

Vanguard of Retrogression

*"Postmodern" Fictions as Ideology
in the Era of Fictitious Capital*

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Preface

Ontological “Difference” and the Neo-Liberal War on the Social Deconstruction and Deindustrialization

Ars sine scientia nihil.

It was 1971. We were in our early 20s and we were mad. After the seeming prelude to apocalypse we had just lived through, who, at the time, would have believed that we were at the beginning of three decades (and counting) in which, in the U.S. at least, mass movements would all but disappear from the streets? Even today, the evanescence of the world-wide mood of “1968” seems slightly incredible. The funk of 1971 turned Wordsworth on his head: “Terrible in that sunset to be alive, but to be young was hell itself”.

The “sixties”, in their positive impulse, were over. In the U.S., the mass movement in the streets of 1965 to 1969 was quickly turning comatose. The ultra-Stalinist Progressive Labor Party captured SDS (Students for a Democratic Society), but captured only a corpse made up only of its own rapidly-dwindling members. The stock market crashed, Penn Central went bankrupt, and the financial markets seized up in a general liquidity crisis (it

would not be the last). Not many people of the 1960's "New Left" paid much attention to these economic developments at the time, and fewer still understood that they signaled the end of the postwar boom. But a sense of the end of something was in the air. The December 1969 Altamont concert of the Rolling Stones had turned ugly, as the Hell's Angels guarding the bandstand had beaten a young black man to death with pool cues. The Chicago police murdered Black Panther Fred Hampton in his sleep. Charles Manson's collective had earlier murdered pregnant actress Sharon Tate and other partygoers in the Hollywood hills, leaving a fork in Tate's stomach, and the Weathermen made the fork into a symbol of struggle at their next conference. Some Weathermen, in turn, blew themselves up in a Greenwich Village penthouse, though Bernardine Dohrn and the others would continue to plant more bombs and to put out their demented manifestos for some time afterward. The postal workers struck militantly and the government sent the National Guard – futilely – to deliver the mail before caving to the strike. Nixon and the U.S. military invaded Cambodia; the Teamsters wildcatted in Cleveland and elsewhere; the National Guard unit which had confronted the Teamsters went on to Kent State with little sleep and killed four anti-war students. A national student strike followed, but it was (significantly) taken over

in many places, for the first time in years, by left-liberals who tried to turn its energy to liberal Democratic politics for the fall 1970 elections. Huey Newton, head of the Black Panther Party (BPP), was released from jail in summer 1970, announcing at the ensuing press conference his intention to "lead the struggle of the people to a victorious conclusion", apparently unaware (after serving 2 1/2 years on manslaughter charges for killing an Oakland cop) that the "struggle of the people" in the U.S. was, for the foreseeable future, folding up the tent. The sleaze and rot of the end of the 60's were not a pretty sight: Tim Leary, the former P.T. Barnum of LSD, held prisoner by the breakaway Eldridge Cleaver faction of the BPP in Algiers; the burnt-out meth freaks scrounging spare change; the grim determination, in dour New Left milieus, to "smash" everything bourgeois.

More diffusely but with more of a future (at least in the professional middle classes), the "new social movements" were gathering momentum: women rejected their second-class roles everywhere in society, (including in the 1960's New Left); gays rode the momentum of the 1969 Stonewall riots; an important minority of blacks and Latinos moved into the middle class through affirmative action programs, the Club of Rome report on *Limits to Growth* and the Rockefeller-backed "Zero Population Growth" gave the

ecology and environmental movements (and more diffusely, a good part of society) the Malthusian agenda they have never really shaken off.

The following essays were written over more than two decades, yet they form a continuous whole, even if it is one that only fully emerged over time. They were written “against the grain” of much of the ideology of the past 50 years, above all in its “left” and “far-left” guises, that might be summarized with the term “middle-class radicalism”. While much of middle-class radicalism may have seemed, over the course of the twentieth century, to overlap with the Marxian project of communism, they are as ultimately opposed as Stirner and Bakunin on one hand and Marx and Luxemburg on the other. One might use the Hegelian term “negation of the negation” to describe the former and the Feuerbachian term “self-subsisting positive” to describe the latter. The “fault line” between one and the other is precisely Marx’s relocation of the “creative act of transformation” (what the “Theses on Feuerbach” call *sinnliche unwälzende Tätigkeit* or “sensuous transformative activity”) within man’s relationship to nature. The fault line is moreover between Hegel’s view of nature as the realm of “repetition”, as “boring”, and Marx’s view of human history, and man’s history in the transformation of nature, as the transformation of the laws of nature themselves, as in his

critique of Malthus's theory of population. In the latter view, nature and natural laws themselves become historical. "An animal only produces its own nature," Marx wrote in 1844, "but humanity reproduces all of nature". An animal is a tool; a human being uses tools. Hegel epitomized the "state civil servant" view of history, with his idea that the Prussian monarch and his bureaucrats performed universal labor, whereas Marx precisely transposes the idea of universal labor, i.e. creativity, to man's sensuous activity within nature, an extension of natural history. This "universal labor" of course exists only fragmentarily and abstractly within capitalism, scattered among the different parts of the (productive) working class, and some parts of the scientific and technical strata. But these fragments, along with others from intellectual and cultural life, are indispensable future parts of a future "activity as all-sided in its production as in its consumption" which Marx, in the *Grundrisse*, sees as the supercession of the capitalist work/leisure antinomy in communism.

Following in the same vein, one might just as succinctly counterpose middle-class radicalism and Marxian socialism as follows: middle-class radicalism conceives of freedom as "transgression", as the breaking of laws, the "refusal of all constraints", as the Situationist International put it more

than 30 years ago, whereas the Marxian project of communism conceives of freedom, as the practical solution of a problematic which evolved theoretically from Spinoza and Leibniz to Kant, Hegel and Feuerbach as the *transformation* of laws, up to and including the physical laws of the universe, man's unique "Promethean" capacity. More than 150 years ago, Marx, in his critique of the middle-class radicalism of the Young Hegelians, said that for Bauer, Hess, and Stirner, science, technology and the human history of practical activity in nature was only "mass, mere mass" (to use the jargon of the day) and one can truly say that for most of the Western left, far-left and ultra-left which emerged from the 1960s, these phenomena are shown the door with the updated (and essentially Weberian) Frankfurt School mantra "domination, mere domination". For the middle-class-radical, "negation of the negation" view, the problems are "hierarchy", "authority", "domination" and "power"; for the Marxian communist view, the problems are the project of the abolition of value, commodity production, wage labor and the proletariat (the latter being the commodity form of labor power within capitalism). From these latter the "negation of the negation" problematic is entirely recast, reformed and superceded, and its heavy overlay of

bourgeois ideology – freedom conceived without the transformation of necessity – discarded.

What is truly appalling today in large swaths of the left and far-left in the West is the willful illiteracy in the critique of political economy. Perhaps even more appalling, and closely related, is the willful illiteracy, boredom and hostility where science and nature are concerned.

It is certainly true that the “critique of political economy” can sometimes be almost as boring as political economy itself, better known today under its still more ideologically contemporary name of “economics”. We recall Marx writing to Engels (in 1857!) saying that he hoped to have done with the “economic shit” within 1-2 years. I myself have studied “economic questions” for years, and have also spent years in recovery from the novicained, ashes-in-the-mouth feeling brought on by excessive exposure to the “dismal science”, or even to its critique.

But this is something rather different than a certain “mood” of the past 35 years, a mood whose culmination to date is the “post-modern”, “cultural studies” scene that has filled up bookstores with its nihilist punning,¹ its “white males never did anything but rape, pillage and loot” theory of history, and its ignorant, revealing “everything and everyone is tainted” projections onto everything and everyone in some potted notion of the Western “tradition”.

This is the world view of demoralized upper middle-class people ensconced in fashionable universities, largely ignorant of the real history of the failure (to date) of the communist project for a higher organization of society, assuming that the historical and intellectual backwater engulfing them is the final product of human history.

All this can be critiqued and rejected on its own terms. It goes hand-in-hand with an ever-lingering “mood” which asserts that there was never anything historically progressive about capitalism, a mood so pervasive that it does not even bother to argue the case, since it rejects out of hand the idea of progress, linear, non-linear or otherwise, and therefore the question is foreclosed before it even comes up. Once the idea of an organization of society superior to capitalism is repudiated, capitalism itself appears to the post-modernists as unproblematic, just as it is to the rest of bourgeois ideology. While some post-modernists might stop short (though God knows why) of one French Heideggerian’s call to “bring the inhuman into the commons” (*offrir droit de cité a l’inhumain*), their underlying world outlook easily moves toward the same repudiation of the tired word “humanism”. This counterposition surfaced in the 1987-88 Heidegger and DeMan² controversies in such formulations as “Is Nazism a Humanism?” (*Le Nazisme est-il un Humanisme?*)³ The

argument was as follows. Humanism was the Western metaphysic of the “subject”, culminating in Hegel and reshaped by Marx. Trapped in and constituted by the metaphysics of “presence”, the reduction of everything to a “representation” (image), humanism was the ideology of the subjection – the PoMos would of course write (subject)ion – of the entire earth to “representation”, in what Heidegger called the worldwide domination of “technological nihilism” (Nietzsche had already arrived at important anticipations of this analysis). For a certain, “post-1945” (!) Heidegger, Nazism had culminated this drive to “technological nihilism”. (When he was a Nazi, up to 1945, Heidegger had gamely argued that liberal capitalism was the culmination of “technological nihilism”.) The French Heideggerians thus argued that Nazism was a humanism in its drive to complete Western “technological nihilism”, and that the apparently Nazi Heidegger, by attempting to “deconstruct” humanism, was thereby “subverting” Nazism. Meanwhile, of course, the opponents of Nazism, of whatever political stripe, were trapped in “humanism” and therefore trapped on Nazism’s terrain, similarly facilitating the worldwide victory of “technological nihilism”. One could presumably count an old humanist such as Rosa Luxemburg, (had she not been murdered in 1919 by proto-Nazis, abetted by Social Democrats) as

someone else confusedly trapped in “technological nihilism”, having died a bit too early to appreciate Heidegger as the real opponent of Nazism.

It is important, in passing, to try to reconstruct the mood of deep decompression throughout the advanced capitalist world, *ca.* 1972, to understand how things came to their current state.

One fundamental shift that has been almost totally forgotten today is the disappearance of the climate associated, for better or for worse, with the word “existentialism” that reigned from the early 1940’s to *ca.* 1965. This mood was articulated in the works of authors who have for the most part faded away: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus, Merleau-Ponty, Dostoevsky, Heidegger, Jaspers, Unamuno, Maritain. (Why, of all these figures, only Nietzsche and Heidegger are still widely read today, will become clear in a moment.) “Existentialism” seemed, in those years, to overlap, or be on a continuum with various contemporary “avant-gardes” of the 1945-1965 period, including the American beats, the British “Angry Young Men”, Paris Latin Quarter cellar night clubs, bebop and free jazz, serial music, the films of directors such as Bergman, Antonioni, Godard, the theatre of Pinter, Beckett and Ionesco. The popularized watchwords of “existentialism” were despair, *Angst*, death, despair,

nausea, absurdity, meaninglessness, alienation. The future of the planet, everywhere, seemed to be high modernist technocracy, materialized in the austere architecture of the international style that had triumphed in the 1930's and in the giant industrial and infrastructural projects that littered the "socialist" bloc or the Third World (steel mills, dams, entire cities like Niemeyer's Brasilia or his equally sinister French Communist Party headquarters in Paris), and buttressed by the economic myth of the "affluent society", "built-in stabilizers", and depression-proof statist economic policies. Existentialism caught the self-indulgent climate of the middle classes in the West which took this trend as a bedrock permanent assumption, and expressed the attitude of the embattled, lonely individual, for whom collective action either did not exist or smelled too strongly of 1930's Stalino-Popular Frontism. Symptomatic of political thought outside the mainstream, in those years, (when people of the "existentialist" persuasion on occasion turned their thoughts, fleetingly, to politics) was the debate over whether the dystopia of George Orwell's *1984* or Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* best captured the future.

The second half of the 1960's basically swept away this mood, but in confusing and conflicting ways. The worldwide middle-class "New Left" definitely had an "existentialist" dimension to it. There was everywhere the

feeling that the cultural revolt of the previous 20-25 years (beginning, at least in the U.S., in the early forties with figures such as Kerouac, Ginsberg, Cassady and Burroughs) somehow ineffably blended into the mass movements in the streets after 1965. ("We dug the first hole for today's underground", as one aging beat put in 1971. "Modernism in the streets" was Daniel Bell's phrase.) Twenty thousand individuals wandered around open-air warrens of perpetual adolescence such as Berkeley, California, each imagining him - or herself - to be Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf*. All of this continued up to its paroxysm *ca.* 1969, to the constitution of the army of "100,000 Villons" as the crotchety Saul Bellow called it.

By 1971, it was clear that this whole culture of the previous thirty years was fading away. In New Left bastions such as Berkeley, people who only 1-2 years before had wanted to be "professional revolutionaries" were now scrambling to be just "professionals": lawyers, doctors, academics, but of course in "an entirely new way".⁴

It was into this social and cultural climate of decompression of middle-class radicalism that the "new Nietzsche" and the "late Heidegger", followed hard by Foucault and Derrida, introduced a whole new turn, as epochal as anything of the previous three decades, laying the foundation for what would become "post-modernism"

(we had also not yet heard words like “yuppie” or “gentrification”). This “new Nietzsche” and “late Heidegger” emerged from almost all the other “existentialist” dross of the 1945-1970 period with a tremendous future before them. Forgotten were the existentialist watchwords and individual problematic of “despair” and “*Angst*” and “dread”, so obviously superceded in the euphoria of the return of the revolution in 1968. And because the 1973 oil crisis and the 1973-75 world recession had not yet happened (putting paid to all the economic myths of the previous three decades, from the liberals’ “affluent society” to the Situationists’ “cybernetic welfare state”) this emergence took place when it appeared to many that the battle was still against “technocracy”, “consumer terror” or the “administered world”. “Chaos” or its threat had not yet become the ruling ideology; it was rather still the spectre of horizons of cement, Corbusier’s *béton brut*, and treeless vistas of high-rise apartments and office buildings, bumper-to-bumper freeway commutes, the quiet omnipresent hum of electronic devices, and deep monotony and boredom that haunted middle-class imaginations. We were not “remembering” the futures of Lebanon, Somalia, Ethiopia, Angola, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Chechnya, Afghanistan, the Iran-Iraq war, ex-Yugoslavia, the South Bronx or south central Los

Angeles, but rather the endless pallid chalky sun and wispy clouds of the Mallarmean sky opening into an eternal empty future, the “entropology” that Claude Levi-Strauss evoked at the end of *Tristes Tropiques*.

This Mallarmean sky tempted some people to look back, through the eyes of Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s interpretations of the pre-Socratics, to archaic Greece, to where (so it seemed) *aletheia* (disclosedness) had begun its devolution into *veritas*, where *Sein* (Being) had devolved into *das Seiende* (entity), when “Western metaphysics”, with Parmenides and Zeno, had “interpreted” Being as “presence”, as representation, and had begun its career of world conquest as the *Geschick* (“destiny” or “sense of reality”) of the West. None of us, then, had ever given a thought to ancient Egypt, or ancient Israel, or to Iran, or Islamic Spain as important sources of our world; we lived in the era of the “reign of technique”, and little prior to a potted, positivistic interpretation of the scientific revolution and a Voltairean view of the eighteenth century seemed of any real importance; if we ever thought about the Renaissance and Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was only as respective proto-rationalist moments of secular “pagan revival” and Max Weber’s Protestant Ethic. We looked to ancient Greece and its philosophy – the fall into the interpretation of Being as

“presence” and the origins of metaphysics – mainly as a distant precursor of the technocratic, administered world. Civilizations such as the Iranian, the Indian, the Chinese, not to mention the worlds of Africa, Polynesia or the Amerindians, barely existed for us; it was so obvious that they had all but succumbed, like ourselves, before the endless pallid sun at the “meridian” of “modernity”, in the world where (as Vaneigem put it) “the guarantee of not dying of hunger was exchanged for the guarantee of dying of boredom”.

Those years, 1971-73, were eery. It seemed that all the revolts of the previous three decades had faded away with remarkable speed, leaving behind only the “new social movements” of women, blacks, Latinos, gays and ecologists, mainly battling their way into the mainstream. Decompression: all the dark underside, all the “repressed”, all the “illicit” of the previously-cloistered (“underground”) milieus of cultural opposition of the earlier period had surfaced violently to become licit and explicit, and were finding their place in the dominant order. Long before Francis Fukuyama made him into a fad, we were delving into Kojeve’s *Introduction to the Reading of the Philosophy of Hegel*, which seemed to echo our sense of being at the end of something, if not exactly the “end of history”.

In this atmosphere, some turned to Foucault, whose idea of “episteme” (in *The Order of Things*) seemed lifted (and likely was) from Heidegger’s notion of *Geschick*, the “destiny” or “sense of reality” beneath all consciousness or action of a culture that occasionally disappeared as mysteriously as it came. (That *Geschick* for the West was the metaphysics of “presence”, or Being reduced to “representation”.) It was a widespread feeling at the time, popularized above all in Kuhn’s theory of scientific revolutions, that indeed historical epochs were underpinned by deep, unspoken, shared assumptions (Kuhn called them paradigms), but that the succession from one to the other could not be called “progress” toward any kind of “truth” outside such paradigms, and certainly could not be linked to anything like capitalist accumulation. We were being pulled, willy-nilly, into the “post-modern” belief that one could know only “signifiers”, and perhaps to the belief that there were only signifiers; few recognized then (as few recognize today) that such ideas were the night thoughts of capital in the same years, as it accelerated its mutation into its increasingly fictive form, seemingly detached from any relationship to production or reproduction.

The war cry was the “overthrow of metaphysics”, as metaphysics had begun after Heraclitus. We were taken

aback and intrigued by the fact that the two opposed views of Hegel and Heidegger took off from the same Heraclitean fragment, so totally did elements of the “realization of metaphysics” and the “overthrow of metaphysics” resemble each other and yet were as ships passing in the night.

For Nietzsche, “metaphysics” was the Platonic world of ideas that fused with Judeo-Christian universality in late antiquity, the “lie on life” erected “above” “reality”, from which life was to be judged, and found lacking. “Better logic than life” was the view inherited from Parmenides and Zeno, and attacked by Nietzsche in his early work *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, and this view of a supra-temporal, supra-spatial “concept” hovering over “life” remained a constant of his indictment of “Western nihilism” throughout. The Western tradition was “nihilist” because this “concept”, this supra-temporal supra-spatial vantage point was precisely “nothing”, empty, a diabolically clever manifestation of weak-willed resentment contrived to pull the “strong” down to the level of the “weak”, that later became the philosophy of Christian monotheism.

Heidegger took over this problematic and carried it much further. In his early period (*Being and Time*, 1927) he began where the late Nietzsche left off, and with the problematic of the Nietzschean Superman, the individual shaping his own reality through an aestheticized will-to-

power constrained only by the limits set by other such wills. (Heidegger, however, developed an entirely different language for this analysis, deeply marked by Kierkegaard, Husserlian phenomenology and pre-1914 *Lebensphilosophie*.) But in his own later period, he decided that both Nietzsche as well as his own early work had concluded Western metaphysics, culminating in a planetary will-to-power to transform all reality into “presence”, an image, a representation, as embodied in science and technology.

Heidegger, like Foucault after him, was aiming his critique directly at dialectical thought, against the reason that tends to absorb the other into itself, that understands all “otherness” as alienation. (Or as Marx said, “nothing human is alien to me”.) Against this kind of rationality, Heidegger tried to erect the wall of *Differenz*, difference that was not dialectically mediated or superceded by any historical process, but just... difference.

In those years 1971-73, this vision was made to appeal. As we attempted to understand the abstract cellophane in which capitalism was wrapping all sensuous reality, to see this terrible abstraction originating in the pre-Socratics was all too intriguing. Of course we knew too that this grew out of the abstraction of the commodity, though we paid less attention to Marxist analyses

(Cornforth, Sohn-Rethel) showing the pre-Socratics in exactly that context.

But did anyone ever notice that Friedrich Nietzsche emerged in the 1870's simultaneously with neo-classical economics? Did anyone ever see him in relationship to the intensive phase of capitalist accumulation which, in the U.S. and in Germany, first took shape in that decade?

The emergence of neo-classical economics (Jevons, Menger, Walras) replaced production with consumption and individual "preferences" as the bourgeois perspective on "economics" (as the replacement for political economy came to be called). (Contemporaries of the Austrian school, a decade or two later, explicitly called this the "subjectification" of economics). Everyone knows that this shift involved the burial of the pre-Marxist labor theory of value as it had culminated in Ricardo and the Ricardian socialists of the 1840s. Most commentary has focused on the link between post-1870s "economics" as a response to the appearance of the socialist workers' movement out of the 1848 revolutions and the Paris Commune; in the new climate, it was necessary to scrap nearly two centuries of successively sharp attempts to show that labor was the source of all wealth. But less attention has been devoted to the shift in world accumulation from producer goods to consumer goods, closely tied to the world agrarian market

and the post-1873 world agrarian depression. This is the reality that produced Nietzsche, and later Heidegger. Nietzsche's bracketing of truth, the idea that "truth" was an aesthetic creation imposed on chaos by the Superman's will-to-power, was the extreme abstract "high" theorization of the beginning of the era in which world accumulation began, above all in England (still the center of the system at that time and for many decades to come), to include an important fictive/ *rentier* dimension, and thus seemed to similarly bracket any concrete relation to production and reproduction.

But there is more: Nietzsche's and Heidegger's profoundly anti-dialectical stance, aimed against Hegel but rebounding onto Marx, is a direct attack on Marx's theory of labor power.

The appearance of the communist movement in 1848 (the Paris June days, the *Manifesto*), "cut history in two", just as Nietzsche himself claimed to do a few decades later. As theorized by Marx, the appearance of communism posed in practice the realization and supercession of all previously existing philosophy, political economy and culture. Communism said in effect: all previous cultural forms were expressions of what society (i.e. human powers) could not do; they were compensations and consolations for the fact that social progress proceeded at

the expense of the individual. The distance between a Napoleon and a Napoleon III (Louis Bonaparte) as portrayed in Marx's *18th Brumaire* is precisely this distance between the two periods. All bourgeois culture after 1850, consciously or not, was a response to the challenge posed by communism, an attempt to maintain the isolated individual viewpoint in which it was increasingly clear what society could do, in which social progress no longer needed to proceed at the expense of the individual but, on the contrary, the individual could at last appropriate social powers as his/her own.

Because Marx's theory of labor power was exactly the relocation of Hegel's world spirit in the "individuality as all-sided in its production as in its consumption" (*Grundrisse*). It was a theory of self-reflexive global praxis (*sinnliche umwälzende Tätigkeit*), a theory of activity in which the object was simultaneously the actor. Communist man "would fish in the morning, hunt in the afternoon and write critical criticism in the evening", that is he would be not any specific predicate but a relationship to a series of specific predicates, and as such a relationship to himself, and "the multiplication of human powers its its own end". This is the social realization of Nicholas of Cusa's actual infinity, and it is against this relationship that relates itself to itself (*sich selbst verhältendes Verhältnis*) that all

bourgeois thought, led by Nietzsche and Heidegger, semi-consciously or consciously, was directed. And it is this attack on creative labor power which the terribly radical post-modernists take over lock, stock and barrel.

It may be a stretch to see Nietzsche's and above all Heidegger's attempt to found an irreducible, anti-dialectical difference (Derrida later called it *diffERENCE*) as the theoretical anticipation of the flexible small firm, segmented marketing and niche consumption, and "post-Fordist" methods of production (though it is exactly right to see them in relationship to post-1870 neo-classical economics). The ineffable sense of hostility to "bigness", in the form of "bureaucracy", "master narratives" of history, large-scale production and social services, i.e. everything that was the hallmark, in bureaucratic form, of the Social Democratic, Stalinist and Third World statist regimes of the first three decades after World War II, hardly needed such esoterica, particularly in the U.S. But it is no exaggeration whatever to say that these theories swept the world, beginning in the early 1970s, as part of a general war on the social at every level, which was the capitalist response to the 1968 upsurge and its aftermath. And behind the all-too-facile attacks on "master narratives" and "bureaucracy", the capitalists and their ideologues, the theoreticians of "difference", were after the real game of

the unitary working-class “subject” which had seriously frightened them from 1968 to 1973. The pulverization of anything that might be construed as a “general interest”, the breaking up of the big “worker fortresses” of Detroit, Manchester, Billancourt and Turin, the staggering reversal throughout the West, after 1968, of earlier postwar trends toward greater income equality, the “identity politics” of various groups asserting they have nothing in common with anyone else, the seemingly limitless ability of capital to attack, outsource and downsize without encountering any “contradiction” undermining it, all create the climate for the post-modern derision of such “foundationalism”, for their “eternity of bad jokes”, while hope for a higher organization of society beyond capitalism seems to fade away by the day.

This was the social and ideological world of the radicalized middle-classes in the early 1970s. What was ending then and there was the world-historical career of “negation”, theorized for modern history by Hegel’s civil servant philosophy, the civil servant with no relationship to the transformation of nature.

“Negation” had ultimately begun with the Greeks in the point-line-plane-cube cosmology derived from the “division of nature” consummated by Zeno and Parmenides’ metaphysic of the infinitesimal, the idea of infinity as an

asymptotic advance (as in Zeno's paradoxes) in either space or time to a goal that was never reached. Henceforth, for the Western conception of nature, the "infinite" was conceived as an "infinitesimal" in both space (the point) and time (the instant), which in the early modern period materialized itself in Newton's physics and was generalized from there to a whole "ontology" in virtually all areas of science and culture. This moment was the social and epistemological beginning of the "dead nature" that seemed everywhere dominant in the 1950s and 1960s. Nature was linear, as the lines of high modernist technocracy and its architecture were linear.

But from the epoch of bourgeois revolutions, in England, America and above all in France, Western culture was invaded for the first time by a consciousness of history as a dimension of realization, as ultimately theorized in the work of G.F.W. Hegel. Western thought, including Western thought about nature, was "invaded" by time. For the first time it was realized that the reality of specific people in society was defined not by some static supratemporal ideal of Man but by what they had the potential to become as social classes, their *historical* trajectory. That, and that alone, is the meaning of Hegel's assertion that the "real is rational", the "oakness" of the "acorn",⁵ however much the formulation, in a totally reductionist interpretation, has

been used or understood as an apology for this or that status quo.

It is more difficult today, after more than three decades of ecologism and environmentalism, to remember to what extent modern culture from the seventeenth and eighteenth century bourgeois revolutions to the 1960s evolved with the increasing bracketing of "dead nature". The Hegel renaissance of the 1950s and 1960s, so essential for New Left Marxism (in combination with the decanting of many of Marx's previously unknown writings, both from the 1840s and up to his writings on the Russian commune [the *obschina*] and the *Ethnological Notebooks*) was perhaps the culmination of this trend. Yet hard behind the Hegel renaissance in Marxism was the recovery (elaborated by Bloch, Kolakowski and others) of the more general neo-Platonic sources of the Marxian dialectic, in Plotinus, Erigena, Eckardt, Cusa, Bruno and Boehme; of the *natura naturans* view of nature of the same tradition, and side by side with that, the idea of *actual infinity* first articulated by Cusa and Bruno, and passing through Spinoza and Leibniz into Hegel and Marx. The latter two are components of an entirely different conception of nature and science. And yet it was exactly of the latter two, and of such an alternative conception of nature and science, that the New Left (along with the rest of society)

was utterly ignorant in the 1960s. Such ignorance was possible and sustained by the reified view of history inherited from the eighteenth century Enlightenment, which created a potted retrospective in which this entire lineage, deeply entwined with religion and mysticism, was largely invisible, or at best a series of secondary tributaries, making possible the view of “metaphysics” against which Nietzsche and Heidegger took over the field.

The “Heidegger vs. Hegel” counterposition could only emerge in a world that looked with positivist lenses “right through” the period 1450-1650 of the scientific revolution culminating in Newton, and the “rebirth of paganism” that led to the Enlightenment, a world that paid no attention to Plotinus, Erigena, Nicholas of Cusa, Bruno, Kepler, Böhme, Leibniz, and Spinoza on the questions of “actual infinity” and *natura naturans*. Heidegger was only possible against a “tradition” oblivious to these realities. Almost no one except Bloch, Kolakowski and a few others recognized that Marx had transposed that tradition to a materialist view of society and nature. Only a few recognize it, even today.

For the culture of the 1960s (and “post-modernism” and “cultural studies” today still live off of the 1960s, or more specifically off the defeat of the 1960s) cannot be understood without a recognition of how truncated its historical sense was. It was not merely “Eurocentric” (and,

with all the inverted patriotism and cheerleading for the Vietcong, Guevarist guerrillas and Mao's China, "Eurocentric" in a very special way); it was blind to everything *in the history of the West itself* which did not lead to the technocratic, scientific "managed" world it presumed to inhabit. Like the reign of "Urizen" that Blake warned against, modernist culture assumed the *infâme* trinity of Locke, Newton and Voltaire to be the unquestioned (if often unrecognized) founders of its world. Consciously or not, it shared Pascal's anguish before *les espaces infinis*. It accepted that sixteenth-seventeenth century separation of *Geist* and *Natur* that did not exist for a Bruno or a Kepler; it lived off it. It did not "see" except as antiquarianism the astrology, alchemy, Kabbala and neo-Platonism of the Renaissance; it did not "see" the multiple editions of the works of the German mystic Jacob Böhme published at the height of the English Revolution of the 1640s. Revolutions, scientific or political, were secular, anti-religious affairs, and so the "meaningful past" was strictly secular and anti-religious as well.

The critique of the Enlightenment implicit or explicit in the Bloch-Kolakowski et al. recovery of the neo-Platonic sources of the Marxian dialectic (as some of the following essays argue) has nothing to do with most of the stupid criticisms of the Enlightenment today promulgated by

ignorant academics for whom history began with the post-1968 translations of the Frankfurt School and Foucault. It rather critiques the triumph of the Newton-Locke-Voltaire world view from the vantage point of the "road not taken," represented by the Cusa-Bruno-Kepler-Böhme-Spinoza-Leibniz stream of "actual infinity" and *natura naturans*, and pointing to a unitary science.

Instead of the development of this "stream", which posits a unitary theory encompassing both society and nature ("we know only one science, the science of history" as Marx and Engels wrote in *The German Ideology*) we have today legions of people with a smattering of knowledge turning out reams of books filled with buzz words that could be (and have been) produced by a computer program, and could be (and are) picked up in peer-group shop talk in a few months at the nearest humanities program or academic conference. Everyone these people don't like is trapped in a "gaze"; everyone "constitutes" their "identity" by "discourse"; to the fuddy-duddy "master narratives" that talk about such indelicate subjects as world accumulation these people counterpose "pastiche" and "bricolage", the very idea of being in any way systematic smacking of "totalitarianism"; it is blithely assumed that everyone except heterosexual white males now and for all time have been "subversives" (one wonders

why we are still living under capitalism); Joyce scholars give way to Howdy Doody scholars, who of course look askance on “privileging” any particular kind of “writing”; the American population that spends an average of six hours a day watching television and three hours a day at shopping malls is thereby “resisting” and “subverting” consumer culture; a crippling relativism makes it somehow “imperial” to criticize public beheadings in Saudi Arabia or cliterodectomy practiced on five-year old girls in the Sudan; (isn’t that an authoritarian imposition of standards from outside?). The French Revolution was an attempt to reimpose control over women, or was a theatrical “ritual” invented by the 19th century, and thus did in fact not occur; for Baudrillard, the Gulf War did not occur either; we don’t know if the genocide of the Jews took place because we have only different “narratives” about it (and everything is of course only a narrative, and none are definitive). At international conferences Moslem and Hindu fundamentalist women brush off criticism of their retrogressionist movements with quotations from Foucault and Derrida; popular science programs in Third World countries are savaged as “imperialist” with similar quotations. The post-modernist relativists thought out their views with Western imperialism in mind, and don’t have much too say when confronted by barbaric atavisms from

“subaltern” cultures, whose first victims are those trapped in this or that parochial group by the very anti-universalism for which the post-modernists led the charge.

Notes

1. “I seem to be condemned to an eternity of bad jokes,” as Nietzsche uncannily wrote in one of his last telegrams to Jacob Burckhardt in 1889, shortly after the onset of his madness. However much he prepared the way for them, Nietzsche had had done of the bottomless, self-satisfied complacency of the postmodernists.
2. In 1987, Victor Farias, a Chilean former student of Heidegger, published a book exploding the “official story” that Heidegger had broken with Nazism in 1934, and provided documentation of his membership through 1945. Shortly thereafter, an overzealous graduate student found dozens of articles, some of them anti-Semitic, in the pro-Nazi Belgian newspaper *Le Soir*, written by former Yale professor (Sterling Professor of the Humanities, to be exact), Paul DeMan.
3. This title was, of course, a play on Sartre’s late-1940s play *L’existentialisme est-il un humanisme?*
4. Cf. The work of Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God* (New York, 2000), on the recycling of 1960s attitudes in 1990s business ideology.

5. CLR James, *Notes on Dialectics* (1948), presents a brilliant use of the idea of “reality” as potential historical trajectory, in this case the trajectory of the petit bourgeois from the English Revolution of the 1640s to the triumph of worldwide Stalinism.

Race and the Enlightenment I

From Anti-Semitism to White Supremacy,

1492-1676

Part One: Pre-Enlightenment Phase: Spain, Jews and Indians ¹

It is not often recognized that, prior to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the period which Western history calls the Enlightenment, the concept of race did not exist.

It is still less often recognized that the origin of the concept of race, in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, in very specific social circumstances, was preceded by centuries of a very different vision of Africans ² and New World Indians, which had to be eradicated before the concept of race could be invented, expressing a new social practice in new social relations.

In the current climate, in which the Enlightenment is under attack from many specious viewpoints, it is important to make it clear from the outset that the thesis of this article is emphatically not that the Enlightenment was “racist”, still less that it has validity only for “white European males”. It is rather that the concept of race was not accidentally born simultaneously with the Enlightenment, and that the Enlightenment’s “ontology”,

rooted in the new science of the seventeenth century, created a vision of human beings in nature which inadvertently provided weapons to a new race-based ideology which would have been impossible without the Enlightenment. Prior to the Enlightenment, Europeans generally divided the known world between Christians, Jews, Moslems and “heathens”; ³ beginning around the 1670s, they began to speak of race, and color-coded hierarchies of races.

What was this alternative “epistemological grid” through which, prior to the 1670s, the West encountered the “Other”?

A part of the answer is to be found in the impact of late medieval heresy on the ways in which the West understood the New World, and its peoples, for more than 150 years after 1492.

One of the most important sources of the heretical ideas and movements which ultimately destroyed medieval Christianity was the Calabrian abbot, Joachim di Fiore, whose work resonated through centuries of heresy and is often decried by detractors as a forerunner of Marxism. ⁴ Writing at the end of the 12th century, and sponsored by three popes, Joachim wrote a prophetic vision of history consisting of three ages: the age of the Father, which was the epoch of the Old Testament; the age of the Son, or the

epoch of the New Testament, whose end was near, and the third age of the Holy Spirit, in which all humanity would enjoy ever-lasting saintliness and bliss. The heretical potential of Joachim's historical scheme was that in the third era, mankind would transcend the institution of the Church itself.

Joachim's particular interest for the questions at hand is his later impact on the so-called "Spiritual Franciscans". In the 13th century, in response to the popularity of the heresies, and particularly the Cathar heresy in southern France, the Church created two new monastic orders, the Dominicans and the Franciscans, with the aim of parrying heretical ideas through an appearance of reform. Important in the latter regard was the "apostolic poverty", the imitation of Christ among the poor, pursued by the Franciscans. When, after decades of success, the Franciscan order had in turn become wealthy and had begun to interpret the vow of "apostolic poverty" as an "inner state of mind", the Spiritual Franciscans broke away to return to the founding orthodoxy. Their interest for the origins of the concept of race lies in their absorption of Joachimite ideas and their later influence, at the end of the fifteenth century, on Christopher Columbus.

Columbus's diaries and *Book of Prophecies* show messianic pretensions of the highest order. It was through

Columbus, first of all, that the prophecies of Joachim di Fiore passed into the ideology of Spanish conquest in the New World. Prior to 1492, Columbus had lived for several years with the Franciscans of the monastery of La Rabida, near Huelva, in southwestern Spain. Though the idea was hardly unique to Joachim, this group, in Spain, shared in the general crusader conception of the late Middle Ages that the millennium would be inaugurated by the reconquest of Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the Moslems. The idea of the unification of the world under Western Christendom had already inspired Franciscan missions to the Great Khan in China in the thirteenth century with the aim of converting China to the crusade against Islam. In the fourteenth century, a navigator's guide called the *Catalan Atlas* showed "Ethiopia" (which meant Africa) under the rule of the legendary black monarch Prester John,⁵ who as a Christian was viewed as another potential ally against the Moslems, if only he could be found. The Portuguese voyages along the African coast after 1415 were partially inspired by a mission to enlist Prester John in such a crusade. Columbus conceived his own expeditions as an attempt to reach the court of the Great Khan for the same purpose, and he took along a sailor fluent in Arabic and Hebrew: Arabic for the Chinese court, and Hebrew for the Lost Tribes of Israel, believed to

be living in Asia. Columbus may have heard of a prophecy, attributed to Joachim di Fiore and current among Spanish Franciscans, that the man who would recapture the Holy Land would come from Spain.⁶ He did use the assertion of the Biblical apocrypha of Esdras that the world was six parts land to one part water to buttress his claim that Asia could be easily reached by sailing west. On the third voyage, off the mouth of the Pernambuco river on the (now) Venezuela coast, Columbus reported that such a large river must surely be one of the four rivers in the Garden of Eden, and was certain that the terrestrial paradise was close by.⁷

It is therefore clear that the messianic ideas of Joachim and Columbus are, to put it mildly, from a different "cosmology" than our own. However, to see their implications for the appearance of the idea of race, some historical background is necessary.

In the eleventh century, just before the medieval Christian West embarked upon the Crusades in its attempt to take the Holy Land from the Moslems, it would have been a daring observer indeed who foresaw the rise of the West to world hegemony. The West existed in the long shadow of Islamic civilization, which in the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa and Spain was just reaching its apogee and elsewhere still expanding vigorously, and of

Byzantium (the Orthodox Christian East) which was arguably far more the heir of Greco-Roman antiquity than semi-barbaric western Europe. These civilizations in turn lived in the shadow of Sung China.

However, the eleventh century medieval West was in fact already embarked on a social, economic and cultural recovery and expansion that soon posed serious problems for its more powerful rivals. This recovery continued until the late thirteenth century, when a system of world trade already connected Venice, Barcelona, Flanders and the Baltic region with the Levant, India and China.⁸ By the early fourteenth century, however, the medieval West (like much of the rest of the world) was in total crisis, culminating in the Black Death of 1348-49, from which it required more than a century to recover.⁹ Between 1358 and 1381, in the aftermath of the Black Death, there were major popular uprisings in France, Flanders and England, weakening (or, in the case of England, destroying¹⁰) the old order of serfdom. In Italy, in 1378, the Ciompi uprising in Florence was a proto-proletarian rebellion.

This fourteenth century breakdown crisis created in Europe a situation of *interregnum*, in which the institutions of the medieval period, the Papacy, the Holy Roman Empire, and feudal kingdoms such as France and England sank into chaos and interminable war; the *interregnum*

lasted until the consolidation of the absolutist states (above all in England, France and Spain) of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Into this *interregnum* moved high medieval messianism, millenarianism and heresy.

Both before, and well after, the general breakdown crisis of feudalism, during the twelfth and thirteenth century phase of high medieval expansion, western Europe underwent a series of social explosions that continued until the middle of the seventeenth century. These heresies and millenarian movements extended from the Cathars in southern France beginning *ca.* 1146, to the English Lollards and Bohemian Hussites at the end of the fourteenth century and the Anabaptists of the German Reformation in the 1520's and 1530's, to the radical sects of the English Revolution in the 1640's. Joachimite ideas of the "third age" beyond the Church were only one of many theological sources of these movements.

The English Revolution, which reached its most radical phase in 1648/49, was the last major insurrection in which such ideologies played a role.. Figures of the radical left of the revolution, such as the Digger Winstanley, saw private property as the result of the Fall from Paradise, and articulated a kind of Christian communism as the overcoming of the Fall. The English Revolution was the last act of the Reformation, and its radical wing,¹¹ the

Levellers, Diggers, Muggletonians, Ranters and Fifth Monarchy Men, the last mass social movement in which Adamic ideas of the overcoming of the Fall came to the fore. The coming of capitalist society was henceforth increasingly articulated in the new secular garb of the Enlightenment, which began to take hold in the 1670s.¹²

The second, “Glorious” Revolution of 1688/89 coincided with a large jump in England’s participation in the new Atlantic slave economy. Prior to its takeover of Jamaica in 1655, England’s New World presence had been far overshadowed by Spain and Portugal, consisting only of Barbados, St. Kitt’s, some smaller islands, and the new North American colonies (at a time when the Caribbean was the far bigger economic prize, as it would remain well into the 18th century).

A mere quarter century after the elimination of the radical wing of the English Revolution by Cromwell, the idea of race, and of Enlightenment generally, moved into the space created by the ebb of millenarian utopia. It is here that we see the final disappearance, *ca.* 1675, of the heretical imagination and its social program. With the consolidation of English constitutional monarchy, following the consolidation of French absolutism, the post-medieval *interregnum*, in which the radical social movements, from the Cathars, by way of the Lollards and Hussites, to the

Anabaptists and Diggers, could still speak the language of religion, was over. This process ended just as England and France, the countries *par excellence* of the Enlightenment, were beginning to surpass Spain and Portugal in the Atlantic slave trade. To better understand what the Enlightenment displaced, it is necessary to look more closely at the ideological world which produced Columbus and the Spanish world empire.

“Race”, as blood consciousness, an idea unknown to antiquity and to the Middle Ages,¹³ first appeared in fifteenth century anti-Semitism in Spain as a new phenomenon, but still entangled in the old “cosmology” of Christian, Jew, Moslem and heathen;¹⁴ it then migrated to the New World in the Spanish subjugation of the (“heathen”) native American population (and in the further actions of the Inquisition against Jews, both in Spain and the New World). 150 years later, it re-migrated to the newly-emergent British empire, which was picking up the pieces of the decline of Spanish power, (in part by posing as a humane alternative to the widely-believed (and largely true) “black legend” of Spanish cruelty). In the second half of the seventeenth century, with the defeat (as indicated) of the radical wing of the English Revolution, the triumph of the scientific revolution (above all in Newton, and theorized into a politics by Hobbes), the burgeoning British slave

trade, and the revolution of 1688, this evolution culminated in the new idea of race. The collapse of the idea of Adam,¹⁵ the common ancestor of all human beings, was an unintended side effect of the Enlightenment critique of religion, which was aimed first of all at the social power of the Church and, after the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, at religion generally. But it was also the necessary “epistemological” prelude to the appearance, in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, of a color-coded hierarchy of races. Locke drove out Habakkuk, as Marx said, and Hobbes drove out Shem, Ham and Japhet.¹⁶

In the waning phase of more than 200 years of Anglo-American dominance of world capitalism, it is easy to forget that England was a relative latecomer in the 500 years of Western hegemony, and the significance of that latecomer status for ideology. The impulse, conditioned by the Anglo-French Enlightenment, to overlook the entwining of the Enlightenment and racism, is part of the same impulse that downplays the significance of pre-Enlightenment developments in Spain in shaping the modern world.

The initial European experience of proto-racism¹⁷ was the appearance of high medieval anti-Semitism, where it had largely receded during the lower Middle Ages (sixth-

eleventh centuries). England expelled its Jews in 1290; France did the same in 1305, and Spain, where Jews had prospered for centuries under both Moslem and Christian rule, expelled them in 1492.¹⁸ It is interesting to note that this new¹⁹ anti-Semitism came into existence at the time of incipient national consciousness²⁰ and also on the eve²¹ of the feudal breakdown crisis; the accelerating transformation of "Christian kingdoms" into nations eroded the older, tolerated citizenship of Jews (and, in Spain, also Moslems) based on religious identification, often linked to relative self-administration within the confines of the ghetto. In the English, French and Spanish²² cases, (the three major European countries which consolidated national monarchies by the late fifteenth century, and developed absolutisms in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) the expulsion of the Jews was also often a pretext for the confiscation of wealth by the heavily-indebted monarchies (often indebted to Jewish money-lenders, as Christians were at least theoretically proscribed from charging interest). In deeply-fragmented Germany and Italy, on the other hand, where early modern national unification was blocked by the medieval legacy of the Holy Roman Empire and the Papacy, Jewish expulsion was a local and sporadic phenomenon, and Italy received many Jews expelled from Spain. Thus the correlation between

anti-Semitism and the new national consciousness (the latter, like race itself, being unknown in the ancient or medieval worlds ²³ is one compelling reason to see the appearance of racism as a by-product of early modern developments. ²⁴ In fifteenth century Spain, anti-Semitism moved from a late-medieval “communal” phenomenon to a modern ideology of blood consciousness, and it is here that the difference between the one and the other is clearest. But Spain (which actually was still divided between the two major kingdoms of Aragon and Castile until 1469) was preoccupied for centuries with the crusade to reconquer the Iberian peninsula from the Moslems, a crusade which was only completed with the fall of Granada in 1492. The Inquisition began its activities in Spain in 1478, and its targets were first of all Jews and suspected *marranos*, or Jews converted to “new Christians” and engaged in clandestine practice of the old ways.

The foundations of the Spanish empire in the New World were laid under the so-called Catholic kings, Ferdinand and Isabel, the sponsors of Columbus. But in 1519, through dynastic marriage, the already powerful Spanish empire became the administrative center of the largest Western empire since Rome, the Holy Roman Empire of the Habsburg Charles V. To the already considerable Spanish lands were added the Habsburg

domains in central Europe, and the Netherlands, and after 1527 two-thirds of Italy fell under Spanish dominion. The Habsburg world empire was the hegemon of European politics, involving itself directly in the internal affairs of all countries (such as France, England, and Scotland) it did not directly control. With the marriage of Henry VIII to Catherine of Aragon, (aunt of Charles V), it appeared briefly that England as well might be integrated by dynastic alliances into the Habsburg sphere. With the marriage of Philip II to Mary Tudor, English queen from 1553 to 1558, this appeared even more likely, expressed first of all in an exponential increase in the persecution of Protestants.

