La Dissémination, Marges de la philosophie</i> , and <i>Positions</i> <i>Radical Philosophy</i> begins publication Colloquium on Nietzsche at Cerisy		Watergate break-in President Richard Nixon visits China, beginning the normalization of relations between the US and PRC
1973	Death of Horkheimer Apel, <i>Transformation der Philosophie</i> Lacan publishes the first volume of his <i>Séminaire</i> Derrida, <i>Speech and Phenomena</i> appears in English translation	Thomas Pynchon, <i>Gravity's Rainbow</i> (–1978) Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, <i>The Gulag Archipelago</i> Roe v. Wade legalizes abortion	Chilean military coup ousts and kills President Salvador Allende
1974	Irigaray, <i>Speculum: De l'autre femme</i> Kristeva, <i>La Révolution du langage poétique</i>	Founding of <i>Critical Inquiry</i> Creation of the first doctoral program in women's studies in Europe, the Centre de Recherches en Études Féminines, at the University of Paris VIII–Vincennes, directed by Hélène Cixous	Resignation of Nixon
1975	Death of Arendt	<i>Signs</i> begins publication	Death of Francisco Franco

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1975	<p>Foucault, <i>Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison</i></p> <p>Irigaray, <i>Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un</i></p> <p>Derrida begins teaching in the English Department at Yale University</p> <p>Foucault begins teaching at the University of California, Berkeley</p> <p>Foundation of GREPH, the Groupe de Recherches sur l'Enseignement Philosophique</p>	<p>The Sixth Section of the EPHE is renamed the École des Hautes Études in Sciences Sociales</p>	<p>Andrei Sakharov wins Nobel Peace Prize</p> <p>Fall of Saigon, ending the Vietnam War</p> <p>First US-USSR joint space mission</p>
1976	<p>Death of Heidegger and Bultmann</p> <p>Foucault, <i>Histoire de la sexualité. 1. La Volonté de savoir</i></p> <p>Barthes is elected to the Chair of Literary Semiology at the Collège de France</p>	<p>Foundation of the International Association for Philosophy and Literature</p>	<p>Death of Mao Zedong</p> <p>Uprising in Soweto</p>
1977	<p>Death of Ernst Bloch</p> <p>Deleuze and Guattari, <i>Anti-Oedipus</i> appears in English translation</p> <p>Lacan, <i>Écrits: A Selection</i> appears in English translation</p>	<p>240 Czech intellectuals sign Charter 77</p> <p>The Centre Georges Pompidou, designed by architects Renzo Piano (1937-) and Richard Rogers (1933-), opens in Paris</p>	<p>Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat becomes the first Arab head of state to visit Israel</p>
1978	<p>Death of Kurt Gödel</p> <p>Arendt, <i>Life of the Mind</i></p> <p>Derrida, <i>La Vérité en peinture</i></p>	<p>George Perec, <i>Life: A User's Manual</i></p> <p>Edward Said, <i>Orientalism</i></p> <p>Birmingham School: Centre for Contemporary Culture releases <i>Policing the Crisis</i></p> <p>Louise Brown becomes the first test-tube baby</p>	<p>Camp David Accords</p>
1979	<p>Death of Marcuse</p> <p>Bourdieu, <i>La Distinction: Critique sociale du jugement</i></p> <p>Lyotard, <i>La Condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir</i></p> <p>Prigogine and Stengers, <i>La Nouvelle alliance</i></p> <p>Rorty, <i>Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature</i></p>	<p>Francis Ford Coppola, <i>Apocalypse Now</i></p> <p>Edgar Morin, <i>La Vie de La Vie</i></p> <p>The first cognitive sciences department is established at MIT</p> <p>Jerry Falwell founds Moral Majority</p>	<p>Iranian Revolution</p> <p>Iran Hostage Crisis begins</p> <p>Margaret Thatcher becomes prime minister of the UK (the first woman to be a European head of state)</p> <p>Nicaraguan Revolution</p>
1980	<p>Death of Barthes, Fromm, and Sartre</p>	<p>Lacan officially dissolves the École Freudienne de Paris</p>	<p>Death of Yugoslav president Josip Broz Tito</p>