European power politics, including politics in the New World, for more than 150 years after 1492 revolved around the rivalry between Spain and France, a rivalry ultimately won by France by the middle of the 17th century. This history can hardly be sketched here, but it must be kept in mind that England, in 1492 and for a long time thereafter, was a second-tier power undergoing the social transformation that culminated, after 1688, in the overthrow of absolutism, and did not begin serious empire building until the 1620s, and really not until the 1650s, when the revolution had ebbed. The story of relations between Spain and England, from 1530 onward, became completely enmeshed in the international politics of the

Protestant Reformation, (which constantly reached into domestic politics), and remained into the 17th century the story of England's attempt to escape the orbit of the Spanish empire. Catholic monarchs such as Mary Tudor (1553-1558) and the Stuarts after 1603 were considered "Spanish" and "Papist"²⁵ and were the targets of popular resentment for that reason. England raided Spanish shipping, sent explorations looking for the mythical Northwest Passage to Asia²⁶ (and thereby began serious trade in the Baltic and with Russia) aided the Dutch rebellion against Spain after 1566 and fought off the Armada of Philip II in 1588, but the English managed to avoid involvement in the ongoing Franco-Spanish wars on the continent, and only after emerging from the first phase of its revolution (1640-1649) was it able to intrude boldly into the scramble for empire with its massive repression in Ireland, in its three successful wars against the Dutch, and its capture of Jamaica. Thus England's serious challenge to Spanish (and Dutch) power in the New World and in the slave trade began only in the mid-seventeenth century, after the turmoil of its (first) revolution, when the slave trade, though already considerable, was nonetheless only one-fourth of the volume it reached in the eighteenth century, under Anglo-French ascendancy.²⁷ Only after the overthrow of the Stuarts in 1688 (by which time France

had replaced Spain as the major Catholic power), and English successes in the Nine Years' War (1689-1697) and the war of the Spanish Succession (1701-1713, fought to prevent a united Franco-Spanish (and Catholic) dynasty under the control of Louis XIV) could England feel itself secure from Spanish and "Papist" interference in its internal politics.²⁸ It is this Anglo-Spanish entanglement, overlapping the Reformation and Counter-Reformation wars, the ultimate defeat of English absolutism, and the English, French, Dutch and Spanish rivalry for world domination which "mediate" between the appearance of the first ideas of racial purity and blood consciousness in fifteenth century Spanish anti-Semitism, their extension to the inhabitants of the New World, and the full articulation of a race theory in the Anglo-French Enlightenment. It is through this history that Jews, Indians and Africans are the successive "Others" in the development of a full-fledged Western racial doctrine.

The 1492 expulsion of the Jews from Spain created a massive Jewish diaspora in Portugal,²⁹ North Africa, Italy, the Netherlands, the Ottoman empire, and ultimately in the New World.³⁰ But even more significant, for our purposes, were the large-scale conversions of Jews into so-called "New Christians", conversions which allowed Jews to remain in Spain and Portugal, while still leaving them

vulnerable to the Inquisition and the blood purity laws.³¹ The New Christians were therefore able not only to arrive in the New World in different monastic orders such as the Franciscans, Dominicans and Jesuits; they were probably involved in the better part of the Spanish high culture of the sixteenth century *siglo de oro*.³² Finally, Jewish messianic ideas, mixed with such currents as the Joachimite millenarianism discussed earlier, filtered into the Christian communist utopias which some religious orders, above all the Franciscans,³³ attempted to build in the New World with the indigenous peoples subjugated by the Spanish and Portuguese empires. The most notorious were the Spiritual Franciscans in Mexico, who came to the conclusion that Europe was too decadent for their ideal of "apostolic poverty", learned Nahuatl and planned a communist utopia with the Indians, until they were discovered and repressed by the Church,³⁴ but similar messianic utopias were advocated or enacted by the Jesuits in Peru and Paraguay, or in the prophetic sermons of the Jesuit Antonio Vieira in Brazil.³⁵

One should not idealize these currents, nor exaggerate their weight in the Spanish and Portuguese colonial empires, but neither should they be judged with anachronistic criteria of the present. They were all crushed, defeated or marginalized by the opposition of local *colon*

elites with no scruples about massacre and forced labor.³⁶ They did not question the evangelization of the New World, nor the empires themselves, nor did they doubt that Christianity was the unique Truth; few thought that they had anything to learn from indigenous cosmologies.³⁷ No one in the sixteenth century, from either the Christian or Moslem Mediterranean world, where slavery had been practiced (without a color code) for centuries, called slavery as an institution into question,³⁸ and they were no different. They sought the support of the monarchs to curb the cruelty of the local elites, a support which, when obtained, mainly remained a dead letter in practice. The point is rather that their messianic utopias did include Indians and Africans and that their ethnocentrism was universalist in the medieval monotheist sense of Christian/Jewish/Moslem vs. heathen, not yet a racial doctrine.

An important transition from the era of Spanish and Portuguese dominance in the sixteenth century to the emergence of northern European (English, French and Dutch) empires and control of the slave trade in the seventeenth century is the belief that the New World inhabitants were descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel. It is here that the connection is made between the Spanish expulsion of the Jews, the diaspora of Jews and New

Christians in different New World projects, and the ultimate appearance of the Enlightenment doctrine of race.

The encounter with the New World shook European culture after 1492 as profoundly as the Copernican revolution after 1543, if not more so. The flood of cosmography, travel accounts, new plants and animals, and above all previously unknown peoples and cultures stretched the doors of perception past the breaking point. Europe had notions, however fantastic, of the Old World civilizations such as Islam, India and China; it had notions, however fantastic, of ancient Egypt, and the empires of Alexander and the Caesars; it had within its own borders Celts, Slavs and other peoples whose existence converged on various current ideas of the “primitive”. Even encountering peoples such as the Aztecs, Mayans and Incas, however exotic they may have seemed,³⁹ still did not challenge a concept of “civilization” they knew from Old World experience. But nothing they could mine from tradition quite prepared them for the encounter with “primitives”, “peoples without the state”, in the Caribbean, the Amazon or later in North America. To situate such peoples for themselves, they could only draw on the legacies of the two strands of Greco-Roman classicism and Judeo-Christian monotheism. Columbus, as was indicated earlier, knew at the mouth of the Pernambuco in 1498 that

he was near the garden of Eden, and for more than 150 years Europeans would debate whether the New World peoples were the Lost Tribes of Israel, the descendants of Ham, the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the Biblical Ophir, descendants of a Phoenician voyage, the survivors of lost Atlantis, the descendants of Gog and Magog, or the peoples of King Arthur's island of Avalon.⁴⁰ The Renaissance had for half a century before the discoveries been excavating a vast lode of the lost, or half-buried legacy of classical antiquity; the heretical currents which prepared the way for the Reformation had been reviving the idea (against the whole weight of the Church) of the "original community" and the "apostolic poverty" of Christ and the disciples, and this mass of cultural memory came rising to the surface, like a sunken cathedral, just in time to provide the "imagination" for the encounter with a previously unknown continent. When, 150 years later, the new tools of scientific and rational critique had turned the battle of the "ancients and the moderns" in favor of the latter, and had destroyed this "epistemological grid" provided by tradition, the West could invent the pseudo-scientific idea of race.

The theory that the inhabitants of the New World were descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel is, once again, the link between anti-Semitism in Spain and the beginnings of

race theory in the rising English, French and Dutch world empires of the seventeenth century. Europe had the historical experience of Africans; the new race theory first emerged out of the debate about the Indians. The Lost Tribes theory was first articulated by various Spanish writers on the New World in the sixteenth century, and, as indicated, some of the Franciscan New Christians were struck by Old Testament parallels in Aztec culture.⁴¹ But the theory first created a sensation when systematized by the Amsterdam rabbi Menasseh ben Israel (a marrano and teacher of Spinoza) in his 1650 book *Esperanza de Israel* (Hope of Israel).

Menasseh's book told of a Jewish traveler in South America who was convinced that there were Hebrew words in the language of his Indian guide, and who concluded from conversation with the guide that "a lost tribe of Israelites still lived in the South American highland",⁴² and therefore went to meet them. The traveller returned to Amsterdam and told his tale to Menasseh ben Israel, where its messianic overtones in 1648 fit into the overall apocalyptic climate of the end of the Thirty Years' War, the most radical phase of the English revolution (where the Fifth Monarchy Men were at the peak of their influence), and a massive pogrom against Jews in the Ukraine.⁴³ Menasseh's book came to the attention of Cromwell, who

met him in 1655 to consider the readmission of Jews to England,⁴⁴ which began the following year.

But in the very year of Menasseh's meeting with Cromwell, another book appeared in Europe that marked the final phase of the pre-Enlightenment debate on the meaning of the New World peoples. This was Isaac La Peyrere's *Pre-Adamitae* (*The Pre-Adamites*).⁴⁵ Using the most advanced methods of the new Biblical criticism, La Peyrere's book seized on internal inconsistencies in scripture to argue that the Bible itself proves that there were people before Adam. For La Peyrere this meant the overthrow of the Bible's monogenecist explanation of the origins of humanity (and therefore of the peoples of the New World), and the truth of a polygenecist view of multiple origins. La Peyrere's book was denounced all over Europe by Catholics, Protestants and Jews. (No one dared to defend it publicly until Voltaire, a century later, and he was still an isolated voice). La Peyrere was arrested a few months after *Pre-Adamitae* appeared, was threatened with the gravest consequences, and had to convert to Catholicism and go to Rome to personally apologize to the Pope to exculpate himself.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, his book became popular with the radical milieus of the period, such as the remnants of the defeated left wing of the English Revolution. The Digger Gerard Winstanley, like many

others, saw in Pre-Adamitae support for a completely allegorical reading of the Bible.⁴⁷

La Peyrere's book had been daringly radical Bible criticism in the mid-seventeenth century, and he saw all peoples, Adamites and pre-Adamites, saved in the messianic recapture of Jerusalem. But others seized on his demolition of the authority of the monogenecist account in scripture and used it to justify the newly-emerging racist color code. In 1680, in Virginia, the minister Morgan Godwin, in a work called *Negro's and Indians Advocate*, polemicized against people in the American colonies who were using polygenecist arguments influenced by La Peyrere to deny that blacks and Indians were human. In 1774, Edward Long's History of Jamaica used polygenecist theory to precisely this end. In 1844, Alexander von Hulmboldt, the German scientist, argued in the first volume of his book *Kosmos* that it was necessary to uphold the monogenecist theory against evidence "as the safe means of avoiding classifying people as superior and inferior".

The death of Adam, together with the defeat of the English radicals, had by the 1650s closed the Joachimite cycle, and ended the debate that had begun in 1492. The triumph of the moderns over the ancients meant that the models and the "epistemological grid" of both Greco-Roman classicism and Judeo-Christian messianism were

exploded, either for interpreting new peoples or for interpreting the motion of bodies in space. The epicenter of the West was now the Anglo-French rivalry for world empire. The first phase of political economy began, and one of its first practitioners, Sir William Petty, wrote the first known treatises proposing a world hierarchy of races, *The Scale of Creatures* (1676). Petty groped toward the definition of an “intermediate stage” between man and animal, in which he could locate the “savage”: “Of man itself there seems to be several species, To say nothing of Gyants & Pygmies or of that sort of small men who have little speech... For of these sorts of men, I venture to say nothing, but that ‘tis very possible there may be Races and generations of such” ⁴⁸ “[T]here be others [differences] more considerable, that is, between the Guiny Negroes & the Middle Europeans; & of Negroes between those of Guiny and those who live about the Cape of Good Hope, which last are the Most beast like of all the Souls (sorts?) of Men whith whom our Travellers arre well acquainted. I say that the Europeans do not only differ from the aforementioned Africans in Colour...but also...in Naturall Manners, & in the internall Qualities of their Minds.” ⁴⁹ Here were the unanticipated extrapolations of LaPeyrere’s radical Biblical criticism. Here is one of the founders of political economy also founding an unprecedeted color-coded

world hierarchy of races. A truly modern figure, indeed. Henceforth, as the Atlantic slave trade rose exponentially to its eighteenth century peak, the naturalistic world view of the Enlightenment could impose itself, sadly tied in so many cases to such an “epistemological grid”.⁵⁰ The New World Indian was no longer a possible descendant of the Lost Tribes; rather, as the Puritans said, “Satan had possessed the Indian until he became virtually a beast”. Where there had once been the kingdom of Prester John, there now was only the Guinea coast, the Bight of Benin and the Middle Passage. Henceforth, the concept of race could be invented.⁵¹

This article originally appeared in Race Traitor 7 (1997)

Notes

1. This article will appear in two parts; Part One will treat the first appearance of racial ideas, in the Spanish “blood purity” laws and the expulsion of Jews and Moslems after 1492, and the transition period up to the 1650s in which Europeans debated whether the New World peoples were descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel; Part Two, in the next issue, will deal with the appearance of the new concept of race itself, beginning in the 1670s, in the first phase of the Anglo-French Enlightenment.

2. To take only one example, though the most important, along with the legend of Prester John (cf. below): the Black Magus/King in depictions of the Nativity scene. "That the African Magus should have been adopted in all German regions by 1470 is by itself remarkable. Still more extraordinary is the fact that the black King was then borrowed by every other significant school of artists in Western Europe, sometimes almost immediately, and by ca. 1510 at the latest." (P. Kaplan, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art*, Ann Arbor, 1985), p. 112. The social basis for this view is suggested by the black presence at the thirteenth century court of the Frederick II (Hohenstaufen), the last important Holy Roman Emperor of the medieval period: 'The proclivity for blacks at Frederick's court was not merely a capricious idiosyncrasy, but a means of suggesting the Hohenstaufens' claim to a universal imperial sovereignty that might include "the two Ethiopias, the country of the black Moors, the country of the Parthians, Syria, Persia... Arabia, Chaldea and even Egypt'.' *Ibid.*, p. 10. These imperial pretensions may appear laughable, and are definitely part of a crusader ideology, but they indicate that the universalism of the Holy Roman Empire was for Christians, not for a non-existent category of "whites".

3. To say this is not to imply that the inhabitants of "Western Christendom" (a concept more appropriate than Europe for the medieval period) did not periodically find all kinds of reasons to hate, kill and oppress Jews, Moslems and "heathens"; it is merely to say that the division of the world between Christians and non-Christians was religious and was not race-based. In medieval Spain, for example (one of the most significant cases, for centuries, of co-habitation between the three monotheisms and also the country in which proto-racism first appeared in the early modern period), Christians and Moslem often converted back and forth as the front lines fluctuated. Moslems enslaved by Christians in the wars of reconquest could, in a generation or two, become serfs (C. Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale*, Ghent 1955, p. 139ff.) Passage from slavery to serfdom varied widely around the Iberian peninsula, but it depended everywhere on the balance of forces between Christian masters and serfs, not on any race-based criterion.

4. Joachim's ideas are briefly sketched in N. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, Oxford, 1983, pp. 108-110. For a fuller treatment, cf. M. Reeves, *Joachim di Fiore* (New York, 1977). Joachim's thought also anticipated some of the unfortunate futuristic ideologues of the defunct Soviet bloc whose cybernetic visions of full communism got them into

trouble because they failed to include the guiding role of the Party.

5. The story of the Prester John legend is told in R. Sanders, *Lost Tribes and Promised Lands*, (Boston, 1978) Ch. 3.

6. A. Milhou, *Colon y su mentalidad mesianica* (Valladolid, 1983), p. 217 refers to this prophecy.

7. Columbus' letter reporting the proximity of paradise is quoted in V. Flint, *The Imaginative Landscape of Christopher Columbus* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 149ff.

8. J. Abu Lughod, in *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (Oxford, 1989) sketches out this world *oikoumene*, whatever problems exist in her idea of what constitutes capitalism.

9. It is not widely recognized that the breakup of the medieval world in Europe, the Middle East, India and China were relatively simultaneous phenomena, attended everywhere, from Japan to Poland, by the thirteenth and fourteenth century eruption of the Mongols, and by the Black Death. Of the four major Old World civilizations, western Europe suffered least from the Mongol invasions. See J. Abu Lughod.

10. R. Hilton, ed. *The Brenner Debate* (London 1985), discusses the impact of fourteenth century agrarian

revolts on the end of serfdom and the triumph of wage labor in the English countryside.

11. The many works of Christopher Hill, such as *The World Turned Upside Down* (London 1987) are the best introduction to these currents. An old classic, originally written in 1895, is Eduard Bernstein's *Cromwell and Communism* (New York, 1963).

12. The radicals were repressed and ebbed away during Cromwell's Commonwealth and the Stuart restoration after 1660; only in the 1688 "Glorious Revolution" was absolutism defeated and constitutional monarchy finally consolidated, after which "Locke drove out Habakkuk" (as Marx put in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, referring to the shift away from religion in the ideology of the bourgeoisie). It is not often pointed out, in typical accounts of the Enlightenment, that the British slave trade to the New World also expanded exponentially after the 1688 "Glorious Revolution" in England, often cited as the beginning of the English phase of the Enlightenment. As late as the 1680s, the Royal African Company, the government slave-trading monopoly (of which John Locke was a board member), transported approximately 5,000 slaves per year, whereas in the first nine years after 1688, Bristol alone handled 161,000 (Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, New York 1980, p. 32).

13. It is an anachronistic mistake to see Greek, Roman, Moslem or Chinese attitudes toward the “Other” in the ancient and medieval periods as “racist”. For the ancient Greeks, a “barbarian” was someone who did not participate in a *polis*; the Romans, also, throughout an enormous empire, thought of themselves as citizens of a city, and saw the “Other” in those who were not (J.A. Armstrong, *Nations Before Nationalism*, UNC Pr. 1982, p. 134) . F.M Snowden’s *Blacks in Antiquity*, Cambridge 1970, Ch. VIII, documents the absence of “color prejudice” among Greeks and Romans. A more recent and powerful demonstration that the idea of race is a modern invention is I. Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore, 1996). “In Greece and Rome, the organizing idea of race was absent so long as the political idea flourished to reconcile the volatile blood relations (kinship)... with the wider demands of the community.” *Ibid.* p. 14.

14. Significant conversion and inter-marriage made the “blood purity” necessary to distinguish between “Old” and “New” Christians, the latter being converted Jews.

15. J. Greene, *The Death of Adam*, (Ames, 1959), pp. 39-54, describes some of the scientific debates in geology and paleontology of the late seventeenth century that called into question Biblical chronologies; similarly, P. Rossi, *The Dark Abyss of Time*, (Chicago, 1984), particularly Ch. 36.

16. The latter were the sons of Noah, from whom the different groups of humanity presumably descended after the flood.

17. We say “proto-racism” because, even when a specific notion of “blood purity” (*limpieza de sangre*), underwriting an idea of “purity of (Christian) caste” (*lo castizo*) began to be implemented in Spain ca. 1450, its aim was still to distinguish Christians and Jews, and therefore remained enmeshed in the older medieval communal conceptions. Nevertheless, the Inquisition, which recognized *lo castizo* only for those who could prove they had no Jewish ancestry for three generations, thereby anticipated the Nazi Nuremberg laws by nearly 500 years.

18. Spain also expelled many Moslems after the final conquest of the Arab kingdom of Granada. Those who remained, the so-called *moriscos*, were forcibly expelled between 1568 and 1609. Prior to the end of the 14th century and the end of *convivencia*, the Spanish kings referred to themselves as the “kings of the three religions” (cf. S. Sharot, *Messianism, Mysticism, and Magic*, Chapel Hill, 1982, p. 72). For the classic statement of Spain as the product of the mingling of the “three castes” cf. A. Castro, *The Spaniards*, Berkeley, 1971, Ch. 3.

19. This fifteenth century anti-Semitism was “new” in comparison to the anti-Semitism of the ancient world

because it rested on a new biological definition of racial purity previously unknown.

20. According to Yves Renouard, "...the boundary lines that determine to this day the frontiers of France, England and Spain were more or less definitively settled in a series of battles which occurred between 1212 and 1214." (cited in I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*, vol. 1, (New York 1974), p. 32.

21. The first large-scale outbreaks of medieval (as opposed to modern) anti-Semitism in Europe occurred at the beginning of the Crusades, in 1096, therefore coinciding with a major acceleration of Europe's expansionist recovery from the ebb point of the ninth and tenth centuries. Even worse outbreaks occurred in 1348-49, when the Jews were blamed in many locales for the outbreak of the Black Death. (A discussion of the evolution of anti-Semitism in the high Middle Ages is in K. Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe*, Cambridge, 1992, Ch. 11) Stow contrasts this with the lower Middle Ages: "...the early medieval period has always been considered a politically favorable one for Jews... Jews had a clearly demarcated and stable political status, which only in later centuries began to erode." *Ibid.* p. 43. Most observers date the beginning of economic slowdown in the high Middle Ages from the beginning of the fourteenth century. Cf., e.g., G.

Duby, *L'économie rurale et la vie des campagnes dans l'Occident médiéval*, vol. 2, part 4 (Paris, 1962).

22. The first major pogrom in Spain began in Seville in 1391, and then spread to many other cities. The first laws of racial purity were enacted in 1449 and approved by the king in 1451. The Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, the same year as the completion of the reconquest. Jews who converted and remained were persecuted by the Inquisition; after 1555 proof of blood purity was required for holders of public office. Cf. J. Gerber, *The Jews of Spain* (New York, 1992), pp. 127-129. The early modern "pre-history" of racism in Spain is also covered in I. Geiss, *Geschichte des Rassismus*, (Frankfurt, 1988), Ch. 3.

23. Greco-Roman antiquity divided the world between those who were of the city and those who were not; the medieval world, as indicated, divided the world into believers (of one of the three monotheisms) and "heathen".

24. As Hannaford puts it: "Between the expulsion of the Jews and Moors from Spain and the landing of the first Negro in the North American colonies in 1619, the word 'race' entered Western languages," *op. cit.*, p. 147.

25. English resistance to the major Catholic powers, first Habsburg Spain and then the France of Louis XIV, was Protestantism's first line of defense after 1558, when Protestant survival against the Counter-Reformation was

anything but certain; this hostility to Catholicism went so deep into English popular culture that, three centuries later, it still survived in the American "Know Nothing" anti-immigrant (essentially, anti-Irish) movement of the 1850s.

26. The early (sixteenth-century) English and French intrusions into the Spanish empire, in search of a passage to Asia which would allow them to circumvent the Spanish domains, at a time when England and France were capable of little more than exploratory missions and transient, failed colonies, is told in P. Hoffman, *A New Andalucia and a Way to the Orient*, (LSU Pr. 1990).

27. Figures on the New World slave trade from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, broken down by colonial power and by century, are in A.M. Pescatello, ed. *The African in Latin America*, (New York 1975), pp. 47-48. These figures show Spain bringing 292,500 slaves to the New World in the seventeenth century, while Britain brought 263,000 to its (Caribbean) colonies; in the eighteenth century, i.e. after the Glorious Revolution (cf. footnote 2 above) and in the high tide of the Enlightenment, shipments of slaves into the British colonies in North America and the Caribbean increase nine times to almost 1.8 million, while Spain's share only doubles. The greater economic significance of the Caribbean, as compared to North America, is shown in P. Curtin, *The*

Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census, (Madison 1969), p. 134; as late as the outbreak of the American Revolution, Jamaica and Barbados accounted for ca. 50 percent of all slaves sold in British colonies, while the southern colonies of North America accounted for only 20 percent.

28. France did continue to support attempts to restore the Stuarts well into the eighteenth century, and Britain still had to fight major wars, which increasingly took on the character of world wars, in which overseas rivalry with the Spanish and French empires was a major issue, As part of that rivalry, both France and Spain militarily supported the rebellion of the American colonies after 1776. Spain's empire was still expanding in the Pacific Northwest as late as 1790, and Thomas Jefferson, after American independence, believed absorption of the new United States by Spain (which owned Florida until 1820) posed a greater threat than re-absorption by Britain.

29. Estimates of total Jews expelled from Spain range between 800,000 and 2 million. They were expelled in turn from Portugal in 1497. Combined with the expulsion of the Moslems after 1492, and the *moriscos* (Moslems who initially remained) by 1609, the loss to Spanish society was a major factor in Spain's later economic decline.

30. Expelled Jews were known as *marranos* (swine). Officially, the only Jews who went to the New World

colonies of Spain and Portugal were the so-called *conversos*, or New Christians; the Inquisition began tracking them there in 1522. Other Iberian (Sephardic) Jews went to the Netherlands and from there, two or three generations later, arrived in the New World colonies of Holland.

31. H. Kamen, in *Inquisition and Society in Spain* (Bloomington, 1985), p. 41, shows that in the initial decades after 1492 the overwhelming majority of victims of the Inquisition were formerly Jewish *conversos*, i.e. New Christians; ca. 1530 the net was widened to suspected "Lutherans"; and still later to Moslems (see statistical table, *ibid.*, p. 185).

32. Serious evidence exists for the New Christian background of Vives, Vitoria, Luis de Leon, St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, Gongora, Gracian, Cervantes, and Las Casas. On the Jewish and Arab elements in the work of one of these figures, cf. L. Lopez Baralt, *San Juan dela Cruz y el Islam*, Mexico City, 1985.

33. The Spiritual Franciscans' view of "apostolic poverty" prepared them to see in New World inhabitants people easily won to Christianity.

34. This story is told in J.L. Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World*, Berkeley, 1970. The impact of Joachimite ideas in Mexico is also described in L.

Weckmann, *La herencia medieval de Mexico*, vol. 1, Mexico D.F. 1983, pp. 258-268.

35. The meshing of messianic ideas taken from Jesuits, including New Christians, with Incan resistance to Spanish rule is described in A. Flores Galindo, *Buscando un Inca: Identidad y utopía en los Andes*, Lima, 1988. The Jesuit Vieira (1608-1697), drawing on the apocalyptic scheme of history in the Old Testament prophecy of Daniel, foresaw a Portuguese-led “fifth empire” of “saints”, echoes the Fifth Monarchy Men of the English Revolution. In fact, Vieira was in both Paris and London in the 1640s.

36. Although not directly in the Joachimite millenarian tradition, Bartolome de las Casas (1474-1566) directly challenged the forced labor of Indians more directly than the millenarians themselves. Las Casas was a Spanish priest (possibly of New Christian background) in Cuba who, for over 10 years, made his living off the *encomienda*, a system of Indian forced labor, but who in 1514 revolted against the Spanish New World system and devoted the rest of his life to agitation against it. He returned to Spain and attempted to win the Church hierarchy to his project of creating free labor associations of Spaniards and Indians. His perspective was flawed from the beginning by his proposal to substitute African slaves for the Indians, a proposal he ultimately repudiated, but only later. His first

efforts failed, and he withdrew to a Dominican monastery where, for 10 years, he sharpened his polemical arguments. After the conquests of Mexico and Peru, Las Casas returned to the New World to further agitate against the *encomienda*, and to write major works on the colonial system and in defense of the Indians. In 1542 the Habsburg emperor Charles V issued a compromise in the "New Laws", which would gradually abolish the *encomienda*, but even this compromise led to a rebellion of the *colons*, including armed revolt in Peru. As bishop of Chiapas, Las Casas confronted Spanish elites in the New World, trying to force the application of the "New Laws", but Charles V withdrew them to stop the *colon* rebellion. Las Casas resigned his position and returned to Spain once and for all. He threw himself into writing, and in 1550-51 confronted Giner de Sepulveda in Salamanca in a debate, in front of Charles V, over whether the New World Indians were "slaves by nature" in Aristotle's sense, and whether evangelization by force was legitimate. Las Casas' defense of the natural freedom of all human beings, and opposition to the use of force again influenced legislation, again unapplied. Las Casas, of the more sober and less apocalyptic Dominican order, echoed a version of the Franciscan belief in the regeneration of Christianity through the evangelization of the Indians, but by the end of his life

limited himself to arguing that the Spanish crown had a right only to evangelize in the New World, but was obliged to respect Indian freedom and property.

37. There were important exceptions to this. Catholic syncretism, the ability to appropriate the gods and goddesses of another culture into the Christian pantheon of saints, has existed since the Church's conversion of the Greco-Roman world. Some of the New Christian conversos in the Franciscan order found themselves fascinated with Aztec and Mayan culture beyond the mere needs of evangelization. Their story is told in Sanders, *op. Cit.*, Ch. 16. The Jesuits also claimed to find evidence that the apostle Thomas, after evangelizing in India, had continued on to Mexico; this was crucial to them because it overcame the embarrassing sixteenth-century time lag in the arrival of the word of God in the New World. This is another demonstration of the religious belief in the unity of humanity which had to be overcome before any race theory was possible "(the Spaniards')... world system, founded on revelation, and their very religion would collapse if the Bible had lied or simply omitted mention of America; ignorance, forgetfulness, and injustice on the part of God were all equally untenable. If there existed a positive truth independent of revealed truth, all European thought, from St. Augustine to Suarez, must go out the window." J.

Lafaye, *Queztalcóatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness*, (Chicago, 1976), p. 186 and Ch. 10 generally.

38. Sixteenth and seventeenth century attacks on slavery focused on excesses of cruelty and violence, not on the practice as such (D.B. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, Cornell UP, 1966, pp. 189-196); as late as the fifteenth century, the Palermo slave market sold Greeks, Arabs, Slavs, Tartars, Turks, Circassians, Russians and Bulgarians (Verlinden, op. cit. p. 385); in the sixteenth century, the majority of the slaves in Spain and Portugal were what today would be called "white".

39. Bernal Diaz, a companion of Cortes, describes the awe of the Spaniards upon first glimpsing Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital, (which may have had as many as a million inhabitants in 1519), and how they instinctly reached for imagery of fantastic cities from the chivalric romance *Amadis of Gaul* (1505) to find parallels in their own culture. Cf. B. Diaz del Castillo, *Historia de la Conquista de Nueva España*, Mexico D.F., 1980, p. 159.

40. A vast literature exists on this subject. Probably the best book, outrageously never translated into English, is G. Gliozzi's *Adamo e il nuovo mondo (Adam and the New World)* (Florence, 1977) whose subtitle *From Biblical Genealogies to Racial Theories (1500-1700)* could not more

concisely summarize the thesis of this article. Gliozzi shows that the concept of race could not exist until scientific critique, beginning with Biblical criticism, had swept away all the legacy of explanation in the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian streams of Western culture. A comparable, but less comprehensive perspective is found in A. Grafton, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge, 1992). On the impact of New World biology and botany, cf. A. Gerbi, *Nature in the New World*, Pittsburgh 1985.

41. R. Sanders, *op. cit.* p. 187.

42. R. Wauchope, *Lost Tribes and Sunken Continents: Myth and Method in the Study of the American Indians*, (Chicago, 1962), p. 53. Cf. pp. 53-59 for the history of the theory, which was still held in early nineteenth-century America, and had been supported by Roger Williams, John Eliot, William Penn, and the Mathers; it is still held today by the Mormons.

43. Sanders, *op. cit.* Ch. 30 tells the story of Menasseh's book; the theory convinced John Eliot, in Massachusetts, to translate the Bible into Algonquin.

44. *Ibid.* p. 371. "it was an empire than the English were not inheriting from the Spaniards, by way of the Dutch, so why not inherit the services of their Jews as well?"

45. In fact, LaPeyrere (1596-1676) knew Menasseh ben Israel personally. La Peyrere was from a Bordeaux Protesant family and, according to one major study, was probably yet another *marrano*. R. Popkin, *Isaac la Peyrere*, pp. 22-23 (Leiden, 1987). His early work was right in the line of Joachimite prophecy, except that, of course, it was the French king (and not, as Vieira asserted, the Portuguese) who would convert the Jews and lead them back to the recaptured Holy Land. Even after his repudiation of *Pre-Adamite*, he continued to defend its theses privately.

46. According to Popkin, *op. cit.*, p. 14, both the Pope and the General of the Jesuit order, in private, had found La Peyrere's book quite entertaining.

47. *Ibid.* p. 39. The complex fate of the theses of *Pre-Adamite*, from the Enlightenment up to the present, is told on pp. 115-176, its immediate impact in England is described in Gliozzi, *op. cit.*, pp. 565-621.

48. Here, indeed, is a predecessor that contemporary "difference" theorists have overlooked.

49. Quoted in M. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, (Philadelphia, 1964), pp. 421-422.

50. A. Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750-1900* (Pittsburgh, 1973) is a remarkable

survey of Enlightenment thinkers such as Buffon and de Pauw and their belief that not only humans, but also plants and animals, degenerated in the climate of the New World.

51. The English Enlightenment phase of the origins of the concept of race will be, as indicated earlier, the subject of Part Two.

Race and the Enlightenment II

The Anglo-French Enlightenment and Beyond

The animal is immediately one with its life activity, not distinct from it. The animal is its life activity. Man makes his life activity itself into an object of will and consciousness. It is not a determination with which he immediately identifies. (The animal)... produces in a one-sided way while man produces universally... The animal only produces itself while man reproduces the whole of nature.

Karl Marx, 1844

They enslaved the Negro, they said, because he was not a man, and when he behaved like a man they called him a monster”

C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (1938)

“The only race is the rat race.”

Wall graffiti, London rioters, 1981

The Western ¹ invention of the idea of race in the seventeenth century, at the beginning of the Enlightenment, was not merely a degradation of the peoples of color to whom it was applied. ² Such a degradation had to be preceded, and accompanied, by a comparable degradation of the view of man within Western culture itself. A society that sees the racial “Other” in terms of animality must first experience that animality within itself. “If you’re going to keep someone in the gutter,” as a black activist of the 60s put it, “you’re going to be down there with them”.

Part One, it will be recalled, showed how rationalist Biblical criticism in the mid-seventeenth century tore away the last of the myths, drawn from Greco-Roman classicism and Judeo-Christian messianism, which purported to explain the origins of the New World Indians in terms of traditions then known to Europeans. This critique unintentionally left in its wake a new, purely biological vision of “natural man” which, in some instances (such as the North American colonies), fused with the new white supremacist color-code justifying the Atlantic slave trade, and the previously unknown idea of race, the identification of cultural attributes with physical features such as skin color, was born.

It is now necessary to situate the Enlightenment between what preceded it and what followed it, in order to see how it got caught up in this definition of human beings as animals, which underlies any association of cultural attributes with skin color or physical features. As stated in Part One, the Enlightenment as such is neither inherently racist nor valid only for “white European males”. But the Enlightenment today cannot be defended merely in terms of the Enlightenment alone. Its limited rationality can only be adequately understood and seen in true proportion by those who see a higher rationality. The best of the Enlightenment, taken by itself, is disarmed against the worst of the Enlightenment.

An ideology is best understood when seen against the background from which it began, and against the future in which it will end.

The view of human beings as animals is inseparable from the birth of bourgeois and capitalist society, which simultaneously gave rise to two interrelated questions which that society has never solved, and will never solve: the question of the proletariat, and the question of the underdeveloped world. (By “animality” in this article I mean what Marx meant in the above quote: someone i.e. a wage laborer compelled by society to identify themselves

with their life activity. From this fundamental degradation flow others, namely compulsory identification by any presumably “fixed” “natural” quality, such as skin color, gender, or sexual orientation.)

The philosophically-disinclined reader is asked to bear with the following, for in a critique of the Enlightenment, it is necessary to first set up the question philosophically. Ideas by themselves of course do not make history. To go beyond the idea of race – the connection between biology and cultural attributes which, for one strand of the Enlightenment, succeeded medieval religious identities – the mere idea of the human race would be sufficient. But before locating these questions in the balance of real social forces where they are actually decided, it is necessary to know what the questions are. Once they are posed, it will be clear why the immediate attitudes on race and slavery of this or that Enlightenment thinker are not the real issue; the issue is rather the view of man of even the best of the Enlightenment which is ultimately disarmed for a critique of its bastard offspring.

The new society which arose out of the collapse of feudalism in early modern, pre-Enlightenment Europe, between 1450 and 1650, was revolutionary relative to any pre-existing or then-contemporary society. Why? It was

revolutionary because it connected the idea of humanity to the new idea of an “actual infinity”.³

What does this mean? In social terms, “infinity” in class societies prior to capitalism is the world of creativity, e.g. art, philosophy, science, usually monopolized by an elite, as well as improvements in the society’s relationship to nature, first in agriculture and then elsewhere, usually made by skilled craftsmen. “Infinity” here means innovations that allow a society to reproduce itself at a higher level, by creating more “free surplus” for its members, or cultural innovation that anticipates or expresses those improvements in human freedom. (The word “infinite” is appropriate because the elasticity of these innovations is infinite.) These improvements in a society’s relationship to nature are universal and world-historical, beginning with stone and bronze tools, and societies that fail to make them run up against “natural barriers” (known today as “ecology crises”) to their existence and either stagnate or are destroyed, often by other societies. This freedom in their relationship to nature through such improvements is what distinguishes human beings from animals, which mainly do not “use tools” but which “are” tools (e.g. beavers, termites) in a fixed relationship to their environment.

Such improvements, once again, have occurred many times and in many places throughout human history. But history is also filled with examples of brilliant civilizations (such as Tang or particularly Sung China) where many such innovations were lost in blocked stagnation or terrible social retrogression. What was revolutionary about the bourgeois- capitalist society which first appeared in Europe, initially in northern Italy and in Flanders *ca.* 1100, was that these innovations were institutionalized at the center of social life,⁴ as necessity. For the first time in history, a practical bridge was potentially established between the creative freedom, previously restricted to small elites, and society's improvements in its relationship to nature.

It was this institutionalization which made possible the appearance of "actual infinity". In the ancient (Greco-Roman) and medieval worlds, "infinity" was expressed in a limited way. The Greco-Roman elite had aristocratic values, and considered any relationship to material production⁵ to be utterly beneath itself, an attitude which meshed well with a "horror of the infinite" often expressed in their ideology. Medieval philosophy, largely shaped by Aristotle in Christian, Moslem and Jewish thought, generally considered an "actual infinity" to be an abomination, often associated with blasphemy. It was exactly this "blasphemy" which was developed in the early modern period of

capitalism by Nicholas of Cusa, Giordano Bruno, Spinoza and Leibniz.

While these figures developed the concept of actual infinity in theological or philosophical terms, prior to the Enlightenment, its implications for the appearance of the concept of race can best be understood by looking ahead to its further development, in social terms, after the Enlightenment, from Kant via Hegel and Feuerbach to Marx. Hegel called Enlightenment (Newtonian) infinity "bad infinity". The practical realization of pre-Enlightenment actual infinity by Marx retrospectively clarifies the impasse (and social relevance) of Enlightenment bad infinity, without an even longer philosophical detour.

Many people know Marx's quip that communist man "will fish in the morning, hunt in the afternoon, and write criticism in the evening, without for all that being a fisherman, hunter or critic". But the underlying theoretical meaning of that quip is not often grasped; it is usually understood merely to mean the overcoming of the division of labor, but it is rather more than that. It is the practical expression of what is meant here by "actual infinity". It is the concrete expression of the overcoming of the state of animality, a reduction of human beings to their fixed life activity in the capitalist division of labor. Marx expressed

the same idea more elaborately in the *Grundrisse*: “Capital’s ceaseless striving towards the general form of wealth drives labor beyond the limits of its natural paltriness, and thus creates the material elements for the development of the rich individuality which is as all-sided in its production as in its consumption, and whose labor therefore no longer appears as labor, but as the full development of activity itself, in which natural necessity in its direct form has disappeared, because a historically created need has taken the place of the natural one.”⁶

The “full development of activity itself” is the “practical” realization of actual infinity. It means that every specific activity is always the “external” expression of a more fundamental general activity, having an expanded version of itself as its own goal. In such a social condition, the immediate productive activity of freely-associated individuals would always be in reality self-(re)production aimed at the multiplication of human powers, including the innovation of new powers. Every activity relates back to the actor. “Actual infinity” in this sense is the practical presence of the general in every specific activity in the here and now. For the Enlightenment, an object was merely a thing; for Hegel and above all for Marx, an object is a relationship, mediated by a thing.

The link between the mechanist revolution of the seventeenth century and the attribution of animality to human beings is Newton's theory of infinity. This – what Hegel called “bad infinity” – is the nub of the question. The infinity, or infinitesimal, of Newton's calculus, which solved the problems of mathematically describing the motions of bodies in space and time, was an “asymptotic” procedure (with roots in Zeno's paradox in Greek philosophy) involving the infinite division of space or time approaching a limit that was never reached. With Newton, infinity for the West became infinite *repetition* toward a goal that was never reached. (It was an appropriate conception for an era in which Man was an ideal to be approached but never attained). This infinity, as shall be seen, expressed the social reality of the new capitalist division of labor, as theorized by Adam Smith, who praised the social efficiency achieved by the relegation of the individual worker to the endless, lifelong repetition of one gesture. With the emergence of this new social phenomenon of the relegation of the atomized individual to a single gesture, early capitalism transformed the human being into the wage worker who (as Marx put it in the quote used at the outset) was precisely identified with his/her life activity, that is into an animal. This was the degradation of the human, simultaneously with the subjugation of non-European

peoples, into which the new concept of race could move, in the last decades of the seventeenth century, following the lead of Sir William Petty's *Scale of Creatures* (1676).⁷ The Enlightenment could say that some (e.g. dark-skinned) people were animals and beasts of burden because the disappearance, under the blows of the new mechanistic science, of the earlier, Greco-Roman or Judeo-Christian views of the human made it potentially possible, in the right circumstances, to see anyone as sub-human, starting with the laboring classes of Europe itself. (This potential would require 250 years to work itself out, from Malthus to the fascist paroxysm of Social Darwinist "living space" (*Lebensraum*) for the "master race").

But it is necessary to be careful; not all Enlightenment theorists of the new idea of "race" were racists; some used the term in a descriptive anthropological sense without value judgment. What laid the foundation for the virulent 19th century theories of race was the taxonomic-classificatory "fixity of species" with which the Enlightenment replaced the older Christian view of the unity of man: "It is the assertion of biologically fixed, unchanging 'races' with different mental and moral value judgements ("higher", "lower") which became the decisive criteron for modern racism and a key argument for its propagation. Bernier, Buffon, Linnaeus, Kant and

Blumenbach develop their systems for the classification and hierarchy of humanity with extremely varied positions on slavery and on the humanity of “races” both outside Europe as well as among the “whites” who were increasingly dominant in world affairs.”⁸

The following is a chart of the major Enlightenment theories of race, with author, work and year of publication:

Georgius Hornius	<i>Arca Noæ</i> (1666) (ca. 1620-1670)	Japhetites (white), Semites (yellow), Hamites (black) Europeans, Africans, Chinese and Japanese, Lapps <i>Europaeus albus</i> (white), <i>Americanus rubesceus</i> (red), <i>Asiaticus luridus</i> (yellow), <i>Afer niger</i> (black)
Francois Bernier	<i>Nouvelle division de la terre</i> (1684) (1620-1688)	
Linnaeus	<i>Systema naturae</i> (1707-1778)	
Buffon	<i>Histoire naturelle</i> (1707-1788)	Lapp Polar, Tartar, South Asian, European, Ethiopian, American
Edward Long	<i>History of Jamaica</i> (1734-1813)	Genus homo: Europeans and related peoples, blacks, orangutans
Johann Friedrich Blumenbach	<i>De generis humanis varietatenativa</i> (1775)	Caucasians, Mongolians, Ethiopians, Americans, Malays

Immanuel Kant (1775)	<i>Von den verschiedenen Rassen den Menschen</i> (1785)	Whites, Negroes, Mongolian or Calmuckic race, the Hindu
Christian Meiners (1747-1810)	<i>Grundrisse der Geschichte der Menschheit</i> (1785)	"light, beautiful" race, "dark, ugly" race

The above chart, with small additions, is translated from I. Geiss, *Geschichte des Rassismus*, pp. 142-143 (Frankfurt 1988).

The Enlightenment was, as such, neither racist nor an ideology of relevance only to "white European males". Nevertheless, it presents the following conundrum. On one hand, the Western Enlightenment in its broad mainstream was indisputably universalist and egalitarian, and therefore created powerful weapons for the attack on any doctrine of racial supremacy; on the other hand, the Enlightenment, as the preceding chart shows, just as indisputably gave birth to the very concept of race, and some of its illustrious representatives believed that whites were superior to all others. This problem cannot be solved by lining up Enlightenment figures according to their views on slavery and white supremacy. Adam Smith, better known as the theoretician of the free market and apologist for the

capitalist division of labor, attacked both, whereas Hobbes and Locke justified slavery, and such eminences as Thomas Jefferson, who favored abolition (however tepidly) and defended the French Revolution even in its Jacobin phase, firmly believed that blacks were biologically inferior to whites.

This kind of polling of Enlightenment figures for their views on slavery and race is, further, is an extremely limited first approach to the question, easily susceptible to the worst kind of anachronism. What was remarkable about the Enlightenment, seen in a world context, was not that some of its distinguished figures supported slavery and white supremacy but that significant numbers of them opposed both. As Part One showed, slavery as an institution flourished in the color-blind sixteenth century Mediterranean slave pool, and no participating society, Christian or Moslem, European, Turkish, Arab or African, questioned it. Well into the seventeenth century, Western attacks on New World slavery only attempted to curb its excesses. Radical Protestant sects in North America (the Mennonites, then the Quakers) were well ahead of secular Enlightenment figures in calling for outright abolition, between 1688 and 1740, and a political movement for abolition,⁹ again with religious groups more preponderant than secular Enlightenment figures, only emerged in the

Anglo-American world in the final quarter of the eighteenth century, as the Enlightenment was culminating in the American and French Revolutions. There is no intrinsic relationship between Hume's philosophical skepticism or Kant's critique of it, and their common belief that whites were innately superior.¹⁰

Any critique of the limits of the Enlightenment, where the question of race is concerned, has to begin by acknowledging the radicalism of the best of the Enlightenment, for that side of the Enlightenment, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was radical in relation to the Western societies in which it appeared,¹¹ and also radical relative to many non-Western societies it influenced. Readers of C.L.R. James' account of the Haitian Revolution will recall his description of the abolition of slavery in all colonies by the French National Assembly in February 1794, when the Jacobins and the even more radical Mountain were at the height of their power, under the pressure of the Parisian masses in the streets. Abolition in Haiti had been won by the black slaves led by Toussaint l'Ouverture in August 1793, but, threatened by British and Spanish military intervention to seize the colony and restore slavery, the Haitian revolutionaries wished to remain allied to France, and wanted abolition confirmed by the Assembly. Neither Robespierre nor the Mountain

wanted it, but the radicalization of the situation under mass pressure, in the most extreme year of the revolution, forced it on them: "The workers and peasants of France could not have been expected to take any interest in the colonial question in normal times, any more than one can expect similar interest from British or French workers today. But now they were roused. They were striking at royalty, tyranny, reaction and oppression of all types, and with these they included slavery. The prejudice of race is superficially the most irrational of all prejudices, and by a perfectly comprehensible reaction the Paris workers, from indifference in 1789, had come by this time to detest no section of the aristocracy so much as those whom they called "the aristocracy of the skin"... Paris between March 1793 and July 1794 was one of the supreme epochs of political history. Never until 1917 were masses ever to have such powerful influence – for it was no more than influence – on any government. In these few months of their nearest approach to power they did not forget the blacks. They felt toward them as brothers, and the old slave-owners, whom they knew to be supporters of the counter-revolution, they hated as if Frenchmen themselves had suffered under the whip."¹² Bellay, a former slave and deputy to the Convention from San Domingo (as Haiti was then called) presented his credentials and on the following

day introduced a motion for the abolition of slavery. It was passed without debate and by acclamation, and was the radical high water mark of the revolution. As James said, it was “one of the most important legislative acts ever passed by any political assembly”.

It is certainly true that the proto-proletarian action of the Parisian masses in 1793-94, and their link-up with the overthrow of slavery in San Domingo, went beyond any political ideas of the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth century.¹³ They were still too weak, and capitalist society too undeveloped, for them to be anything but brilliant precursors of later revolutions in which, for brief moments, revolts in the “center” fuse with revolts in the “periphery” and mark a turn in world history.¹⁴ It was not in France but in Germany, over the next two decades, that philosophers, above all G.F.W. Hegel, would theorize the actions of the Parisian masses into a theory of politics that went beyond the Enlightenment and laid the foundations for the theory of the communist movement later articulated by Marx.¹⁵ Nevertheless, nowhere did the radical Enlightenment program of “Liberty-Equality-Fraternity” acquire such concreteness as a program for mass action as in Santo Domingo after 1791 and in Paris in 1793- 1794; Toussaint l’Ouverture had himself studied French Enlightenment thought. Thus the “best of the

Enlightenment" is revealed precisely by the actions of people who, influenced by it, were already in the process of going beyond it, with practice (as always) well in advance of theory. This realization of the Enlightenment, as the revolution ebbed, was also the end of the Enlightenment, for reasons too complex to be treated here.¹⁶ The Enlightenment had foreseen neither the Jacobin Terror nor Napoleon, and could only be salvaged by figures such as Hegel and Marx, who subsumed the Enlightenment into a new historical rationality of the kind defended here.

One strand of the worst of the Enlightenment was realized in the work of Thomas Malthus (1766-1834), laying the basis for an ideology which is still rampant today, and completely entwined, in the US and many other countries, with racism.

Malthus's basic idea, as many people know, was that human population increases geometrically while agricultural production increases only arithmetically, making periodic famine inevitable. Malthus therefore proposed measures for "grinding the faces of the poor" (as the saying goes), opposing a minimum wage and welfare because they encouraged profligate reproduction of the working classes, and welcoming periodic epidemic, famine and war as useful checks on excess population.¹⁷ (In

contrast to today's Malthusians, such as the World Bank and the IMF, who preach zero population growth to Third World countries, Malthus also opposed contraception for the poor because the "reserve army of the unemployed" kept wages down.) Even in Malthus' own time, innovations in agriculture had doubled production in England, but Malthus was above all concerned with developing a "scientific" facade for policies aimed at maximizing accumulation and controlling the vast armies of poor people unleashed by the early, brutal phase of the Industrial Revolution. It would be a travesty to call Parson Malthus an "Enlightenment thinker"; he was already denounced by liberals and radicals of his own time. But his linear view of agricultural production was a direct extrapolation, in political economy, of the linearity and "bad infinity" of Newtonian physics and the Enlightenment ontology. Malthusian man was Hobbesian man: an animal, performing a fixed function in the division of labor in a society with fixed resources. Malthus was not so opaque as to deny invention, but his linear view, which he shared with all political economy (as shall be shown momentarily) concealed the reality, demonstrated many times in history, that innovations in productivity (and not merely in agriculture) periodically move society forward in non-linear leaps, from apples to oranges, so to speak. (In the late

sixteenth century, for example, end-of-the-world cults proliferated over the coming depletion of the forests in Europe's wood-based economy; a century later, inventions in the use of iron had made coal, not wood, Europe's major fuel, obviating the earlier hysteria.) Resources, like human capabilities, are not "fixed", but are periodically redefined by innovation, and major innovation ripples through a whole society, creating the non-linear "apples to oranges" effect.

The same linearity, however, pervaded even classical political economy, with direct Enlightenment sources (most importantly in Adam Smith), from which Malthus may be seen as an early, but significant, deviation. David Ricardo (1772-1823) was praised by Marx as the most advanced political economist, the theoretician of "production for production's sake". (For Marx, by contrast, "the multiplication of human powers", not production *per se*, was "its own goal".) But although innovation was far more central to Ricardo's economics, he too succumbed to the linearity of his premises. Malthus's bourgeois "end of the world" scenario was overpopulation; for the productivist Ricardo, the unleashed productivity of capitalism would be strangled by ground rent as poorer and poorer soils were used for raw materials. Like Malthus, Ricardo failed to conceive of "quantum-leap" innovations that would

supercede the need for specific, limited raw materials. Thus the two major “end of the world” scenarios produced by nineteenth century economics grew out of Enlightenment, bad-infinity premises that saw even innovation in terms of linear repetition. Ricardo culminated classical political economy’s theorization of labor, but the limitations of a bourgeois viewpoint prevented him from grasping the idea of human labor-power, out of which “apples to oranges” improvements in society’s relation to nature periodically occur.¹⁸

Marx’s concept of labor-power is the concrete realization, in social terms, of the “actual infinity” of pre-Enlightenment thought; it is the nucleus of a rationality beyond the Enlightenment, a rationality centered on the “fishing in the morning, hunting in the afternoon, and criticism in the evening” notion explained earlier, in which man goes beyond a fixed place in the division of labor, “fixed” natural resources determined by one phase of productivity, and the fixity of species in relation to their environment that characterizes animals. It thereby goes beyond the worst of the Enlightenment, the Hobbesian view of man which, in concrete historical circumstances, fuses with Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment race theory.

The preceding, then, was a “theoretical” exposition of the flaws of the Enlightenment world view, (the general world view of bourgeois-capitalist society in its progressive phase), which have disarmed it against race theory and racism, the association of physical features with cultural traits, and even, in their early phase, contributed to them. It has the advantage of going “beneath” the wide array of views for and against slavery and white supremacist race theory held by individual Enlightenment figures to the foundations of a world view they shared, but it has the great disadvantage of posing “theoretically” the evolution of ideas which are in fact the product of a shifting balance of forces in real history.

Marx’s realization of pre-Enlightenment actual infinity in his theory of labor power superceded both the Christian idea of humanity and the Enlightenment view of Man in a concrete-practical view of real people in history. But, as stated earlier, if race were merely an idea, it could be overcome by another idea. The connection first made by some Enlightenment figures between biology and culture became socially effective in the seventeenth and eighteenth century not as a mere idea but as a legitimization of the Atlantic slave trade, of Western world domination, and in the U.S., the special race stratification of working people as it first emerged in seventeenth century Virginia;

it was deflated neither by Marx's writings, still less by the real movements organized by many of Marx's followers (whose relation to the overcoming of race was often ideologically rhetorical and practically ambiguous, at best). The biological idea of race has been marginalized, but not made extinct, in official Western culture since the nineteenth century by anti-colonial struggles and the emergence of former colonies as industrial powers, by the culmination of Western race theory in Nazism, and by the successes of the black movement in the U.S. in the 1960s, with both national and international repercussions. It was also marginalized, within the official culture, by a critique launched in the early twentieth century by figures such as Franz Boas and Robert Ezra Park, which began as a distinctly minority view among educated whites and which increasingly drew momentum from these events. Nevertheless, beginning in the late 1960s, and accelerating in the climate of world economic crisis since then, the biology-culture connection and its (usually explicit) racist edge began to make a comeback in the work of Konrad Lorenz, Banfield, Jensen, Scheckley, Herrnstein, E.O. Wilson, and more recently in the controversy around Herrnstein and Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve*.¹⁹ Biological theories of culture (with no racist intent) are also

reappearing in the utterances of such figures of liberal credentials as Camille Paglia and Carl Degler.²⁰

The history of the idea of race as the biological determinant of culture after the Enlightenment is far beyond the scope of this article. After the French Revolution, the backlash against the Enlightenment took many forms, but the relevant one here was the intensification of the biology-culture theory of race first developed by some Enlightenment figures, and relative oblivion for the more neutral anthropological use of the term, not linked to judgmental color-coded race hierarchies, developed by others, even if still tainted with a “fixity of species” outlook. But the key point is that when deeply anti-Enlightenment figures such as Count Gobineau²¹ (1816-1882) began the intensification of race theory that pointed directly to fascism, they had already found the concept of race in the Enlightenment legacy. By the end of the nineteenth century it was common coin in both Europe and America to refer to the “Anglo-Saxon race”, the “Latin race”, the “Slavic race”, the “Oriental race”, the “Negro race” etc. with or without (and usually with) judgmental ranking,²² and usually assuming a biological basis for cultural differences. (Phrenology, which claimed to determine intelligence by skull shape and size, also remained a respectable science until the end of the

nineteenth century.) The admixture of Social Darwinism after 1870 (for which Darwin is not to be blamed) and the massive land grab known as imperialism created an international climate in which, by 1900, it was the rare educated white European or American who questioned race theory root and branch. Forerunners of *The Bell Curve* routinely appeared in the US up to the 1920's demonstrating "scientifically" the biological inferiority of the Irish, Italians, Poles, and Jews, and influenced the Immigration Act of 1924 sharply curtailing immigration and imposing quotas on such nationalities.²³ Eugenics accelerated in popularity in the Anglo-American world from 1850 onward, and Hitler and the Nazis claimed that they took many ideas, such as forced sterilization, from the American eugenics movement. Margaret Sanger, the famous crusader for birth control, was a white supremacist, as were a number of early American suffragettes and feminists.²⁴ Some sections of the pre-World War I Socialist Party made open appeals to white supremacy, and the SP right-wing leader Victor Berger was an unabashed racist.²⁵

For many of these post-Enlightenment developments, the Enlightenment itself is of course not to be blamed. Many Social Darwinists, eugenicists, suffragettes, Progressives and socialists ca. 1900 undoubtedly identified with the Enlightenment and thought their ideas of

“science”, including “scientific” demonstration of the innate inferiority of peoples of color, were an extension of the Enlightenment project, and the preceding discussion shows they in fact had their Enlightenment predecessors. Nevertheless, the early intellectual debunkers of this pseudo-science, such as Boas, were also heirs to the Enlightenment. When the Enlightenment is remembered today, it is not Bernier, Buffon and Blumenbach who first come to mind, but rather Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, Kant (as philosopher, not as anthropologist) and Paine, and one could do worse than to summarize their legacy as the debunking of mystification. The Enlightenment contributed to the Western theory of race, and the real separation of culture from biology was the work of post-Enlightenment figures such as Marx, and above all the real historical movement of the past century. Nevertheless, when the Enlightenment is attacked today by Christian, Jewish, Moslem and Hindu fundamentalists for separating religion and state, or by the new biologism of the New Right or the Afrocentrists for its universalism, or by the post-modernists as an ideology of and for “white European males”, it is the best of the Enlightenment, the *Liberté-Egalité-Fraternité* of the Parisian and Haitian masses in 1794, and the best post-Enlightenment heirs such as Marx, which are the real targets. Such attacks remind us that, once critique is

separated from the limitations of the Enlightenment outlined here, there is plenty of mystification still to be debunked.

This article originally appeared in Race Traitor 10 (1998)

Notes

1. One reader of Part One criticized it for Eurocentrism, because it overlooked earlier color-coded racial systems in other cultures, citing in particular the case of the Indian caste system as it was imposed by the Indo-european (formerly called "Aryan") invaders of the subcontinent ca. 1500 BC. Since my argument was that race as an idea could not appear until rationalist and scientific critique up to the mid-seventeenth century had overthrown mythical and religious views of man to arrive at a biological view, this objection seemed highly unlikely. The theoretical foundation of the Indian caste system does correlate the four *varnas* (which means, among other things, color) with the four castes. But the hierarchy of *varnas* in India is inseparable from a similar hierarchy of "purity/impurity" which descends from the Brahmins at the top to the Sudras at the bottom, not to mention the untouchables who are not even included in the system. And "purity" for a caste is

connected to action (*karma*), in this life as in previous ones; thus the Hindu system conceives of someone's birth in the Brahmin caste as the consequence of "pure" action, and their ability to stay there the result of ongoing "pure" action, (whereas the Sudra have committed "impure" action) something totally different from a race system, where no one acquires or loses skin color by action. As Oliver Cox puts it: "The writers who use modern ideas of race relations for the purpose of explaining the origin of caste make an uncritical transfer of modern thought to an age which did not know it. The early Indo-Aryans could no more have thought in modern terms of race prejudice than they could have invented the airplane. The social factors necessary for thinking in modern terms of race relations were not available. It took some two thousand more years to develop these ideas in Western society, and whatever there is of them in India today has been acquired by recent diffusion." *Caste, Class and Race*, p. 91 (New York, 1959).

2. Part One of this article, "From Anti-Semitism to White Supremacy, 1492-1676. Pre-Enlightenment Phase: Spain, Jews and Indians" argued that the first known racist social practices were the "blood purity" laws created against Spanish Jewry in the mid-fifteenth century. As a result, many Jews converted to Christianity where, as so-called "New Christians", they entered the Franciscan, Jesuit and

Dominican orders of the Catholic Church where their own messianism mixed with Christian heretical ideas in the evangelization of the peoples of the New World. One widespread view , among many theories taken from Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian sources, held that the New World peoples were descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel. These theories were debated for 150 years until the French Protestant Isaac LaPeyrere published a book *The Pre-Adamites* (1655) in which he argued from internal inconsistencies in the Old Testament that there had been people before Adam. While LaPeyrere himself was still completely in the messianic tradition and still believed in the theological assertion of the unity of mankind, others used his theory to argue that Africans and New World Indians were different species. Sir William Petty, in his *Scale of Creatures* (1676), made the link between skin color and culture, thereby theorizing for the first time what had begun in practice in Spain more than two centuries earlier. It is in this way that the idea of race and the Enlightenment came into existence simultaneously.) Part One defined “race” as the association of cultural attributes with biology, as it first appeared in early modern anti-Semitism in Spain’s historically unprecedented fifteenth-century “blood purity” laws. This association was then transferred to the Indian population of Spain’s New

World empire, and then generalized through the North Atlantic world to legitimate the African slave trade, which greatly intensified in the late seventeenth century just as the Enlightenment was beginning. But this evolution did not just happen. For 150 years after 1492, Europeans sifted through all the myths and legends of their Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian past to find an explanation for previously unknown peoples in a previously unknown world. They saw in New World peoples the survivors of Plato's Atlantis, descendants of a Phoenician voyage or King Arthur's retreat to the Isle of Avalon, or finally as the Lost Tribes of Israel. By the mid-seventeenth century, rationalist critique of the Bible and of myth ripped away these fantastic projections, and inadvertently destroyed the idea of the common origin of humanity in the Garden of Eden. By 1676, simultaneous with the multiracial Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia and the Puritan extermination of the Indians of New England in King Philip's War, Sir William Petty articulated a new view, relegating peoples of color to an intermediate "savage" status between human beings and animals.

3. Figures who articulated the previously heretical "actual infinity" in the 1450-1650 period, in theological and then philosophical form, were Nicholas of Cusa, Giordano Bruno, Spinoza and Leibniz.

4. "The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them whole relations of society." *Communist Manifesto*

5. Improvements, such as inventions, in the ancient world, were made haphazardly, and were often viewed as curiosities, not something to be socially applied in a systematic way, or were even shunned because of the threat they posed to existing social relations.

6. K. Marx, *Grundrisse*, (1973 ed.), p. 325.

7. Petty's book is the first known Western source which both overthrows the Christian idea of the unity of man and also connects biological features to a color-coded race hierarchy. "Of man himself there seems to be several species, To say nothing of Gyants and Pygmies or of that sort of small men who have little speech... For of these sorts of men, I venture to say nothing, but that 'tis very possible there may be Races and generations of such... [T]here be others (differences) more considerable, that is, between the Guiny Negroes & the Middle Europeans; & of Negroes between those of Guiny and those who live about the Cape of Good Hope, which last are the Most beastlike of all the Souls (sorts?) of Men whith whom our Travellers arre well acquainted. I say that the Europeans do not only

differ from the aforementioned Africans in Collo... but also... in Naturall Manners, & in the internall Qualities of their Minds." Quoted in M. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, p. 421-22, (Philadelphia, 1964).

8. I. Geiss, *Geschichte des Rassismus*, (Frankfurt, 1988), p. 142. Geiss sees Hume as the first Enlightenment figure (in 1753-54) who specifically theorizes a racist hierarchy of color (p. 149); he does not seem to be familiar with Petty's text. See I. Hannaford's *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Johns Hopkins, 1996) surveys the same period, with somewhat different judgments (cf. Ch. 7), and sees the main break occurring with Hobbes.

9. In 1780, during the revolution, Pennsylvania, with its large Quaker presence, became the first North American colony to abolish slavery.

10. E. Chukwudi Eze's *Race and the Enlightenment* (New York, 1996) is a useful compendium of little-known texts by Blumenbach, Hume, Kant, Hegel and other figures, mainly expressing white supremacist disdain for Africans and African culture. In my opinion, these texts mainly demonstrate that Hume, Kant and Hegel expressed the limitations of their time, and in no way shows any race-linked implications of the philosophical works we still read

today. I would be interested in hearing from readers who think otherwise.

11. Figures such as Hobbes, Locke or Hume were all suspected of radical atheism by the conventional middle-class opinion of their time, still tied to official religion. They were in reality moderates, deeply hostile to radical popular forces, many of which still spoke a religious language. The “left to right” spectrum of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in no way, particularly in the Anglo-American world, aligns itself neatly with distinctions between the “secular” and the “religious”, as the examples such as the Digger Gerard Winstanley or William Blake clearly show. The mainstream Enlightenment always opposed the “antinomian” social radicalism associated with such figures. *Cf. M. Jacobs, The Newtonians and the English Revolution, (1976).*

12. C.L.R. James. *The Black Jacobins*, pp. 120, 138-139 (New York, 1963).

13. The great majority of Enlightenment figures limited their political aims to a constitutional monarchy on the post-1688 English model or to a vision of benign top-down reform by Enlightened absolutist despots; the proclamation of a Republic in France in 1791 was the result of the practical radicalization of the political situation there and

throughout Europe, not a preconceived application of Enlightenment ideas.

14. The radical wing of the French Revolution, the Parisian masses, was crushed in 1794 by the Jacobins, who were in turn overthrown by moderates; after Napoleon's seizure of power in 1799, France restored slavery in all its possessions and lost 50,000 soldiers in a failed attempt to subdue Santo Domingo. In 1848, when capitalism and the proletariat were more advanced, a new French revolution (part of a European-wide uprising) occurred and finally succeeded in abolishing slavery in the colonies, after England had done so in 1834.

15. Hegel's fundamental idea that "the real is rational" comes directly out of his analysis of the French Revolution. In contrast to even the best of the Enlightenment, Hegel (having the example of the revolution before him, as the Enlightenment did not) was the first to understand (even if he did not use this language) the "sociological" truth that a social class (e.g. the Parisian proletariat) is not a "category" but an act, and that the "truth" of any social class (i.e. the "real") is not its own day-to-day humdrum self-understanding in "normal conditions" of oppression but the extremity of what it has the potential to become ("the rational") at crucial turning points (generally called

revolutions). Hegel's own late conservatism and that of his followers turned the meaning of "the real is rational" into a simple apology for the existing status quo, cutting the radical heart out of Hegel's original meaning of "the real".

16. The Enlightenment (at the great risk of oversimplification) conceived abstractly of Man as "natural man", endowed with reason, and endowed with "rights of man" by "natural law". The counterpart of this was a conception of societies as initially formed by individuals who came together in some kind of "social contract"; Enlightenment theory thus assumed individuals who initially existed independently from society and history. Society was the "sum" of such individuals. It was a completely ahistorical view, which is one reason the Enlightenment was so preoccupied with utopias in distant places, in which Man could be portrayed in harmony with (static) "nature", and with New World Indians or Tahitians, who supposedly revealed Man "in Nature", or with the "wild child" raised outside all social institutions. "All men once lived as they live in America", said John Locke, referring to the American Indian. The Enlightenment was also preoccupied with drawing up constitutions (as Locke did for the Carolina colony in North America, or Rousseau for Poland), as if social institutions were derived from, or could be derived from, "first principles", and were not, as Vico

first argued, a *factum*, the product of activity. Enlightenment social thought had an ideal to realize, a human nature that could be distilled and identified separate from society and history. Thus Rousseau could conceive this ideal of Man as something to approach but never be achieved, the social equivalent of Newton's bad infinity.

17. Cf. the invaluable book of A. Chase, *The Legacy of Malthus: The Social Costs of the New Scientific Racism* (New York, 1980), particularly Ch. 4. Space does not permit a full discussion of the influence of Malthusian ideology today. I will limit myself to pointing out that John Maynard Keynes, the theoretician of the post-1945 welfare state, explicitly identified himself as a Malthusian. Keynes obviously was not opposed to a minimum wage, welfare measures or contraception; what he shared with Malthus was the idea that the buying power of unproductive classes should be increased to avoid periodic depressions. Malthus and Keynes had in common a "consumer's" view of the economy, assuming that if demand were maintained, production would take care of itself. But the underlying world view of both Malthus and Keynes, as theoreticians of the unproductive middle classes, had the necessary corollary of "useless eaters", which in the austerity conditions of the post-1973 period in the U.S. have mixed

with classical racism to produce a “conservative-liberal” consensus for the abolition of America’s (minimalist) welfare state. Bill Moyers’ reportage on teenage parenting among American welfare populations was classical Malthusian propaganda about the “promiscuous poor” from a “liberal” viewpoint.

18. One may readily understand the distinction between labor and labor power by the recent example of the “new industrial countries” (NICs) such as South Korea. Cases such as this are not merely a question of dropping some factories into a peasant economy. South Korea emerged over 35 years from an extremely poor, predominantly rural, Third World country to one which exports high-quality technological goods and even conducts its own R&D. This was made possible by many things, but among them were the creation of an infrastructure (transportation, communications, energy systems) and above all a skilled work force capable of operating modern factories. South Korea in 1960 had an abundance of labor, but desperately short of labor-power.

19. After being largely marginalized by official culture in the U.S., many of these authors were translated into French in the 1970’s where they contributed to the rise of

the anti-immigrant National Front, which openly proclaims white supremacy in its public utterances.

20. Paglia attacks 50s and 60s left culturalism for overlooking the “dark” biological side of sexuality; Degler announces his conversion to the “return of biology” in *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought* (New York, 1991).

21. Gobineau’s book, *The Inequality of the Races*, which became the manifesto of late nineteenth-century Aryan supremacy, was first published in 1853.

22. T. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America*, ch. 13 (New York, 1963), tells the story of Anglo-Saxon race theory. Gossett also traces the history of the polygenecist theory of races, as discussed in part one of this article, through the nineteenth century in ch. 4.

23. A dense survey of this history is in A. Chase, *The Legacy of Malthus: The Social Costs of the New Scientific Racism* (New York, 1980).

24. Cf. Robert Allen, *Reluctant Reformers: Racism and Social Reform Movements in the United States*, ch. 5 (New York, 1975).

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 223-227.

The Online World Is Also On Fire

How the Sixties Marginalized Literature in American Culture

(and Why Literature Mainly Deserved It)¹

The real “sixties”, of course, (at least for white middle-class American youth) started in approximately 1964 with the Berkeley student revolt and, following hard on that, with the appearance of the hippie counter-culture.

In 1964/65, “literature” was still everywhere in the air among people who felt they were, or wanted to be, in the center of “what was happening”. No such person would voluntarily admit to an ignorance of Kesey, Kerouac, Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Salinger, Jean Genet, J-P Sartre, Camus, Kierkegaard, Unamuno, Norman Mailer, Saul Bellow, Kafka, Mann, Aldous Huxley, Proust, Henry Miller, Michael McClure, Leroi Jones and many other names one could provide. There was an equally imposing list of names from jazz, psychoanalysis, philosophy, the theater, film, sociology (e.g. C. Wright Mills), twentieth century music, performers such as Lennie Bruce. All of these elements seemed to blend into one sensibility which one might characterize with then common-coin words such as “beat” or better “existentialist”.

About one year later, in 1965/66. this world, which could have been found with some variation of names in 1950, or even in embryo in 1940, was mortally wounded. All *dramatis personae* at the time agreed in this assessment: ca. 1966 or '67, a group of beats around Herbert Gold put out a manifesto calling for a regroupment of people who liked jazz, literature, etc. against the rising tide of the hippie counter-culture with its beads, Be-Ins, rock concerts, communes, "underground newspapers", mysticism (and of course basic, willed illiteracy and anti-intellectualism). It got big play for a day in the SF newspapers and was never heard of again, a pure media event. (Miles Davis, in his autobiography, has a very pointed description of his realization, ca. 1968, that jazz had been overwhelmed by rock, echoing the same assessment but drawing very different conclusions.)

What was responsible for this tremor, after which literature never regained the centrality it had in American (middle class) culture up to 1965? It was the incredible kaleidoscope of events, from the Berkeley Free Speech movement, the bombing of North Vietnam, the assassination of Malcolm X, the invasion of the Dominican Republic, the Watts riots, the emergence of LSD, riots on Sunset Strip, the break in rock associated with the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, the appearance of Black Power and

the end of the civil rights movement, the Hells Angels' attack on the first big Berkeley anti-war march in Fall 65, the appearance of strobe light shows and the Fillmore Auditorium and the Avalon Ballroom and the Haight Ashbury and Country Joe and the Fish, Bob Dylan's seemingly epochal shift from folk to electric. All in one year. One might stir in the Cultural Revolution in China (that is, the fantasy thereof for Western youth), the simmering Third World revolutions in Latin America and Africa and Asia, the coming of the gurus and swamis from India, the Beatles' shift to drugs and meditation, to add a truly international dimension.

The total impact of these events, compressed into such a short time at the very moment when there were more adolescents coming of age as a percent of the population than at any time before or since, (a demographic reality that itself stamped events) dealt a fatal blow to pre-1965 "avant-garde" culture. Michael Rossman, a Berkeley activist and journalist, wrote somewhere about the experience of the inebriation of FSM in Fall 64: he said that "the pitch was such that if one suddenly noticed that the white wall of one's apartment was in fact a heaving wall of white ants, it might seem startling but it would not seem incredible, because incredible things were happening every day, not merely on the TV screen, but through people's lived

collective action". The subsequent roller coaster ride up year by year rose to the crescendo of 68/69, and was followed by the crash that began, and accelerated, after 1969, to *ca.* 1977. In half a decade, the country had gone from LBJ's Great Society and Martin Luther King and the Peace Corps to the Weathermen, the Altamont concert, Charles Manson and the murder of Fred Hampton by the Chicago police. Where there had been in 1960 earnest crew cut and bobbed-hair liberal supporters of JFK, and Young Republicans, there were in 1970 Trotskyists, Stalinists, Maoists, Young Lords, Black Panthers, White Panthers, Hell's Angels, Gypsy Jokers, Up against the Wall Motherfuckers, Tim Leary and Richard Albert aka Baba Ramdass, Ken Kesey' and his bus of Merry Pranksters, Carlos Casteneda and Mescalito, Esalen, the Guru Maharaji, the Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers, free-jazz black nationalists, the East Village Other, the Stonewall riots, women's consciousness raising groups, Woodstock Nation, fraged Army officers in Vietnam, the death of George Jackson, Attica, the Chicano riots in LA, the Brown Berets, the "army of 100,000 Villons" as Saul Bellow called them, "modernism in the streets" as Daniel Bell put it.

Tom Wolfe has expressed his shock that no great novel emerged from all this. Certainly, no "story" interests members of that generation (that is, people born between

1940 and 1955, people old enough to be conscious in 1970) remotely as much as the ramifications of that decade, or more precisely half-decade. The conservatives today are quite right to remain obsessed out it, correctly sensing that something was broken then that has never been put back together, literature being one part of that. And yet no serious literary expression of that earthquake was written either in the midst of it or subsequently. Undoubtedly, many people, even people who were on LSD for most of those years, subsequently started reading or (reading again) and even went back to school and are now deconstructionist literary theorists. But no one wrote a novel of any importance about it, not here, not in France, not in Germany, not in Italy or Britain or Japan, similar countries where a similar break occurred around the same time. In the mid-60s, the most popular college major was "English", and half of all English majors were aspiring novelists and poets. By 1970, most people still majoring in English were people planning to become suburban elementary school teachers.

During the years when reality seemed (in Rossman's words) like a heaving wall of white ants, virtually no figure who had seemed important in 1964 had a damned thing to say about it that mattered to the ascending generation. The (media-created) battle cry was "Don't Trust Anyone

Over 30" but the hard truth was that many people would have welcomed one or two sane voices over 30, *if* they had been up to the enormity of what had happened. But there were none, or almost none. And least of all from the quarters of the Lionel Trilling sensibility. (I will return to this.) Irving Howe wrote *ca.* 1978 in the *New York Times Book Review* how the lack of seriousness of the 60's revolt was demonstrated by how few adults were involved. He forgot to mention that in the crucial years most adults were supporting the war, or in the case of the "Lionel Trilling" sensibility, denouncing the excesses of the anti-war movement.

In the wake of such events, authors such as Steinbeck, James Jones, Lawrence Durrell, Ignazio Silone, Kazantzakis, Arthur Miller, E.M. Forster, Somerset Maugham, Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, J.P. Donleavy, Francois Mauriac, Gunther Grass, Alain Robbe- Grillet, Italo Svevo, James Baldwin, Faulkner, Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, Bernard Malamud, Edward Albee, Norman Mailer, James T. Farrell, Dostoevsky, and their problematics seemed separated from the present by a chasm. While it is possible to use many of them to measure the distance from the sensibility of those days) they had damn little to say that illuminated the crisis that erupted in those years and which has never really abated. No novel succeeded in telling the

story of real people coming of age in the 1960s and what happened to them later, as they attempted to put together coherent lives after such an initiation. It is true that the apocalypticism that reigned from '65 to '69 was overblown and excessively dismissive of the past, and that there were lots of older people who had plenty to say. The only problem was that virtually none of them were ever mentioned in the truncated "Chaucer to T.S. Eliot" vision of reality of 1950s and 1960s English departments, and damn few of them were primarily "literary" figures! *There's* a major source of the deflation of the prestige of literature since then. In the mid to late 60's, with the familiar world exploding all around, English professors formed by the "new criticism" flatly denied that historical context was of any relevance in understanding "great literature". Questions such as Pound's fascism or Milton's involvement with the English revolution made their way into a classroom only as an afterthought. People abandoned literature in droves for fields such as cultural history where these and similar questions were the issue. This is what the Hilton Kramers of today won't forgive in the sixties, that they destroyed high modernist formalism, the previous two decades' cultural restorationist myth (for all the arts, not just literature) of the "pure work of art taken by itself". The purveyors of taste in those days wanted to pretend that

figures such as Milton were as narrow and cut off from everything but the literary as they were, and worse, wanted to pretend that literature itself doesn't wither in such a hot house, and that the life radiating from Milton's work didn't have something to do with those involvements. They didn't want to hear about Shelley's involvement in social radicalism. How unfortunate for them that Shelley did not consider such concerns beneath himself! And what a breath of fresh air to discover how totally false their arid snobbery was, and how false it was for so much of the cultural (and not merely literary) "canon". The utter condescension of those people and their assertion that their parochial waspish Anglo-American sensibility, pervaded by the odor of tea and decaying crumpets, was smugly "superior" to lowly concerns about exploding ghettos and the napalming of Asian children, and their attempt to wall off the great culture of the past from similar concerns. How totally unlamentable the demise of their cocooned little world: one can almost forgive the "race/ gender/ class" boors of today when one compares them with the people who dominated the cultural high ground in 1965. In this respect, one can say that books like Tim Clark's *The Painting of Modern Life* or Peter Linebaugh's *The London Hanged* are "cultural events" more significant than the appearance of any novel since the 60s.

If one sets the preceding list of novelists against names such as Guy Debord, Walter Benjamin, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Trotsky, C.L.R. James, (the early) Wilhelm Reich, Rosa Luxemburg, Victor Serge, E.P. Thompson, Georg Lukacs, George Orwell (for his journalism), Herbert Marcuse, Norman O. Brown, for starters, (and significantly, not one an American) there's no question which group electrified an important current of the 60s generation more and seemed, then and since, a more coherent guide to their present. Or, closer to today, people such as Chomsky or Christopher Lasch. One can agree or disagree with someone like Lasch, but can one argue that there is any contemporary novelist who has come close to his analysis of American culture and its malaise in the past 30 years? Can one name one post-1965 novel which has captured the imaginations of 60s people (or anyone) as did E.P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class* (the latter seeming to be about a different country than the "Chaucer to T.S. Eliot" one had dutifully ingested since the eighth grade)?

But this still does not fully answer Wolfe's question about why no novel was written in America (or anywhere else) after the 60s which came close to capturing what went on in those years. Consider, as the beginning of an answer, the contrast with the 30s, in the U.S. and

everywhere else. Writers congresses against fascism, attended by thousands, with keynote speeches by Brecht, Gide, Mann and Romain Rolland. The "literary politics" associated with the early *Partisan Review*, or (*Les Temps Modernes* after WWII), the *Masses* (or even the Stalinized *New Masses*). The great debate over literature and fascism, as associated with names such as Pound, d'Annunzio, Brasillach, Jnger, Barres, Hamsun. The long debate over "socialist realism", or, after the war, the "committed novel" (à la Sartre). Or Lionel Trilling and the New York intellectuals, Howe, McCarthy, Dwight McDonald's magazine *Politics*. One can point to the extension of such "literary politics" into the 60s (as in the involvement of figures such as Mailer and Lowell and McDonald in the antiwar movement) but we can also agree that they were fairly marginal to the main events of the times and above all that they had no results in literature. And again, these very problems were anathema to the theorists of "new criticism" who were on the front lines of defining what was literature in those years. The generation shaped by the 1930s depression turned to the writing of (now forgotten) "proletarian novels"; an important part of the generation shaped by the 1960s "which wanted to write", under the influence of figures such as Thompson or CLR James, turned to the writing of labor history and more broadly

“new social history”. And they turned there because the richness of the horizons opened up, both in what had been lived and in the question raised exactly for the “feel” of daily life in the past, was richer than any novelistic tradition at hand. It is no accident, and says a great deal, that the *New York Review of Books* is today dominated by historians, not by literary critics or (more up to date) literary “theorists”.

By 1970, many of the young people with literary aspirations in 1965 were studying history, philosophy, or social theory, or all three, and some were “standing fast” in factories, Harvey Swados fashion. (To be honest, many were studying law and medicine, never to be heard from again.) Serious social history offers a kind of vehicle to the “way it was” that one finds in certain novels, as in the best passages of a book such as Huizinga’s *The Waning of the Middle Ages* or an E.P. Thomson description of an English execution in 1820 (admittedly, exceptional masterpieces but there are a number) and one must concede that these works provide a lot of anthropology of daily life, much like a Thomas Hardy novel. Novels are undoubtedly a superb, perhaps unsurpassed, way of entry into these realities, and historians have only begun to write about such dimensions in the past few decades. Novels and poetry undoubtedly open up realities that no history can match. It’s just that

none have succeeded in doing so for our epoch and, as someone once said, all the rest is scholarship. Norman Mailer's *Armies of the Night* (1968) and a lot of his other 60s journalism actually comes closer to being true "literature" of the period than any novel I'm aware of. A somewhat similar evolution can be followed in Sartre's turn from (on the whole) eminently forgettable novels in the 40's to his attempts to grapple with history, (a dialogue with history being already present in *Nausea*) and with the situation of a writer like Flaubert in history, but Mailer is really unique in attempting to fuse novelistic subjectivity with a large canvas of historical events, whatever his success (and he certainly caught the spirit of the events).

The sixties ended in an ugly mood, as the lyricism of 1968 gave way to Kent State, the invasion of Cambodia and national student strike against it, the Altamont rock concert (Hell's Angels again), the COINTELPRO back-alley operations against the Black Panthers, the Manson murders, (and Weather Underground leader Bernardine Dohrn's applause for them), calls to "smash" (a key word then) monogamy (and the family and the state, all in the same breath), the authoritarian degeneration of dozens of urban and rural communes, the Chicago conspiracy trial, the New Haven Panther trial and endless other movement trials, the vogue for Kim il Sung and *ju che* (the North

Korean doctrine of self-reliance), dozens of campus and public building bombings, the self-destruction of four Weatherpeople in a Village bomb laboratory, and increasing paranoia about CIA, FBI, DIA and local “red squad” agents on every campus and in every leftist political group. The Haight-Ashbury in 1964 had been a quintessential working class and Bohemian neighborhood and in 1967 the center of the “summer of love”; by 1970 it was a dangerous, seedy place of strung out methadrine freaks scrounging spare change, the burned out hulk of an evanescent millennial euphoria. (It would only recover a decade later with the beginning of gentification, about which more later.) The breakdown and partial *Lumpenization* of the New Left and hippie counter-culture led to a reification of language rivaling anything in 1930s Stalinism. One could see a former Princeton graduate student, a drop-out and full-time political activist, slicing the air before him with practice karate chops as he walked and talked, and using *ju che* as an adjective, as in “he’s really *ju che*”, meaning “he’s really together”: an unforgettable sign of the times. Marcuse called this whole process of half-crazed, déclassé, guilt-ridden, downwardly mobile middle-class people determined to “smash” every bourgeois vestige within themselves, a generation seemingly suddenly seized with visions of Nechaiev, “repressive desublimation”. Only a

small minority of people really shaped by the 60s drank this cup to the dregs, but few people seriously involved with what had happened escaped its vortex entirely. Not one person in the center of this maelstrom would dream of writing a novel about what was going on; the times were for getting jobs to organize in factories, and for karate, and target practice, and study groups on *Capital*, and a hardening of sensibilities on every side, not for poetry as understood by Charles Olson or Robert Lowell, and bored indifference to the mere suggestion of such an endeavour in 1970 or 1971 would be the most civil response one could imagine. It is stunning that an observer in some ways as astute as Tom Wolfe could have missed this, and not see it as a major reason that no novel was ever written about the 60's. No one outside this moment could have done it, and no one inside it would have.

The American 1960s were, among other things, once revolutionary fervor was removed, a downsizing of the expectations of a significant portion of the middle class, which would culminate in gentrification, prior to the downsizing which has been remaking the world of corporate America since the 1970s. People forever lost to the world of *Leave It to Beaver* could only re-embrace it when it was repackaged as *Sex, Lies and Videotape*.

The crucial connection between the end of the 60s and the post-modern world was the movement of a significant number of the 60s generation from the “Nechaiev” vortex described above, to their gentrification in the professional middle classes. In 1969, tens of thousands of these people wanted to be professional revolutionaries; by the late 70s, many of them were content merely to be... professionals. This transformation of the political and cultural vanguards of 1965-70 into one section of the yuppies of 1980 was even more striking in Europe than in America, for reasons too complex to elaborate here. It is most striking of all in academia, on both sides of the Atlantic. But America fell farther and faster than Europe in the past 25 years, and it is false to see today's fashionable academic pseudo-left as recruited significantly from serious militants of the late 60s, as is in fact the case in France, Germany or Italy. Many of those militants, far from the TV cameras and the sound bite, are still standing fast, in one way or another. The sometimes erratic Camille Paglia, in her brilliant essay “Corporate Raiders and Junk Bond Traders”, on the “cultural studies” scene today, rightly points out (against neo-conservative propaganda) that no serious leftist could make it in the 1970s academy, assuming he/she wanted to, which few did. Nevertheless, the hedonism of the new professional strata that emerged with the “high tech” world

in the 70s and above all the 80s, so far from the "organization man", the "man in the gray flannel suit" of 40 years ago, can only be understood as a legacy of the 60s. The Soho or Tribeca lofts, the minimalist furniture, the Italian fashion, the espresso, the cocaine, the granola, the cult of cuisine and designer ice cream, are all a bizarre refraction of 1950s New York Bohemia, after the nihilist "hollowing out" that removed literacy and any concern for radical politics. And one must not overlook the little detail that this "life style", often in the very premises of former cold water flats or garment factories, requires an annual income of \$150,000 a year to maintain. New York or San Francisco Bohemia, the last social milieu in the U.S. that took literature seriously beyond the reach of the dead hand of the academy, was cheek by jowl with working-class neighborhoods and working-class radicalism. It suffices to think of New York's White Horse Tavern, where Dylan Thomas and radical longshoremen drank, or analogous places in San Francisco's North Beach, described so beautifully by Kenneth Rexroth. And it suffices to think of what has happened to such places by 1995. It is true that most people who earn \$150,000 a year today are "on line" in one way or another. But that was only the final step in the process which produced them, which was the growing pressure to professionalize, destroying the old genteel

poverty and sweeping away so many 1960s people and enclaves. These dual income/no kids people, in contrast to the old liberal professional classes (who had much more leisure time), do not read much of anything unless related to their 90-hour workweeks, which started well before computers swept all before them in the 80s. The transformation of America in the past 30 years into an “hour glass” society, leaving only yuppies and the homeless in cities like Manhattan and devastating the life conditions of the urban working class and marginal Bohemia, is a major factor in the decline of reading.

It is certainly true that the “plugged in” daily reality of the American middle class businessman, (now that we have situated such people more fully in their contemporary context) that such a reality, which is shared by half or more of the population, offers little possibility for a novel of the stature of *Light in August* or *Studs Lonigan*. (In fact, Faulkner’s “The Bear” can probably be read as much as an obituary for a certain kind of life as for the possibility of writing fiction about contemporary life in an interesting way).

As indicated above, “professionals” have less leisure than 30 or 50 years ago. They’re more swept up in the rat race. The work week has increased (for those who work)

by 20% since 1973, and two "professional" paychecks will barely support a family of four which one supported handily in 1960. The on-line life of that businessman ignores the fact that the growing social and spatial ghettoization of American society artificially isolates him from 12-year olds with automatic weapons, abandoned Midwestern steel towns, a homicide rate off the charts in the industrial world and a teen suicide rate not far behind, AIDS, the return of TB, religious revivalism, homelessness, and teenage parenting, and creates a totally artificial environment protected as much by security guards and more subtle "No Trespass" signs as by on-line technology. This is in total contrast to the situation up to the 1950s, where all social classes jostled each other in daily life, at least in some major cities. This was the great reality that made a Dickens or Balzac possible, and it came unstuck long before the computer and e-mail.

One might ask how many people today, and particularly people under 40, can read Joyce, Woolf or Proust as they were meant to be read. To read these authors as they are meant to be read is undoubtedly the province of a small and declining number of people. That's precisely the rub. The contemporary reader who reads classics such as Rabelais or Dante might find it all quite edifying, but then years can go by when no one in their ken so much as

mentions Rabelais or Dante. The modern reader of such works can persist, but it will always be an effort against the feeling that Dante's Ninth Circle is getting closer by the day, breaking beyond the bounds of "literature", as children exchange gunfire across America, marauding guerrilla bands without ideology or purpose are razing city and countryside like locust hordes in Angola and Liberia and Afghanistan, people are eating book glue to get through the winter in Sarajevo, 10 million abandoned and glue sniffing children are living in the streets of Brazil and being exterminated like rats by roving police death squads, a million people are in U.S. prisons having heavy metal piped into their cells 16 hours a day (and liking it), Moslem fundamentalists are slitting the throats of Westernized women in Algeria and assassinating intellectuals who criticize them, homeless people are getting their breakfast out of garbage cans up the street from my house, 40 semi-declared or undeclared wars are currently in progress, there's bubonic plague in India and all kinds of diseases coming back in the U.S. because of budget cuts, millions of people are working full time at minimum wage and living in shelters, and paramilitary neo-Nazi groups are holding maneuvers in Idaho and in Virginia. In this world, it is difficult to cultivate the state of mind into which one enters through, among other things, great literature. The world is

on fire, and as someone said, when the house is on fire, it focuses the mind and makes it difficult to think of other things. At the end of *Homage to Catalonia* Orwell evokes the “deep deep sleep of England”, in which, even in a world on fire, the *Times* was on the doorstep every morning, with the milk, and predicts (in 1939, of all years) that England would be dragged from this sleep by the sound of falling bombs. One could up-date that passage today for millions of people who live the deep sleep of American suburbia and exurbia, since many cities are already inured to the sound of gunfire in the night. The increasing immersion of the social classes which historically read literature in artificial ghettos of various kinds walling them off from the realities of the times (an artificiality, to be sure, enhanced by electronic technology) robs literature of its “purchase”, and turns it into “elevator music”, to use Don DeLillo’s metaphor.

One might argue that what I am expressing in the above is fundamentally middle-class guilt, and that Henry James or Virginia Woolf or James Joyce could have produced a comparable list of horrors that did not prevent them from writing novels and appreciating them. But that is where I beg to disagree. I’ll sidestep a quarrel about whether the world in 1995 is more barbaric than it was in 1895, since most people would probably agree that it is,

but moreover since it is not central to the question at hand. Many canonical works of the great period of the novel were written during the long peace of 1815-1914, when at least the leisured classes could travel from St. Petersburg to Paris and London and on through the colonial world without so much as a passport. Hannah Arendt (in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*) noted the appearance of a brutalized new social type in modern capitalist society beginning with the colonial experiences (and massacres) of the 1870s and 1880s, (intensified by the Boer War) but this new social type did not have serious social consequences until the mass jubilation of August 1914 in Europe occasioned by the outbreak of World War I (when everyone thought they'd be home by Christmas) and above all in the 1920s, when fascist street gangs, steeled by the experience of the trenches, became a real force in many European countries. One could go on. Many of the Russian revolutionaries sentenced by the Tsar to Siberia hunted, fished and wrote books in exile; by the 1930s, millions sent there by Stalin perished in concentration camps. The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary experience is, for the English-speaking world, mainly one of gentility, and the twentieth century, to put it mildly, has not been kind to gentility. Nor have many of its greatest works been written by or for people of gentility. And there's not much left of

gentility except illiterate gentrification. The question, as always, is why.

One might ultimately reject Adorno's comment that it is impossible to write poetry after Auschwitz, but it is a problem which the nineteenth century genteel reader did not have to confront, and of which he/she could not have conceived.