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	PHILOSOPHICAL EVENTS	CULTURAL EVENTS	POLITICAL EVENTS
1980	Deleuze and Guattari, <i>Capitalisme et schizophrénie. 2. Mille plateaux</i> Foucault, <i>The History of Sexuality, Vol. One</i> appears in English translation	Murder of John Lennon Cable News Network (CNN) becomes the first television station to provide twenty-four-hour news coverage	Election of Ronald Reagan as US president Solidarity movement begins in Poland
1981	Death of Lacan Habermas, <i>Theorie der kommunikativen Handelns</i> Bourdieu is elected to the Chair in Sociology at the Collège de France	First cases of AIDS are discovered among gay men in the US Debut of MTV	Release of American hostages in Iran François Mitterrand is elected as the first socialist president of France's Fifth Republic Confirmation of Sandra Day O'Connor, first woman Justice, to the US Supreme Court
1982	Foundation of the Collège International de Philosophie by François Châtelet, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Pierre Faye, and Dominique Lecourt	Debut of the Weather Channel	Falklands War
1983	Death of Aron Lyotard, <i>Le Différend</i> Sloterdijk, <i>Kritik der zynischen Vernunft</i>	Alice Walker, <i>The Color Purple</i> Founding of <i>Hypatia</i>	
1984	Death of Foucault Lloyd, <i>The Man of Reason</i>	Marguerite Duras, <i>The Lover</i>	Assassination of Indira Gandhi Year-long strike of the National Union of Mineworkers in the UK
1985	Death of Schmitt Habermas, <i>Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne</i> Irigaray's <i>Speculum of the Other Woman</i> and <i>This Sex Which Is Not One</i> appear in English translation First complete translation into French of Heidegger's <i>Sein und Zeit</i>	Don DeLillo, <i>White Noise</i> Donna Haraway, <i>Cyborg Manifesto</i> Gabriel Garcia Marquez, <i>Love in the Time of Cholera</i>	Mikhail Gorbachev is named General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union
1986	Death of Beauvoir Establishment of the Archives Husserl de Paris at the École Normale Supérieure	Art Spiegelman, <i>Maus I: A Survivor's Tale</i> (-1989) <i>Historikerstreit</i>	Chernobyl nuclear accident in USSR Election of Corazon Aquino ends Marcos regime in Philippines
1987	Derrida begins his appointment as Visiting Professor of French and Comparative Literature at UC-Irvine	Toni Morrison, <i>Beloved</i> Discovery of Paul de Man's wartime journalism damages the popularity of deconstruction in America	In June Gorbachev inaugurates the perestroika (restructuring) that led to the end of the USSR The First Intifada begins in the Gaza Strip and West Bank

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1988	Badiou, <i>L'Être et l'événement</i>	Salman Rushdie, <i>The Satanic Verses</i>	Benazir Bhutto becomes the first woman to head an Islamic nation Pan Am Flight 103, en route from London to New York, is destroyed by a bomb over Lockerbie, Scotland
1989	Heidegger, <i>Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)</i> Žižek, <i>The Sublime Object of Ideology</i>	Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska Tim Berners-Lee submits a proposal for an information management system, later called the World Wide Web	Fall of the Berlin Wall Students protest in Tiananmen Square, Beijing
1990	Death of Althusser Butler, <i>Gender Trouble</i>	The World Health Organization removes homosexuality from its list of diseases Beginning of the Human Genome Project headed by James D. Watson	Nelson Mandela is released from prison Reunification of Germany Break-up of the former Yugoslavia and beginning of the Yugoslav Wars Lech Walesa is elected president of Poland
1991	Deleuze and Guattari, <i>Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?</i>	Fredric Jameson, <i>Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism</i> The World Wide Web becomes the first publicly available service on the internet	First Gulf War
1992	Death of Guattari Guattari, <i>Chaosmose</i> Habermas, <i>Fakticität und Geltung</i> Honneth, <i>Kampf um Anerkennung</i>		Maastricht Treaty is signed, creating the European Union Dissolution of the Soviet Union
1993	Gilroy, <i>Black Atlantic</i>		Dissolution of Czechoslovakia; Vaclav Havel is named the first president of the Czech Republic
1994	Death of Popper Grosz, <i>Volatile Bodies</i> Publication of Foucault's <i>Dits et écrits</i>	Death of Ralph Ellison The Channel Tunnel opens, connecting England and France	Genocide in Rwanda End of apartheid in South Africa; Nelson Mandela is sworn in as president North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), signed in 1992, goes into effect
1995	Death of Deleuze and Levinas		World Trade Organization (WTO) comes into being, replacing GATT

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1995			End of Bosnian War
1996		Cloning of Dolly the Sheep (died 2003)	Death of Mitterrand
1998	Death of Lyotard		
1999	Badiou leaves Vincennes to become Professor and Head of the Philosophy Department at the École Normale Supérieure	Death of Iris Murdoch	Introduction of the Euro Antiglobalization forces disrupt the WTO meeting in Seattle Kosovo War
2000	Death of Quine Negri and Hardt, <i>Empire</i>		The Second Intifada
2001	Balibar, <i>Nous, citoyens d'Europe? Les Frontières, l'État, le peuple</i>		Terrorist attack destroys the World Trade Center
2002	Death of Bourdieu and Gadamer		
2003	Death of Blanchot and Davidson	Completion of the Human Genome Project	Start of the Second Gulf War Beginning of conflict in Darfur
2004	Death of Derrida and Leopoldo Zea Malabou, <i>Que faire de notre cerveau?</i>	Asian tsunami	Madrid train bombings
2005	Death of Ricoeur	Hurricane Katrina	Bombings of the London public transport system
2006	Badiou, <i>Logiques des mondes. L'Être et l'événement, 2.</i>		Bombings of the Mumbai train system
2007	Death of Jean Baudrillard and Rorty		
2008	Publication of first of Derrida's Seminars: <i>La Bête et le souverain</i>	Death of Robbe-Grillet, Aimé Césaire, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn	Election of Barack Obama, the first African American president of the US International banking collapse
2009	Death of Lévi-Strauss, Leszek Kolakowski, Marjorie Grene	Death of Frank McCourt and John Updike	
2010	Death of Pierre Hadot and Claude Lefort	Death of Tony Judt and J. D. Salinger	Arab Spring uprisings begin in Tunisia
2011	Death of Michael Dummett and Elizabeth Young-Bruehl SPEP celebrates 50th anniversary		Death of Václav Havel US special forces kill Osama Bin Laden Occupy movement
2012		Death of Eric Hobsbawm and Adrienne Rich	

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Major works of individual philosophers are collected at the end of the relevant essay in the text.

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