But to return, one last time, to the impact of the 60s. A fairly Anglo-American centered sensibility dominated the main current of literary taste in the U.S. into the early 1960s. But for more than a century prior to the 60s, (but not, principally, in England) the cutting edge of literature had passed to Bohemia, above all in France. The most dynamic milieus of the American literary scene by the early 60's was the kind of Bohemia associated with the beats. As Leroi Jones/ Amiri Baraka put it in his autobiography, his encounter with beat poetry in the 50s was the first time he discovered that "poetry could be written about something besides Greek statues and suburban birdbaths". Many of the original beats were at least briefly Trilling's students and rebelled in part precisely against the gentility of the liberal literary milieu after the war. And French Bohemia loomed large, as the archetype, in American Bohemia in the 50s and early 60s. But it was a Bohemian tradition

associated with Villon, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Henry Miller, Celine, Genet, Camus or Sartre, and it was already out of touch with the fact that by the 1950s in France the “human sciences” were rapidly overshadowing literature as the focus of cultural debate, as exemplified by Sartre’s own turn from writing novels to writing tomes of Marxist theory and a Marxist-existentialist study of Flaubert. (It also was largely oblivious to a French questioning of the very idea of literature since at least Dada and surrealism, which fed into the later development of theory.) This disjuncture between American perceptions of France and what was actually happening in France would bear its fruits after 1968 when continental “theory” overwhelmed the moribund Anglophilic tradition embodied by “new criticism”. But the broader point remains that literature was being eclipsed by other concerns in the major countries of Europe as well, and Rossman’s “heaving wall of white ants” experience was hardly limited to America, and similarly surpassed the ability of literature to be its main expression. In Germany the Group of 47, in France the *Temps Modernes* milieu, and in England the “angry young men” were just as rudely demoted by the late 60s apocalypse as Lionel Trilling (and the beats) in the U.S. Things were afoot that just weren’t in the “Chaucer to T.S. Eliot” philosophy, and they were not in the Jack Kerouac/Allen Ginsberg philosophy either. It has

been noted before that many 1930s (and particularly Jewish) intellectuals in the U.S. used Anglo-American literary modernism as a vehicle into the previously exclusively WASP elite. History may show the sixties to have been in part about a similar kind of "strategy", to use today's jargon, for still newer groups. But the 60s had the (for the U.S.) unprecedented impact of breaking the hegemony of a ridiculously provincial Anglo-American literary fixation and hegemony, in Bohemia and in academia. Whatever his problems, Maurice Blanchot is a hell of a lot more interesting, and in touch with the serious philosophy of the century, than I.A. Richards.

The breaking of the mold set by Pound, Joyce and Eliot, and by such critical currents as Irving Babbitt, Trilling, or Richards, and the increased influence of continental thought over Anglo-American provincialism has to be seen as an achievement of the 60s, and a positive one, *pace* the furies of the *New Criterion*.

But this was hardly a mere movement of ideas. This would never have happened, and the reading and writing of novels and poetry would not have been so demoted, if something far deeper and more fundamental had not happened in the culture. This was the movement from "internalization" to "externalization" that transformed the

small American literary Bohemia of 1940-65 and its "forbidden" activities into the vast explosion of the late 60s. History will decide whether or not an element of that explosion did not involve a vast "ghost dance" simultaneous with the beginning of America's international and domestic decline, harbinger of the social restructuring that has followed, a restructuring often masked by edulcorated sixties ideology and hedonism. One example that immediately comes to mind is the involvement with drugs and the homosexuality of a Ginsberg or a Burroughs in Mexico or Tangier or San Francisco in 1950, and then the way in which these phenomena swept the culture by 1970. Few people reading the original edition of Burrough's *Junkie* in 1953 would have imagined the impact of drugs in the world of 1995, which seems to be synthesizing the dystopias of Orwell and of Huxley. At least since 1940, the entanglement of literary Bohemia with cultural "taboo" was never far below the surface in such milieus. By 1970, "Bohemian" attitudes towards blacks, women, sex, nature, drugs and "lifestyle" were influencing millions, which was of course, in the broader context of the social transformations sketched above, the end of Bohemia, and of the kind of writing (and reading) which went on there. Consider the evolution of Leroi Jones to Amiri Baraka. When a "counter-culture" virtually becomes the culture, something in it has

to change. Aldous Huxley and a handful of people experimenting with mescaline in Taos in 1962, Kerouac living alone at Big Sur in the late 50s: how could quality change to quantity on such a scale without a profound impact? In the 1920s Malcolm Cowley and his friends went up to a little Catskills town named Woodstock to write; but we mainly know the name because of the 1969 rock concert attended by hundreds of thousands. The same thing happened to every Bohemian enclave, and not just in the U.S. The paeans to the "Seraphim Sailors" in Ginsberg's "Howl" (1955) had by 1969 metamorphosed into the Stonewall riots. There could no longer be "beats" when many of their attitudes and lifestyles were on the streets in mass movements of blacks, Latinos, women, gays, ecologists, never existing before with such force. In the movement from elite sub-cultures to mass movements, something that was previously written about begins to be lived, and therefore writing must change, or desiccate. Imagine Madame Bovary discussing her problems in a women's consciousness-raising group in 1970, or Kierkegaard talking about his in a Carl Rogers encounter group or at an Esalen retreat. This undoubtedly involves an element of "repressive desublimation", but the pre-1965 literary world was totally superseded by events in face of it.

The 60s were a vast return of the repressed, something like Aschenbach's dream at the end of *Death in Venice*, whose repercussions have by no means played themselves out. There was a vast stretching of the culture's sensibilities, which pre-empted the traditional role of art in that stretching, precisely because much of it originated in the art world of the previous avant-garde. The result has been an explosion of books on subjects unimaginable 30 years ago. Take the works of the gay historian John Boswell on medieval Christianity and homosexuality; they are almost literally inconceivable without the Stonewall riots. One could find hundreds of similar books, of uneven quality, on the history of every one of the cultural taboos shattered by the 60s. Again, one can be more or less enthusiastic about the intellectual climate unleashed by "cultural studies", but they are just one example of the kind of opening of the "doors of perception" that has occurred, with which few novels compete. The idea that novels convey to us an irreplaceable feel for daily life is unfortunately confined to the times and places in which novels were written, which is pretty limited historically and geographically. In an hour in a high-quality bookstore one can find massive studies of Shi'ite theology and its impact on Iranian history, the social history of Memphis in late antiquity, Amazonian shamanic medicine, Jewish mysticism

in thirteenth century Barcelona, the impact of alchemy on the history of science in the West, the sixteenth- and seventeenth- century utopian millennia in the New World, the role of transported radical political convicts in the formation of seventeenth century Jamaica, Ifa divination, seventeenth century Andean resistance to Spanish colonialism, eighteenth century Aleppo, the architecture of Barabudur, and T'ang aesthetics, (and these are just subjects that leap to mind) and about which next to nothing was widely available prior to the 60s. Lionel Trilling never heard of such things, and that's too bad for Lionel Trilling, and the cramped reality he represented. The novel and poetry are not merely competing with on-line reality, they are competing with the growing discovery of realms of history more fantastic than anything that could have been made up.

Notes

1. A longer version of the article appeared in the journal *Agni*.

The Renaissance and Rationality

The Status of the Enlightenment Today

In the movement from Boehme to Bacon, there is a great step forward in precision and an equally great step backward in sensuousness.

G.F.W. Hegel, *History of Philosophy*

Few people in the Western left today are very enthusiastic about defending the Enlightenment *per se*. And with good reason: its social legacy is in a shambles. In the 1945-1975 postwar expansion East, West, South and North, the “enlightened planner” (whatever the sordid reality) had cachet. Today, from Novossibirsk and Chernobyl to the dynamited high rise towers of St. Louis, by way of the giganticism of the semi-abandoned steel plants and superhighways built with Western and Soviet aid for now-forgotten Third World dictators, the planet is littered with the ruins of the bureaucratic appropriation of the Enlightenment project. A vigorous defense of the Enlightenment, as put forward by figures such as Habermas and his followers, might seem a breath of fresh air in the contemporary climate of post-modernism and

“identity politics”, whose hostility to the Enlightenment, drawing on Nietzsche and Heidegger (often without knowing it) the Habermasians rightly decry. To seriously defend the Enlightenment today means to draw on a historical culture which is totally unfashionable, suspiciously “white male”, in the trendy academic radicalism of today. But such defenses also shows signs of not realizing how serious the problem is. One cannot today defend the Enlightenment (and we agree that a defense is necessary) with the ideas of the Enlightenment alone. However unpalatable it may be to do so in the contemporary climate, where the Enlightenment project is everywhere under attack by Nietzscheans, “cultural studies” ideologues, Christian, Jewish and Muslim fundamentalists, Foucaultians, Afrocentrists and (most) ecologists, it is necessary to discuss the limits of the Enlightenment in order to defend it, and to go beyond it.

One of the more serious errors today, of those on the left who wish to critically defend the Enlightenment, is their hurry to draw a line of direct continuity from the Enlightenment to Marx.

The Enlightenment, following the French revolution, has always had its critics, such as Burke, de Maistre, Chamberlain and other figures of the nineteenth- century

counter-revolution. But there was another critique of the Enlightenment afoot in Europe well before the French Revolution, the German *Sturm und Drang* movement, which included figures of no less stature than Herder and Goethe, and which prepared the way for another critique of the Enlightenment, romanticism. It is true that there are few romantics today, and consequently few post-modernist nihilists waste any breath attacking "the dialectic of romanticism". The protoromantic *Sturm und Drang*, and the romantic movement throughout Europe after 1800, added many elements to the revolutionary tradition. Winckelmann's study of Greek art founded a Hellenophilism which was foreign to the Latin-Roman contours of the Enlightenment in France, and pointed toward a vision of community in the *polis* which inspired Hölderlin (hardly an "Enlightenment" figure) and the early Hegel, in pointed rejection of the statism of most of the French *Aufklärer*. Out of the work of Herder (and the lesser-known Vico) came an understanding foreign to the Enlightenment that social institutions do not derive from abstract principles but are the *factum*, the product of history. Marx studied the work of the conservative German historical school of law, in order to appropriate elements of its organicist critique of the abstraction of the Enlightenment for the revolutionary movement. The romantic philosophers Schelling and Fichte

developed an idea that also exists nowhere in the Enlightenment, except as adumbrated (at its end) by Kant: that human activity constitutes reality through its praxis. G.F.W. Hegel, who critiqued both the limits of Enlightenment and of romanticism, pulled all these elements into a philosophy of history that was, as Herzen said, the “algebra” of revolution. There would have been no “Theses on Feuerbach” without these figures, and hence no Marx as we know him today. What did the “Theses on Feuerbach” say? They said “all previous materialisms, including Feuerbach’s, do not understand activity as objective”. Marx here is explicitly referring to Enlightenment materialists such as Hobbes, Mersenne, and Holbach, emphasizing the importance of the “active side developed by idealism”, by which he means Schelling, Fichte and Hegel, none of whom can be considered “Enlightenment” thinkers, even if they are also not “anti-Enlightenment”, in the same way as figures such as Maistre, for whom the Enlightenment and then the French Revolution were quite simply the eruption of the satanic in history.

Another major distinction between the Enlightenment and Marx is the attitude toward religion. This is particularly important since most Marxists have tended to think that Marx’s view is basically identical with that of Voltaire:

religion is “wrong”, “false”, *l’infâme*. But Marx, coming after 50 years of the rich philosophical discussion of religion in German idealism and then in his materialist predecessor Feuerbach, saw religion “as the heart of a heartless world, the spirit of a world without spirit”. Religion for Marx was a prime case of what he called alienation, whereby human beings invert dreams of a better life into an other-worldly form. But a Voltairean would never have said, as Marx did, that “you cannot abolish religion without realizing it”. Simple Enlightenment atheism never asserted there was anything to “realize”, because such a view accords its (alienated) truth to religion.

History vs. abstract principles, *polis* community vs. statism, the alienated human truth of religion vs. eighteenth-century atheism, constitution of the world by activity vs. a mere contemplative vision of reality as “out there”: all these key concepts were developed not by the Enlightenment but by *Sturm and Drang*, and then romanticism and idealism, they were all fundamental for Marx. A straight line from the Enlightenment to socialism which does not exist, makes both an easier target for the post-modernists as a “master narrative” of “domination”, resting on schoolboy notions of “materialism” which derive from Newton’s atomism. This telescoping of Enlightenment and socialism is actually (and usually quite unintentionally)

reminiscent of Stalinism, which did not have much use for the post-Enlightenment (not to mention pre-Enlightenment) sources of Marx (as sketched above) either.

¹

Enlightenment political thought moves, at its "commanding heights", from Hobbes and Locke to Rousseau and Kant. But it is exactly here that the problems arise. The Enlightenment is not just, not even primarily, a body of thought; it is that, but it is still more a social project and a social practice that was, in the majority of cases, taken up and implemented by state civil servants. This was not the case in England, where Enlightenment thought of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the work of Bacon, Newton, Hobbes, Locke, Hooke, Boyle, Smith, Gibbon, Hume and Paine unfolded in a new civil society which had successfully freed itself from absolutism by the revolutions of 1640 and 1688. Nor was this the case in America, where Jefferson, Franklin, Paine and Madison were just as much at the cutting edge, freeing America from colonial domination. But the Enlightenment on the continent, to a great extent as ideology and above all as the practice of Enlightened absolutism, was statist through and through, from the *philosophes* and their dreams of benign Asian despots, to the Jacobins, to the Prussian reformers of 1808. In France, Spain, Portugal, the Italian

states, Prussia, Sweden, Austria and Russia, (and in the Iberian and French colonies in the New World), the Enlightenment was the theory and practice of civil servants working for absolutist states. Voltaire at the Prussian court of Frederick II or Diderot at the Russian court of Catherine the Great are only the most memorable instances of the intertwining of the *philosophes* and the Enlightened absolutisms of their time. Even Napoleon, in a warped way, was spreading Enlightened statist reform through his conquest of Europe.

It may well be the case that the best of the thought of Voltaire and Diderot was “in contradiction” with their idea of influencing powerful monarchs to do the right thing. To point out the realities of their statism is not to fall into a Foucaultian view of the Enlightenment as about nothing but “power”, nor is it to echo a Frankfurt School view of the Enlightenment as mere “domination”. One is quite right to reject these Nietzschean and Weberian views of rationality. The problem of many contemporary defenders of the Enlightenment is their failure to see that the bedrock foundation, what the Enlightenment itself accepted as its undisputed point of departure and its model of the power of rational thought was Newton’s physics. But Newton’s physics (which were, in their time, undoubtedly revolutionary) were not merely about physics, or nature:

they stood for 150 years, and in reality for 300 years, as the very model of what “science” was and ought to be. For most figures of the Enlightenment (important exceptions are Diderot and Rousseau) the rigor and exactness of mathematical physics stood as a model for all realms of human endeavor, including the psyche and the arts. Figures such as Condillac and Holbach spent decades trying to work out a psychology (as Hobbes had earlier done with politics) based on the central Newtonian concept of “force”, and Condorcet dreamed of a “social mathematics”. LaMettrie went from *la nature machine* to *l’homme machine*, and this was generalized by LaPlace and LaGrange into *l’univers machine*. And, lest one get the impression that these were mainly late Enlightenment aberrations, one should recall the great impact of Euclid and Galileo on Hobbes, Voltaire’s pamphleteering for Newton, or finally Kant’s statement, just about the time that Gauss was realizing otherwise, that Euclidean space was the only possible space.

These strong metaphors, and the program they inspired, generalized from a powerful breakthrough in the dynamics of physical bodies in the new abstract space and time, to the totality of science and culture, died out very recently. Only a generation ago psychological behaviorism, which has to be seen as a very degenerate heir of the late

Enlightenment of Condillac, LaMettrie and Holbach, still got a serious hearing in Anglo-American universities, and Talcott Parsons in the 1940s boasted that he was “close to splitting the sociological atom”.

Thus, while completely supporting their desire to do battle with the post-modernists, one must ask today’s *Aufklärer*: what are you going to do with the Enlightenment today? What conceivable intellectual, political and social program is possible today built on the Enlightenment alone? (This is a very separate question from its defense against those who deny its once-radical edge.)

Newton’s physics were, once again, not merely a physics, (the latter undoubtedly being of great power, a guiding research program for over 200 years), they were little less than an ontology, and they were unquestioned by the Enlightenment. Few contemporary defenders of the Enlightenment have much to say about Newton’s alchemy, astrology, Biblical commentary, history (attempting to confirm the truth of Old Testament chronology), anti-Trinitarian theology or search for the Egyptian cubit, a body of work which Newton himself placed on an equal footing with his physics and of which, for him, his physics was only a part. (Interestingly, and revealingly, the Frankfurt School and the Foucaultian critics of the Enlightenment have little

to say about them either.) Many of these pursuits were already becoming unfashionable in Newton's own time, and Voltaire's popularization of Newton on the continent after 1730 already passed them over in total silence. But the discovery of this Newton is already enough to show that he was not exactly, or certainly not only, an "Enlightenment" thinker. It is quite right to date the Enlightenment not from the eighteenth century French *philosophes* but from seventeenth century English figures such as Bacon. But in rightly situating the question in the seventeenth century, the typical defender of the Enlightenment also steps into the quagmire in which received ideas about the Enlightenment and its origins disappear.

Newtonian science, and hence the Enlightenment, defeated the kind of church-sponsored obscurantism represented by the trial of Galileo, or the earlier trial and execution of Giordano Bruno. But it also defeated what I would call Renaissance-Reformation cosmobiology, as the latter is associated with names such as Nicholas of Cusa, Bruno, Paracelsus, John Dee, Robert Fludd, Boehme and above all Kepler. Elements of it persist as late as Leibniz, co-inventor with Newton of the calculus, and who already polemicized against Newton's mechanism. Newton, as sketched above, still had much of the Renaissance magus about him. This cosmobiological world view further found

its cultural expression in figures such as Dürer, the Brueghels, Bosch, Shakespeare and Rabelais, just as later Pope and Dryden attempted to create a literature in keeping with Newtonian science. In this transition, an empty, atomistic space and time, based on an infinity understood as mere repetition (the infinitesimal) deflated and expelled a universe brimming with life, in which, further, human imagination was central. One need only think of Paracelsus, the peripatetic alchemist, astrologer, chemist, herbalist, tireless researcher and medical practitioner who called the human imagination "the star in man" (*astrum in homine*) and who placed it higher than the mere stars which preoccupied astronomers. But no figure is more exemplary than Kepler, who looked for the Platonic solids in the order of the solar system and who attempted to demonstrate that the distance between the planets was in accordance with the well-tempered tuning of the "music of the spheres". This was the world view – the cosmology – which was deflated and replaced by Newton's colorless, tasteless, odorless space and time, and the latter deflation reached into every domain of culture for 300 years. And this cosmobiological world view was an indisputable precursor of Marx's "sensuous transformative praxis" (*sinnliche unwälzende Tätigkeit*) and hence of modern socialism. By its notion of human participation of

the constitution of the world (whereby it smacked of heresy for the Church), it was closer to Marx than any of the intervening Enlightenment views.

Until quite recently, it was customary to acknowledge many of these figures, and Paracelsus and Kepler in particular, as pioneers who contributed to the transition "from alchemy to chemistry", "from astrology to astronomy". But the Enlightenment vision of their advance was completely linear, as if nothing of importance had been lost. But already a figure of the stature of Leibniz, who himself made a major contribution to the new science, argued in his polemics against Newton's publicist Clarke that something had been lost: life, not as the random result of a billiard ball universe, but as a phenomenon central to the meaning of the universe, as it had been for Paracelsus and Kepler.

The Enlightenment did not shed light on this transition; on the contrary, it was mainly totally oblivious to it, when it was not actively obscuring it. The Enlightenment created the myth of the "dark ages" of religion between Greco-Roman antiquity and the seventeenth century (one need only think, by contrast, of the brilliant culture, including the scientific culture, of Islam). It saw a monolithic Christianity completely hostile to science and thereby fashioned the

modern (and modernist) myth that history prior to Newtonian science was strictly a battle between “religion” and “materialist atheism”, the latter being exactly the kind of materialism which Marx rejected in the “Theses on Feuerbach”. (This is not to suggest that Marx was not an atheist but merely to insist on the distinction, developed earlier, between his critique of religion and Voltaire’s.)

In reality, while most of the figures of Renaissance-Reformation cosmobiology were at least nominally Christian believers of one kind or another (although in the case of Bruno, one wonders) their significance is precisely that they represented a “third stream”, an alternative to both the dominant Aristotelian scholasticism propagated by the Church and to the atomistic materialism that congealed in the Enlightenment. This “third stream” was also often combated, along with atheist materialism, by the Church as the highest heresy.² And this “third stream” and its significance were essentially hidden for three centuries by the Manichean portrait of the past developed by the Enlightenment and taken over in the ideology of modernity.

This “third stream”, of which again Kepler is the culminating figure, was hardly, as Enlightenment ideology portrayed it by assimilating it to “religion”, hostile to science or to scientific research. Indeed, Kepler’s work

provided one part of the key to Newton's theory of universal gravitation. The "third stream" was of course characterized by many untenable *a priori* views such as the correspondence of the microcosm-man and the macrocosm-universe, or by Kepler's own search for Platonic form, as in a perfect Platonic circle in the orbit of the planets. Kepler passed over into modern science by abandoning that form for the empirically-discovered ellipse, but he got there by looking for it. The "third stream" had little or nothing to counter the successes of the Newtonian-atomist program, until the latter had exhausted itself. Nevertheless, a history of the science since Newton which has attempted to revive the "third stream", too complex to concern us here, would include names of the stature of Baader, Schelling, Oersted, Davy, Faraday, Goethe, W.R. Hamilton, Georg Cantor and Joseph Needham, and the issues they raise are far from settled.

It is significant that neither the pro-Enlightenment Habermasians or the anti-Enlightenment deconstructionists and Foucaultians have much use for Renaissance-Reformation cosmobiology, and the reason is that all of them tacitly accept the Enlightenment linear view of history and progress as the sole possible kind of progress, in which the "third stream" disappears into the "religion" of the "dark ages". There is an unacknowledged agreement here

between opposing sides which makes possible a recasting of the debate. This largely unspoken agreement accepts the division of the world between culture and nature, (or *Geist* and *Natur* as the Germans would say) and, however differently various figures may treat the world of consciousness, they concede the world of nature to the mechanists. Such a division was only possible after Newton and the ideological suppression of the cosmobiological “third stream”, which, whatever its flaws, presented a unitary vision of consciousness and nature. The reaction to the implications, for consciousness, of the Enlightenment program was quick in coming, and many took up Donne’s lament of “all coherence gone”. But from Pascal to Rousseau to Hegel (for whom nature was “boring”, the world of repetition) to Nietzsche to Heidegger, all the different formulations on the impossibility of treating human consciousness on the model of mathematical physics (which is indeed impossible) took off from the assumption of dead nature, in which “life” had to appear not as Paracelsus’ *astrum in homine* or Leibniz’s *vis vitae* but as some “irrational” “vitalistic” force.

Nor should the reader get the impression that Renaissance- Reformation cosmobiology did not have political implications, as atomism and mechanism shaped the political thought of the Enlightenment. Its first and

major political implication stems from the fact that it was decidedly an ideology of *interregnum*, appearing between the collapse of the medieval Holy Roman Empire and the consolidation of English capitalism and above all continental absolutism, both of which eradicated it everywhere. In a meaningful sense, the Renaissance and Reformation as a whole can be understood as *interregnum* phenomena, but many other currents within them competed with what I call cosmobiology. These political implications were not as well articulated by its theoreticians as was the Enlightenment, partly because the concept of the “political” (itself recognized by Marx as an alienated separation) only autonomized itself later and partly because these movements, unlike the Enlightenment, were primarily of the lower classes, and thus were completely defeated, and their history mainly written by the victors. Their finest hours were the radical wing of the Reformation (essentially, the Anabaptists and their leader Thomas Münzer) and the radical wing of the English Revolution, the Levellers, Diggers and smaller sects. (Gerard Winstanley stands out as a spokesman for this milieu.) One only fully appreciates Newton’s political meaning when one understands the importance of his tirades against these “enthusiasts”, as they were called. Here it can be seen clearly that the English Enlightenment

triumphed not merely by defeating reactionary Stuart absolutism but also by defeating radical currents to its left.

When the *interregnum* was over, ca. 1650, the radical social base of the “third stream” was socially and politically defeated, and the Enlightenment could begin, with its two contending models of English constitutional monarchy and French absolutism, the latter becoming the model for most of the continent. But left defenders of the Enlightenment, pass over in silence the fact that the Anglo-French Enlightenment triumphed over a radical as well as a reactionary rival, and always bore the markings of that fact.

Stated briefly, the spirit of Marx’s underlying world view is more truly the direct heir, the “realization” of the sensuousness of figures such as Shakespeare, the Brueghels and Paracelsus, than of any subsequent phase of the Anglo-French Enlightenment and its aftermath.

One might well ask what such a critique of the Enlightenment, from the vantage point of Renaissance-Reformation “cosmobiology” means today, in political terms.

What it means is this. From the French Revolution until the 1970s, the dominant currents of the Western left, and the movements it influenced in the colonial and post-

colonial world, were indeed heirs of the Enlightenment. They were this because, in practice if not always in rhetoric, they inherited the tasks of completing the bourgeois revolution, tasks for which the Enlightenment, as the most advanced outlook of that revolution, was eminently suitable. First Social Democracy, from the 1860s onward, and then Stalinism, from the 1920s, took over a large part of the Enlightenment attitudes toward science, the state, technology, heavy industry, rationality, nature, a linear view of progress, philosophy and religion. That view was at bottom atomistic and mechanistic, even when dressed up as "dialectical materialism". Their statist development ideology and strategy was most successful in countries where no liberal bourgeoisie was strong enough to fight in its own name for the Enlightenment program against pre-capitalist social relations. Social Democracy and later Stalinism took over the full weight of Enlightenment statism of the continental variety. This was not surprising, since they gained influence mainly in the same backward countries in which Enlightenment statism had been successful, for essentially the same reasons. With the virtually universal spread of state bureaucracy for the century up to *ca.* 1975, whether in liberal democracy, Social Democracy, Stalinism or Third World nationalism, this Enlightenment ideology was rooted practically in a vast

global stratum of middle-class state civil servants, whatever else they may have disagreed about. Not accidentally, their theory of history, when they felt they needed one, was articulated by the state civil servants *par excellence* Kant, Fichte and Hegel.

The crisis of the Enlightenment today is the world-wide crisis of that state civil service stratum, welfare-statist, Stalinist or Third Worldist, and its inability after the mid-1970s to continue to develop the productive forces and to advance their Enlightenment program, something they had done rather successfully in the previous century, particularly from 1945 to 1975. The international left is in crisis because it uncritically took over the Enlightenment, and thereby confused the tasks of the bourgeois revolution with those of the socialist revolution; the left's claims to fight for social emancipation got completely entwined with the state bureaucracy and civil service, which are irreducible obstacles to full social emancipation. There is nothing more to be done with the Enlightenment, taken by itself, because there is no more bourgeois revolution to make. There is also nothing more to be done with the Enlightenment view of nature, derived as it is from Newton's atomism and mechanism. The Enlightenment grasped in a one-sided way the impact of the natural environment on man but, lacking the idea of constitutive

practice, has little to say in an era such as our own, so shaped by the problems of man's impact on the environment. This is not because, as the post-modernists say, Western science and technology are nothing but "domination", but because the unique role of humanity in the biosphere, its "species-being" to use Marx's term, was articulated not by the Enlightenment but by the "active side developed by idealism" as Marx put it in the "Theses on Feuerbach". The Enlightenment looked to Nature to underpin its abstract theories of Natural Man; it did not understand that human history constantly creates "new natures", and hence new "human natures", by its interaction with the biosphere.

The Foucaultian and Frankfurt School critics of the Enlightenment live off the impoverishment of the left by its extended romance with a one-sided appropriation of the Enlightenment, by the left's century-long confusion of the completion of the bourgeois revolution by state civil servants with socialism, and by the worldwide crackup of that project. The pre-Enlightenment, Renaissance-Reformation cosmobiology which passed through German idealism into Marx's species-being means even less to them than it does to figures such as Habermas. Yet the usual critique of them is undermined by the tacit agreement across the board that "nature is boring", i.e. the

realm of mechanism, as Hegel, articulating the ultimate state civil servant view, cut off from practice in nature, said. Both sides of this debate still inhabit the separation of culture and nature, *Geist* and *Natur*, which came into existence through the Enlightenment's deflation of cosmobiology. It is the rehabilitation, in suitably contemporary form, of the outlook of Paracelsus and Kepler, not of Voltaire and Newton, which the left requires today for a (necessarily simultaneous) regeneration of nature, culture and society, out of Blake's fallen world of Urizen and what he called "single vision and Newton's sleep".

The Nazis and Deconstruction

Jean-Pierre Faye's Demolition of Derrida

Jean-Pierre Faye has for the most part and, to his credit, remained on the margins of Parisian fashion. In 1972, his massive *Langages totalitaires*, the prior volume of the work under consideration here, fell into an unreceptive climate. This earlier work was an attempt at the exegesis of key concepts of German political and cultural thought from 1890 to 1933, showing a profound "oscillation" between the language of the *Konservative Revolution*, begun by Nietzsche, and Marxism, up to the triumph of National Socialism. Faye showed the remarkable trajectory of certain words, up to the extreme "oscillations" of 1923, where the KPD's "Schlageter turn" led it to work with the Nazis against the Versailles treaty, and 1932, when Communists and Nazis again worked together to bring down the Social Democrats in Prussia. Since this review is concerned with the sequel, dealing with the period from 1933 to 1990, it can only refer the reader to a masterpiece which unfortunately received little enough attention in France, and next to none in the English-speaking world.

There are many reasons for this silence. Faye's work is definitely part of the larger "linguistic turn" of French thought since the 1960s but Faye's theory of language is very much *sui generis*. Further, what distinguished *Langages totalitaires* from the great majority of contemporary attempts, in France and elsewhere, to understand society and politics through a theory of language, was that Faye's book was based on minute, detailed reconstruction of a vast array of German ideologies over four decades, and very much tied to a theory, and critique, of political economy. In contrast to much fashionable theory, in which the unmasking of the "gendered subject" at the most abstruse literary or philosophical level is presumed to explain whole historical epochs, Faye masters his material in the manner of an empirical historian without ever losing sight of a theoretical framework, whatever its problems. In the last instance, Faye too seems to see history unfolding at the level of language but, in reading him, one never senses the kind of trifling with the complexities of reality one finds in representatives of the postmodernist vulgate such as Hayden White or Dominick LaCapra.

Nearly two decades separate *La raison narrative* from its predecessor. While its focus is on the impact of the work of Martin Heidegger, particularly in post-1945 France, it has

a far wider range than the earlier book. Written in 1989-1990, and therefore in the immediate wake of the Parisian “Heidegger affair” of 1987-1988, it draws on a far larger time frame, one adequate to a full assault on Heidegger and the French Heideggerians, and Jacques Derrida in particular. Faye draws on elements as initially dispersed as Homer, the new archaeology of the history of writing in the ancient Near East, the broader context of Western epic narrative from Gilgamesh to Cuchulain, possible Indian influence on Greek philosophy through Alexander’s march to the Indus, Jewish *haggadah*, the Arab moment in the recovery of Aristotle by the medieval West, Cervantes, and Rabelais. It is, to this reviewer’s knowledge, one of the most far-flung critiques of the whole project of *la pensee francaise* as it has been exported, over twenty years, by Derrida in particular.

The core of *La raison narrative*, however, remains a very precise sequel to Faye’s earlier history of German ideology in the 1890-1933 period. Its focus is on Martin Heidegger’s evolution in the crucial period from 1927 to 1952, (a period that was “not just any quarter of a century,” as the author puts it), and how his transformation was understood, and internalized, particularly in France after 1945.

The dominant version of this story, as told by *la pensee francaise*, prior to its explosion in 1987 (in particular by French Heideggerians from Beaufret to Derrida), was as follows: Heidegger's main involvement with Nazism was in 1933-1934, when he accepted the rectorship of Freiburg University, from which he resigned after understanding that Nazism was not what it seemed in the first flush of its "revolution of the existence [*Dasein*] of the German people," as Heidegger put it in one of his famous speeches as rector. (Heidegger had sufficient courage of his convictions to republish unchanged, in 1952, his 1935 essay *Introduction to Metaphysics*, which refers to the "internal greatness" of the National Socialist movement, which he saw as a first attempt to come to terms with human fate in the era of "planetary technique.") Most French Heideggerians ultimately regarded Heidegger's brief involvement with Nazism (shown by Victor Farias in 1987 to have been not so brief) as a "detail," as Jean Beaufret put it succinctly, but interpreted this detail within a complex framework of damage control that moved quickly from Heidegger's admittedly vicious actions as rector to the much more abstruse level of his philosophy. Faye is hardly content with confronting this debate on the level of further detective work concerning Heidegger's administrative role in 1933-1934, although he does turn up some remarkable

items generally overlooked by post-1945 Heideggerians. (One of these is the text of Heidegger's November 1933 speech, "*Bekenntnis zu Adolf Hitler und dem national-sozialistischen Staat*," roughly, "Declaration of Allegiance to Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist State," a speech that had attracted far less attention than Heidegger's May Day 1933 speech to the Freiburg student labor brigade. In the midst of the French "Heidegger affair" in 1988, Francois Fedier managed to translate this speech into French under the title, "*Appel pour un plebiscite*"). Faye shows that as rector Heidegger was no passive Nazi, permitting, for example, the takeover of the Jewish student association building by an angry mob and the detention of the Jewish students by the SS. But Faye's book operates on a whole different level from that of Farias, which launched the "Heidegger affair" and which primarily detailed such actions and Heidegger's active membership in the Nazi party through the end of the war. Faye, unlike Farias, takes on Heidegger at the jugular of his famous "redescription" (the term is Rorty's) of the history of Western philosophy as a history of "nihilist metaphysics."

The more philosophical side of the story told by *la pensee francaise* after 1945 centered on Heidegger's *Kehre*, or turn, of the 1930s and 1940s, expressed in a series of essays, culminating in the 1946 "Letter on

Humanism" addressed to former Resistance officer and philosopher Jean Beaufret. In this *Kehre*, Heidegger recognized that all Western philosophy from Parmenides through Nietzsche up to the Heidegger of *Being and Time* had been trapped in a "metaphysics of presence" (essentially, understanding truth as representation), and that this metaphysics of presence had as its essence a "will to power" of a "subject" aimed at the "planetary domination of technique," which had been the essence of Nazism. Heidegger, in this interpretation, from the *Kehre* until his death in 1976, turned to the project of the "deconstruction" (in German, *Abbau* or *Dekonstruktion*) of this Western metaphysics of presence.

The great power of Faye's *La raison narrative* is not merely to take on this whole interpretation of Western thought, which has become almost an ineffable mood in the postmodern academy, but to show as no one else has done its origins in the same seamy party politics emphasized by Farias. What Faye shows, in short, is that forty-five years of postwar French philosophy (for starters) were dominated by a problematic, and a vocabulary, first articulated in an attack on Heidegger by a party hack philosopher and future officer of the SS, Ernst Krieck. Prior to this attack, Heidegger had never called the Western metaphysical tradition "nihilist"; thereafter, through a

detailed evolution, marked by further difficulties with Nazi ideologues from 1933 to 1945, that characterization moved to the center of his project. (Indeed, in his famous 1966 interview with *Der Spiegel*, published upon his death ten years later, Heidegger once again praised Nazism as the first attempt to rethink the human relationship to technology.)

Further, Faye shows that the famous word *Dekonstruktion* was first used in a Nazi psychiatry journal edited by the cousin of Hermann Göring, and that the word *Logozentrismus* was coined (for denunciatory purposes) in the 1920s by the protofascist thinker Ludwig Klages. In short, sections of French and, more recently, American academic discourse in the “human sciences” have been dominated for decades by a terminology originating not in Heidegger but first of all in the writings of Nazi scribblers, recycled through Latin Quarter Heideggerians. Faye zeroes in with surgical skill on the evasions of those, particularly those on the left, for whom the “greatest philosopher” of the century of Auschwitz happened to be – as a mere detail – a Nazi.

But there is more, much more. (No short review can do justice to the multiple levels of this book.) Faye argues that the evolution of Heidegger’s thought from 1932-1933 to 1945 can be understood essentially as a response to the

party attacks, by Krieck and others, and Heidegger's (apparently successful) attempts to distance himself from what Krieck called the "metaphysical nihilism" of the *Judenliteraten* (i.e., Jewish *litterateurs*) which he claimed to find in Heidegger's pre-1933 work.

Faye shows that after 1933, under pressure from Nazi polemics, Heidegger began to characterize the prior Western metaphysical tradition as "nihilist" and worked out the whole analysis for which he became famous after 1945: the "fall" in the Western conception of Being after Parmenides and above all Aristotle, the essence of this fall in its modern development as the metaphysics of the "subject" theorized above all by Descartes, and the evolution of this subject up to its apotheosis in Nietzsche and the early Heidegger of *Being and Time*. Between 1933 and 1945, this diagnosis was applied to the decadent Western democracies overcome by the "internal greatness" of the National Socialist Movement; after 1945, Heidegger effortlessly transposed this framework to show nihilism culminating not in democracy but... in Nazism. In the 1945 "Letter on Humanism" in particular, Western humanism as a whole is assimilated to the metaphysics of this subject. The new project, on the ruins of the Third Reich, was to overthrow the "Western humanism" that was responsible for Nazism! Thus the initial accommodation to Krieck and

other party hacks, which produced the analysis in the first place, passed over to a “left” version in Paris, barely missing a step. The process, for a more American context, goes from Kriek to Heidegger to Derrida to the postmodern minions of the Modern Language Association. The “oscillation” that Faye demonstrated for the 1890-1933 period in *Langages totalitaires* has its extension in the contemporary deconstructionists of the “human sciences,” perhaps summarized most succinctly in Lyotard’s 1988 call to *donner droit de cite a l’inhumain*.

Faye is tracking the oscillation whereby, in 1987-1988, it became possible for Derrida, Lyotard, Lacoue-Labarthe, and others, to say, in effect: Heidegger, the Nazi “as a detail,” by his unmasking of the nihilistic “metaphysics of the subject” responsible for Nazism, was in effect the real anti-Nazi, whereas all those who, in 1933-1945 (or, by extension, today) opposed and continue to oppose fascism, racism, and antisemitism from some humanistic conviction, whether liberal or socialist, referring ultimately to the “metaphysics of the subject” - such people were and are in effect “complicit” with fascism. Thus the calls for an “inhuman” thought.

It is perhaps here that the “linguistic” level on which Faye operates achieves both its greatest success and reveals its weakness. Because, quite apart from philosophy

and language, there is no shortage of examples in which liberalism, Social Democracy, and Stalinism, to take three major sorts of forces that have been enlisted in antifascism, have been complicit with fascism itself. In Germany, before 1933, it was the liberal parties of the center that melted away, losing their base to Hitler; the German Social Democrats outdid themselves, even after January 1933, in attempting to carve out a role as a loyal opposition to Nazism (right up to May Day 1933, the date of both Heidegger's rectoral speech and of the banning of the SPD); as for the Stalinist KPD, it is the case in point of Faye's "oscillation."

In the last decade in France and in Germany we have seen moderate right and moderate left parties, in classic fashion, moving to accommodate the demands of the new racist far right. Faye, writing in the now forgotten democratic euphoria of 1989-1990, feels free to use terms such as "democracy" and "human rights" in a completely unexamined way, whereas such terms have also been sullied in the mouths of the likes of Francois Mitterand and Jacques Attali, not to mention Bernard-Henri Levy and Alain Finkielkraut. Faye is absolutely right to show where the full force of the Heideggerian project comes from and to what moral bankruptcy it leads: Heidegger, in three decades after World War II, could never bring himself to

condemn Auschwitz, and in a 1952 essay mentioned concentration camps in the same breath with the mechanization of agriculture as comparable examples of “nihilism”. Faye is also right to show how Heidegger and the Heideggerians, in their “redescription” of Western thought, have distorted everyone from Aristotle to Spinoza to Nietzsche, the last of whom virulently denounced German anti-Semitism and who described himself as “at one” with Spinoza, whereas for Heidegger Spinoza was a *Fremdkörper* – a foreign body – in philosophy. There is a deep critique to be made of Heidegger, the French Heideggerians, Foucault and Derrida, and their latter-day bastard progeny the postmodernists, and Jean-Pierre Faye has made a major contribution to it. Western thought will be extricating itself from the effects of their “redescription” of the tradition for a long time. Nevertheless, this project cannot be carried through to completion without a critical examination of the way in which many “democrats” and defenders of human rights, by their hypocrisy and double standards, have themselves contributed to the malaise over the positive meaning of such concepts, through the most remarkable emigration of words, of the ideas of Ludwig Klages, Dr. M.H. Göring, and SS officer Ernst Krieck.

Multi-Culturalism or World Culture?

On a “Left”-Wing Response to Contemporary Social Breakdown ¹

A Rosa Luxemburg of the twenty-first century, studying America during the decades after 1973, will see a general fall in living standards of roughly 20% for at least 80% of the population. She will note that in 1945, the U.S. had the world's leading industrial exports, the world's highest level of productivity, and the world's highest paid work force. In such a setting, lasting into the late 1950's, she will note that one working-class income was sufficient to support, i.e. to reproduce, a family of four or even more people. She will note that, into the early 1960's, most, but by no means all such incomes were earned by whites, and she will also note the steady growth of a northern urban black proletariat into the same period, also reproducing black working class families. By 1992, on the other hand, two or more working-class incomes were necessary for the early 1960's level of reproduction, and more and more of the children of those black working class families, living among the ruins of America's industry, were being pushed into the underclass. She might come across a *Business Week* survey (August 1991) showing that the joint income of a

typical young white working class couple, both holding full-time dead-end jobs, was equal to 44%, in real terms, of the pay of one skilled worker of the same age 30 years earlier. For a working-class couple of color, the fall was even more dramatic. In the early 1950's, our Rosa Luxemburg figure will note, the average American working-class family paid 15% of its income for housing, whereas in 1992, this figure was approaching 50%. She will therefore not be surprised to see that over the 45 years following World War II, the bulk of capitalist profits earned in the U.S. shifted radically from industry to banking and real estate. The top items among U.S. exports by 1992 were no longer primarily technology and industrial products, but agricultural goods and popular culture.

Our twenty-first century historian will naturally ask herself how such a dramatic change could occur so quickly, and she will easily find the answer in a vast outflow of productive investment capital, beginning in the late 1950's, first toward Canada and Europe, then, by the mid-1960's, increasingly toward parts of the Third World. She will see how the 35-year de-industrialization of America was the other side of the this "farming out" of mass production, the steady rise of European and above all Japanese competition, and the global revolution of "high technology" expelling living labor from the production process. Applying

the earlier Rosa Luxemburg's concept of the total social wage to this process, she will see without great difficulty that the main target of this accumulation (and dis-accumulation) was the very same well paid, highly skilled U.S. work force of the immediate postwar period. She will see the parallel to the decline of England from 1870 to 1945, except that she might note the skill with which America's rulers, from the late 1950s onward, finessed, cajoled and bludgeoned European, Japanese and Arab holders of ever-mounting dollar reserves to re-invest them in American government bonds and the U.S. capital market, thereby enabling the gravity of the decline to be concealed from the majority of Americans, and even from most members of the ruling elite. Re-reading Marx's *Theories of Surplus Value* or her earlier namesake's *Accumulation of Capital*, our historian may smirk at the imprisonment of the elite in their pitiful Keynesian and monetarist economic ideas, touting as "growth" a year-to-year increase in GNP while America's cities filled up with closed factories, potholed streets, drug addicts, fast food chains, security guards and homeless people.

Pushing our thought experiment further, perhaps it will catch our historian's attention that by the late 1980s, American high school students taking international standardized exams were, in every subject, in precisely

20th place of 20 so-called “advanced industrial countries”. She may note that by the same time, over 50% of PhDs in scientific and technical subjects in American universities were awarded to foreigners, and that what remained of American R&D thereafter depended increasingly on such foreigners remaining in the U.S. (She might smile at such an unexpected reversal of “dependency theory”.) Looking at the reproduction of the broader work force, she will not be surprised to see managers, in what skilled industrial sectors remained, wondering out loud what to do when the current, older generation of workers retired, because the high schools and colleges were no longer replacing their skills. But familiar with earlier Marxian and Luxemburgist concepts of the reproduction of labor power, and seeing how the American capitalists had been by-passing the costs of this reproduction for 35 years, none of this will surprise her.

Nor, finally, will our Rosa be surprised to learn that in the glitzy mainstream institutions of ideology, in the media, in the highly-funded research institutes, in academia, in publishing or the schools, this gutting of America’s ability to materially reproduce itself, from the late 1950s onward, was barely mentioned, and rarely discussed with any seriousness or awareness of the gravity of the problem. Reviewing standard figures of the dominant ideologies, she

will note that the John Kenneth Galbraiths and the Milton Friedmans of the 1960s, the E.F. Shumachers and Ivan Ilyches of the 1970s, or the “supply-siders” and “flexible specialization theorists” of the 1980s were doing their job in keeping attention focused on phony problems and phony solutions.

Remembering the earlier Rosa Luxemburg’s pre-World War I polemic with Lenin and other revolutionaries about the meaning of the expanded material reproduction of society, our 21st century historian will eagerly turn to the radical opposition in declining American capitalism, fully expecting to find there, at last, a serious discussion of these issues and contending programmatic and strategic solutions for them. How, she will ask herself, were the “cutting questions” being posed among America’s self-styled radical milieu, inside and outside the academy, as the country sank into an economic and social crisis worse than that of the 1930s? Surely, there, she will find the debate about the above questions carried out with the seriousness the situation demanded.

In fact, as we know, in a survey of the great majority of milieus or publications broadly associated with the left in America today (1991), activist or academic, our historian will find very little discussion of the issues above, still less

any programmatic initiatives organized around them. She will find, perhaps, some brilliant literary theorist explaining that social class, the economy and – why not? – deindustrialization are essentially a “text”. Thinking perhaps that such a concept of class nonetheless arises in a search for a new basis of class unity in the new, post-1973 period of crisis and decline, she will perhaps be surprised to learn that, no, the big debate on the American left in the late 1980s and early 1990s was about the “difference” of the “identity” of every oppressed group, with the notable exception of the working class as a whole, and that this difference was, in fact, just... difference. Reading more deeply, she will discover that the very word “reproduction” did not mean in 1992 what it meant in the writings of Marx – the ability of a social class or society to materially reproduce itself in an expanded way – but had been pre-empted by a debate over reproductive rights in the strictly biological sense, which are by no means trivial questions but which can be trivialized by isolating them from the notion of reproduction in the broader social sense. She will initially be surprised to discover the widespread belief that identities along lines of race, gender and class are not constituted in relationship to production and social reproduction but rather by the “desires” of the groups and individuals concerned. She will be even more surprised to

hear proponents of the older, apparently more pedestrian view of the working class as a universal class, whose emancipation is the necessary (but not sufficient) precondition for all emancipation, mocked as exponents of an antiquated “master discourse”.

But nothing, I think, will surprise our twenty-first century Rosa Luxemburg more than the discovery that, during the two decades of the pulverization of America’s work force in the process described above, the majority of the American left increasingly came to characterize many of the very processes associated with the material reproduction of society, such as industry, technology, social infrastructure, science, education, technical skills and their transmission from one generation to the next, as well as literacy and the cultural traditions that arose inseparably from these phenomena in the earlier history of capitalism, as expressions of “white male” values and ideology. She will be even more perplexed to realize that this identification of the expanded material reproduction of society as a “white male” phenomenon took hold in the very decades when Japan and the new capitalist powers of Asia were becoming powerhouses of the capitalist world economy, and were contributing mightily to the dismantling of the life supports of the American working class. She might note the convergence between the increasing

circulation of all types of fictitious paper in the U.S. economy and the increasing preoccupation of broad segments of the American left with symbolically defined identities and with a general view of reality as "text". She might see a parallel between the economic trend of deindustrialization and the academic fad of deconstructionism. She might conclude that the majority of the American left had been colonized by the dominant ideology and its obliviousness, over decades, to these problems. She might notice that the way in which the American left, historically confined to its ghettos in the society and in academia, posed the very important questions of race, gender, sexual preference and class were in fact shared by very few ordinary working people, who did not experience these questions as text and who were nonetheless also preoccupied with these issues. Our Rosa Luxemburg might finally conclude that, going into the great social and economic crisis of the 1990s essentially blind to the question of expanded material reproduction of society as the sole framework in which to seriously pose issues of race, gender and class, the bulk of the American left was not only blinded by its own ideology, but that it was positively contributing, often stridently, to the dominant ideology of the times.

Our Rosa Luxemburg will have discovered the great debate about multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism is in. Not inappropriately, multiculturalism means different things to different people. To the well-funded and much-trumpeted theorists of the right, the self-styled exponents of “cultural literacy”, the Allan Blooms and William Bennetts, multiculturalism is a subversive euphemism for the end of white supremacy in American education and in American society as a whole. To the pseudo-radicals of the academic intelligentsia, who have turned social class into a “text”, multiculturalism is the freeing of a “multiplicity of discourses”, a dissolution of the ostensible “phallogocentrism” of an ostensible “Western” cultural tradition. (One important clue to the sterility of the debate, as currently posed, is a startling agreement between the opposing sides on just exactly what Western culture is.) So extreme is the situation that neoconservative critics like Hilton Kramer can present themselves as defenders of the safely embalmed “high” modernist avant-garde of the early twentieth century, of Joyce, Proust, or Kafka, as if men of Kramer’s sensibility did not, 70 years ago, revile such revolutionaries, and as if they would be capable of recognizing, and appreciating, a new Joyce, Proust or Kafka today. At the other end of the spectrum, while the American population as a whole falls to

forty-ninth place in comparative world literacy, the purveyors of the post-modern “French disease” continue a frenzied production of self-involved books and posh academic journals which communicate nothing so much as a basic ignorance of real history and the pathetic belief that the deconstruction of literary texts amounts to serious radical political activity.

In this article, we will not concern ourselves with the right-wing media assault on the multiculturalists as the force primarily responsible for the palpable collapse of liberal education in the U.S. The vacuousness of such claims, coming from the political camp which has been gutting the reproduction of labor power at every level of American society for more than thirty years, has been dealt with elsewhere. We will focus rather on the claims to radicalism of the multiculturalists themselves, or of any definition of human beings in society which is essentially cultural. From such a focus, we will develop a critique of the Eurocentric conservatives and of the multiculturalists from the vantage point of an emerging *world* culture.

It might be said without great exaggeration that the contemporary debate over culture comes down to a debate over the world historical status of ancient Greece. For an Allan Bloom and many of his ilk, all that is valid in the last

2,500 years of history is almost literally a series of footnotes to Plato and Aristotle. For the multiculturalists, on the other hand, trapped as they are in the logic of relativism, ancient Greece must necessarily be just one “equally valid” culture among many. But, given its centrality in the classical Western canon, ancient Greece cannot be only that, but also the very source of phallogocentrism.

When one probes the terms of this debate, however, what is truly amazing is that the ostensibly anti-Eurocentric multiculturalists are, without knowing it, purveying a remarkably Eurocentric version of what the Western tradition really is.

The ultimate theoretical sources of today's multiculturalism are two very white and very dead European males, Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. For the uninitiated, the continuity between these philosophers and today's revolutionary claims for rap music may seem arcane indeed. But they are also very telling. Even if Nietzsche and Heidegger must ultimately be rejected (and they must), one trivializes them at one's peril. Nietzsche, writing in the latter decades of the last century, and Heidegger, whose most important work was written in the second quarter of this one, could hardly have

imagined the contemporary *fin de siècle* in which their names would be mentioned in the same breath with 2 Live Crew, Los Lobos or the Sex Pistols. Both men were haunted by a vision of a world of crushing uniformity which they saw taking shape around them, and of which the working-class socialist movement of the last century was – for them – the culmination. They sought the origins of this leveling process in the most remote origin of the Western cultural tradition, that of archaic Greece, and above all in the pre-Socratic philosophers. What is today called “difference” with distinctly populist emphasis was, ironically, first articulated by Nietzsche as a radical aristocratic refusal of the culmination of history in a “closed system” of egalitarianism, liberalism, democracy, science and technology, or socialism, which for him were so many manifestations of a “slave morality”, the leveling wish for sameness which the “weak” foist upon the “strong”. That such an idea, one hundred years later, would become the basis for vaunting the radical “difference” of a gay black woman of the underclass did not, in all probability, occur to Nietzsche. Nietzsche looked rather to the emergence of a new elite of aesthetic lawgivers, whom he called supermen, and who would have the strength and courage to shape reality like great artists, without having to invoke debilitating universal truths valid for everyone. Nietzsche’s

specific solution, which has often (and wrongly) been seen as an important source of fascism (it was a minor source of fascism), interests his contemporary partisans far less than his diagnosis, but the idea of every individual as an aestheticized “will to power”, who shapes a world with no reference to supraindividual, universal laws and with no limits except those imposed by other such wills, is the direct source of Michel Foucault’s “microphysics of power”, and indisputably foreshadows something of the contemporary reality of a Donald Trump or an Ivan Boesky, just as it foreshadows the reality of a postmodern literary theorist pursuing tenure on an Ivy League campus.

Nietzsche and Heidegger saw the origin of planetary uniformity and leveling in the very Western conception of reason, with its universal claims. They, like their postmodern followers, did not trouble themselves with analyses of material conditions, modes of production and the like. They felt that in taking on the problem at the philosophical level, they were aiming for the jugular. While socialism was the culmination of the trend they denounced, Nietzsche knew next to nothing of Marx or Marxism (although he did brilliantly intuit the bourgeois character of the German Social Democrats, long before most Marxists did). Heidegger was more familiar with Marx – above all through his student Herbert Marcuse – he but rarely treats

Marx directly in his work. For both of them, Hegel was a stand-in for the kind of historical rationality which culminated in socialism. The meaning of the contemporary fashionable word “deconstruction” is a distillation of their attempt to overthrow a dialectical rationality, and what they attack in Hegel is subliminally imputed to Marx. (The occasional assertion that Marxian and de-construction theories are compatible is like saying that Marxism and monetarist economics are compatible.) Their target is a rationality for which all “otherness”, i.e. difference, is sooner or later subsumed in a higher synthesis or supercession. For Nietzsche, such a dialectic was (as it also was for Hegel), the dialectic of master and slave, but in contrast to Hegel, a dialectic which grew out of the resentment of the slave, a slave morality. For Nietzsche, the critique of the dialectic was a defense of the “difference” of the aristocratic master, the higher aesthetic lawgiver he called the Superman.

(Having said this, it is important to point out that there are false universals, which conceal the specific interests of class, caste, racial or gender elites within empty pretensions of all-inclusiveness. The error of the post-modern theorists of difference, however, is to conclude that because such false universals exist, no other kind could exist. For Nietzsche, universal values (or what the post-

modernists call “master discourses”) were invented by the weak to rein in the strong; for the post-modernists, who get their Nietzsche through Foucault, such values, including Marxism, are “discourses of power” over the powerless. If the French Communist Party, or Stalinism generally, used Marxism to justify totalitarian bureaucracy, the logic goes, then all Marxism must necessarily lead to totalitarian bureaucracy. If Ronald Reagan speaks of morality, then all morality must be similar to that of Ronald Reagan. And so on.)

Heidegger carries the critique of the dialectic much farther. All of the stages of his complex evolution cannot be traced here. While deeply influenced by Nietzsche, Heidegger saw both Nietzsche and his own early phase (which was summarized in *Being and Time* (1927) as the culmination of the very tradition he was attempting to overthrow. Nietzsche’s solution had been to see every individual as a “will to power”, strong or weak, master or slave, and every perspective articulated by individuals as a “will to power”, an aesthetic attempt to shape a reality that had no laws separate from such wills, because such wills are all that exist. The early Heidegger had, by a complex transposition, taken up such a will to power into his conception of individual existence in *Being and Time*. But the experience of Nazism, which he initially saw as a

revolution against Western metaphysics, convinced him that the “will to power” pointed invariably to a planetary domination of the earth by technology (again, the closed system of technique and science which was the nightmare of both Nietzsche and Heidegger), and that this impulse was latent in the Western philosophical project from Parmenides onward. (Heidegger later concluded that the Nazis had remained trapped in the general “technological’ nihilism” of the West. In his last phase, which would be decisive for Michel Foucault, Heidegger decided that the history of Being in Western culture was the history of this will to power, codified in a conception of Being as *presence*, reducible to a discrete image. In Western culture, in Heidegger’s interpretation, what cannot be reduced to such an image has no “Being”, but the ontological level of Being, as Heidegger conceives it, is precisely what defies such a reduction. The Western planetary project of technical mastery, in this critique, was a direct outgrowth of the pre-Socratic Greek vision of Being after Parmenides, which was, in reality, a “forgetting” of Being. The only solution, in the last phase of Heidegger’s work, was to wait for the emergence of a new sense of Being, something as fundamentally new as the Parmenidean sense had been new 2,500 years ago. Anything which did not overthrow

(i.e. deconstruct) the metaphysics of presence could only be another step in a planetary “technological nihilism”.

But the post-modern cultural theory which has swept North American academia in the past two decades did not come directly from German philosophy, nor does it preoccupy itself directly with the Nietzsche-Heidegger diagnosis of the planetary dominion of technique and the metaphysics of presence. The North American current is unthinkable without the Parisian Nietzsche and Heidegger as they developed after 1945, for it was in France above all that these philosophers acquired left-wing credentials. The two major mediators of Nietzschean-Heideggerian “difference” to North American post-modern academia are Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. In their work, “difference” is radically transformed. It is no longer, as with Nietzsche, the difference of the aristocratic radical against mass resentment, nor, as with Heidegger, the critique of a planetary project of the dominion of technique, of “technological nihilism”, the triumph of the Same at the heart of the metaphysics of presence. In France, “difference” became, with Foucault, differences of “desire” and, with Derrida, of “other voices”; in America, it became, in pseudo-radical guise, the ideological counterpoint to the pulverization of the social in the era of high-tech neoliberalism, the ultimate intellectual leveraged buyout.

Currents on the left which are hostile to or skeptical of French- inspired post-modernism have been at a loss to combat it because of their own disarray at many levels. The “race/gender/class” theorists sound radical enough, and few people of a traditional Marxist background are philosophically equipped to combat the theory at its roots (indeed, few of the “race/gender/class” theorists know where the roots are). Furthermore, most variants of the Marxist tradition find themselves shackled, in attacking the post-modernists, by certain assumptions held in common with them, flowing from the centrality of France and of the French Revolution in the revolutionary tradition. The cachet of the post-modernists, internationally, is the French connection, and certain assumptions, now crumbling, about the position of France in capitalist and socialist history still create a space for them in the debris. It was for this reason that the recent debate over the French Revolution, and the rise of the French revisionist school led by Francois Furet, must be seen as a broader context for the international impact of post-modernism.

At the beginning of *Words and Things* (1966), the book that established Michel Foucault as a major figure in France, there is a fascinating analysis of Velasquez’s painting *Las Meninas*, which contains in some sense the whole Foucaultian project. In this analysis, Foucault

identifies the king as the lynchpin in the whole game of representation, which is the real subject of the painting. In all of Foucault's early work, and above all in his innovative (but problematic) early studies of medicine and of madness, the project is the identification of Western reason with the ostensibly omniscient vantage point of the king, of representation, and of power. This project is the ultimate source of Foucault's conception that all "representational" discourses of ostensibly universal knowledge – including Marxism – actually conceal discourses of separate power. For Foucault, any attempt at such a universal "discourse", and by implication a universal class, which attempts to unite the different fragments of social reality, or the different oppressed groups of capitalist society, (particularly one which privileges the working class), must necessarily be a separate discourse of power, the game of representation centered on the "king", or master discourse. When attempting to fathom the French phase of post-modernism, it must always be kept in mind that the overwhelming experience of "Marxism" in that country was the experience of the ultra-Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), of which Foucault was briefly a member at the beginning of the 1950's. But even more revealing than such biographical details (which are, for all phenomena emanating from the postwar French intelligentsia, real

enough) is Foucault's equation of rationality with the principle of the king, and with the French absolutist state of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the state overthrown, (and then strengthened) by the French Revolution. For Foucault and the Foucaultians, there is no other reason than the reason of the "Classical Age", that of French Enlightened absolutism. The aestheticized formalism of the French intellectual tradition, of which Foucault is a perfect product, has its ultimate roots in aristocratic Gallican Catholicism, and achieved its finished form in France's *grand siècle*, the seventeenth century that witnessed the rise of Louis XIV's prototypical enlightened absolutist state. Foucault could not be farther from the Cartesian tradition of "clarity" spawned by that state, but it is significant that for him, such rationality is the only rationality there is. Of course Foucault was perfectly aware of, and deeply indebted to, German philosophy from Kant, via Hegel and Marx, to Nietzsche and Heidegger. But German philosophy is, like French philosophy, the product of another Enlightened absolutist state, Prussia, and therefore easily unmasked as another discourse of power. The tradition that remains opaque to Foucault is the English, in the same way that the revolution which remains opaque to him (and to all the contending parties in the post-modernism debate) is the English revolution,

particularly its radical currents. But the blindness of Foucault is unfortunately also the blindness of most of the Marxian tradition, including Marx, for whom the French Revolution was always of far greater importance than the English. Because of this blindness, the contemporary crackup of statism, from France to Russia, and of which Foucault is in some sense a major theoretician, leaves the bulk of the international left, which had its own problems with statism, theoretically and politically disarmed.

Before probing this assertion, it is necessary to look at the common ground between Foucault and the neo-liberal revival of the 1970s, which at first glance could not be farther from Foucault's predilections. It is this common ground which allows us to see how the post-modernists are the unwitting pseudo-radical theoreticians of the era of Reagan and Thatcher, giving a "radical" panache to the atomization of society in the new period.

As we have indicated, the ideology of "difference" began with Nietzsche's and Heidegger's attack on the universal claims of Western, above all dialectical reason, and its drive to make the "Other" into a moment of the "same". In France, through Foucault and Derrida, this "deconstruction" of the unitary subject of Western philosophy (culminating in Hegel's world-historical subject,

the latter often seen as a stand-in for Marx's proletarian subject) led to a view of a "plurality of discourses", of "multiple voices", that were never mediated in a higher unity, understood as illusory by definition. Finally, in America, these currents became the extremely esoteric veneer of what amounts to a radical restatement of American pluralism, radical only in the radicalism of its insistence that people of various races, ethnicities, and sexual preferences in fact have nothing of importance in common with one another. In this view, in opposition to Marx, even "class" becomes just one more difference, not a unifying element whose emancipation is the sine qua non of all emancipation. (One recalls, in contrast, the assertion of the Wobbly preamble that "the working class and the employer class have nothing in common", where the working class bears within itself the germ of a higher unity.) For Hegel and Marx, difference is *contradiction*, pointing to a higher synthesis; for the post-modernists, difference is irreducible difference, and a higher synthesis just a new discourse of power, a new "master narrative." The high irony is that for Heidegger, such qualities as class, race, ethnicity and sexual preference are precisely in the fallen realm of a "metaphysics of presence", images "beneath" which real authenticity, always totally individual, and always destroyed by such "presencing", is discovered.

The current theorists of “identity” who base themselves on such collective categories, and for whom individuality is hardly a concern, have completely inverted the source. But in such a way do ideas migrate, particularly to America.

But there is more. It is not often appreciated in the U.S. that Foucault, in France, anticipated both the media event of the “new philosophers” (Andre Glucksman, Bernard Henri-Levi, *et al.*) in 1977, but also the neo-liberalism that first gained currency under Giscard d’Estaing and then became an international tidal wave in the 1980s, fervently embraced by the “socialist” Mitterand government. What is the connection?

As indicated above, France, because of the international impact of the French Revolution (which far exceeded that of the English Revolution) always had a central position in the mythology of the Marxist left. Although the French working class, at the beginning of the twentieth century, had vital revolutionary syndicalist and anarchist currents, by the post-World War II period the dominant PCF and the erratic Socialist Party, as well as the major trade unions which gravitated around them, were overwhelmingly statist. This statism merely echoed the statism of the main French economic tradition of mercantilism, which had origins in the pre-1789 *ancien régime*. It was a statism

quite similar to twentieth century versions which proliferated in welfare, socialist, communist and fascist ideologies just about everywhere, and which also had roots in the mercantilism of seventeenth and eighteenth century continental Europe. Because France had, along with England, Holland, and the United States, participated in the first wave of bourgeois revolutions prior to industrialization, it was always assumed that France was a capitalist society of roughly the same maturity, and that the bureaucratic statism of the French left was a degenerate form of a movement that pointed "beyond capitalism".

In fact, France in 1945 was still a deeply rural society, with 50% of the population still living on the land, engaged in micro-agricultural production. Yet only since the 1970s, when the French peasantry had sunk to 8% of the population, has it generally been appreciated that the statism of the French left, like the statism of the left everywhere, was an expression not of maturity, but of backwardness, and that the Parisian culture which fascinated leftist intellectuals throughout the world was not so much about the supersession of capitalism as the absence of full-blown capitalism.

French statism, of which French leftist statism was an important part, oversaw the rapid industrial transformation

of the country from 1945 to 1975. As a result, France became a country of the type pioneered (on the continent) by Germany, in which agricultural producers also fell to less than 10% of the population. Then, as in other countries at the same threshold, the state bureaucracy became a positive hindrance to further economic development. The result was, from the mid-1970s onward, an ideological and then programmatic wave of neo-liberal de-centralization in which the French left discovered it was no less trapped in statism than were the Gaullists. Foucault's "de-centering" of the Hegelian subject, aimed at "Western" Marxism of the 1950s and 1960s and, beyond that, at Marxism generally, had carried out ideologically what Giscard and then Mitterand carried out practically, the dismantling of the French mercantilist development tradition.

The final connection was made by the "new philosophers", who popularized Foucault in their slick paperbacks and media happenings. At the cutting edge of this development were figures such as Glucksmann and Henri-Levy, both of whom had once been ultra-Stalinist militants of France's post-1968 Maoist movement. The appearance, in 1974, of Solzhenitzen's *Gulag Archipelago* was the moment of truth with their ostensible earlier ""Marxism". After a decade of glorifying the most elephantine totalitarian state in modern history, Mao's

China, the “new philosophers” became famous by proclaiming, in the newly receptive neo-liberal climate, that all Marxists, including those who had been combating Stalinism fifty years before them, were of necessity totalitarians too. What they took from Foucault was the notion of the “master discourse”, the philosophy of the Hegelian or Marxist type which attempts, or purports, to unify fragmentary realities into higher, universal syntheses. Within a decade, suspicion of universalizing “master discourses” had become rife in American academia, tantalizingly parallel to Reaganism’s ideological dismantling of big statism and de-centralization of poverty and austerity to states and cities.

But nevertheless, contemporary post-modernism does remain rooted in the original problematic of Nietzsche and Heidegger, in the defence of difference. And as such it retains Nietzsche’s and Heidegger’s account of Western thought, one which is paradoxically highly Eurocentric, in keeping with the highly Eurocentric view of history which supported such a view of philosophy. For Nietzsche and Heidegger were pure products of what we will call, momentarily, the Greek romance of German philosophy. The post-modernists are thus caught in the trap of presenting and “de-constructing” a curiously “Western” version of the Western “tradition”, a version which reads

out of history a fundamental non-Western moment, the contribution of ancient Egypt and its further elaboration in Alexandria and in Islam.

As it is emerging in recent serious characterizations of actual Eurocentrism, such as those of Samir Amin and Martin Bernal, one of the great crimes of Western ethnocentrism since the eighteenth century has been the writing of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Moslem world out of its history, not merely since the Moslem conquests of the seventh century, but also in the period prior to the emergence of ancient Israel and ancient Greece, perhaps best exemplified by the occultation of the historical importance of the civilization of ancient Egypt. The merit of Bernal's multi-volume *Black Athena*, whatever its other problems, has been to squarely pose the significance of ancient Egypt for the formation of the Western tradition.

The disappearance of ancient Egypt from the horizon of Western cultural origins is, historically, a relatively recent phenomenon, barely two centuries old. As Bernal and others have pointed out, the ancient Greeks themselves frankly acknowledged Egypt (whose civilization predated their own by more than two millennia) as a major source of their world. For the other pole of Western origins, ancient Israel, the sojourn in Egypt, and the exodus from the land

of the pharaohs, was a founding moment of the culture. The Egyptian provinces of the Roman empire, centered on Alexandria, were the source of the last important philosophical movement of antiquity, neo-Platonism, from which the Hegelian and Marxian dialectic directly derive. Further, Alexandrian neo-Platonism grew out of an international ferment in which all manner of Near Eastern philosophies and mystery religions, as well as Buddhism, mixed with the moribund remnants of Greco-Roman classicism, and decisively marked the early history of Christianity. It was this very Alexandrian legacy which the Moslem conquests of the seventh century appropriated, and molded, by the eleventh century, into the apex of Arab and Persian civilization, associated with the urban splendor of Bagdad, Damascus and Cordoba. During the same period, the knights of the court of Charlemagne were valiantly struggling to learn to write their names. When, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the works of Avicenna, Averroes, al-Ghazali, and al-Farabi were translated into Latin, the cultural heritage of antiquity, but one thoroughly transformed by its Alexandrian and Moslem phases, passed into the then-impoverished "West". (The contemporary multiculturalists never tell us that "Oriental" Islamic civilization also claims to derive from both Jewish and Greek sources, and that therefore these "logocentric"

legacies are not unique to the sources of the “West”, nor do they tell us that Islam spread the study of Plato and Aristotle from Morocco to Malaysia.)

When, in fifteenth century Italy, these Arab and Persian roots had contributed mightily to the Renaissance, ancient Egypt was again revered, through the writings of the so-called “Hermes Trismegistus”, as the ultimate source of neo-Platonic wisdom, although in a way more mystified than had been the case among the ancient Greeks. Finally, in the seventeenth and eighteenth century phase of Enlightened absolutism, “Egyptian wisdom”, ultimately of Alexandrian origin, was thoroughly entwined with the ideologies of the middle-class radical secret societies and sects, such as the Rosicrucians and the Freemasons, which played an important role in the French Revolution.

(It should be kept in mind that prior to the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphs in 1822, most Western Egyptophilia was of a wildly speculative nature. What is important, for this discussion, is the continuity of the myth of Egypt, whatever the reality, and the fact that “Western” tradition had no difficulty acknowledging it.) It is the highest irony that virtually every major figure in the “Western” “canon” from the twelfth to the early nineteenth century, as defended by the actual Eurocentrists, from the

French troubadours to Dante, by way of the Florentine neo-Platonists Pico and Ficino, Rabelais, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Spencer, Milton, Leibnitz, Spinoza, Goethe and Hegel (to focus for a moment on the philosophical and literary currents) were deeply influenced by this “Egyptian wisdom” or “Alexandrian” legacy in either its neo-Platonist or Hermeticist or Jewish mystical (Kabbalistic) form, and acknowledged it more or less as such. In actual fact, the Eurocentrists would be hard pressed to mention a major pre-Enlightenment figure who was *not* influenced by such currents. After 1800, these same traditions passed into the legacy of romanticism and later the Bohemian avant-garde, where they remained a force up to at least surrealism. Nevertheless, in spite of the increasing tendency, through the nineteenth century, among Western Hellenophiles, to see ancient Greece as a *sui generis* phenomenon, hermetically sealed from Semitic and African (Egyptian) influences, figures of no less stature than Melville, Hawthorne and Poe (to cite only American examples) still bore the markings of successive “Egyptian revivals”.

But in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, an ideological shift began to eclipse the “Egyptian” tradition. This shift was the Anglo-German romance with ancient Greece, which achieved its apotheosis in Germany after 1760. The causes of this shift are complex, and

cannot be dealt with here. The Anglo-French intrusion into the eastern Mediterranean after 1798 made the “Eastern question”— the struggle for the corpse of the moribund Ottoman empire — a major foreign policy question in Europe until 1918, and undoubtedly influenced the West’s desire to read the legacy of the Near East, over millennia, out of a new view of history which imagined ancient Athens arising quite in isolation from its historical environment. Bernal is undoubtedly right to see a new anti-Semitism and racism at work in this transformation. But there are many other factors as well. The final phase of the “Egyptian” tradition within the mainstream of European culture was that of Enlightened absolutism, which had been destroyed or thoroughly reformed in the era of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars. Once the absolutist state which contributed to the Enlightenment was shattered, secular rationality could separate from the old “Egyptian” mystique. Indeed, the new militant Enlightenment world views had no need for, and every reason to dispense with, the apparent obscurantism of Freemason ritual. This “decanting” of Enlightenment rationality from its pre-revolutionary institutional framework pushed the “Egyptian” tradition toward the romantic and Bohemian margins of the new, ascendant bourgeois society.

The new, Anglo-German and above all German romance with ancient Greece was already a break with earlier views of Greco-Roman antiquity as they developed from the Renaissance onward. The revival of antiquity in the fifteenth century was first of all a revival of Roman civic culture, and the literary and historical models of fifteenth century Italy were above all models of Roman civic virtue and civic rhetoric. The philosophical revival of Plato, as indicated earlier, came through Arab and Byzantine sources, and arrived in the garb of Egyptian mystery religion, which only later was discovered to have nothing to do with ancient Egypt. When the rise of Enlightened absolutism modeled on the France of Louis XIV, set down a cultural hegemony extending from Paris to St. Petersburg, by way of Santo Domingo and Rio de Janeiro, the ultimate tone of this culture was again Latin, and Roman. The legacy of ancient Greece, prior to the eighteenth century, (when Latin was far more widely known than Greek) was always filtered through a Roman garb: it was empire, the state, law, the civic virtues of the citizen which were remembered, and not the communitarian dimension of the Athenian *polis* and the Greek city state. It was left to disunited, fragmented Germany, where national unification was still a distant dream, to lead the cultural revolt against the imperial mode of the Roman-Latin-French civilization of

Enlightened absolutism. This revolt, and the Greek romance to which it gave rise, is associated with figures such as Herder, Winckelmann, Goethe, and later Hoelderlin and Hegel; it cannot be explained through racism and imperialism alone, but it was German Hellenophilism that buried the “Egyptian” tradition and occulted it from the historical memory of Western origins. A similar development occurred in England, out of English romanticism’s involvement with the Greek war of independence in 1823 (and therefore once again with the “Eastern question”), but figures such as Keats, Shelley and Byron had no international cultural impact on the scale of the German Hellenophiles, who were, among other things, the direct precursors of another Hellenophile, Karl Marx.

The disappearance of ancient Egypt, or the myth of ancient Egypt, from the horizon of Western cultural origins, where it held sway until the late eighteenth century, was the *sine qua non* for the constitution of a “modernist” view of Western history which, unfortunately, was until very recently uncritically accepted by the great majority of the Western left, a view which made the left susceptible to the blandishments of post-modernism. This outlook traced a certain Western history from Athens to Renaissance Florence, to the London and Paris of the Enlightenment, to the culmination of Western high bourgeois culture which

ended in the successive deaths of Beethoven, Goethe and Hegel *ca.* 1830. This was a history written with an eye to the progress of a certain kind of classical rationality, which vaguely acknowledged the Hebrew prophets as distant precursors of that rationality (for their role as demystifiers). For such a sense of Western history, deeply shaped by the French view of the Enlightenment and by the French Revolution, and deeply critical of religion from a positivist point of view, nothing much had happened in the two millennia from Socrates' Athens to the Florence of the Medici. For such a sense of history, the Alexandrian and Islamic moments sketched above, because of their religious dimension, for all intents and purposes did not exist, except possibly as transmitters, and certainly not as shaping forces in their own right. This was the legacy of the Anglo-German romance with ancient Greece, the world view in which the Near East, before, during and after Greco-Roman antiquity, dropped out of Western history. The disappearance of Alexandria and Islam was inseparable from the disappearance of ancient Egypt, as part of a general isolation of ancient Athens from its eastern Mediterranean environment, before and after its golden age.

This is the real Eurocentric view. And what do the ostensibly radical post-modern multiculturalists tell us

about all this? Precisely nothing! And why? Because, through Nietzsche and Heidegger, Foucault and Derrida, they have swallowed the Hellenophile romance whole, except to change the plus and minus signs. They ignore the Arabic and Persian sources of the Renaissance, and thus obscure the Alexandrian and Moslem mediation, and further development, of the Greek legacy. Further, they agree with the Eurocentrists across the board that “Western” culture, like all “cultures”, is a self-contained phenomenon. Do they tell us that French Provencal poetry, from which modern Western literature begins, borrowed massively from Arab poetry, and particularly the erotic mystical poetry of Islamic Spain? Do they tell us that Dante was steeped in the work of the Andalucian Sufi Ibn Arabi? That some of the greatest Spanish writers of the 16th century *siglo de oro*, such as St. John of the Cross and Cervantes, drew heavily on Islamic and Jewish sources? Do they tell us about the Franciscan heretics in sixteenth century Mexico who attempted to build, together with the Indians, a Christian communist utopia in defiance of a hopelessly corrupt European Catholicism? Do they tell us about the belief in the Egyptian sources of Western civilization which held sway from the ancient Greeks, via the Florentine Academy, to the eighteenth century Freemasons? They tell us nothing of the kind, because

such syncretistic cross-fertilization of cultures flies in the face of their relativistic assumption that cultures confront each other as so many hermetically sealed, and invariably distorting “texts”. So many “dead white European males” turn out to have massive debts to dead males (and in the case of Arabic poetry, females) of color! The post-modernists are so busy exposing the “canon” as a litany of racism, sexism and imperialism that they, exactly like the explicit Eurocentrists, fail to notice that some of the canon’s greatest works have roots in the very cultures they supposedly “erase”.

Edward Said’s omnipresent book *Orientalism* virtually founded this genre. Said tells us about how Western views of the Eastern Mediterranean world, particularly after the rise of modern imperialist rivalry (the so-called “Eastern question”) were a distorting discourse of power, and could essentially only be that. (His discussion of Dante, for example, makes no mention of Ibn Arabi.) But Said tells us absolutely nothing about the Western “discourse” on the Orient when the balance of forces were exactly reversed, namely from the eighth until the thirteenth centuries, when Islamic civilization towered over the West, culturally and militarily. As one writer put it:

Were the Eskimos suddenly to emerge as the world's leading artists and scholars, were factories in Greenland to outproduce those of Japan, and were invaders from the far north to conquer the United States and the Soviet Union, we would hardly be more astonished than were the Muslims two hundred years ago when they suddenly fell under West European control".²

Centuries of Arab and then Ottoman hegemony in the Mediterranean, and their very real ability to militarily threaten the European heartland, which receded only at the end of the seventeenth century, had blinded Moslems to the rising world power to the north, hundreds of years after their actual ascendancy had been lost.

Said is of course not writing about "Occidentalism", or a Moslem "discourse" on the West, and cannot be criticized for not including examples such as the statement of the Arab Ibn Sa'id, who described the Franks in the mid-11th century as

resembling animals more than men...The cold air and cloudy skies (cause) their temperaments to become frozen and their humours to become crude; their bodies are extended, their coloring pale, and their hair too long. They lack keenness of

understanding and acuteness of mind, they are dominated by ignorance and stupidity, and blindness of purpose is widespread".³

What is important is not to multiply quotations proving the banal point that the Moslem world at its apogee was as ethnocentric as the Europeans were at theirs; the point is rather that, in the periods of Moslem world ascendancy, Moslems thought of the inhabitants of the Christian West as barbarians inhabiting a backwater which interested them as little as the blue-painted inhabitants of Britain interested the Roman cultural elite in the second century CE.

But we can criticize Said for not telling us more about "Orientalism" in the West during the period from the 8th to the 13th centuries when the cultural superiority of the Islamic world over Europe was a reality, and an acknowledged one. He does not tell us about the archbishop of Zaragoza in the ninth century who deplored the decadence of the Christian youth in his time and their enchantment by the brilliant Arabic culture emanating from southern Spain, to which all of Europe then looked:

They are incapable of writing a correct sentence in Latin but excel the Moslems in the knowledge of the finest grammatical and rhetorical points of Arabic.

The scriptures and the writings of the Church fathers lie unread, but they rush to read and translate the latest manuscript from Cordoba.

Said and the other analysts of Western “discourse” do not often discuss these realities, because they challenge one of their most sacrosanct assumptions, whether implicit or explicit, that of total cultural relativism. They are loathe to admit that some cultures are, in the context of world history, at certain moments more dynamic, in fact superior to others, and that Arabic culture in Moslem Spain in the eleventh century towered over culture in Zaragoza or in Paris. To acknowledge this would open the way to acknowledging the unacceptable, unrelativist idea that in the seventeenth century, the situation had reversed itself and that some cutting edge of world historical ascendancy and superiority had passed to the West. Yet one need only look at the direction of translations to see the change, as it was understood by both sides. From the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, thousands of works of Arabic philosophy, science, mathematics and poetry were translated into Latin and avidly read all over Europe, while little or nothing was translated in the opposite direction. After the French invasion of Egypt in 1798 (the event which, long after the West had laid the foundations of

world hegemony, awoke the Moslem world to the new situation), a mass of translations from French into Arabic began and continued through the nineteenth century.

Donald Lach begins his multi-volume *Asia in the Making of Europe* with the following statement:

It has often been acknowledged that gunpowder, the printing press and the compass were essential to the ascendancy of Europe. It is less often acknowledged that none of these were European inventions.

This reality is acknowledged neither by the Eurocentrists, nor by the relativists of contemporary multiculturalism. To do so, once again, would be to acknowledge a world historical process larger than any single culture, and a dynamism at the level of world history in which there is cross-cultural syncretism and *progress*.

To look seriously at world history prior to Western ascendancy would also undermine another cherished dogma of multiculturalist relativism, namely that the global hegemony of Western culture in modern history rests exclusively on military force. For Said, the discourse of Orientalism is first and foremost a discourse of such "power". But history shows repeatedly that military conquest is usually followed by the cultural conquest of the

conqueror, that cultural hegemony has often moved in the *opposite* direction from military superiority. The repeated Mongol and Turkic invasions of China and the Middle East up to the fifteenth century, so devastating to Chinese and Moslem civilizations (and no small factor in their later vulnerability to the West), invariably led, within a couple of generations, to the integration of the Mongols and Turks into the cultures they had overrun. The Almoravid and Almohad invasions of Moslem Spain from North Africa in the eleventh and twelfth centuries similarly led to their integration of the invaders into the overrefined urban culture they conquered; indeed, the great Arab historian Ibn Khaldun built his whole theory of universal history on this cycle of nomadic conquest and later absorption by the conquerors.

The rather singular convergence of military ascendancy and of cultural hegemony by the West, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, is one “difference”, seen in the perspective of world history, which the multiculturalists should tell us more about. To do so, all they lack, like their counterparts the Eurocentrists, is a notion of world history, and knowledge of it.

A look at world history in a contemporary context would also lead the multiculturalists to the question of the current

economic and technological supremacy of Japan, which, one would think, might pose some difficulties for their assault on the ideology of “dead white European males” as the ruling ideology of our time. The indisputable fact that the world’s most dynamic capitalist zone for the past three decades has been in Asia does not trouble them in the least, since they are, among other things, profoundly bored by questions of economics and technology which cannot be connected to cultural difference. The implicit, if not explicit, agenda of the multiculturalists is to present the values associated with intensive capitalist accumulation as “white male”, so that “non-white” peoples such as the Japanese or Koreans who currently embody those values with a greater fervor than most “whites” somehow lose their difference, and certainly their interest. The executives and R&D teams of the Asian firms currently pounding American and European industry with their cutting-edge products would undoubtedly be surprised to learn that their values were “white”. (It used to be the case that the association of cultural attributes with skin color was called... racism.) The multiculturalists document the struggles of Andean or Eritrean women against imperialism and gender oppression in every detail, but the successive strikes waves of the Korean workers, one of the most important upsurges of the past decade, is passed over in silence. Somehow when a

Third World country is industrialized, is ceases to be "different".

In this connection, to conclude, it is necessary to consider the "material conditions" in which post-modern multiculturalism has come to center stage. It is only slightly an exaggeration to say, as indicated earlier, that it emerged out of the collapse, in the West, of the model of capitalist accumulation based on the assembly line, of which the automobile, in production and consumption, was the symbol *par excellence*. The vision of "modernity" we have analyzed throughout had as its implicit or explicit teleology the transformation of the planet into a world of mass production workers, a transformation which France, from which the theory emerged, underwent after 1945 as few other countries. The end of this model of accumulation in the post-1973 world economic crisis dissolved the climate in which various "archaisms" could be assumed to be on the verge of extinction. This is not to offer a narrowly economic analysis of the current ideologies of multicultural identity, or to imply that there was something fundamentally healthy about the 1945-1973 model of accumulation, or to suggest that a new expansion based on a new model of accumulation would restore the old notions of modernity and rationality which were shared, at bottom,

by Western capitalism, the Eastern bloc, and Third World development regimes.

Notes

1. August 2000: The following article was written in 1991, and published, in a somewhat reduced form, in *Against the Current* in 1993. To some extent, the climate following such events as the UPS strike (Summer 1997) or more recently, Seattle (November 1999) has dispelled the extreme economic blindness that characterized the general discussion on the American left ten years ago, when Foucault, Derrida, Said and Spivak were riding high. That said, the polemic of the article against the remnants of these ideologies remains useful.
2. D. Pipes, *In the Path of God*, p.97.
3. Ibid., p. 81.

Post-Modernism Meets the IMF

The Case of Poland

Sometime in the course of the 1970s, the international Marxist ferment of the previous two decades lost its momentum and, in most quarters, also lost its road map. Only the hardiest individuals or the most foolish sectarians claim that the events of the past 15 years have not seriously tested the received ideas, even the best ones, which proliferated in the epochal developments of the 1960s. The post-1975 crackup of world Stalinism, associated with economic and social debacles in Indochina, China, Africa, and more recently in Eastern Europe and finally the Soviet Union itself, is actually the least of these events. This phenomenon surprises a consequential anti-Stalinist Marxist of the earlier period only by the rapidity of the collapse and by the total prostration of the system it revealed. Revolutionary critiques of Stalinism from a Marxist viewpoint were hardly dominant in the 1960s, but they were not without influence in every major capitalist country, and even in a few "socialist" ones. But few anti-Stalinist Marxists of the 1960s and 1970s imagined that the growing revulsion against statism would, for an extended period, triumph almost exclusively in the worldwide wave of "neo-liberalism" promoted by the

unlikely alliance of Thatcher, Reagan, Mitterand, Teng, Gorbachev and, most recently, the Solidarnosc government of Poland. Fewer still imagined the “return of religion” as an explosive social issue in contexts as diverse as the Islamic world, the U.S., Israel, Poland, Latin America or France. The 1980s were clearly a “trial of the Enlightenment”, and all the more so for those strands of Marxism which saw only continuity between the Enlightenment and Marx. If any historical development of that decade stretches the “epistemological lenses” of Marxism more than the Iranian revolution, it must be the Polish workers’ movement since 1980 which, in repeated waves of strikes and other resistance, opened an irreparable breach in Stalinist totalitarian rule, not in the name of Marx or Luxemburg, but with the blessings of the Pope, the U.S. government, the International Monetary Fund and the Friedmanite school of economics.

Out of this “trial of the Enlightenment” in the West and elsewhere have emerged the “new social movements” and, in less activist intellectual milieus invariably tied to academia, such movements’ more esoteric ideological expression, increasingly known under the rubric of “post-modernism”. Their contribution to clarifying the reigning malaise may be stated succinctly. To those ideologues and dullards, still benighted by the “canons” of the “nineteenth

century”, who lament or work to rectify the current loss of a “road map”, these bright-eyed junior professors rush, like so many latter-day Zarathustras with their lanterns in daytime, to announce the good news that there is no road map, but rather many maps, and more importantly, that *there is no road*. Or better still: there are many roads, not necessarily connected to each other, not necessarily leading anywhere and that, lo!, they are to be found more or less exactly where the mapmakers... “desire” them to be.

Not all the post-modern, post-Marxist, post-political theoreticians of the current ebb of struggle have been so quick or so content to proclaim that multiple discourses and identities of desire, “articulated” by the new social movements of women, gays, pacifists, Third World peoples and ecologists will succeed where the unspeakably boring working class has failed. This second stream also “marches to a different drummer”, but their different drummer marks time for them in Frankfurt rather than in Paris. They also like the “grassroots” “citizens’ initiative” “pluralist” aspects of the new social movements, but they are less hell-bent than the French originators of “acquired intelligence diminution syndrome” on jettisoning quite the entire edifice of 2,500 years of the Western “canon”. Marx and his concerns, such as capitalist crisis and the abolition of wage

labor, are of course hopelessly passe for these “Bernsteins” of post-modernism as well, so they focus instead on the resurrection of “civil society” and the “public sphere” which it provides for “discourse” and “communication”. But, in the end, much like their allies of the French persuasion, they live in chic lofts in New York’s Soho and Tribeca districts, and even occasionally notice New York’s 100,000 homeless people articulating their identities and their desires for food and shelter as our theoreticians make their way into chic restaurants or into chic black-leather orange-hair and gold-chain conferences where they darkly warn against the “totalitarian” project of attempting to radically abolish and supercede *this* rotting social order. The remark of one wag captures their world outlook precisely: “Marxists have previously attempted to change the world; the point, however, is to interpret it.”

Such people are worthy of passing critical mention not because of any serious risk that their ideas might influence an honest working person looking for a way out of today’s grinding social decay, or because the protagonists of “desire” and “discourse” would ever bother to make their thoughts known in a programmatic way to working people. We polemicize against them only because many of their ideas are derived from the writings and struggles of a nobler social stratum, the postwar anti-Stalinist

intelligentsia of Eastern Europe, who in turn came to maturity in the ruins of the defeated world revolution that shook Kiel, Berlin, Munich, Budapest, Vienna, Petrograd and Moscow from 1917 to 1921. We can attempt to understand and perhaps even partially empathize with the curious and ultimately disappointing evolution of the generation of postwar oppositionists in Eastern Europe, such as Kuron, Modzelewski, Michnik, Heller, Kolakowski, Konrad, Szelenyi, or Feher, under the crushing weight of their direct experience of Stalinism. (We can thereby also see in even truer dimensions the ultimate consequences of the tragedy and defeat associated with the revolutionary generation conjured up by the names of Luxemburg, Trotsky, Korsch, or Serge.) But no such considerations need restrain us when we contemplate the unrelenting and pretentious farce, drawing on the work of the postwar Eastern Europeans and other currents, which has been perpetrated in Western European and above all American academia by the likes of the later Castoriadis, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Andrew Arato or Jean Cohen.

In the 1940s and 1950s, the “God That Failed” generation of former leftists burned by Stalinism, who then made their peace with capitalism, usually made the transition directly; in the hothouse climate of the immediate post-World War II period, the few coherent

voices who could challenge their facile equation of Stalinism and Marxism were easily marginalized and ignored. Too many Stalinists, and too many apologists for the West had a deep interest in a situation where both sides happily agreed that Stalin's Russia was the very realization of the communism prescribed by Karl Marx. The ex-Stalinist ideologues, moreover, successfully won hegemony for their ideas by insisting that as ex-Communists, they, and they alone, understood Communism better than anyone. They made no secret of their past or their sources because the latter were their strength and cachet. Today, on the other hand, the "post-political" ideologues of "new social movements", who "are neither pro-capitalist nor pro-socialist" but above all "democrats", have gone their predecessors one better. They do not merely write as if they never heard of the Marxist critiques of the Soviet and specifically Stalinist experience, starting with Rosa Luxemburg's 1918 broadside at Lenin, and continued in the 1920s, 30s and early 40s by such figures as Mattick, Bordiga, Korsch, Trotsky, CLR James, Dunayevskaya or Schachtman; they write, in contrast to the more honest Cold Warriors, as if they themselves had not spent years studying the work of such people, or as if this body of work had somehow been historically refuted. The current neo-conservative and neo-

liberal climate, combined with the hopeless domestication of the leftist discussion in the West by academia, relieves them of the pressure they once felt to draw on, or at least to respond to, such critiques. These people know perfectly well that the attempt at a Marxist account of the Stalinist phenomenon was continued in the postwar era both by some of the above-mentioned figures, as well as by Tony Cliff, Pierre Naville, David Rousset, Rita di Leo, Antonio Carlo, Hillel Ticktin, and even in the early and sometimes interesting work of their own mentors Castoriadis and Lefort. One need not agree with any or all of the above writers, since they deeply disagree among themselves. But one can use their work, often carried out in the difficult personal circumstances of serious political engagement, as a benchmark of quality and integrity from which to properly judge the current generation of trendy Post-Marxist intellectuals in the West, who have occulted these sources, or simply replaced them in their footnotes with the more fashionable names of their respective academic disciplines. The older generations of leftists were broken by the horrendous decades of Stalinism, fascism and Cold War hysteria; the post-modernist post-Marxist purveyors of current fashion (who for the most part have never gone anywhere near the real political movements of their own lifetimes) have caved in to nothing more than 15 years of

social quiescence and political ebb in the West and to the pressures of the race for academic jobs and tenure.

(Having said the above, we hasten to add that there is in fact a real crisis of Marxism and that the post-modernists, like all ideologues, live off of real problems; it is merely that their role in occulting the best efforts of the past to pose and solve such problems has become yet one more obstacle to dealing with them today.)

The most important message of the ideological climate of the past decade, from Reagan and Thatcher by way of Jeffrey Sachs to the editors of *Telos*, is this: any attempt to take seriously Marx's critique of civil society, and his call to abolish civil society by abolishing the commodity production upon which it rests, is by definition totalitarian" and leads straight to the Gulag. Because Marx's relationship to Hegel and to German philosophy was so poorly understood at the time, the Cold Warriors of the 1940s and 50s rarely troubled themselves with these subtleties. For them, Stalin, like Lenin before him, was a Marxist, and had "applied" "Marxism-Leninism" to the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia, and that was that. The continuity from Marx to Lenin to Stalin was obvious and unproblematic. The new generation also wants to trace a direct thread from Marx's "Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right"

to Lenin to Stalin to Pol Pot and Shining Path. But the Marx and Hegel renaissances of the postwar period, in which these people cut their teeth, leaves them with a much more formidable task. Their whole case rests on a distortion of the relationship between the early Marx's critique of civil Society and his later turn to the critique of political economy. Because this distortion, as articulated in works such as Jean Cohen's problematic book on the subject (*Class and Civil Society: The Limits of Marxian Critical Theory*, Massachusetts, 1983), is so fundamental to the stance of the post-Marxists, we must give it our particular attention. To cut through this question, is not merely to undermine these currents at their strongest point; it is also to open the way to a frank discussion of some lacunae in even the best of the Marxian tradition closely related to the actual crisis of Marxism.

Both Hegel and, more radically, Marx confronted the problem posed by the extreme atomization of individuals in modern civil society, and their consequent relationship to the State. The new theoreticians of democracy are quite right that the point of departure of Marx's entire project is in the dialogue with and supersession of Hegel's inadequate solution to this problem. Marx's answer to the dualisms of civil society was the abolition of the latter, in

the well-known sense of the German Philosophical term *Aufhebung*, which implies both continuity and discontinuity.

The fundamental question before the international left today is whether or not Marx was (as this writer believes) right to think that civil society could be abolished (*aufgehoben*) on a higher level (which preserves and deepens the positive historical achievements of civil, that is, bourgeois society) and not on a lower level, as happened in Soviet-type societies. The second question, which follows hard on the first, is: if Marx was wrong about the critique of civil society, and was in fact a proto-totalitarian, what, if anything, remains valid in his critique of political economy and its programmatic implications? The fact that today's theoreticians of the "public sphere" and of "democracy" separated from the question of capitalism vs. socialism think it superfluous to ask, let alone answer that second question is one powerful sign of the underlying bad faith and of the agenda of accommodation in their negative answer to the first. IMF teams shuttle about Latin America, Africa and now Eastern Europe, pushing slash-and-burn policies on countries and governments crushed under trillions in foreign debt; neo-liberal economic policies in the U.S. increasingly blur the lines between First and Third Worlds for America's working class and inner-city populations, (and where, for the latter,

infant mortality is at Third World levels); factory closings marginalize a whole generation of young workers in the West (and, in the U.S., a generation of black youth), all without eliciting the slightest interest or protest from these people. For nearly 15 years, "soft cop" democracy has sold austerity in countries emerging from "tough cop" dictatorship all over the world, but the only concern of the new watchdogs of "civil society" is to pounce whenever someone points, like Marx 150 years ago, at the formal side of the public sphere enjoyed by those now eating, (when they do eat), at the newly-opened soup kitchens of Buenos Aires and Warsaw. One important tack of these new defenders of the "West" against the "East" has been to pass over in total silence the devastation of the "South", where it has been the bankers of New York, London, Paris and Frankfurt, more than the waning bureaucracies of Moscow and Beijing, who are calling the shuts for the concentration camps without walls that are Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, the Sahel, Nigeria or Zaire (which should not make us forget similar open-air concentration camps named Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique or Ethiopia).

But to be radical is to attack ideology at the root, and the root, here, is the supposedly "totalitarian aspiration" of Marx's post-1843 evolution.

Marx attacked the mediation proposed by Hegel between the atomized individual and the state as the typical conceptual sleight-of-hand of German philosophy. Far from identifying a real mediation between the individual and the supposed universality of the state, Hegel's presumed solutions mystified Prussian reality. The contradictions between abstract universality and concrete individuality which Hegel variously saw as mediated in the civil service, in the "corporation" (i.e. societal interest groups), or in art, philosophy and religion, were discovered by Marx to be real antagonisms in social practice, which could only be solved by their abolition in social practice. Marx discovered the empty universality held out by the state to atomized individuals in civil society to be an abstraction, growing from the alienated social existence of real people in an antagonistic social world. (Or, in Anatole France's memorable formulation: "The law, in its sublime egalitarianism, prohibits both the rich and the poor man from sleeping under the bridges of the Seine.") Marx argued that the practical abolition of civil society would reunite atomized private individuals with their alienated social powers. He characterized his solution to the antagonisms of civil society in the abolition of the latter as the material human community" (*Gemeinwesen*).

But such figures as Jean Cohen and those who follow her see Marx's post-1845 shift from the radical democratic call for a realization of the universal claims of civil society to "political economy (the post-Marxists like to forget that Marx called it the "*critique of political economy*") as the fatal step. In this transition, Marx discovered the proletariat as the concrete universal class, (a "class with radical chains" as he had put it in 1843), which could practically abolish civil society and realize its empty universality in a higher, substantial social form. This, for the civil society theorists, is the nub of a program with "totalitarian aspirations". In this conception, State and Society are "de-differentiated" (as if Marx were a theorist of statism).

What this optic totally obscures is that Marx did not dumbly take over Ricardo's political economy, but rather submitted it to the same immanent critique to which he had submitted philosophy. As Lukács showed in his 1923 classic, *History and Class Consciousness*, Marx found in the contradiction between abstract exchange value and concrete use value the transposition, and thus the root, of the contradiction between abstract universality and concrete individuality with which he had already grappled in philosophy, jurisprudence and political philosophy. He understood that the earlier separations and contradictions

rested on a separation already made in production, in a society in which labor power had the status of a commodity. Thus Marx's turn to the critique of political economy is also a continuation, and a deepening, of the earlier immanent critique of Hegel. The civil society theorists have reformulated the old counterposition between the early and late Marx that was always a shibboleth of the Stalinist interpretation of Marx. A whole generation once used the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* to free Marx from the Stalinists; part of that same generation, (like "an old bitch gone in the teeth" in Ezra Pound's phrase), now uses the 1844 Manuscripts to show that Marx was... well... sort of a Stalinist after all.

Cohen sees in Marx's transition, from his 1840-1845 settling of accounts with Hegel and Feuerbach to his immersion in the critique of political economy, an abandonment of "immanent critique", or the "contrasting of norm and reality". (This in itself is preposterous, because Marx used precisely the same method in discovering, in his critique of political economy, the labor power hidden by the reified category of "labor" in British political economy, and particularly in Ricardo's labor theory of value.) The post-Marxists fault Marx for moving away from his earlier view of "universalistic norms of citizenship, principles of legality, and a formally democratic and constitutional state as fully

positive developments" (cf. David Ost. *Solidarity and the Politics of Antipolitics*, p. 26 [Temple, 1990]). It is quite true that Marx, after he began the critique of political economy, was no longer merely a radical democrat. But it is the worst vulgarization to imply that "immanent critique" was abandoned in Marx's increasing turn to the "economy" and that thereafter for Marx, civil society is nothing but the capitalist market" (*ibid.*, p. 27). "Immanent critique" of philosophy and law did indeed lead Marx to the historical discovery that these spheres were not self-subsisting, and immanent critique, by exploding the autonomy of such spheres from within, also taught him that their internal self-contradictions could not be resolved in their own terms, but required the extension of critique to a broader terrain. The post-Marxists' falsification is their implication that Marx did not also show that the self-contradiction of "economics" could not be resolved in the separate, alienated terms of that sphere, and that the formal pretenses of the "universality" of the commodity status of labor power in capitalism, too, was not universal enough. And it is quite true that in this process, Marx ceased to view the formal side of citizenship, legality and the constitutional State as "fully positive developments", any more than he saw the emancipation of capitalist "free labor" from medieval corporations (that "democracy of

unfreedom", in his phrase) as a purely positive development

The post-Marxists and the partisans of civil Society want to say, in effect, that the experience of Stalinism in Russia and in Eastern Europe was in fact the legitimate historical test, and the definitive historical failure, of Marxism as a whole. They think that the Stalinist attempt to abolish the dominance of the market in backward agrarian societies is a warped but ultimately faithful "Marxist attempt to abolish the dominance of the market, period. The better-read figures in this current know that the discussion, within Marxism itself, of the degeneration and failure of the Russian Revolution began within months of seizure of the Winter Palace. They know that Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks, whatever else one might say about them (and one can clearly say a great deal), never doubted for a moment that without revolution in the West, the Russian Revolution was doomed to degenerate. They know that Marx himself usually envisioned the construction of socialism on the foundations of a materially advanced capitalist society. They also know that in the most important case where Marx flirted with an alternate basis for the transition to communism – the peasant commune theorized by the Russian Populists – he concluded in 1881 that capitalism's penetration of the Russian countryside

had condemned Russia as well to the capitalist road. They know that the Stalinist model arose in conditions of extreme backwardness in which the working class was at most 15% of the (largely peasant) population, and was then exported to Eastern Europe by the Red Army. The partisans of civil society and their East European fellow ex-radicals who now see the formal spheres of civil society as a “purely positive development” know all this, will acknowledge it (though less and less) under pressure, but insist that such objections are secondary and contingent. For them, as for Ronald Reagan and *Time* magazine, it is Marx’s “totalitarian aspirations”, and not merely Stalin, that are on trial for the barbarism of the forced collectivizations, factory speedup directly under GPU Supervision, slave labor, “bacchanalian planning”, state terror and ideological delirium that shaped the actual “state socialist” model after the abandonment of the NEP. The contemporary social climate gives weight to such arguments, and in it, the classic Marxist rejoinders to such insinuations, as cited above, somehow sound like Talmudic and unconvincing “old hat”.

Lenin is of course an easier target than Marx for these people, and a full settling of accounts with Lenin’s legacy cannot be undertaken here. Beginning in the late 1960s, a very extensive debate in the West began to make serious

distinctions between Marx and Lenin, drawing ultimately on such pioneering sources as Karl Korsch's 1923 *Marxism and Philosophy*. The most effective part of this critique, in this author's view, focused on the new elements which Lenin introduced into the Marxian tradition with his emphasis on the role of the organized revolutionary intelligentsia in "bringing consciousness to the working class", a notion which is far more muted in Marx, if it is there at all. Much ink has been spilled on this question and it is not imperative to settle it here. What is important, however, is the rapidity with which the post-Marxists and civil society theorists are all too happy to assimilate Lenin to Marx. Using the more vulnerable target of "Leninism", (which for them is almost always seen as the self-evident precursor of Stalinism) it is the very idea of social revolution they are really after. These theorists, on a terrain already mined with false assumptions, seek a "third way" between capitalism, ("a civil society centered on the market") and "state socialism", which they imply or openly identify with Marx. This "third road", as in the formulation of David Ost's recent book on Poland, is a permanently open democracy, a civil society based "neither in the state or in the marketplace" (once again, as if Marx were an advocate of statism) but an interesting new mode of production called "a vibrant political public sphere". This

“third road”, the post-Marxists like to tell us, has been theorized and practiced by the new social movements, the Greens, human rights activists, radical Christians and, in Eastern Europe, by Solidarnosc in Poland.

It is most instructive to see the relevance and above all the limits of this post-Marxist perspective when applied to the recent historical event which probably most clearly tested it, the working class insurgency in Poland from 1980 onward. Since at least the revolutions of 1830, Poland has always occupied a special position in the history of the international left, and as far and away the largest Eastern European country, developments in Poland have usually had implications far beyond its borders. There is no question that the evolution of the Polish intelligentsia since the 1960s, in relation to the Polish working class, provides an excellent case study in the issues raised above.

In 1964, Jacek Kuron and Karol Modzelewski wrote their *Open Letter to the Party*. This pamphlet-length work is, without question, the most interesting analysis of the Stalinist system ever written in the Soviet bloc during the postwar period. It is a rigorously Marxist attempt to locate the dynamic of the “state socialist” system (a challenge in which the theoreticians of civil society evince not the slightest interest), which is characterized without hesitation as a new form of class rule and against which only a “new

proletarian revolution" offers a meaningful perspective. Kuron and Modzelewski situate Polish "state socialism" (a term to which they, in contrast to most post-Marxists, give a real definition, whether one accepts it or not, and sharply distinguish from Marx's own project of abolishing the state along with social classes) in a thoroughly international framework, clearly recognizing, like the Bolsheviks before them, the impossibility of revolution in Poland without revolution throughout the Eastern bloc and ultimately in the capitalist West. In the *Open Letter*, Kuron and Modzelewski have none of the illusions about the capitalist West which crept into their politics in the course of the 1970s, under the impact of such short-lived phenomena as the "Euro-communism" of the PCI. The retreat of the Polish opposition from the perspectives of the *Open Letter to the Party* of 1964 is the real story of what happened in Poland after 1970 and particularly after 1980. The *Open Letter* was translated and distributed throughout the world in the 1960s, and was read everywhere for what it was, the most advanced statement of Marxism, based squarely on a call for international revolution, east and west, ever written in the Stalinist bloc after 1945.

One should not of course exaggerate the role of one document, however important. But since both of the authors, and particularly Kuron, went on to play leading

roles in the events of the 1980s, one might expect the post-Marxists to provide a more serious treatment of their evolution away from revolutionary Marxism, one which had no illusions about “reforming” either the party or the state. The theses of Kuron and Modzelewski’s *Open Letter* are clearly quite far from what the authors themselves thought, wrote and did after 1970. Yet it never occurred to them then, and no one would never dare imply today, that their 1964 call for “all power to the workers’ councils” was a “totalitarian aspiration”. But that is precisely the implications of the entire perspective with which the post-Marxists and civil society theorists approach Eastern Europe.

Well before the emergence of Solidarnosc in 1980, the Polish working class was already the most consistently militant in Eastern Europe. In 1956, 1970 and 1976, in particular, it conducted strike actions that were turning points in the whole evolution of Polish society, and which were followed closely in both blocs. Yet for those for whom the working class is at best just one more “social movement”, each of these turns in the history of the pre-1980 Polish working class, not to mention the social and economic context in which they occurred, fall into obscurity, allowing them to distill a whole optic on events from their terrain of predilection, the evolution of the

intellectual Opposition. This opposition in Poland was undoubtedly central, and through KOR in particular, was central in the evolution of the workers' movement itself. But this focus on intellectuals, speaking (indeed, pioneering) a language similar to their own, allows the post-Marxists to ignore the same realities which the Polish intelligentsia, for other reasons, also ignored. The meaning of the turn in Stalinist economic strategy after 1970, the Gierek regime's frenzied borrowing in Western capital markets to buy social peace through increased worker consumption, the fatal blow delivered by the 1973 world economic crisis to this export-oriented strategy, and how all these forces influenced the climate in which the opposition evolved, are generally *terra incognita* to these people. The slightest attempt to identify the overall dynamic of the Stalinist societies, a more than 50-year old debate, or their relationship to the capitalist world market, is equally beyond them. They cannot be troubled by the slightest discussion of the concrete relationship, in Poland, between the state bureaucracy, the working class, and the peasantry, or of the impact of post-1945 industrialization on the balance of forces between them. The important attempts of figures such as Hillel Ticktin, working within a Marxist framework, to discuss the historical relationship between extensive and intensive phases of accumulation

and to relate them to the crisis of Soviet-type societies, draw little but a yawn. The “totalitarian aspiration” that leads Marxists (and others) to pose a relationship between such questions and “civil society” forecloses, for the post-Marxists, an investigation of these apparently boring questions.

What do they substitute for such concerns?

The “antipolitics” of the post-1970 Polish opposition, which inspired post-Marxist David Ost’s recent book, was theorized in an essay of the same name by the Hungarian writer Gyorgy Konrad. Ost defines this term, in a passage worth quoting at length:

The goal [of Solidarnosc] was a political arrangement neither capitalist nor socialist, neither East nor West, but something new and original, something that borrows whatever seems worthwhile from existing models without adopting any one model altogether. It is for this reason that the Polish opposition rejected being pigeonholed into Western categories of ‘right’ and ‘left’. This is why they scorned naive questioners asking if they favored ‘capitalism’ or ‘socialism’. Their goal was autonomy, an open democracy, *podmiotowosc* [roughly, “subjectivity”], and their enemy was a party monopoly that sought to crush it all. Their goal was

a political system centered on neither the state nor the market, but on the public sphere of a strong, pluralist, and independent civil society. What they coveted was the social space for a free public life. To the extent that capitalism provided for that space, they were “for capitalism”. To the extent that capitalism limited social space according to market constraints, they were “against capitalism”. And the same goes for “socialism”. To the extent that it undercut market constraints on freedom, great; to the extent that it undercut democratic freedoms themselves, down with it. They sought autonomy within a stable democratic polity, where what was most important was not the final goal of a perfect world, but the continually open search for a better world. They rejected the old left with its vision of a perfect society because they knew it led to Lenin’s “*Kto-kovo*” (“Who will beat whom?”) understanding of politics, where either the good guys with all the answers triumph absolutely, or they are wiped out by the philistines who will lead society astray. The new opposition admitted that it did not have all the answers, and said that that was OK. The vagueness of “permanently open democracy” is one of the things that made it so attractive, and so apt a

description. They didn't know exactly what it meant. They didn't know what "the answer" was. What they knew, from thirty-five years of experience, was that believing one does know "the answer" is the source of the problem." (Ost, p. 15)

Yet somehow the answers, thrashed Out in the "vibrant public sphere" by these very same earlier exponents of "anti-politics turned out ultimately to lead to Jeffrey Sachs and to an austerity program which the *Wall Street Journal* has criticized from the left.

In the above passage, Ost has in all probability faithfully rendered the world view of at least the intellectual wing of the movement that brought the party to its knees in Poland in 1980-81. It is a world view whose genesis is perfectly, tragically comprehensible in light of the conditions that engendered it. But it is also a world view ultimately inadequate to the problems it set out to resolve, and if this was not clear in 1980-1981 (which it was), it is certainly clear in 1990, when the people who articulated it are in power. "Neither capitalism nor socialism", "neither 'left' nor 'right'", "neither state nor market": who, in Poland in 1980, could meaningfully counter the mass movement's visceral rejection of Marxism (which was, of course, the "Marxism" hopelessly compromised by the decades when it became a

meaningless husk in the mouths of gangsters and their ideological flunkies)? In an ideological atmosphere in which concepts like “socialism” or “planning” or the “abolition of wage labor” were transformed, over 50 years, into sawdust and a catechism masking the privileges of the grey Stalinist Babbitts, the Catholic Church (which, after all, taught the Stalinists a thing or two about ideological casuistry) could plausibly appear as a force in touch with the very wellsprings of life itself.

Thus armed, or disarmed, as the case may be, with such ideas, Kuron, Michnik and the rest of the Polish opposition suddenly found themselves in a situation beyond their wildest expectations, the strikes which culminated in the Gdansk accord of August 1980. Through 1980 and 1981, Solidarnosc and the KOR intellectuals who most influenced it, confronted by an explosion of such unexpected depth which forced a recognition of independent unions on the party, groped toward a notion of their possible role. It is a relatively well-known chronology which will not be repeated here in detail. Having cracked the Stalinist state’s monopoly of social life by establishing parallel unions alongside the moribund official ones, the KOR intellectuals and working-class leaders such as Walesa had to define a role for themselves in a hurry.

Yet is precisely here that the alternative Marxist approach to Polish and Eastern European reality became the obstreperous uninvited (or better, disinvented) guest at the post-Marxists' otherwise quite open-ended and eclectic theoretical smorgasbord. In the social realities of Poland and elsewhere, it was terror, the secret police and the militia which ruthlessly expelled this rude intruder; in the more polite Western academic world in which the partisans of civil society reside and write, mere silence or (when that is impossible) the insinuations of the skillful pamphleteer usually do the trick. (In Poland, since 1980, the vacuum created by this absence has been filled by Catholicism, hallucinatory versions of Western neo-liberalism, and by growing nostalgia for Josef Pilsudski's interwar dictatorship.)

One pair of uninvited guests at the post-Marxists' threadbare banquet are two Eastern European revolutionaries, Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky, in contrast to the respectful attention they usually accord the ideas of such well-known theorists of the modern workers' movement as Jürgen Habermas Jean Cohen, Hannah Arendt or Philippe Schmitter.

Rosa Luxemburg, in writings ranging from her 1898 doctoral dissertation *The Industrial Development of Poland*, via her battles against none other than the nationalist-

populist Pilsudski himself in the Polish socialist movement, ca. 1908, to her ongoing polemics with what she saw as Lenin's party-substitutionism right up to her death in 1919, had a lot to say about Poland (and Russia) that is of obvious relevance today. Luxemburg argued that the economic inter-relationship of Poland and Russia was already so great that a Polish revolution would necessarily also have to be a Russian revolution, and that in such a context, there was no possible progressive role for Polish nationalism (Poland prior to 1918 was of course partitioned between Germany, Russia and Austria-Hungary). In her formulation, nationalism was "utopian under capitalism, reactionary under socialism". The conventional wisdom on Luxemburg within the socialist movement (needless to say, as yet another "proto-totalitarian" she requires no mention at all in contemporary post-Marxist circles) was that she was "wrong on the national question", and she certainly was wrong (like most other twentieth century Marxists) in underestimating the ferocious tenacity of nationalism in the working class, and perhaps in the Polish working class above all. (What she would have said before the spectacle of masses of striking workers genuflecting before an archbishop, we can only hazard to guess.) But Luxemburg, a revolutionary internationalist equally at home in the workers' movements of Russia, Poland and Germany, a

theorist of the mass strike and of the primacy of the direct lessons of mass working-class struggle over the directives of “the shrewdest central committee” has posed since her death an unanswerable challenge to Stalinist totalitarianism, Social Democratic accommodation and, of late, to the post-modern post-Marxists (who may rightly intuit that the very juxtaposition of her name on the same page with those of their theoretical sources could only underscore the abyss between a real workers’ movement in motion and the concerns of very-late-twentieth-century academia).

It is of course true that the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg were precisely nowhere in the discussion of the postwar opposition in Poland, through a complex process of the distortion of historical memory that cannot concern us here. In a country where the questions of Stalinism and national oppression are so intertwined, and run so deep, where Pilsudski’s PPS so overwhelming won out, where her own SDKPiL was so quickly Stalinized after her death and after the founding of the Comintern, Luxemburg’s acid remarks on the future trajectory of Pilsudski (who in the pre-1914 period had the sympathies of the grey eminences of the Second International and of German Social Democracy) in the direction of “National Bolshevism” (en route to a military dictatorship), as well as everything else

she stood for, (starting with her critique of Lenin), could be easily forgotten. (All the more so after she was finally awkwardly embalmed in the ruling Stalinist pantheon, with the official publication of her complete works in East Germany in the course of the 1970s.) But Rosa Luxemburg was also associated with an even more formidable historical reality, the emergence of the soviet in the Russian and Polish 1905, and later, in the German revolution of 1918-1919, with the Räterepublik or republic of workers', soldiers' and sailors' councils

The post-Marxists have yet to enlighten us on the totalitarian character of these classic expressions of real working-class power.

Yet here, in 1905 and in the European revolutionary wave of 1917-1921, as in later revolutions in Spain and elsewhere, was a "public sphere" beyond anything the partisans of the "new social movements" have ever come up with, in theory and still less in practice. Here, the formal side of bourgeois legality and "citizenship", its complete separation from the concrete realities of economic life, was absorbed into living, palpable, "concrete universality". In these council and soviet forms, which were precisely the concrete discovery of masses in motion and not the prior "dream of some world reformer" (*Communist Manifesto*) was sketched out precisely the *Aufhebung*, abolition on a

higher level, of the positive advances of bourgeois society. Yet this tradition, and how it fell into such total oblivion for a Polish workers' movement that was groping, practically, toward the recreation of some of its finest moments (or, even more importantly, why it failed to attain them) is of no interest to the post-Marxists and post-modernists.

Leon Trotsky was no favorite of Luxemburg, but he too wrote some interesting books and pamphlets about the problems which the post-Marxists prefer to discuss with the other tools. Trotsky, almost uniquely, developed Marx's theory of permanent revolution from the experience of the 1905 revolution. As chair of the Petrograd soviet of 1905, he had some ideas on a proletarian "public sphere". Even before Lenin, he saw the possibility of a Russian working-class revolution (in tandem with a revolution in the West, above all in Germany) obviating the phase of a bourgeois revolution which the entirety of the Second International saw as the linear, inevitable next step for Tsarist Russia. After the failure of the German revolution to materialize, and the totally unforeseen isolation of the enfeebled Soviet state in a hostile capitalist world, Trotsky clung to the perspective of world revolution to save the Russian Revolution from inevitable degeneration. He understood that the Russian Revolution failed first of all in Germany. His 1936 theory of the "degenerated workers' state" was

and is highly debatable, but it is at least a serious Marxist attempt to grasp the dynamic of a “Soviet-type” society, part of a debate of a seriousness far greater than the economically-illiterate academic faddism of the post-Marxists. Trotsky, like Luxemburg, in a world far less dramatically inter-connected than today’s, understood what the Eastern European ex-radicals recently converted to the market and to the buildup of NATO (at least until German reunification made them hesitate) have such a hard time with: the simple, relentless, and “reductionist” truth that capitalism is – from its origins – an international system, centered in the tyranny of the world market, and that it, like the Stalinist sub-system of the world market (a world market crashing down on Eastern Europe today), can only be abolished internationally. Won over to the “politics of anti-politics” in 1980-81, swept up in the euphoria of the mass strike and their momentary victory over the party, Polish workers and intellectuals tended to “forget” this reality. Or, worse still, in their demand (in late 1981, just before martial law) that Poland join the IMF, they embraced this reality from the wrong end.

We are hardly suggesting that the best of the old revolutionary tradition, the vision of direct workers’ democracy in the specific form of soviets and workers’ councils, or the even older vision, often simple-minded in

the extreme, of the complete abolition of the market, remain an infallible, ready made guide to today's reality and problems. But the contemporary climate obliges us to point out that these real historical experiences of 1917-1921, and not the Gulag of slave labor and "state socialism" in essentially agrarian Societies undergoing forced-march industrialization, remain the true historical benchmark against which the possible anachronism of the old visions must be demonstrated. It is yet another symptom of the bad faith of the post-Marxists and post-modernists that these well-known historical realities are ignored or dismissed in passing as the ephemeral "utopian" side of a movement whose true telos was the concentration camp, as if Rosa Luxemburg were merely a well-meaning cat's paw for Joseph Stalin.

The post-Marxists steer clear of any discussion of the legacy of Luxemburg, Trotsky (and the latter is, of course, hardly unproblematic) and other early twentieth century revolutionaries, just as they steer clear of the more than 70-year old Marxist debate on the "Russian question" to which we have alluded several times. They do so because they know that to acknowledge the existence of such a discussion, let alone to seriously engage it, would take them onto a terrain where their theoretical framework would quickly self-destruct. Nowhere is this evasion more

obvious, and more crippling, than in their enthusiasm for “market socialism”.

The post-Marxists treat gingerly the question of “market socialism”, and for good reason. For there was in 1980-81 no greater illusion, revealing the dead end of the “politics of anti-politics” and pointing straight to Solidarity’s embrace of Jeffrey Sachs’ draconian austerity program, which, in 1980 or in 1990, the creation of a “civil society” implied for Poland.

There is a discussion with a long history, both theoretical and practical, on the use of the market in socialist planning, a discussion carried on throughout the twentieth century by Social Democrats, Stalinists, partisans of the “third way” such as the economic architect of the 1968 Prague Spring, Ota Sik, W. Brus, Oskar Lange or, most recently, Alec Nove. Because they like to settle everything at the level of philosophy and theory, the partisans of post-Marxism and of civil society tend to ignore, or bowdlerize, these debates in postwar Poland and throughout the Eastern bloc, on different types of market reforms, the introduction of Western econometrics and ultimately even of neo-classical and specifically Friedmanite economics. Even farther from their purview are the debates among anti-Stalinist Marxists such as Trotsky, Dunayevskaya, James, Cliff or Ticktin about the operation

of the famous (and highly pertinent) Marxist “law of value” in the Soviet bloc. (Stalin himself, in the appended “Concerning Certain Errors of Comrade Yerushenko” of his *Economic Problems of the U.S.S.R.*, weighed in on this subject.) Yet whenever Polish workers and oppositionists in 1980-81, groped for the economic basis of the post-Marxists’ “vibrant public sphere”, it was usually some variant of “market socialism” they embraced.

The question of “market socialism” is of fundamental importance for many reasons. It takes us right back to the beginning of this critique of “postmodern politics” and its cavalier formulations on the relationship of civil society, the market, and formal legality. Because, with increasing stridency over the past 15 years, the partisans of “civil society” and the “public sphere” have (quite consistently) increasingly come to identify the market (they trouble themselves less and less with “market socialism”) as the guarantor of civil society. As David Ost, to take one example, admits in his account of the discovery of the market without phrases by the Polish opposition in the mid-1980s, during martial law, “it was as if the opposition remembered that *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* means not just ‘civil society’ but also bourgeois society” (p. 168).

As with the question of soviets and workers’ councils, we do not wish to imply that the question of the

relationship between plan and market is a trivial one for the future of socialism, or a question to which easy answers are to be lifted out of old classics. We merely wish to assert, from observation of the recent ravages of the market in places like Chile, Peru, Bolivia and, more recently, Poland, (not to mention its recent ravages in places like northern England or the American Midwest) that the answers to these problems are not to be found (contrary to what a majority of Polish society today seems to think) in the writings and prescriptions of Jeffrey Sachs and Milton Friedman, or among those ex-Stalinist "leftists" whose bad consciences about their statist past lead them to advocate a "left" version of the same thing. The dictates of the market today, on a world scale, from Detroit to Sao Paolo and from London and Paris to Peking, via Lagos and Bangladesh, mean, for literally billions of people, the scrap heap: grinding poverty, *Lumpenized* marginality, starvation, destitute old age and death. This is the reality which is daily intensified through the increasingly brazen "lifeboat economics" of the Chicago School or their new East European counterparts. But for the truly trivial approach to these problems, once again, no one excels those theoreticians whose rarefied engagement with Big Theory leaves them with no time, and less desire, to trouble themselves with such messy realities. These latter-

day exponents of the “purely positive development” of formal legality and the colonization of all reality by the laws of commodity production have nothing better to do than attack, with all the fanaticism of the newly converted, contemporary efforts at the renewal of Marxism as the face of barbarism itself. The current barbarism committed in the name of the market and formal legality interests them not in the least.

The idea that, in 1980-81, or at any later time, there could have been an economically viable course for Poland (or, by implication, for any other debt-strapped semi-developed country of Eastern Europe or Latin America emerging from dictatorship), without a working-class seizure of power and its internationalization is utopian, most recently refuted in the wrenching scenes of social dislocation emanating daily from a Warsaw where material conditions for many people are today back to 1945 levels. Just in the same way that “we do not form our opinions of individuals solely from what they think of themselves, but rather on how they express their life activity”, we also do not judge societies and social movements solely by their self-conceptions. However tragic it may be that no one in Poland in 1980, or perhaps in 1989, believed it, the project of a working-class revolution against capitalism remains to be reinvented, as the sole long-term

perspective offering any way out of the current devolution of Poland, and most other Eastern bloc countries as well. This does not mean that such a revolution is on the immediate agenda, nor that there are not many strategic and tactical questions to be settled between here and there. But nothing else holds out any positive prospect to the majority of the Polish population now being crushed under austerity. Once again, the legacy of Stalinism in Poland and Eastern Europe weighs heavily against any solution smacking of "collectivism". But the contraction of the world market and the unfolding of the ongoing world economic crisis since at least 1973 simply leave no room for any "neo-corporatist" compromise (as figures such as David Ost advocate), and the only possible "vibrant public sphere", separated from serious international considerations of economics and politics, is the one that millions of Poles (and Argentines) are now mulling over in their charity soup kitchens. Apparently, the intensity of the crisis is such that it does not even leave any room for the supposed "second way" of "state socialism" either. In the meantime, Eastern European workers are discovering what theological nuances today differentiate "reform" from "reaction".

In the 1981-89 evolution of martial law and its aftermath, increasingly the party itself was embracing

virtually everything that Solidarity had demanded in 1980-81. Once the totalitarian mold was broken (which the party never imagined it could restore integrally), the logic it had always feared forced it from retreat to retreat, until the discourse of the “public sphere”, “civil society” and the superiority of the market over planning could virtually be eulogized in the party press itself. When the strikes of 1988 erupted, from a new generation of young workers not even in the work force in 1980-81, the revival of Solidarity was accelerated by the party’s open recognition of the need for independent unions to rein in the working class. If the Stalinists had only understood in 1981 that they needed Solidarity to control the working class, (as Walesa and others were clearly willing to do), how different things could have been!

The historical experience of Stalinism has delayed by decades, perhaps generations, the maturation of the historical project, first elaborated by Marx, of a positive supersession of the formal juridical universality of “civil”, or bourgeois society, and the commodity status of labor power in that society upon which it rests. Nothing illustrates the weight of the albatross of Stalinism better than Polish society in the past decade, in which one of the most creative, combative and resourceful worker insurgencies in modern history ran, seemingly willfully, into

the embrace of the Pope, Western bankers and the International Monetary Fund, and nothing illustrates the depth of the havoc wrought by Stalinism better than its bastard progeny among those who are attempting to dig their way out of its ruins. "The sleep of reason will engender monsters", as Goya prophesied. Tragically, in Eastern Europe, and cynically, in the West, much of the intelligentsia, weary of tired retreads of discredited (and caricatured) variants of Marxism, has turned for new sustenance to the intellectual junk bond salesmen of our era. In Warsaw, today, the Chapter 11 proceedings are already underway.

The Universality of Marx ¹

A strange anomaly dominates the current social, political and cultural climate. World capitalism has for over fifteen years been sinking into its worst systemic crisis since the 1930s, and one which in its biospheric dimensions is much worse than the 1930s. At the same time, the social stratum which calls itself the left in Europe and the U.S. is in full retreat. In many advanced capitalist countries, and particularly in the U.S., that stratum increasingly suspects the world outlook of Karl Marx, which postulates that capitalism brings such crises as storm clouds bring the rain, of being a “white male” mode of thought. Stranger still is the fact that the relative eclipse of Marx has been carried out largely in the name of a “race/gender/class” ideology that can sound, to the uninitiated, both radical and vaguely Marxian. What this “discourse” (to use its own word) has done, however, is to strip the idea of class of exactly that element which, for Marx, made it radical: its status as a universal oppression whose emancipation required (and was also the key to) the abolition of all oppression.

This question of the status of universality, whether attacked by its opponents as “white male”, or “Eurocentric”, or a “master discourse”, is today at the center of the

current ideological debate, as one major manifestation of the broader world crisis of the waning twentieth century.

The writings of Marx and Engels include assertions that the quality of relations between men and women is the surest expression of the humanity of a given society, that the communal forms of association of peoples such as the North American Iroquois were anticipations of communism, and that the suppression of matriarchal by patriarchal forms of kinship in ancient Greece was simultaneous with the generalization of commodity production, that is, with proto-capitalism. Marx also wrote, against the Enlightenment's simple-minded linear view of progress that, short of the establishment of communism, all historical progress was accompanied by simultaneous retrogressions. But most of this is fairly well known; this is not what bother contemporaries. What bothers them is that the concept of universality of Marx and Engels was ultimately grounded neither in cultural constructs or even in relations of "power", which is the currency in which today's fashion trades.

The universalism of Marx rests on a notion of humanity as a species distinct from other species by its capacity to periodically revolutionize its means of extracting wealth from nature, and therefore as free from the relatively fixed laws of population which nature imposes on other species.

"Animals reproduce only their own nature", Marx wrote in the 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, "but humanity reproduces all of nature". Nearly 150 years later, the understanding of ecology contained in that line remains in advance of most of the contemporary movements known by that name. Human beings, in contrast to other species, are not fixed in their relations with the environment by biology, but rather possess an infinite capacity to create new environments and new selves in the process. Human history, in this view, is the history of these repeated revolutions in nature and thus in "human nature".

What bothers contemporary leftist opinion about Marx is that the latter presents a formidable (and, in my opinion, unanswerable) challenge to the currently dominant culturalism, which is so pervasive that it does not even know its own name.

Today, the idea that there is any meaningful universality based on human beings as a species is under a cloud, even if the opponents of such a view rarely state their case in so many words (or are even aware that this is the issue). For them, such an idea, like the idea that Western Europe from the Renaissance onward was a revolutionary social formation unique in history, that there is any meaning to the idea of progress, or that there exist criteria from which one can judge the humanity or

inhumanity of different “cultures”, are “white male” “Eurocentric” constructs designed to deny to women, peoples of color, gays or ecologists the “difference” of their “identity”.

Edward Said, for example, has written a popular book called *Orientalism* which presents the relations between the West and the Orient (and implicitly between any two cultures) as the encounter of hermetically-sealed “texts” which inevitably distort and degrade. In this encounter, according to Said, the West from early modern times counterposed a “discourse” of a “dynamic West” to a “decadent, stagnant” Orient. Since Said does not even entertain the possibility of world-historical progress, the idea that Renaissance Europe represented an historical breakthrough for humanity, which was, by the fifteenth century, superior to the social formations of the Islamic world is not even worth discussing. Such a view not only trivializes the breakthrough of Renaissance Europe; it also trivializes the achievements of the Islamic world, which from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries towered over the barbaric West, as well as the achievements of T'ang and Sung China, which during the same centuries probably towered over both of them. One would also never know, reading Said, that in the thirteenth century the flower of Islamic civilization was irreversibly snuffed out by a “text”

of Mongol hordes (presumably also Oriental) who leveled Bagdad three times. Were Said somehow transported back to the wonder that was Islamic civilization under the Abbasid caliphate, the Arabs and Persians who helped lay the foundations for the European Renaissance would have found his culturalism strange indeed, given the importance of Plato and Aristotle in their philosophy and of the line of prophets from Moses to Jesus in their theology. Said's text-bound view of the hermetically-sealed relations between societies and in world history (which for him does not meaningfully exist) is the quintessential statement of a culturalism that, which a pretense of radicalism, has become rampant in the past two decades.

Martin Bernal has written a book called *Black Athena* which current fashion likes to lump with Said's, even though it rests on the opposite view of the relations between cultures, and does not deny the existence of progress in history. Bernal's book is subtitled "The Afro-Asiatic Roots of Classical Civilization", and is an attempt to show precisely how Egyptian (and therefore African) and Phoenician (and therefore Semitic) cultures influence the Greek achievement in antiquity. For Bernal, this is not an attempt to trivialize the Greek breakthrough, but rather, as he states from the outset, to restore it to the true dimension which modern racist and anti-Semitic classicism

had obfuscated, by setting it against its real backdrop of dialogue with other cultures. If Said had titled his book *The Hellenistic Roots of Islamic Civilization* or *The Islamic Roots of the European Renaissance*, he would be much closer to Bernal than he is, but then he would have written a different, and far better book, one not likely to become popular in the “era of Foucault”.

In such a climate, then, it is quite refreshing to read Samir Amin’s *Eurocentrism*, a book by an Egyptian Marxist intellectual whose critique of Western ethnocentrism, including actually Eurocentric variants of Marxism, is not made from a relativizing discourse of cultural “difference” incapable of making critical judgments. Amin’s critique of Eurocentric Marxism is not aimed at the latter’s (unfulfilled) aspirations to universality, but rather on the premise that such Marxism *is not universal enough*. Amin seeks a “way to strengthen the universalist dimension of historical materialism”. He has plenty of problems of his own, though they are of another order. But his book has merits which should be highlighted before people read no further than the title and assimilate it too quickly to the genre established by Said (whose world view Amin characterizes, drawing on the earlier critique by Sadek Jalal el-Azm, as “provincial”).

Amin, who understands the “species” dimension of Marx’s thought, believes many unfashionable things. He believes that there has been progress in world history, that such progress obviously antedated the emergence of the West, that the social formation that engendered Renaissance Europe was revolutionary, unique in world history, and superior to any that had preceded it, and that its achievements, including science and rationality, had laid the foundations for further historical progress, which must clearly go *beyond* the West.

In the first section of the book, presenting an overview of the mainly Mediterranean “tributary” (pre-capitalist) societies prior to the Renaissance, Amin lays out a theory of successive innovations, from ancient Egypt onward, which were breakthroughs for humanity as a whole, and which made possible further universal breakthroughs. “The universalist moral breakthrough of the Egyptians”, writes Amin, “is the keystone of subsequent human thought”. Later, in ancient Greece, there was “an explosion in the fields of scientific abstraction” in which “empiricist practice – as old as humankind itself – finally came to pose questions of the human mind that required a more systematic effort of abstraction”. The accomplishments of ancient Egypt, moreover, later evolved to an all-encompassing metaphysics that furnishes Hellenism, and

later Islam and Christianity, with their point of departure, as the thinkers of the period themselves recognized.

One might quarrel, even substantially, with the specific emphases of Amin's account of the creation, over several millennia, of what he characterizes as the general synthesis of "medieval metaphysics" in which the (Moslem) Averroes, the (Jew) Maimonides and the (Christian) Aquinas without qualms read, critique and borrowed from each other. But Amin is certainly right that the origins of Eurocentrism came from reading out of history the common Eastern Mediterranean origins of the medieval era in which Islam was long superior to barbaric Western Christendom, and out of which the capitalist West emerged. This artificial isolation of the Greek breakthrough from its broader context made it possible to forget both the earlier phase in ancient Egypt and particularly the later contribution of Hellenistic Alexandria upon which both Christianity and Islam drew so heavily, and later transmitted to Europe. In Amin's view, it was precisely the backwardness of Europe relative to the Islamic Mediterranean that made the next breakthrough possible there, where it did not have to confront the sophisticated medieval metaphysics of Islam. And presumably no one will call Amin an "Orientalist" when he notes "the reduction of human reason to its single deductive dimension" by Christian and Islamic metaphysics

and when he regrets that “contemporary Arab thought has still not escaped from it”.

Amin’s critique of Eurocentrism is not, as we said, the latter’s affirmation of modern capitalism’s uniqueness and, for a certain historical period, (now long over) its contribution to human progress. He aims his fire at capitalism’s rewriting of history to create an imaginary “West” which could alone have produced its breakthroughs. By rejecting the attempt to discover universal historical laws that would accurately situate the West’s achievement with respect to all the societies who helped build its foundations (in the way that Bernal does for ancient Greece) the West created a powerful ideology denying the global historical laws that produced it, thereby undermining the very universal character of its achievement, and “eternalizing” progress as unique to the West, past, present and future. In Amin’s own words, worth quoting at length:

The dominant ideology and culture of the capitalist system cannot be reduced solely to Eurocentrism...

But if Eurocentrism does not have, strictly speaking, the status of a theory, neither is it simply the sum of the prejudices, errors and blunders of Westerners with respect to other peoples. If that were the case, it would only be one of the banal forms of

ethnocentrism shared by all peoples at all times. The Eurocentric distortion that marks the dominant capitalist culture negates the universalist ambition on which that culture claims to be founded... Enlightenment culture confronted a real contradiction that it could not overcome by its own means. For it was self-evident that nascent capitalism which produced capitalism had unfolded in Europe. Moreover, this embryonic new world was in fact superior, both materially and in many other aspects, to earlier societies, both in its own territories (feudal Europe) and in other regions of the world (the neighboring Islamic Orient and the more distant Orients)... The culture of the Enlightenment was unable to reconcile the fact of this superiority with its universalist ambition. On the contrary, it gradually drifted toward racism as an explanation for the contrast between it and other cultures... The culture of the Enlightenment thus drifted, beginning in the nineteenth century, in nationalistic directions, impoverished in comparison with its earlier cosmopolitanism.

In light of the above, it goes without saying that Amin has no use for Islamic fundamentalism and other Third Worldist culturalisms, which he diagnoses as an anti-

universalist provincialism existing in counterpoint to the provincialism of Said and of the post-modern critics of “white male thinking” (Amin does not use the latter term; I do). This conflation of “white male” with the humanist universalism produced by world history actually reproduces dominant ideology by denying that the Renaissance was a breakthrough in a broader human history and by failing to recognize the contributions of “non-whites” to key aspects of “Western” culture, as Bernal showed in *Black Athena*. (Bernal leaves to black nationalists the problem of putting together his corroboration of the African dimension of ancient Egypt, which they have always maintained, with his claim that it had an important influence on Greek culture, which they have always denounced as “white”.) Neither Eurocentric provincialism nor anti-Western provincialism draws much solace from a truly universalist approach to history.

But despite these undeniable strengths of Amin’s *Eurocentrism*, Amin’s book is deeply flawed by its own baggage, of quite another type. What Amin gives brilliantly in his diagnosis, he takes away clumsily in his prescription for treatment. I apply to him the same critique he applies to the Euro-centrists: he is not universal enough. His own universalism is not that of the global class of working people exploited by capitalism, but that of an ideologue of

Third World autarchy. He sets out "to strengthen the universal dimension of historical materialism" but winds up only presenting in slightly modified language the kind of Marxism whose debacle in the 1970s helped to spawn post-modernism in the first place. Amin's universalism is not that of the international working class and its allies, but that of the *state*. The post-modernists' point of departure is their assertion that all universalism is necessarily a concealed apology for power, as in the power of the state. Amin, unfortunately, will not disabuse them.

Who is Samir Amin? He is perhaps best remembered as the author of the two-volume *Accumulation on a World Scale*, which, like *Eurocentrism* and most of his other books, have been translated and published, not accidentally, by Monthly Review Press. He might be less charitably remembered as one of the more outspoken apologists of the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia in the years 1975-1978, persisting even when it became known that the Khmer Rouge's near-genocidal policy had killed 1 million of Cambodia's 8 million people. Cambodia is in fact an example of Amin's strategy of "delinking", which repeated unhappy experience has taught him to call a "national popular democratic" strategy, since neither the Soviet Union nor China nor Pol Pot's Cambodia can be

plausibly characterized as “socialist”. (Cambodia, significantly, is not mentioned once in *Eurocentrism*.)

Amin belongs to a constellation of thinkers, including Bettelheim, Pailloix, Immanuel, and Andre Gunder Frank, who worked off the ideas of Baran and Sweezy and who became known, in the post-World War II period as the partisans (not of course uniformly agreeing among themselves) of the “monopoly capital” school of Marxism. The “Monthly Review” school, which had its forum in the publishing house and journal of the same name, evolved from the 1940s to the 1980s, liked “anti-imperialist” movements and regimes, and believed that “delinking” (to use Amin’s term) was the only road by which such movements and regimes (which they then tended to call socialist) could develop backward countries. This inclination led them from Stalin’s Russia to Mao’s China, by way of Sukharno’s Indonesia, Nkrumah’s Ghana, Ben Bella’s Algeria to Castro’s Cuba. Most of the time, they came away disappointed. They went with China in the Sino-Soviet split. The post-Mao evolution cooled them on China, but this disappointment was quickly followed by Pol Pot’s Cambodia, the expulsion of the (ethnic Chinese) boat people from Vietnam, the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, the Sino-Vietnamese border war of 1979, and China’s virtual alliance with the U.S., It was hard, in those

years, to be “anti-imperialist” when the “anti-imperialist” forces were all at war with each other, and when China was being armed by the biggest imperialist of them all. With the fundamentalist turn of the Iranian revolution for good measure, by 1980 a lot of people, including people in the Third World, were coming to the conclusion that “anti-imperialism” by itself was not enough, and some were even coming to think that there was such a thing as a *reactionary* anti-imperialism. Finally, around the same time, countries like South Korea and Taiwan emerged as industrial powers, not by autarchy, but by using the world market and the international division of labor, which Amin and his friends had always said was impossible.

Delinking is a fancy name for an idea first developed by Joseph Stalin called “socialism in one country”. (Amin thinks that Stalin was too hard on the peasants, but he has never said what he thought about the millions who died during Mao’s “Great Leap Forward”.) Amin and the school he comes out of base their world strategy on a theory of “uneven development” which they see as a permanent by-product of capitalism. This in itself is fine, and was worked out in more sophisticated fashion by Trotsky 80 years ago. For Amin and his co-thinkers, delinking is a strategy to break the “weak links” in the chain of international capitalism. Karl Marx also had a theory of “weak links”,

which he called “permanent revolution”, a term significantly never used by Amin, probably, again, because of its Trotskyist connotations. Marx applied it to Germany in 1848, where it explained the ability of the German workers, because of the weakness of the German bourgeoisie, to go beyond bourgeois liberalism to socialism in the struggle for democracy, hence giving the revolution a “permanent” character. Leon Trotsky applied the same theory in Russia after 1905, and was alone, prior to 1917, in foreseeing the possibility of a working-class led revolution in backward Russia.

But Marx and Trotsky, unlike Amin, did not propose that the workers in “weak link” countries “delink” from the rest of the world. They saw the working class as an international class, and saw German and then Russian workers as potential leaders in a world revolutionary process. Following this logic, the Bolshevik revolutionary strategy of 1917 was entirely predicated on a successful revolution in Germany for its survival. When the German revolution failed, the Russian revolution was isolated and besieged. Only when Stalin proposed the previous unheard-of grotesquery of “socialism in one country”, and the draconian autarchy it implied, did “delinking” first enter the arsenal of “socialism”.

Although Amin and his Monthly Review colleagues rarely spell out their origins so clearly, their theory rests on the defeat, not on the victory, of the world revolutionary wave of 1917-1921. Amin's theory takes from Marx's notion of permanent revolution only the "weak link" aspect. Amin thinks that "delinking" saves the workers and peasants of the delinked country from the bloody process of primitive accumulation imposed by Western capitalism, but it only legitimates that same process, now carried out by the local "anti-imperialist" elite. The workers and peasants of Cambodia, for example, learned this lesson the hard way. Amin's theory also "delinks" the workers and peasants of the Third World from the one force whose intervention (as the early Bolsheviks understood) could spare them that ordeal: the international working-class movement. Amin thinks socialist revolution by working people in the West is essentially a pipedream; he at least has the honesty to say so. Amin's theory, finally, links the workers and peasants in the "de-linked" countries, under the auspices of "national popular democracy" (he does not dare call it socialism, as he and others used to) to Mao, Pol Pot and their possible future progeny, who substitute themselves for Western capitalists and carry out that accumulation under the rhetoric of "building socialism". That is why it is appropriate to call Amin's theory that of a

Third World bureaucratic elite, and his universalism a universalism of the state.

All of this is stated only allusively in *Eurocentrism*; Amin's book *Delinking* (which appeared in French in 1985, and which will soon appear in English) is more explicit. In the latter book at least, Amin gingerly raises the question of Cambodia, where he speaks (as such people always do) of "errors", but nowhere does he say why "delinking" will work any better the next time.

One can therefore only regret that Samir Amin's spirited defense of some of the most important aspects of Marx, so maligned in the current climate of post-modern culturalism, as well as his much-needed attempt to go beyond Eurocentric Marxism, conjugates so poorly with his "national popular democratic" strategy of delinking. "National" and "popular" were also words central to the language of fascism, and none of the regimes Amin has praised over the years for "delinking" have a trace of democracy about them. The next breakthrough in world history has to go *beyond* the exploitation which characterizes world capitalism, in the "periphery" and in the "core". Recent history has seen enough cases where "delinking" has led to autarchic meltdowns that have tragically led millions of people in places like Poland, the Soviet Union, China and Cambodia to think that Western

capitalism has something positive to offer them. It doesn't. But neither does Samir Amin.

Notes

1. The following article originally appeared in *New Politics*, 1989.

The Fusion of Anabaptist, Indian and African as the American Radical Tradition

1, 2

Tho' obscured, this is the form of the Angelic land.

William Blake, *America*

Ten years ago, even five years ago, I was highly skeptical about the native American radical tradition, with its clearly religious origins and overtones, to the extent that I even acknowledged its existence. Then, Europe and its apparently solid working-class traditions seemed the rule, and America, where those “immigrant” currents had ultimately had so little lasting impact, the oddity. What compelled me, in the past decade, to invert that viewpoint and to judge the European left from the perspective of the American radical tradition, was hardly a mass upsurge in America. It was the collapse of that European tradition in Europe, as part of a profound crisis of the international left generally, which showed the European movement’s true social content – its actual dynamic and accomplishments, not its self-understanding and rhetoric – to have been about issues that were settled in America long ago. Once it

seemed clear that the role of the European revolutionary tradition from France to Germany to Russia had in fact been to make Europe more, not less, capitalist, it seemed obvious why this tradition had made little impact in such a totally capitalist society as America. It also seemed clear that the native American radical tradition, originating ultimately in the radical religious currents who "lost" at the very dawn of capitalism, and their meeting with the non-Western peoples – Indian and African – who shaped early American culture as much as white people, might have something very unique to contribute to the current and still completely unresolved crisis of the international revolutionary left, something actually more radical than anything modern Europe has known.

That international left has been, since the mid-1970s, in what is arguably the deepest crisis in its history since the appearance of the classical workers' movement, as far-reaching in its long-term impact as the collapse of that movement into nationalism and social patriotism in 1914. All the familiar landmarks are gone. The surge of worker insurgency throughout the West in the 1968-1973 period, which everywhere revitalized the belief that the working class could and would supercede this society, has been replaced by the grim realities of the U.S. "rust bowl", the gutted British midlands, and similar shutdowns of whole

industrial regions on the European continent. The Western working class which frightened capitalism with the "revolt against work" in the last years of the postwar boom has had to fight – and mainly lose – even more militant struggles in the 1980s just to retain what in 1973 seemed to be the givens set down by the struggles of the 1930s and 1940s. Technology-intensive innovation on one side and the rise of important industrial mass production in the Third World on the other side have as their most important aim a full-scale assault on the wage bill of American and European workers. Little or nothing in the experience of the classical Western workers' movement to date can serve as a guide to action in finding an adequate response to this situation, which is going to get worse, perhaps far worse, before it gets any better.

Precisely the fact that all the familiar landmarks are gone makes it both possible and, more important, absolutely necessary to look at history with fresh eyes. For the past century, Marxism as an ideology has been associated with two basic models, the German and the Russian. Up to the time of World War I, the German socialist movement and German-American immigrant workers set the tone for American socialism; after 1917, the Russian Revolution and Eastern European, predominantly Jewish immigrant workers assumed that

role. We know these movements in their modern forms as Social Democracy and Stalinism, and for most politically-conscious people, the crisis of the past decade was not necessary to reveal their bankruptcy. What the last decade has revealed, however, was that even most of the post-World War II anti-Social Democratic and anti-Stalinist left shared certain unspoken assumptions with those currents which disarmed them in the face of recent developments. Because of those shared illusions, the crisis of Social Democracy and Stalinism (and Third World Bonapartism) has turned out to be their crisis as well. Those illusions revolve ultimately around a failure to see that even the most revolutionary wings of Second and Third International Marxism were more caught up – in practice, if not in theory – in the completion of the bourgeois revolution and the elimination of pre-capitalism, than in the elimination of capitalism as such.

From 1914 until the mid-1970s, the world looked pretty much like the world anticipated in Lenin's 1916 pamphlet *Imperialism*. Even resolutely anti-Stalinist revolutionaries in the advanced capitalist countries, influenced by Trotsky's theories of permanent revolution and combined and uneven development, assumed that serious capitalist development outside of Western Europe, the U.S. and Japan was an impossibility. Even as they opposed the

Stalinist and Third World Bonapartist regimes that attempted to substitute for Western capitalist investment, they shared the assumptions of the bureaucratic movements and ideologies that the capitalist world market would never industrialize these areas. More often than not, they also accepted Lenin's explanation of the reformism of Western workers by the "super-profits" generated by imperialist investment.

Today, the appearance of the Asian "Four Tigers" (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore) as well as industrial zones in countries such as Mexico and Brazil, has ended the myth of Third Worldism. Simultaneously, serious deindustrialization of such areas as the U.S. "rust bowl" or of the British midlands, combined with large-scale immigration into the U.S. and Europe from the Caribbean, Latin America and former colonies in Africa and Asia has seriously blurred the distinction between "advanced capitalist" and "Third World" zones. The result of these developments, combined with China's decade of "market socialism", the debacle of Stalinist rule in Indochina, and the patent failures of various postwar Third World state bureaucracies (Indonesia, Egypt, Ghana, Algeria) or more recent Soviet-influenced regimes in Africa (Ethiopia, Angola, Mozambique) to solve the most elementary problems of development has deflated the

heady atmosphere of Third World statism that lasted into the mid-1970's. Whether in Reagan's America or Thatcher's England or Mitterand's France or Teng's China or Gorbachev's Russia, the virtues of the market against the dead weight of state bureaucracy were discovered with a vengeance in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the international left associated (rightly or wrongly, and too often rightly) with the state went into severe crisis and decline.

What, the reader might ask, does this have to do with the anti-Social Democratic, anti-Stalinist, anti-Third World Bonapartist tendencies derived from the international left opposition of the 1920s, who never had these illusions? And what does all this have to do with the radical Reformation?

I submit that the old ideas have worn thin and that it is time for revolutionaries to cast a disabused look on the received ideas of socialist history. I submit that even the most resolute attempt to make sense of the contemporary conjuncture armed with only the best of the continental European socialist tradition – the “healthy moments” of German Social Democracy and Russian Bolshevism – is not enough. It is not enough because those movements as well

are hopelessly entwined with the discredited statist tradition.

Where, the same reader might ask, is the state in a tradition which rests on the call for "All Power to the Soviets" in Russia in 1917 and in the Spartakusbund's battle for a "council republic" in Germany in 1918-1919? In those heady days of direct working class power in the factories of Petrograd, Moscow, Berlin and some other Central and Eastern European industrial centers, perhaps nowhere. It lay, rather, in the relationship of those islands of industrial capitalism to the vast mass of petty producers – above all peasants – that surrounded them. And it existed in the intelligentsia, which had broken away from its assigned role as civil servants in the Central and Eastern European monarchies to become revolutionary, and which proposed to mediate an alliance – above all in Russia – between the working class and those peasants. Capitalism, hard experience has taught the revolutionary left in the past 70 years, is not just a relationship between factory workers on one side and the capitalists and their state on the other. It is also a relationship of that "immediate production process", as Marx called it, to the other social strata with which it interacts, who have more than once been decisive in determining the political fate of the workers taken by themselves. The irony of the continental

European left for over a century is that a certain “Marxism” has been most successful among workers precisely in the countries where the peasantry has been most oppressed and most militant in its fight against precapitalist agriculture. To unravel this truth is to uncover the hidden threads linking the movements that produced a Lenin, a Luxemburg or a Trotsky to the state.

When examined closely, the continental European revolutionary tradition set in motion by the French Revolution, extending through 1848, German Social Democracy and the German and Russian Revolutions of 1917-1918, was always a fusion of workers and professional revolutionaries drawn from the intelligentsia. They always existed, furthermore, in close relationship to the peasantry; indeed, for all the focus on the question of the relationship of “party and class” in the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, the triumph and successful defense of that revolution was unthinkable without the simultaneous peasant revolution – a bourgeois revolution for land to the peasants – in the countryside.

The continental European socialist tradition was born in the radical moments of the French Revolution; it was given its decisive theoretical formulation by Marx and Engels in the 1840’s and produced the seemingly unstoppable

German Social Democracy from the 1860s to 1914; it first seized state power with the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. But we should note that it was influential primarily in those countries such as France, Germany and Russia where it confronted the statist legacy of Enlightened absolutism and the unsolved agrarian question – the creation of a capitalist agriculture – which those states were created to resolve. The revolutionary intelligentsias who played decisive roles in the European continental tradition were themselves products of an educational system established to train state civil servants for the Enlightened despotic states. Their fusion with radical workers' and peasants' movements well into the twentieth century has been the history of the modern socialism which entered crisis in the 1970s.

America, by contrast, like the European countries which had achieved a civil society by the end of the Reformation era in the mid-seventeenth century, never developed an intelligentsia capable of fusing with its very militant working class. (Indeed, more direct violence was probably used against American workers from 1877 to the 1920s than against any other Western working class.) Where did the intelligentsia in continental Europe come from? It came, as we indicated earlier, from an educational system designed to carry out, from above, social and economic

tasks which had already been realized in the areas influenced by Calvinism and radical Reformation currents.

My hypothesis is that the agrarian question is the key to the understanding of the rise and fall of the continental European socialist tradition, and that the failure of that tradition to make a serious impact in America is a reflection of the fact that American agriculture – with the important exception of the South prior to 1865 – was always capitalist. In contrast to continental Europe, it was never necessary to build a mercantile development state in the U.S., with the attendant civil service, educational system, and therefore intelligentsia disposed to ally itself with workers' and peasants' movements. Despite their rhetoric, the socialist movements of Europe were actually far more involved in making their societies purely capitalist than in ending capitalism, (which in some cases had barely implanted itself) and in winning basic democratic gains won long ago in this country. Their crisis began precisely when, in the course of the post-war boom of 1945-1973, the societies containing them finally emptied their countrysides and became fully capitalist in the way America had been for a long time. It was this development, in the context of the larger crisis of the international left associated with the state and the completion of the capitalist revolution, that reveals their real historical significance.

This is in no way a critique of Marx's critique of capitalism. It is a critique of the classical workers' movement which took its "poetry" from the tradition dominated by the German and Russian models, and the completion of the bourgeois revolution they entailed.

It is thus time to look carefully at other societies – including and above all the U.S. – in which the continental European socialist tradition did not have much impact for the simple reason that the conditions of its serious presence – the legacy of the absolutist state, the disgruntled intelligentsia produced by a statist civil service and its educational system, and an unresolved agrarian question – were quite lacking. When we look at societies like Great Britain, Holland, Scotland, Switzerland or the U.S. (not accidentally all countries where Calvinism was highly influential in the seventeenth century) we see that what set them on a different course from most of continental Europe was that they had achieved some kind of civil society in the era of the Reformation and the religious wars it engendered.

Viewed from the era of Ronald Reagan, and the decades in which the U.S. has become the center of world counter-revolution, it is sometimes difficult to recall that the United States was once the most democratic country in the world,

for all the incompleteness of that democracy. It had the first general suffrage for white males (1828), the first mass political parties, and even the first self-styled working-class political party (1836-1837) in the Jacksonian period. It is even more difficult to recall that this early democratic character of America went back to a legacy of the era of Reformation wars and some of their defeated factions.

In the essentially "Anglo-American" North Atlantic political economy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, religion had a very different fate from its continental counterpart. In these countries, a capitalist society was brought into being by radicals who could still speak the language of religion. On the continent, where Catholicism and Protestantism both became established state religions, the creation of a capitalist, civil society always required the most ruthless confrontation with religion. In England and in the U.S., on the contrary, religious radicals were at the forefront of social struggles, such as anti-slavery agitation and the first modern labor agitation of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The American colonies and the young United States were initially settled largely by groups with origins in the left wing of the English and German Reformation. These groups created the "native" American radical tradition, and it is this tradition which was eclipsed by the

world hegemony of the European continental radicalism and its explicit or implicit statist vocation of the past century. As the latter goes into eclipse, the former comes more sharply into view. For those – such as myself, not so long ago – who “went to school” with the best theorists of the Second and Third Internationals, Lenin, Luxemburg or Trotsky, the American native radical tradition was virtually invisible. I think it would have been less invisible to Marx and Engels, who knew the historical significance of a Jacob Boehme for their tradition. Indeed, Engels, who came out of a deeply Pietist background himself, hoped that the American Shakers would come around to a working-class perspective.

Revolutionaries in America have to come to terms with the fact that for the two centuries prior to 1840, the North American territory (with the exception of the Spanish-speaking Southwest) that became the U.S. was peopled more or less solely by left-Reformation (largely English and German) settlers, Indians and blacks (the latter being probably 20% of the population on the eve of the Civil War in 1860). The interaction of these three groups created certain constants of American culture which were not fundamentally altered either by industrialization or by further immigration, the two main forces which favored the importation of continental European radicalism. The real

American radical tradition was born in this meeting of the Anabaptists, Indians and Africans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

America today is far and away the most religious country of the so-called “advanced capitalist” world. In the 1976 world Gallup survey on the importance of religious beliefs, over 50% of the American population expressed a belief in God and a significant number described themselves as “born-again” believers. The Gallup survey attempted to establish a correlation between importance of religious beliefs and indices of social development. Most countries in the world aligned themselves neatly on a spectrum that went from Sweden and Japan (high level of development, very low incidence of religious belief) to India (low level of development, very high incidence of religious belief). Significantly, the U.S. was totally off the chart, followed closely by Canada, with a coexistence of high indices of development and great importance attached to religious belief.

But the question of explicit religious belief and practice is secondary to the pervasiveness of religious influence in American culture, more often in a secularized form. It is here, I think, that we get to the core of the issues at hand, and to the significance for the present of the pre-1840,

pre-industrial American culture created by “left Reformation” American (English and German) Protestant settlers, Indians and blacks, and thus of the radical wing of that culture.

The ongoing “American Gothic” legacy of the New England Puritans to the U.S. to this day cannot be underestimated. The lasting core of that legacy was the idea of America as a historically privileged “redeemer nation”, a “city on the hill”, whose history was the revelation of God in the world, a self-conception very similar to that of the Jews of ancient Israel with whom the Puritans deeply identified. This legacy was further tied up with a theological idea of “radical evil” materialized in the forces who opposed the self-righteous unfolding of providence. In the seventeenth century, in the 1636 Pequot War and the more total 1676 King Phillip’s War, this will to annihilation of radical evil was first exercised against the Indians of New England. The Puritans were the founders of the tradition that leads, in secular form, straight to *Rambo* (even if they were also much more interesting than *Rambo*). In 1692, in the Salem witch trials, the women charged with witchcraft were accused of having learned the “black arts” from a Caribbean slave and possibly from some local Indian shamans. Thus both the self-righteousness of American expansionism and the

association of non-white peoples (and of white women associated with them) with “radical evil” comes right out of seventeenth century Puritanism. Through the influence of New England schoolteachers who were the cutting edge of grammar school education, and through Christian fundamentalism, this original nexus of attitudes set the tone of American culture far beyond New England, into the nineteenth century, when the Puritans themselves had lost their early hegemony. But the secular remnants of their theological justifications for Indian extermination and expansionism remain potent three centuries later.

But the Puritans were not the only Protestants in early America. Indeed, they were opposed, in New England itself and more substantially in the mid-Atlantic states, by descendants of the other, more radical wing of the left Reformation, the Anabaptists (and related currents), some of whom established explicitly Christian communist communities upon arrival in North America. German Mennonites in the mid-Atlantic region attacked slavery publicly in 1688, decades before the better-known Pennsylvania Quakers began to do so. In the Massachusetts Bay Colony itself, the English libertine Thomas Morton was transported to England in chains in 1630 for having sold alcohol and arms to local Indians, but above all on suspicion of “wenching” with Indian women. In

1740, in the course of the first “Great Awakening” or revival movement in American Protestantism, which had both anti-Puritan and definite class overtones, blacks were accepted into mid-Atlantic congregations for the first time. Again and again, the revolt against Puritanism within white Protestant culture was linked to sympathy for the conditions of Indians and blacks. It was this multi-racial character which definitively made this native American radical tradition something more than a transplanted English or German dissident Protestantism.

Indeed, this multi-racial character was what was uniquely American about almost everything in early American culture that did not simply imitate Europe. A search for “culture” in seventeenth and eighteenth century America that looks only for counterparts of European high culture sees little that is original. This is in part because such a perspective – already marked by the legacy of the secular continental intelligentsia – is generally disinclined to take the religious culture seriously. Such a view does not see the Mennonite psalms and hymns that evolved when blacks joined the mid-Atlantic congregations and chorales during the Great Awakening of the 1740s, producing possibly the first of a long and very rich Afro-American musical tradition (a tradition which is undoubtedly America’s most unique contribution to world culture). It

does not see the actually African religious dimension that was brought into American Protestantism by the “converted” slaves (who actually converted Christianity as much to their own purposes and traditions as vice versa). It does not see the Afro-American dances such as the ring-shout absorbed into the tent revivalism of the Second Great Awakening after 1800. It does not see the rich traditions of the black spiritual – traditions that Europeans such as the composers Dvorak and Delius had to call to the attention of Eurocentric American musicians as the U.S.’s real musical culture – that are ultimately the source of the secular Afro-American musics of the last third of the nineteenth century. In a more contemporary context, such a perspective does not take sufficiently seriously the religious background from which the two most important black leaders of recent American history, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, emerged to lead social movements that shook this society to its foundations.

The role of the Indians in the shaping of American culture is even more obscure to the modern “Eurocentric” eye, and in some ways even more complex, than the role of black Americans. But it was no less important, and to a large extent shaped the terrain on which white-black relations evolved. (It was, after all, the impossibility of enslaving the Indians that led to the use of Africans.) Both

the Renaissance and Reformation involved ideologies of a “return” to some idealized past: the Renaissance looked to Greco-Roman classicism, and the Reformation looked to the early Christian communities before the appearance of the Catholic Church. This turn to “origin” occurred, perhaps not coincidentally, just as European exploration revealed the existence of lands (particularly North America and Brazil) and “peoples without the state” who seemed to embody, for some, Biblical imagery from “before the fall”. This is a complicated question (better unraveled in “Race and the Enlightenment,” elsewhere in this volume) but it was central to three centuries of utopias tied up with the New World.

Let us pick up the thread of the agrarian question. The U.S. Civil War of 1861-1865 was the denouement of a crisis that dominated American politics from its advent in the 1840s until its eclipse in the 1870s, that is in the very period that the modern European and American working-class movements came into existence. The slave emancipation it produced was in fact part of a larger international political conjuncture which saw the Russian serf emancipation, the Meiji Restoration in Japan, and the unification of Germany and Italy, each of them a reorganization of the internal market for a new phase of capital accumulation. In 1873, a world depression began

which deflated agrarian prices until the 1890s. As a result, the U.S., Russia, Canada, Argentina and Australia emerged as major grain exporters. The drastic cheapening of the cost of food made it possible for workers' real material consumption to rise even as their real wages, in the same deflation, fell.

The same process began to occur for manufactured goods consumed by workers a couple of decades later. Beginning in the 1880s, stimulated in part by the ability to feed more urban industrial workers with lower money wages, mass production moved to the fore, particularly in the United States and Germany. By the 1920s, capitalism was on the verge of making mass-produced consumer durables available to working-class consumption in the same fashion as had occurred earlier with food. As their cost of production fell, workers could buy them even as their incomes remained stable or even declined, relatively or absolutely. This reality, and not the "super-profits" from imperialist investment, was the material basis of the reformism of the classical Western workers' movement.

As a result, by the turn of the twentieth century, American capitalism was in the vanguard of the creation of a mass consumer urban culture with hedonist overtones that began to seriously undermine the legacy of Puritanism

in American culture, represented in 1900 by "Victorian" morality, anti-alcohol leagues, fundamentalist revivalism in the Bible Belt, and small-town boosterism. This urban mass consumption and the hedonist culture it rapidly began to produce, made possible first by the revolution in agricultural and then industrial productivity, remained a distant dream for the countries of Europe in which militant socialist movements came to the fore, movements which often had more than a whiff of Puritanical morality themselves. And at the center of the world-wide appeal of this culture was black-based American music and dancing, beginning with the cakewalk in the 1880s, followed by ragtime and finally, the "other revolution of 1917", the world breakthrough of jazz. The seventeenth century fusion of Radical Reformation anti-Puritanism of German and English Radical Reformation millenarians with Indians and later Africans produced in the long run the subterranean backbone of a kind of genuine freedom, however tied up with reification, atomism, and passivity, that continental Europe only achieved on a serious scale after World War II. This "Afro-Anabaptism" was and is the genuinely American revolutionary tradition on which all Jacobinism, Social Democracy and Bolshevism ultimately founders.

What I am suggesting is that the international left, just now emerging from over a century of “German” and then “Russian” hegemony, was in fact colonized by a world view rooted in the problematic of the continental European despotic states and their oppositions, a world view that uncritically accepted the whole legacy of *Aufklaerung* (I use the German word for “Enlightenment” because it was the Prussian civil service of the early nineteenth century that brought this social stratum into the revolutionary tradition, culminating in the philosophy of Hegel) developed by the state civil service and the intelligentsia, and which obscured the Radical Reformation roots of Marxism, particularly for countries, such as the U.S., where the left-wing Reformation was the direct source of the radical tradition. One could easily imagine a spokesman for this *Aufklaerung* view admitting that the Radical Reformation was indeed the source of the native American radical tradition, but then going on to say, quite naturally, that such a tradition – in contrast to the ostensibly “Marxist” outlook he was defending – was “petty bourgeois”.

Perhaps this is a useful term to get at the pre-industrial or anti-industrial character of the Mennonites, Schwenkfelders and Hutterites of the eastern Pennsylvania communist communities, of the radicals of the Great Awakening of 1740 who spawned the ferment leading to

the American Revolution, the Shakers, the “anti-Masonic” movement of the 1820s in upstate New York, the Abolitionists or some currents of post-Civil War agrarian radicalism. Taken by themselves, perhaps these followers of Jacob Boehme, Immanuel Swedenborg and William Blake – the real theoreticians of the “native” American tradition – might ultimately be dismissed with that most dismissive of Marxist epithets. But what is unique about America, the ultimate source of what I call “Afro-Anabaptism”, is precisely the “crossover” between these refugees from the defeat of the European Radical Reformation with the Indians and later the Africans they encountered here, as rapidly sketched above. And with that crossover – the hidden historical project of a multi-racial “New Jerusalem” which already by the end of the seventeenth century pointed to something beyond the West – I submit that the subterranean American utopian tradition left the terrain of “petty bourgeois” radicalism. If the continental European radical tradition rests on the fusion of the intelligentsia with the working class and peasantry, then the American radical tradition, whose sources are prior to *Aufklaerung*, rests on the fusion of Radical Reformation, Indian and African. If our hypothetical defender of the *Aufklaerung* current of contemporary Marxism wishes to call the native radical tradition “petty

bourgeois", at least he should realize that he is talking from the vantage point of the Enlightened state civil service, industrializing backward countries, and not emancipated humanity, superceding work and leisure in a new kind of species-activity.

Readers grappling with the practical problems of the current crisis, and the seeming dead end to which the tradition derived primarily from Lenin, Trotsky or Luxemburg leads in a world where robotics and deindustrialization are decimating the Western working class on which the old traditions rest, might wonder what use is to be found in the resurrection of old "native" currents of radicalism. In today's "supra-national" world economy, isn't this just a "backward looking" utopia even more dead than the legacy of the Second and Third Internationals? I would say: quite the contrary.

If Second and Third International Marxism, including its best representatives, is indeed the ideology of a "completion of the bourgeois revolution" in which the agrarian question and the role of the peasantry were the less-noticed but indispensable ingredients in ostensibly "working class" movements, if these movements were in fact more about abolishing pre-capitalism than capitalism (a project in which they have been quite successful from

Germany to China), if, finally, they incorporated the “discourse” of the Enlightened state civil service and turned Marxism from a theory of the “material human community” (*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*) into a strategy for industrializing backward countries, then it seems fair to say that they arose from the world of the hegemony of work which imposed itself, first in England and then elsewhere, from the seventeenth century onward. But Marxism, in its deepest sources and aspirations, is not just about the “humanization” of the world of work, nor even just about the working-class control of production (and reproduction) which have been at the center of the healthiest Marxist currents of the twentieth century. Marxism is about the supercession of the capitalist antagonism of work and leisure in a new kind of activity which takes up within itself activities currently dispersed in those separate spheres. The American tradition of Radical Reformation/ Indian/ African comes from a past prior to the establishment of the hegemony of work, and points to a future beyond the hegemony of work, characterized by a higher form of the “total activity” which, at its best, occasionally manifested itself in precapitalist societies (e.g. the great Renaissance festivals) and which is in reality closer to communism than Second and Third International recipes for industrializing backward countries.

Not too long ago critics of Marxism used to point to the living standards of Western workers as the obvious refutation of the old Marxian prediction of the "increased immiseration" of the proletariat. The emergence of the Midwest "rust bowl" and legions of street people sifting through garbage cans in every American city have buried that saw, and most people sense that this is only the beginning. But such irrefutable confirmations of Marx's theory of crisis cannot obscure the malaise felt by revolutionary socialists who sense that their best traditions are poor guides to the present and the future, and that neither the "German" nor the "Russian" revolutionary legacies, or the more accessible memories of American labor history, such as Flint '37, are of much use in the world of the new international division of labor and technology-intensive strategies to expel living labor from the production process. The factories occupied in Flint were among the newest and most productive in the world; today, they are not, nor are many other production sites in the U.S. Marx, in the *Grundrisse* (1857), was also visionary in foreseeing a phase of capitalism in which science would be directly appropriated to the production process and would become a major source of value in its own right. Such a phase of capitalism would not only co-exist with the large-scale expulsion of living labor from mass production

- it would be the “other side” of such an expulsion. We live, essentially, in that world. The only choice for the American working class and its allies is a resolutely internationalist perspective for a working-class led and based reconstruction of the world economy, or continuing to suffer the capitalist restructuring now underway, with all the deindustrialization and gutting of living standards that implies, of which the past 10-15 years are just a foretaste. But on the other side of this *Grundrisse* phase of capitalism, now being realized on a global scale, is the emancipation of society from the hegemony of work that has dominated it since capitalism first became the dominant mode of production. This emancipation, as we indicated earlier, will not be the cybernetic Lotusland imagined by some “visionaries” of the 1960s (who merely extrapolated a degraded vision of capitalist leisure, and its passivity, as the trend of the future), but a new kind of activity in which the purposive, creative side of contemporary work and the dispersed (e.g aesthetic) sides of contemporary “leisure” fuse into something else. In some Australian aboriginal societies, for example, the word for “work” and “play” is the same, and there is no word for “art”, because everything is infused with the aesthetic dimension which we have isolated in the ghetto of “art”. If the preceding analysis of the fusion of Radical Reformation,

Indian and African is right, then American radicals have a legacy of unusual richness for renewing their own movement for the looming period of confrontation ahead, a legacy valid not merely for the U.S. but also finally worthy of the “form of the Angelic land”, in Blake’s phrase, which the world has tried, and to some extent even today still tries to see in the unfinished historical project of this country.

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Notes

1. The following is a slightly-edited version of an article originally published in *Against the Current* in 1987.
2. November 2000: This essay attempts, in a nutshell, to apply Ernst Bloch's idea of "noncontemporary contradiction" to American history. It was written for a symposium on "Religion and Politics" in the U.S.-based journal *Against the Current*. The topic, obviously, was suggested by the aggressive rise of the Christian right in American politics over the previous decade. Some of the immediate references to the economic situation are clearly

out of date, although the crisis they point to is still with us, in altered form, after nearly a decade of the “New Economy”.

Marxism and the Critique of Scientific Ideology

An animal reproduces its own nature, but humanity reproduces all of nature.

Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844)

We know only one science: the science of history.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*

Marx and Engels devoted a great deal of attention to the question of “science” and to the establishment of their theories as “scientific”. This included an approach to natural science, although virtually all the writing on this subject was done by Engels. The abortion of Soviet scientific philosophy, and the nonsense produced in the name of “proletarian science” in various “Marxist” regimes has reduced this dimension of the Marxian project to near invisibility today in the advanced capitalist world. Such is the *Zeitgeist* that even those (such as this writer) who see current developments in the world economy as a complete vindication of Marx’s theory of capitalist crisis are

circumspect about trumpeting that fact as a victory for “scientific socialism”.

Marx and Engels, revolutionaries that they were, still bore the earmarks of their era, and that era was one of almost boundless faith in the achievements and uses of natural science, conventionally understood. We, in contrast to Marx and Engels, know the meanings of names such as Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Bhopal, Chernobyl; we know all too well a world in which the linear application of microrationality is quite compatible with macrobarbarism.

It is thus easier for us, today, to see that Marx and Engels took the natural science produced by bourgeois society pretty much at face value. It is true that Engels, in *Dialectics of Nature*, tried his hand at “standing Hegel on his head” by puerile applications of quantity and quality to natural processes. Lenin, later, in *Materialism and EmpirioCriticism*, similarly intervened in an intraparty dispute on the side of a distinctly pre-Kantian materialism. The “Marxism” popularized by the Second, Third and Fourth Internationals has been the Marxism of an Hegelianized, or ontologized matter, in which classical bourgeois science, above all physics, is taken as a virtual model for any science, including a science of society. Marx and Engels knew better, but their popularizers did not, and the

founders left some of their most revolutionary conceptions in their 1840s embryo and consigned most of it to “the gnawing critique of the mice”.

What lies like a chasm between us and such a concept of materialism is the vastly expanded view of Marx which has developed in the last 60 or 70 years, but particularly since World War II, a Marx who was unknown to all but a handful of scholars before 1945, and who was certainly unknown in the mass workers’ movement which invoked his name. This is the Marx who wrote the *Grundrisse*, the “Theses on Feuerbach”, the 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*; this is the Marx who drew deeply on Hegel’s *Logic* when elaborating the method of *Capital*, the Marx of whom Lenin spoke in 1914, upon reading Hegel’s *Logic*, when he said that “no previous Marxist” (including himself) had adequately understood Marx.

What has also enriched our understanding of Marx has been the demonstration, by figures such as Kolakowski and Ernst Bloch, that the “active side developed by idealism” to which Marx refers in the “Theses on Feuerbach” comes straight out of the neo-Platonism of late antiquity, or such medieval and early modern neo-Platonists as Eckhardt, Nicholas of Cusa, Giordano Bruno, Jakob Boehme, all

predecessors of Hegel and rarely, if ever, invoked by the “hard-headed materialists” of the classical workers’ movement. But both historical developments, and serious research, make these connections banalities today for those with a minimum of literacy and honesty.

Finally, the history and philosophy of science itself, as one expression of the deepening “ecology crisis” (i.e. the crisis of the planet’s self-reproduction), has in the past three decades opened up perspectives on the origins of modern bourgeois science that would have seemed fantastic to the theoreticians of the classical workers’ movement. Today, we know that Newton, the very paradigm of bourgeois science, had a lifetime interest in astrology and alchemy, and in all likelihood read Boehme himself (who had enjoyed great popularity during the radical phase of the English Revolution of the 1640s). Historians such as the Jacobs have shown meticulously that the ideology of “Newtonianism”, from which astrology, alchemy and Boehme had all vanished, was the product of a vast social battle against the extremist “enthusiasts” on England’s radical fringe. Thus even the “queen of the sciences” is today revealed to have imposed itself in a deeply political and ideological war. “It may be possible to understand the English Revolution without understanding Newton”, as one writer put it, “but it is impossible to

understand Newton without understanding the English Revolution".

All this notwithstanding, it is little recognized today that the world view articulated by Marx between 1843 and 1847, to which he had little opportunity to return where questions of natural science were concerned, in fact contains an implicit vision of a completely different kind of science than that developed by capitalism, or later by official Marxism. Historical experience allows us, and in fact compels us, today, to return to these undeveloped theses of Marx and see where they lead us in the development of a conscious, self-reflexive, sensuous conception of global praxis (the latter being exactly what Marx actually meant by the word "science").

What follows, then, is a small contribution to the elaboration of that completely different kind of science which grows from that "germ of a new world outlook", as Engels called the "Theses on Feuerbach". I present them in the form of theses/ dialogue, to be elaborated in response to subsequent critique and comment.

1. What destroyed the classical revolutionary workers' movement of the 1848-1930 period?

The answer must be: the state, Social Democratic (Keynesian) and Stalinist.

2. What were the “value” foundations of this institutional modification (i.e. of the appearance, in 1933-1945, of the Schachto-Keynesian state)?

Answer: the transition from absolute to relative surplus-value as the main source of capitalist accumulation.

3. “Marxism” from Engels to Lenin was essentially the *ideology* of the substitute bourgeois revolution, from Germany in the 1860s to Cambodia in 1975, necessary to make the transition out of pre-capitalist social relationships (essentially, the destruction of feudal relationships on the land) and accumulation centered on absolute surplus value, derived from a lengthening of the working day of labor power recruited in large part from the countryside. “Vulgar Marxism” (i.e. the recapitulation of pre-Kantian materialism) necessarily arose as the expression of this, the real content of the 1870-1945 “socialist” movement.

4. The phase of accumulation in which relative surplus-value, derived from the intensification of the production process and the reduction of labor power to its generally abstract form, was generally reached in Europe and the United States in the 1870-1945 period. This is the period in which capitalism forges a technology appropriate to itself, as opposed to its earlier commodification of existing technologies. Capital, therefore, is, in this phase, a

materialized social relationship, and a materialized ideology. What ideology?

5. Answer: the ideology of mid-seventeenth century England and English empiricism, developed by Bacon, Newton, Hobbes, Locke and Smith, simultaneously and in unitary fashion in physics, philosophy and political economy (with all of them making contributions in more than one area – Locke in both philosophy and political economy, Newton as head of the British mint, etc.) Where did that ideology come from?

6. Answer: ultimately, from the Parmenides-Zeno “bad infinity” continuum developed in Greece in the sixth century BC, which has always been the foundation of the *ideology* of science in the West. Parmenides elevated Being above space and time, and developed an ontology of the infinite divisibility of space and time in the visible, “fallen” world. Democritean atomism agrees with the Parmenidean division of reality, transforming Being into the “void”, and affirming only the existence of randomly associated atoms. What is excluded from “science” by this ideology is the creative act, the creation of the world in cosmology, as in Plato’s *Timaeus*. Religious or philosophical creation cosmology is the ideological expression of humanity’s “sensuous transformative praxis”, i.e. man’s anti-entropic

role in the biosphere. Human history is the history of the creation of new biosphere environments.

The Parmenidean plane of (undetermined) Being above space and time is also the philosophical counterpart to the commoditization of social relations in sixth-century-BCE Greece. Value, like Being, strips individual objects of all contingent, secondary qualities and relates them to a general standard of pure abstraction: non-contingency, or labor time. Thus abstraction in philosophy and value in political economy are (as Sohn-Rethel has argued for ancient Greece), two sides of the same general process, both founded on the autonomization of the world from its creators. What was the result?

7. Answer: in a later, more mature commodification of society, sixth century England, Parmenides-Zeno's "ontology" of (bad) infinite divisibility of space and time passed from being an ontological prejudice to being a "material force", in the asymptotes of Newton's derivative for the description of motion. The successes of Galilean-Newtonian atomism in the description of the (local) motion of bodies, fine in and of itself, was "mistakenly" generalized as an ontology, an ontology founded on the manifest successes of the method on the lowest level of significance. The simultaneous triumph of an atomistic physics,

philosophy and political economy repeats at a higher level the invasion of all spheres of social life by the commodity categories of value, therefore of labor, which had occurred 2,200 years earlier in Greece. The result, for science, was the “death of nature”, de-cosmization, *vis à vis* the earlier Renaissance neo-Platonic (“astrobiological”) views, in which human imagination was grasped (as in Paracelsus) as a *natura naturans*, a creating nature. The natural world of Galileo, Newton and Descartes receded into a represented extension, from which human participation (the creative act of transformative innovation), was excluded. Many currents of contemporary ecology ideology, most notably the Gaia theory, are founded on this diminution or exclusion of the human contribution to the renewal of nature through biosphere innovation.

8. This ontology, successfully realized as a “material force” by seventeenth century physics and then falsely generalized from limited, correct applications in statics and dynamics to a total view, reached its completion in 1850 with Clausius’ formulation of the second law of thermodynamics. Carnot, in 1808, had formulated the first, the law of conservation for the study of steam engines; Clausius generalized this approach to a theory of entropy for closed systems, i.e. systems without “outside” intervention, or negentropic intervention reversing entropy

in a local system by depleting energy from a larger system. The obvious consequence was to generalize the entropic movement of a closed system without intervention to the ultimate “closed system”, the universe as a whole. Therefore, from the ontological prejudice of the Parmenides-Zeno continuum, to Newton’s derivative, to thermodynamics, in which energy is defined as a “form of motion” and measured in categories of work, the “bad infinity” ontology which excludes the “creative act” (negentropy) is progressively generalized into a massive material force, tending toward the heat-death extinction of the universe. In such a decosmized universe, in which time and space are conceived as uniform and the coherence of matter as contingent and random, the appearance of life itself must appear as an accident. The exclusion of the creative, negentropic, lawful intervention of living matter in the reversal of entropy, first posited ontologically/philosophically, becomes in 1666 and finally in 1850 a “materialized” nature praxis. What were the consequences?

9. Not accidentally, the second law of thermodynamics, which states that all closed systems tend to an equalized dissipation of energy organization, is formulated in the same decade (through the earlier work of Kelvin, Thompson et al. in the 1840s) as the appearance of Marxism and of the beginning of the end of absolute

surplus-value preponderance in accumulation. Marx generally formulates what we called earlier (following Engels) "the germ of a new world outlook", which, though little developed on the natural science side, essentially rejects the "exclusion of the creative act" from the biosphere and ultimately from the cosmos. In the conception of species-being, Marxism locates "biosphere innovation" as the repeatedly demonstrated *actual* infinity of human evolution, and ultimately of evolution generally. Human beings, the first species which contains within its own capacities infinite elasticity of evolutionary modification of the biosphere and hence of itself, repeatedly produces "new natures" by inventing new technologies which tap previously dormant and unusable energy sources. The ontologically determined "running down" of the universe posited by bad-infinity physics (Parmenides- Zeno/ Newton/ Clausius) "materializes" the infinite *repetition* ontologically presupposed by bad-infinite exclusion of the creative act (the latter being first of all improvements in man's interaction with nature), and materializes the projection into nature of the "atomistic ego" of bourgeois society, just as Marx, by positing the end of the reducibility of the material world to the standard of labor (value) restores the creative act to a conception of biosphere praxis.

10. These more implicit than explicit sides of Marx remained virtually undeveloped until quite recently because of the ideologization of his work described in thesis 3 above. The vulgar Marxist recapitulation of the pre-Kantian eighteenth century materialism, as the ideology of a substitute bourgeois revolution, had no use for a "creation cosmology", particularly insofar as actual bourgeois natural science, which was its model, continued to score further apparent successes based on the same ideology. Thus the "Marxist" heritage, which in Germany and above all in Russia was developing from a theory of *Gemeinwesen* (the pre- and post-commodity community) to a glorification of the productive forces, directly appropriated bourgeois natural science almost completely uncritically. It never understood that the simultaneity of the appearance of value categories and of fundamental modifications of "bad infinity" physics in the sixth century BCE, the seventeenth century and in the 1890-1930 relativity/quantum revolution necessarily implied that the suppression of value would also be the suppression/ supersession of "bad infinity" science. But this "Marxism" was the ideology of the transition to relative surplus-value accumulation, and was not about the suppression of the categories of value.

11. These problems would only come to a head through and after the 1968-1973 onset of the world

economic/ecology crisis, the *end* of the phase of accumulation centered on relative surplus-value which had begun after 1850. Georgescu- Roegen, for example, as one ideologue of contemporary austerity, connects the appearance of neo-classical economics (i.e. bourgeois thought in the phase of relative surplus-value, the primacy of the viewpoint on the economy of the *consumer*), with the entropy law, to affirm one and the other.

12. Simultaneously, the crisis which began in 1968-1973, which was an expression of a revolt of the forces of production against the relations of production, i.e. that the former were too productive to be contained within value forms, responded to the need to destroy productivity by the process of deindustrialization. The appearance, for the first time, of seriously industrialized countries outside of the “classical” capitalist world of 1914 (Europe/ North America/ Japan) developed by capitalism (e.g. the Asian “tigers”) undermined forever the hegemony of the pseudo-Marxist development ideology for backward countries. This reality, in contrast to the pre-1968 period in which industrialization seemed confined to the classical zone and to the Stalinist-Third-Worldist autarchic states, made possible the recovery of the *Gemeinwesen* dimension of Marxism contained in Marx’s correspondence with the Russian Populists, which was suppressed in the 1880s and

1890s ideologization of Marxism. Thus the “substitute bourgeois revolution” as a social force which sustained the ongoing pseudo-Marxist view toward science crumbled along with Leninist-Stalinist development ideology. This makes possible the return, within the Marxism tradition, of the actual infinity, *natura naturans*¹ creation cosmology which was always there in the idea of species being.

For Hegel and for Marx, the idea of “self-reflexivity” was fundamental: Hegel’s self-developing world spirit, Marx’s definition of capital as “value valorizing itself” (*sich selbst verwertendes Wert*). Such self-reflexivity must move to the center of a science of global sensuous praxis. As we have indicated, the second law of thermodynamics rested on the assumption of the universe as the ultimate “closed system”. But because of the atomistic assumption of the whole theory, such a closed system precisely does not “act upon itself”. It is perhaps no accident that atomism, in Russell, runs up against its final formal paradoxes in the 1890-1930 period (of the social and political reshaping of the world for the Schachto-Keynesian state and the intensification of the production process), and that with Goedel the whole formalist project is torpedoed forever. Basically, the whole foundation of atomist science rests on the $I=I$ assumption of identity (as articulated by Fichte). We get here into the question of symmetry of time and

space. What does identity mean? It means the mirror reversibility of a system. Space and time were supposed by atomism to be uniform, and hence reversible in both directions, backward and forward. When reality is distanced into a representation (a mirror image) then creative intervention is excluded. This is the spectacle transformed into a material force in physics, ideology and, with the bulk of the ecology movement, ultimately in society. Once one "breaks the mirrors", the linear invertibility of time is also shattered, and can be replaced by the major non-invertible motion: the rotation of a helix. Not accidentally, the helix is the central metaphor of time for Marx (the *Kreislauf* of the cycle of capital). Then, life ceases to appear as contingent to the cosmos, which is the very presupposition of the existence of a cosmos in the first place. Thus the radical critique of Einstein cannot merely limit itself to a modification of the theory of general relativity by a demonstration of the theory's atomistic foundations (though that in itself may be a valid critique). The fundamental flaw in Einstein is the exclusion of the appearance of life, and the development of life, as a lawful, non-contingent and negentropic event in the history of the universe.

As the otherwise atomistic quantum physicist Heinz Pagels put it:

Conceivably, life might be able to change those laws of physics that today seem to imply its extinction along with that of the universe. If that is so, then might not life have a more important role in cosmology that is currently envisioned? That is a problem worth thinking about.

In fact, it may be the only problem worth thinking about.²

Notes

1. *Natura naturans*, nature which creates, is a term used by a tradition of philosophers from John Scot Erigena (ninth century) through Bruno, Paracelsus, up to Spinoza. In our conception, human innovation in the biosphere is *natura naturans*.
2. H. Pagels, *The Cosmic Code*, p.322 (1982).

From National Bolshevism to Ecologism ¹

There are few important currents in the history of the twentieth century which are not influenced by an ideological oscillation between Marxian revolution and the “conservative revolution” as it was conceived at the end of the nineteenth century by various thinkers, of whom Georges Sorel is perhaps the best known. And few examples of this oscillation, which Jean-Pierre Faye articulated in exemplary fashion in his book *Totalitarian Languages*, are more substantial than German National Bolshevism, a movement which, while small in numbers, played a critical role in the life of the Weimar Republic. The notes which follow are an attempt to present the general outlines of National Bolshevism, and it will be obvious that this oscillation goes well beyond the German framework.

1. The Prussian state, as the fundamental model of an autarchic, bureaucratic, mercantilist and nationalist state designed for the promotion of economic growth, the state which Fichte called *der geschlossene Handelstaat*, was also at the origin of the first nationalism tied to populist ideas, in the anti-*Aufklärung* of Hamann, Herder, the Brothers Grimm, etc. French rationalism in the era of Louis XIV was also a statist mode of thought, but it was not nationalist. It

was, on the contrary, cosmopolitan in a period when "cosmopolitan" and "French" were interchangeable. Germany, but especially Prussia, first set out on the path which, eventually, produced National Bolshevism: the mercantilist and populist state, articulated by F. List in political economy.

2. Marx characterized nineteenth century Germany as the country which took up within itself all the grandeur and poverty of world historical development, a kind of concrete universal in Hegel's sense. Can it be an accident that all the currents of world historical importance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were baptized in Germany? It is here that one finds the origins of the Social Democratic travesty, and of the welfare state (Lassalle-Bismarck), the origins of communism (Marx), and finally the origins, or at least the culmination, of fascism. It is thus quite natural that National Bolshevism, in that oscillation brilliantly described by Faye, anticipated so many monsters of the modern world: Bolshevism in decay, for its part, would take care of the rest.

3. It is in this context that the debate between Lenin and Luxemburg over Polish nationalism assumes all its importance. On the question of Pilsudski's status in the Second International, Rosa Luxemburg argues for a

complete break, while Lenin hesitates and lines up with the center of the German Social Democracy, which wants an accord with Pilsudski at all costs. All this occurred in 1908. The career of Pilsudski after 1918, which is well known, could not be a better confirmation of Rosa Luxemburg's warnings. Lenin's error foreshadowed the failure of orthodox Bolshevism on the national question, and there was no more genuine National Bolshevik than Pilsudski. Nevertheless, it was Bela Kun, head of the Hungarian revolutionary government during its three months of existence in 1918-19, who first used the term "National Bolshevism".

4. National Bolshevism, which made its appearance in the German council movement in 1920, was initially created by two ex-militants of the American I.W.W., who played in Germany the same role as anarcho-syndicalism in Italian fascism, confirming once again that non-Marxist anti-capitalism, even within the working-class movement – or more precisely, particularly there – is a *sine qua non* in the development of fascism.

5. The Treaty of Rapallo, in 1922, was the point of contact between National Bolshevik "sentiment" in Germany, closely tied to the corporatism of Rathenau, and the Russian state after the world revolutionary ebb in 1921.

The German National Bolsheviks saw in Russia nothing but a *geschlossener Handelstaat*, socialist and nationalist, at a time when the revolutionary, internationalist and cosmopolitan impulse of its early years was disappearing. On the Russian side, the figure of Radek was the adequate symbol of this convergence. In the oscillation of 1922-23, we see the simultaneous origins of the two great ideologies of the century: “anti-imperialist” nationalism directed against the metropolis of capitalism (U.S., United Kingdom, France), and the nascent Stalinist state.² The first was the precursor of all the Third World “development regimes” since 1945, or even before (Ataturk, Vargas, Peron); the second, precursor of the various “national Stalinisms” which today rule roughly fifteen countries.

6. Even more fascinating in National Bolshevism is the way in which it takes up the ideology of the “conservative revolution” as it was articulated, beginning with Nietzsche, by German thought. National Bolshevism is an aristocratic ideology, but one formulated by people who themselves were far from being aristocrats. What we see here is the program of nineteenth century aestheticism, when the moment of the imagination established by Kant in the *Critique of Judgment* was removed from the larger edifice of his thought. Lukacs (in *Destruction of Reason*, Vol. 1) already showed that all bourgeois philosophy in Germany

after Hegel was a degeneration of Kantianism, and a development of fragments of Kant's work. It suffices to think of Schopenhauer, or Nietzsche, but also of *Lebensphilosophie* and existentialism.

7. With this subterranean relationship between the aristocratic revolution and National Bolshevism (in France, Drieu la Rochelle is the best example) is linked the relationship of prewar German expressionism and certain currents issuing from Dada, particularly Hugo Ball. Our concern here is not to establish direct ties between individuals, but in pointing to a general cultural ambiance in which an anti-technological artistic avant-garde linked up with the cultural aristocracy of non-aristocrats, taking over "Bolshevism" understood strictly in terms of the *geschlossene Handelstaat*.

8. National Bolshevism is also linked to the mythological renaissance of the late nineteenth century, culminating in Nietzsche. This current of thought entered politics through the work of Sorel, who was simultaneously, and not incorrectly, an admirer of both Lenin ³ and Mussolini.

9. The great ideological inversion of this century is not only the blindness which claimed to see socialism where there was only Stalinism, but also – flowing from the same source – the myth of progressive anti-imperialism

attributed to movements or to countries which, in contrast to the USSR, do not even make the pretense of abolishing capitalism. Is it not possible to trace an almost direct line of descent from National Bolshevism and the Treaty of Rapallo to the ties between the USSR and Nasser in 1957, or, at the level of the grotesque, the relations between China and various Third World Ubus (Pinochet, Jonas Savimbi, *et al.*)? Once again, the same oscillation. It is obvious that the triangle Germany-Poland-USSR played a role, in the twenties, similar to that of the Third World relative to the capitalist metropolis of today. The joke in all this is that the left of the advanced capitalist countries, through the persons of Nasser, Nkrumah, Sukarno, Peron, etc. has reimported the ideas of National Bolshevism in nearly perfect form. This reimportation of course meshes perfectly with its unabashed populism in Europe and the U.S.⁴

10. Finally, since 1973 we have seen, in the advanced capitalist sector, the return, under the rubric of "ecology", of another oscillation which can be integrated into the National Bolshevik perspective. I cannot trace in a few lines the relations between the current ecology movement and the German Wandervögel of the 1900-29 period, a youth movement whose members went over massively to fascism. Nor can I trace the links between Ernst Jünger and

Mao Zedong, but there is no question that there is a significant presence of ex-Maoists in the ecology movements of Germany, France and Portugal. It was not for nothing that Western European Maoism was recently characterized as the “last anti-industrial utopia”. The thinker who squares the circle of this movement is undoubtedly Martin Heidegger, whose lyricism on Being and power plants, written as early as the 1950s, could easily be republished in the ecological manifestos of today. Heidegger’s musings are today taken up by many theoreticians of the Frankfurt School, who criticize classical Marxism for having no critique of the “domination of nature” by human technology. But Marxism already showed long ago that this “nature” is a human praxis, and that what dominates it is capital, a social relationship, and not a specific capitalist technology, which materializes that social relationship. Fichte and other German romantics would have easily seen themselves in the *geschlossene Handelstaat* of Schacht and Speer in 1933-45; today, in California and elsewhere, while Jimmy Carter calls for quasi-autarchy in energy, a whole series of Zen Buddhist and macrobiotic currents call for “zero growth” as an “anti capitalist” movement.

Thus we have not left behind the oscillation between, on one hand, anti-technological lyricism and, on the other,

the autarchic statism which, for the first time, announced itself, in Prussia, in approximately 1760.

Notes

1. This article originally appeared in the *Diario de Notícias*, Historical Supplement, March 18, 1980 (Lisbon).
2. August 2000: See the excellent book of Joseph Love, *Crafting the Third World* (Stanford, 1996) on the transmission of ideology from the German right (Sombart) to the interwar Romanian corporatists (Manolescu) to the Third World “dependency theorists” (Prebisch, Cardoso) of the post-1945 period.
3. August 2000: This juxtaposition is hardly intended to imply that “Bolshevism = fascism”. Lenin was not exactly a theoretician of “myth”. The specifically “Russian” element which the Russian intelligentsia (and hence Lenin) brought to Marxism had its origins in fourteenth century Eastern orthodox monasticism (and culminated in the ex-seminary student Stalin); this stream has been uncovered by the works of Berdaiyev, and by the problematic but provocative book of the ex-Stalinist turned neo-liberal Alain Besancon, *Les origines du leninisme*. Besancon’s formulation is that Russian culture, in contrast to that of the West, “was not catechized but rather liturgized”,

producing a monastic asceticism which was secularized in the Populists of the 1860s and 1870s and which Lenin encountered in his favorite novel (which he read repeatedly), Cherneshevsky's *What Is To Be Done?*

4. August 2000: Once again – although the author does not seem aware of the full implications for the Western left of the genealogy he establishes – *cf.* the book of Joseph Love. The class of “progressive state civil servants”, in or out of power, which have set the tone for the left for over 100 years, recognize their own brethren in “authentic” “Third World” guise, blissfully unaware of the German romantic ideas they take over from these ideological “export platforms”.

History and the Realization of the Material Imagination

On the Origins of Modern Science in Neo-Platonism, the Kabbala and the Works of Hermes Trismegistes, and the Implications of these Origins for the Development of a Self-Reflexive Theory of Global Praxis

Introduction 1979

What follows touches widely on a number of disparate topics, but it has as its aim an analysis of certain problems in the history of philosophy and of scientific thought. Its fundamental aim is to question the currently existing lines between “culture” and “nature” and to posit a possible unitary theory encompassing both.

Introduction 2001

When this essay was first written, its main polemical target was the kind of positivism posing as Marxism represented by a Coletti or the endless late 1970s debates over the “transformation problem”. No one had yet heard

of the “culture wars”, still less of the “science wars”. In editing it for publication today, I have mainly added footnotes to later works, and a passing reference to “post-modernism”, which arose in part in reaction to the sterility of the positivism and empiricism attacked in this piece.

The history of modern science is conventionally dated from the innovations in astronomy, optics and physics made in early modern Europe from the fifteenth to through the seventeenth century, innovations which were synthesized and transformed by the ambiguous figure of Newton. If Newton is not to be wholly blamed for Newtonianism,¹ it can hardly be denied that the ideology of mechanism which issued from his works was the predominant “paradigm” for what constituted science in the West (and not merely in the sciences of nature) until at least the nineteenth century. If mechanism, empiricism and atomism, the three major modes of thought which drew sustenance from official glosses of Newton’s work, have happily been laid to rest in physics itself, they do not cease to assert themselves, to this day, as models for “scientific rigor” in most areas of human endeavor, and particularly in those areas (such as the so-called “social sciences”) farthest removed from the actual cutting edge of modern

research in the natural sciences. The modern physicist is perfectly aware that science has nothing to do with a plebiscite of “observable facts”, but a parody of the same epistemology – one vastly inferior to the works of Newton or Descartes – continues to linger on, even in areas, such as contemporary Marxism, where it is least expected.

The Newtonian revolution in physics (one whose true dimensions, in the mind of its protagonist, remain unknown because of reluctance to publish Newton’s massive works, estimated at one million words for alchemy² alone, in the esoteric sciences – primarily alchemy, astrology and the Kabbala – of the Renaissance) closed another development, that of the origins of modern empirical science in three mystical or semi-mystical currents of antiquity: the neo-Platonic tradition developed by Plotinus, Philo, the Pseudo-Dionysos, Augustine and John Scotus Erigena;³ the Jewish Kabbala,⁴ a veritable Jewish neo-Platonism which investigators date from the second century CE; but which received its decisive formulation in the Hispano-Provençal region in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries;⁵ and finally, the works of Hermes Trismegistus (Thrice Great), believed during the Renaissance to be an Egyptian⁶ but later discovered to be a thinker (or group of thinkers) of Hellenistic antiquity, also of the second century CE.

Neo-Platonism, the Kabbala and Hermetic science were the centers of concern of the fifteenth-century Florentine Academy, most notably in the works of Pico della Mirandola and Marcelo Ficino. The Academy, in turn, was decisive for Giordano Bruno and the astronomers Johannes Kepler ⁷ and Tycho Brahe, and to a lesser extent for Copernicus. It was this "world view" which made possible the break with non-experimental scholastic science and the neo-Aristotelianism of the schoolmen. ⁸ It was "paradoxically" an otherworldy philosophy which made possible a revolutionary breakthrough to the natural world itself.

Such influences necessarily evoke discomfort among the theoreticians of modern empiricism and science, who long have explained the co-existence of the "prescientific" concerns of these astronomers with substantive empirical science as a sign of a "transition". It was indeed a transition, completed by Bacon, Newton, Descartes and their progeny, and one which achieved a complete break with such "metaphysical dross" and clarified the complete severance between the observations of the conscious mind and the nature which it contemplated. *Res cogitans, res extensa.*

We necessarily see things in a different light. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century revolution in

physics has essentially closed the era of mechanistic science, and placed the “constitutive” role of the “observer” at the center of at least quantum physics. Modern thought is now compelled to turn back to the “prescientific” phase of the origins of modern science, and there to discover some startling anticipations of the problematic with which the twentieth century revolution in physics confronts empiricism and atomism. The fundamental tenets of the new scientific world view are the following:

1. There is no knowledge of the material universe separate from the active constitution of human praxis; mathematical theories made it possible for Einstein to revalue the conception of light inherited from Newtonian physics, itself refuted by the Morley-Michaelson experiment of 1887. The abandonment of the theory of the “ether”, corpuscles which were previously thought to bend light, and its replacement by a geometric theory of space curvature, was one blow to mechanism in physics.
2. Further, Einstein’s fundamental insights were formalizations of pre-formal, poetic conceptualizations about time and space. Einstein’s question, at age 16: “What would the universe look like if I sat on a beam of light?” was the pre-formal poetic imagination of a conceptual revolution.⁹ This fundamentally poetic quality of creative scientific work, in its early conceptual stages,

the pre-formal “scaffolding” that is later knocked away from the formalized final structure, is a key aspect of the convergences which we are trying to illuminate here.

3. In modern physics, the foundations of a unified theory of the self-development of energy (negentropy), ¹⁰ the unification of cosmology, biological evolution and history into a single science, are made manifest. In the Newtonian world, space and time were abstract dimensions for atomized objects and their interactions. ¹¹ Concerning time, the evolution of post-Newtonian thought was captured by Schopenhauer: “Before Kant, we were in time; after Kant, time is in us”. Human history is effectively a great game with time, a triumph of creativity over linear time. In Heraclitus’ conception: “Time is a child-king playing with pawns, the royalty of a child”. Or, for Marx: “Time is the dimension of human freedom”. Duiksterhuis wrote of the “mechanization of the world picture”; contemporary science could refer to the “temporalization of the world event”.

4. The revolution in modern physics was made possible by the nineteenth century German revolution in mathematics, itself a counterpart of the German philosophical critique of British empiricism. From Gauss and Weierstrass, to Riemann and Cantor, the fundamental question of German mathematics in this period is the question of infinity. And

infinity – a question posed for Western thought in its modern form since Nicholas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno – is the mathematical expression of totality, or, in Marxian terms, of species-existence. The Hegelian revolution in philosophy was the theorization of an internally-differentiated time continuum of infinity, an actual infinity, (the transfinite, in Cantor's terminology) realized within history: the concrete universal. In Marx's notion of the self-subsisting positive and the "individuality as all-sided in its consumption as in its production" (*Grundrisse*) this theory is given its practical expression as the programmatic basis for the transformation of the world. The nineteenth-century transformation of geometry from Gauss to Riemann pointed at least implicitly to universe expansion, in their break with Euclidean geometry and potential "temporalization" of space.

5. Modern physics thereby shows a historically-evolving universe,¹² a continuum (replacing the old "atoms and the void" of every atomism and empiricism), a universe which is internally differentiated through time. It is an evolution of energy states to ever-higher organizations of complexity. A material object accelerated to the speed of light is space-time, and all apparently discrete "matter" is a space-time event.

6. Twentieth-century physics essentially revealed the universe to be activity, or more precisely, self-activity. The universe is (potentially) self-reflexive; the biosphere certainly is. The fundamental movement of the universe may in fact be a systolic-diastolic movement of expansion and contraction of energy, an empirical question still to be solved by modern research. Nevertheless, Einstein's world is a world in which there is no absolute time or space. In contrast to the contemplative view of time of even the most advanced philosophy, the thought of Hegel in which Absolute Spirit looks back *post festum* over the configurations (*Bilder*, or images) of its past stages, this thought is the thought of an activity in which linear time collapses into a helix, a Riemannian nested manifold. Humanity acting consciously to transform necessity in a new historical manifold, in revolution, abolishes linear time, and all previous moments are "recaptured" within the internally-differentiated time continuum.¹³

7. It can be no accident that the basic critique of Newtonian physics, and of empiricism generally, happened precisely in Germany, and precisely in a dialogue as it was carried out by philosophy.¹⁴ Leibniz had already rejected absolute space and time, just as Spinoza had posited a notion of infinity in the present (actuality, or actual infinity). Germany, and German thought, was the location

of history and historical thought *par excellence*, the country which more than any other was compelled to realize and assert the qualitative aspect of time.¹⁵ The fundamental breakdown of the Newtonian universe begins with the critique of the primacy of the Euclidean geometry which was its indispensable counterpart, in the revolution in geometry carried out in Germany and in Russia in the wake of the French Revolution.¹⁶ There is a tempting and uncanny parallel between the universal event which destroyed forever the unitary, semicyclical and absolute space and time of Enlightened absolutism, and the mathematics, centered in geometry, which attempted to formulate a new, qualitative notion of space, one which at least implicitly made the first breach between space and time as qualitatively distinct dimensions. This geometry developed, beginning in the early nineteenth century, in Germany and Russia, the two countries most acutely subjected to "combined and uneven development". Lobachevsky's development of a negative non-Euclidean geometry, in which the sum of a triangle's angles is less than 180 degrees, is followed by Riemann's positive non-Euclidean geometry, in which the sum of the angles of a triangle's angles is greater than 180 degrees. This formulation of a positive non-Euclidean space is the later foundation of a physics based on space-curvature, an

expanding universe, and a general theory of the self-development of energy. It is space entered into time, the historical time generalized and made conscious by the French Revolution, and ultimately demonstrated to be indistinguishable from time, and from energy.

We begin to see the significance of pre-Newtonian, pre-Cartesian science from the fact that it as well was preoccupied with an earlier version of actual infinity. Perhaps the greatest revolution of seventeenth century science was the revival and further development of the Zeno-Parmenides “asymptotic” infinitesimal, the idea of infinity as something “at the end” of time. That this was by no means the case for pre-Cartesian philosophy is demonstrated by the theories of Nicholas of Cusa, who already in the fifteenth century had posited a geometry in which two parallel lines extended infinitely into space ultimately converged. A curved space is a self-reflexive space, a space-time in which infinity is present in self-development. For pre-Cartesian science, with its ideas of macrocosm and microcosm, the universe was not only alive, but the mind of the scientist did not stand outside the “objective” world it apprehended.¹⁷ It was not, in Marx’s phrase, vulgarly squatting outside the universe. Neo-platonic science posited man, and man’s scientific activity, as part of the universe.

What was at stake in the struggle between neo-Platonic (Hermetic-Kabbalistic) science and nascent empiricism in the seventeenth century was fundamentally the question of the creativity of the intellect.¹⁸ (The neo-Platonists of course often interpreted this creativity as the creativity of God.) At the heart of these currents was a preoccupation with the creation of the world, drawn in different ways from the “emanationist” views elaborated by Plato in the *Timæus*. These traditions all posit the creation of differentiation (material forms) as emanations of an original, single unity of energy. In the classic neo-Platonic formulation, God – who is absolute, non-determined and perfect – is discontent with this “in itself” perfection, and “disperses” himself (the Kabbalistic stage of the “broken vessel”)¹⁹ only to reconstitute himself on a higher, non-alienated level of greater perfection, or perfection in-and-for-itself, as it were. It is not difficult to see in this triadic movement of unity/ externalization and alienation/ higher unity the foundation of the Hegelian dialectic,²⁰ and also the methodology of the three volumes of *Capital*: capital-in-itself, or the immediate production process; capital-for-itself, or the reproduction of the total social capital, understood naturally not as a sum but as a totality distinct from its individual capital parts; and capital-in-and-for-itself, volume three, where the interaction of these two

moments with the world of capitalist production produces the real movement of the *Kreislauf des Kapitals*, the (helical) circle of capital, itself nothing more than the real-world movement of Hegel's alienated *Kreislauf* of the spirit described in the final pages of the *Phenomenology*, wherein the Spirit looks back on the configurations (*Bilder*) of its own previous stages. Capital is Hegel's Spirit: totality apparently moving by itself. Marx's *Capital* is nothing other than the phenomenology of labor-power coming to its concept, discovering itself as the unconscious mover of an apparently autonomous world. The world of capital is the inverted world (*verkehrte Welt*) described by Hegel, and earlier by Plato in the *Timæus*; it is a world in which

in capital-profit, or better still in capital-interest, land-ground rent, labor-wage, in this economic trinity as the congruence of the components of value and wealth in general with its sources, the mystification of the capitalist mode of production, the reification of social relations, the immediate convergence of the material relations of production with their social-historical determinacy is completed: the enchanted, inverted world set on its head, where Monsieur le Capital and Madame la Terre, as social characters and simultaneously as mere things, carry on their macabre dance. It is the

great merit of classical political economy to have dissolved this false appearance and deception, this autonomization and fossilization of the various social elements of wealth in relation to each other, the personification of things and the reification of production relations, this religion of everyday life ...

21

In the German original, those words whereby Marx "plays around" with Hegelian vocabulary, as he puts it in the introduction to volume one, are underlined:

Im Kapital-Profit, oder noch besser Kapital-Zins, Boden-Grundrente, Arbeit-Arbeitslohn, in dieser oekonomischen Trinität als der Zusammenhang der Bestandteile des Werts und des Reichtums ueberhaupt mit seinen Quellen ist die Mystifikation der kapitalistischen Produktionweise, die Verdinglichung der gesellschaftlichen Verhaeltnisse, das unmittelbar Zusammenwachsen der stofflichen Produktions mit ihrer geschichtlich-sozialen Bestimmtheit vollendet: die verzauberte, verkehrte und auf den Kopf gestellte Welt, wo Monsieur le Capital und Madame la Terre als soziale Charaktere und zugleich als blosse Dingen ihren Spuk treiben. Es ist das grosse Verdienst der klassischen

Oekonomie, diesen falschen Schein und Trug, diese Verselbststaendigung und Verknoecherung der verschiedenen gesellschaftlichen Elemente des Reichtums gegeneinander, die Personifizierung der Sachen und Versachlichung der Produktionsverhaeltnisse, diese Religion des Alltagslebens aufgelöst zu haben... ²²

In this summary paragraph from volume three, Marx discovers, behind three false moments, a fourth, previously unknown term: the self-development of labor power. That Marx explicitly links this trinitarian conception to religion, the “religion of everyday life”, and to a fourth term which does not appear on the surface of capitalist life, but which is in fact the motive force of the entire “inverted world”, namely, labor power, makes him a direct heir to the neo-Platonic tradition.

Reason has always existed, but not in its rational form.

The revolution of neo-Platonism, which begins in roughly the second century CE (simultaneous with Hermeticism and the Kabbala), was the fusion of the Aristotelian notion of development with the static Platonic notion of the World-Idea. This fusion resulted in the theory of the creation of the world through the triadic movement of unity-dispersion-higher unity.

It was fundamentally this dynamic view of creativity which attracted the Renaissance scientists. At one level or another, neo-Platonism has discussed, through the creativity of God, the creative activity of man. (Kepler comes most immediately to mind; for him, scientific investigation was the royal road to the "mind of God".) For most of these philosophies, consciousness is a series of stages of upward movement, at the highest level of which consciousness becomes a God-consciousness. In the ninth-century theologian John Scotus Erigena, for example, this fourth, highest stage of nature is called *natura naturans*, nature which creates but which is not created. Although not self-reflexive (Erigena places nature which both creates and is created on a lower level) we see in theological form an anticipation of Hegel's world spirit, an in-and-for-itself subject which is the object of its own activity.²³

Thus for Kepler or Tycho Brahe, the discovery of the Platonic (or Pythagorean) unity of the physical world was the structure of the divinity, and moreover, a structure of the divinity which corresponded to the mind of man.²⁴ The belief in the geometric structure of nature, as a manifestation of the forms of the World-Idea, prompted neo-Platonic astronomers to seek out these mathematical structures in nature itself; it was thus a belief that the forms of the mind (or at least the "mind of God") and the

forms of nature were the same, based on a mystical emanationist philosophy of the creation of the world, which led to actual empirical breakthroughs which the apparently more “empiricist” neo-Aristotelian scholasticism, by itself, would never have made. We see here, as with the nineteenth century and twentieth century revolutions in mathematics and physics, that conceptual leaps in science are made not through empirical investigation of “facts” by themselves, but by new conceptualizations which create and account for new “facts”. As Newton put it succinctly: “I could not understand it from the phenomena”. And as Einstein summarized: “It is the theory which decides what we can observe”.²⁵

Microcosm-macrocosm: that what is true for the laws of the creativity of the mind must be true for nature as a whole. In discovering within the natural world structures anticipated by pre-cognitive, pre-formal and pre-empirical conceptualizations, the neo-Platonic astronomers were proving what we can call the “negentropic” quality of human thought: thought not as the “parallel” or “reflection” of energy but, when understood as a concrete moment of the practical creativity of the universe, as the higher organization of energy itself. It is this view which returns with post-Newtonian science, wherein figures such

as Einstein place poetizing conceptualizations at the center of scientific creativity.

The pre-mechanist, Renaissance idea of actual infinity entered mathematics *per se* with Cantor's transfinite. Cantor was steeped in the philosophical discussions of the infinite, and explicitly discusses the views of Spinoza, Leibniz and Nicholas of Cusa in his paper on the transfinite (*Foundations of a General Theory of Manifolds*, 1883). ²⁶

Another substantive question at issue here is that of determination (*Bestimmung*) as it has been treated by philosophy since the beginning, and posed mythically in the Old Testament. The task of philosophy from Heraclitus to Hegel, and of theory since Marx, has always been to concretely situate – to determine – particulars in relationship to the whole, or totality. A stand on the question of particulars – of concrete Being – is itself a metaphysics or philosophy, and the answer to this question, whether as in-and-for-itself self-reflexive development (Hegel and Marx) or as the overt anti-universality of medieval nominalism or its twentieth-century counterparts, logical positivism and existentialism (and most recently “post-modernism”) is the basis for fundamentally opposed world outlooks. An answer to the question of particular-universal determination which

locates universals as real within particulars is the hallmark of every current of thought we are examining. In fact, the very foundation of Judeo-Christian civilization, the idea that at a specific moment, eternity entered time and the infinite and the finite were mediated in the person of a living individual already posed the question of the "transfinite" for Western thought. But it was present, even earlier, in Moses' encounter with Yahwe in the Old Testament, where the divinity appears as a burning bush and answers the question of identity as: "I am that I am".

27

The question of determination is moreover linked, in the early phases of neo-Platonism and Kabbalism, to the questions, touched on above, of creativity and inversion. In its alienated state, after leaving the in-itself perfection of its beginnings, consciousness is confronted with dispersion; sense-certainty, or the apparently self-evident discreteness of the objects of the senses. In the reintegrated unity of a consciousness in-and-for-itself (to use Hegel's term) the neo-Platonic view of truth discovers the immediate contents of consciousness to be false until re-located on a kind of "wheel" or ascending helix in time (which is time); no specific content or determination is true; the truth is the process of the continuous self-development of consciousness through the specific determinations. Truth is

process, the process of self-development: self-development of the universe (cosmology), self-development of the biosphere, self-development of the human species. Or, in Marx's formulation, the communized individual is a "hunter by morning, fisherman by afternoon, critical critic by night", without for all that "being" (predication) hunter, fisherman or critical critic. The communist individual will not be any specific determined content, but will be a process or relationship to a nested manifold of socially-mediated activity. Hegel expresses this idea in the following passages:

Die Sache selbst verliert dadurch das Verhaeltnis des Predikats und die Bestimmtheit lebloser absktraker Allgemeinheit, sie ist vielmehr von der Individualitaet durchdrungene Substanz; das Subjekt, worin die Individualitaet ebenso als sie selbst oder als diese wie als alle Individuen ist, und das Allgemeine, das nur als dies Tun aller und Jeder ein Sein ist, eine Wirklichkeit darin, dass dieses Bewuettsein sie als seine einzelne Wirklichkeit und als Wirklichkeit Aller weiβ... ²⁸

The thing itself thus loses the relationship of predicate and the determination of lifeless, abstract generality, and becomes much more a substance full

with individuality; the subject, wherein individuality is to all individuals as it is to itself or to another; and the general, which only as this activity of all and of each individual is a being; and finally, a reality, insofar as this consciousness knows it as its individual reality and as the reality of all...

[S]ie sind Predikäte, die noch nicht selbst Subjekte sind...²⁹

They are predicates, which are not yet subjects...

Marx places the same idea in its practical-social form when he says:

[I]t is only when objective actuality generally becomes for man in society the actuality of essential human capacities, human actuality, and thus the actuality of his own capacities that all objects become for him the objectification of himself, become objects which confirm and realize his individuality as his objects, that is, he himself becomes the object...³⁰

Or again, where the link is made explicit between the inverted world and alien determinations, creations of men which appear to men to create them:

Man makes religion, religion does not make man... But man is not an abstract being squatting outside the world... This state and this society produce religion, which is an inverted consciousness of the world because they are an inverted world... (Religion)... is the fantastic realization of human essence inasmuch as human essence possesses no true reality.³¹

For the reader who might be inclined to counterpose the “young” Marx who wrote the above passage to the “mature, scientific” Marx of *Capital*, and for whom the articulation of the same idea in the “Trinity” passage of the final pages of volume three (as quoted earlier) is not ultimately convincing, the following passage is worth considering:

At the level of material production, the real process of social life... we find the same relationship as at the level of ideology, in religion: the subject is transformed into object, and vice versa.³²

This veritable Phenomenology of the Material Reproduction Process continues:

[T]his money and these commodities, these means of production and these means of subsistence rise

up as autonomous powers, personified by their owners in opposition to labor power, stripped of all material wealth... the material conditions, indispensable to the realization of labor, are estranged (*entfremdet*) from the worker and, moreover, appear as fetishes endowed with a will and soul of their own... commodities, finally, appear as buyers of people... ³³

Our purpose here is not to multiply quotations stating the same fundamental idea of the inversion of subject and object from other sections of *Capital*, the *Grundrisse*, or *Theories of Surplus Value*. It is merely to establish that for Marx, and in a still-mystified form for Hegel, inversion ³⁴ and determination are the same, i.e. the domination of human activity by apparently autonomous creations, or predication, or determinations, constitute the essence of alienation for Hegel and for Marx. And this view in turn is nothing but a nonmystified version of the phase of "dispersion", externalization and "broken vessels" (Kabbala) described in the neo-Platonic theories of creation which we have discussed. Marxism is the reason in its rational form of the mystifications of neo-Platonism, which still located creativity in God and not in socialized man. The

concrete, demystified articulation of this creativity is as follows:

[Capital]... thus creates the material conditions for the development of the rich individuality which is as all-sided in its production as in its consumption, and whose labor also no longer appears as labor, but as the full development of activity itself... ³⁵

Or, in anticipation, Hegel:

[T]he spirit is activity... ³⁶

We therefore submit that if anyone wishes to speak of "science" without an understanding of these elementary truths of the history of science, thought and social practice, without posing science as the self-comprehension of self-reflexive global labor power, without recognizing the truth of Marx's assertion that

[T]he chief defect of all previous materialism (including Feuerbach's) is that the object, actuality, sensuousness is conceived only in the form of the object or perception, but not as sensuous human activity, as praxis, subjectively... Feuerbach wants sensuous objects actually different from thought objects, but he does not comprehend human activity itself as objective... ³⁷

Such an individual can only be considered beneath the demands, and the most advanced theory of our time.

To return again to our discussion of neo-Platonism and the origins of modern scientific thought, we note that the problem of determination and predication existed for these early modes of thought as the problem of the attributes of God (as in Maimonides and Spinoza): God was Absolute, Undetermined. *Determinatio est negatio*, limitation. The revolution of modern thought is the discovery of a solution to the relationship between the infinite and the finite relocated in man's self-activity, man's universal or species-activity having as its goal the transformation of himself: Hegel's concrete universal, Marx's species-individual, and entering mathematics as Cantor's transfinite.

What is the relationship between this "history of philosophy" and prephilosophical myth, on one hand, and modern thought on the other? Between the end of classical Hellenic philosophy, culminating in Plato and Aristotle, and the revival of Renaissance science and thought, there occurred a new, and often-neglected stage in philosophy, which was reintroduced into Europe after 1100 through Moslem and Jewish sources. The thought of antiquity returned, but it returned on a higher level. The Arabic-Judaic culture which developed from the ninth through the

twelfth centuries from Bagdad to Cordoba, which was in turn deeply marked by the Hellenistic philosophy and science of late antiquity,³⁸ was a qualitatively higher development of antiquity, and when Hellenic antiquity in the work of Aristotle and then Plato was rediscovered in the West from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, it was with the incorporated revolution in thought, expressed in the works of figures such as Ibn Sina, of Hellenistic neo-Platonism synthesized and moved to a higher level.

The significance of this idea can be seen if we recall the role of mathematical theory in the two scientific revolutions which created modern physics, those of the fifteenth through the seventeenth century and of the nineteenth through the twentieth century. While it is in fact the case that the Renaissance neo-Platonists, (and first of all Kepler), or later Einstein, came along to discover material which had been around for millions of years, that is not the full story. The rise of early modern astronomy and the appearance of relativity are two moments of historically-determined manifold changes which are constituent parts of broader transformations of man's self-activity "in" nature, i.e. of conscious nature's self-activity. New manifolds of human praxis in nature had to come into existence for Kepler or Einstein to "see" elliptical orbits, or space-curvature (respectively).

It is not that the earth began to circulate around the sun because Copernicus conceptualized its necessity; it is not that space became curved because Einstein's theory explained the precession of the perihelion of Mercury in a way incompatible with Newtonian gravitational theory; it is that each of these theoretical revolutions created theoretical structures for apprehending these specific, "given" phenomena as part of a moment of a general, active transformation of humanity's relationship to the biosphere.

Every society creates the cosmology and the physics it requires to express that relationship, and every stage of social development requires its own cosmology and physics. It is not that certain phenomena, such as the acceleration of a falling body in the earth's field of gravity, are different in different manifolds;³⁹ it is, on the contrary, that such given particulars are located as truth only within different theoretical frameworks which make them visible in the first place. (As Einstein said, "It is theory which decides what we can observe", though he did not go on to say that such theories evolve as part of new phases of human biosphere praxis.)

Thus such human reconceptualizations, such as those of Copernicus, Kepler or Einstein, effectively transform the

laws of the universe insofar as they are active practical constitutions ⁴⁰ of the universe at new, determinate manifolds. Newtonian physics remain true within Einsteinian physics, as a subset located within new general laws. Einstein's overturning of Newton is a classic case of the unmasking of a fallacy of composition, in which laws which are locally true (for observable phenomena of the earth's framework) are emphatically false at the level of the universe as a whole, ⁴¹ in replication of the Marxian distinction between truths for individual capitals and the total social capital.

In physics as in the critique of political economy, the totality is not a sum.

Through the evolution of human praxis, the biosphere itself has evolved, and has even extended beyond the earth itself. There is today no nature which can be understood in isolation from global social praxis; nature is that praxis. To discuss the laws of that nature without a discussion of the evolution of the laws of human praxis, the highest mode of conscious nature-praxis, is a futile enterprise. A science of the evolution of the biosphere which excludes the transformation of the laws of activity of the highest organization of energy within that biosphere is an incomplete science.

A similar example can be drawn from modern physics. Certain of the newer (transuranian) elements, such as Berkelium or Californium, do not exist "in nature"; they are human creations from the beginning. To be accessible to observation, they must be pushed to speeds approaching the speed of light in linear accelerators to leave traces from which meaningful constructs about them can be formulated. The laws of the creation and nature of such elements are praxis-governed from the outset. Not only do they not exist separately from the observer; they do not exist separately from the activity of the observer.

Finally, it is necessary to respond in advance to the possible objection from a partisan of the Kuhnian "paradigm", who will agree with the assertion that theory decides what can be observed, and that therefore there are no visible "facts" whatever without theory, but will go on to assert that the succession of these paradigm theories is not determined by any necessity, and that because reality for science is a theoretical construct there can be no progress in science. To posit such progress, for a Kuhnian, is to once again posit the existence of a nature to which science is a greater and greater approximation of external truth.

The reader will see, from the previous discussion, the fallacy of such an objection. It agrees with vulgar

empiricism in positing a nature in which human activity is not a qualitative transforming presence. For empiricism, nature exists independently of observation, operating according to laws which a passive scientific observer deciphers.

For the Kuhnians, nature is admitted to be visible only to the extent that it is theoretically illuminated, but it is conceived as independent of any necessary determinacy for the specific theory and without any recognition that it is the activity of the theoretician, and the side of theory as on the side of nature, which is in question.

In short, Kuhn's theory is beneath the truth of Marx's First Thesis on Feuerbach, in which Marx points out Feuerbach's inability to see that human activity is objective. When we assert that the poetic conceptualizing powers of the human mind-in-act, or active intellect, are higher forms of the organization of energy, are conscious energy apprehending its own practice, we necessarily reject the notion that such conceptualization does not proceed according to laws and that its theoretical constructs are in any way arbitrary. They are, on the contrary, specific responses to theoretical-practical crises in human self-activity in the biosphere, and they conceptualize new advances in that practice. They are

determined (in the sense of our earlier discussion of determination: given content) by the practical problems posed by necessity, and as solutions to those problems. They are assertions of freedom in the context of transforming necessity at any specific stage. A scientific theory which revolutionizes the view of nature is by definition a theory which poses a revolution in human reproductive activity "within" nature. It is, finally, *natura naturans*, nature which creates.

This transformation of laws by transformation of conceptualization is the meaning of the "active intellect" as elaborated by such Arab neo-Platonists as Ibn Sina. Restated in more appropriate modern form, it is the power of the human intellect to transform and move the laws of the universe themselves to higher stages as it moves human praxis to higher stages. It means that, because there is nothing whatever which is arbitrary about conceptualization and poetizing thought, but that on the contrary the poetic imagination itself develops lawfully, that poetizing activity is an energy state. What runs through the highest levels of philosophy from the neo-Platonism of late antiquity onward is the idea of self-creating energy, non-imagistic (irreducible to discrete objects) and non-determined, not reified.

Thus the origins of modern science, far from being an ill-conceived and arbitrary eclecticism containing prescientific and empirical investigation simultaneously, turn out to be a qualitatively different method of investigation, one whose fundamental ideas place the constitutive imagination-intellect of the scientist at the “center” of creation. The quantitative superiority of the mechanistic world view which triumphed in the seventeenth century (although as Leibniz and William Blake were aware, in their very different critiques of Newton, only relatively) swept aside the fundamental truths of Renaissance science for three centuries until its underlying assumptions began to reach their limits in the overall crisis in which the “addition” of micro-rationalities led to a “sum” which was in fact a totality of absurdities.

A modern scientific outlook thereby rejoins pre-Newtonian theories at a higher level. It asserts that the world is activity, and that there is no contemplative truth outside of activity. It further discovers pre-formal poetizing thought to be, not merely an “anticipation” of formal mathematical truth, but the direct activity of energy itself, moving lawfully to higher levels of organization. The poetic faculty of man is negative entropy, i.e. negentropy, i.e. matter evolving to higher states and transforming the laws of its activity. It is no mere parallel to or approximation of

such a process, the process of humanity constituted as a collective praxis of conscious nature (hylozoic, or living matter).

The conceptual counterrevolution of Cartesianism and Newtonianism was the division of the world, the placing of thought outside the universe. From this division comes the classical separation of imagination and reality; “it’s only imagination” is the battle cry of all literalism and empiricism, which do not see the condensation ⁴² (poetizing) activity of the imagination as the basis of scientific creativity. In Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* and in Marx’s *Capital*, discreet imagistic entities are revealed, in different ways, to be “lower moments” of higher energy states, of process.

In the neo-Platonic origins of Marxism, ⁴³ in the critique and practical struggle against the inverted world, we move toward a completely new conception of imagination.

It is the literal realization of Rimbaud’s prophecy: “Poetry will no longer mark the rhythm of reality; it will go ahead” (*La poesie ne rythmera plus la réalité; elle ira en avant*). It will be a world of the realization of the powers of the imagination, the end of the separation in which it will be possible to say “that’s only imagination”. In the development of neo-Platonism and other “mystical”

currents, into the modern philosophical conceptions of infinity from Cusa and Bruno to Spinoza and Hegel, in the species-individual of Marx and in the transfinite of Cantor are posed such energy states, beyond any specific determination, a turning spiral of creativity, of time renewed and renewing. We are the infants of a world in which the conceptual and practical problems (and they are vast) of these currents will converge into a new, unified self-reflexive theory of the universe, the biosphere and history, a world in which the material imagination will be the ends and means of its own self-reproduction, in which its exercise "for its own sake" will be the means and the goal:

When the narrow bourgeois form has been peeled away, what is wealth, if not the universality of needs, capacities, enjoyments, productive powers, etc. of individuals, produced in universal exchange? What, if not the full development of human control over the forces of nature – those of his own nature as well as those of so-called "nature"? What, if not the absolute elaboration of his creative dispositions, without any preconditions other than antecedent historical evolution which makes the totality of this evolution – i.e. the evolution of all human powers as such, unmeasured by any previously established

yardstick, an end in itself? What is this, if not a situation where man does not produce himself in any determined form, but produces his totality? Where he does not seek to remain something formed by the past, but is in the absolute movement of becoming?

Marx, *Precapitalist Economic Formations*

Notes

1. The ideologization of Newton's work in a political context is explored in M. Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1689-1720* (1976); a complementary work on the ideology of atomism in the same context is J.R. Jacob, *Robert Boyle and the English Revolution* (1977).
2. Cf. above all the two books of B.J.T. Dobbs, *Foundations of Newton's Alchemy* (1975) and *Janus Face of Genius. The Role of Alchemy in Newton's Thought* (1991).
3. The importance of this current for the origins of Marxism is presented in L. Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, vol. 1, ch. 1. (1978).
4. On the possible influence of Jewish mysticism on Newton, cf. Brian Copenhaver, "Jewish Theologies of Space

in the Scientific Revolution", in *Annals of Science* 37 (1980). More generally, the interpenetration of theology, philosophy and science up to the seventeenth century is presented in A. Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* (1987).

5. Obviously the works of Gershom Scholem are a basic starting point for this tradition.

6. Frances Yates. *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (1964).

7. On Kepler, cf. J.V. Field, *Kepler's Geometrical Cosmology* (1988); also G. Simon, *Kepler astronome astrologue* (1974).

8. The classic presentation is E.A. Burtt, *Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science* (New York, 1954).

9. This side of Einstein, as well as his later break with the logical positivists of the Vienna Circle who tried to claim him as one of their own, is explored in Gerald Holton, *Thematic Origins of Scientific Thought* (1973). See also Einstein's letter to Jacques Hadamard on his own non-verbal creative thought processes in the collection of B. Ghiselin, ed., *The Creative Process* (1952).

10. The idea of negentropy, or entropy reversal through higher complexity, is developed by (among others)

O. Costa de Beauregard, *Second Principe de la Science du Temps* (1963), and *La Notion du Temps* (1963).

11. Again, on the theological dimensions of Newton's work, particularly as it concerns the notions of absolute space, *cf.* J. Zafiropulo, *Sensorium dei dans l'hermetisme et la science* (1976), and X. Renou, *l'Infini aux limites du calcul* (1978).

12. The expansion of the universe was derived from Einstein's general theory of relativity by the Russian Friedmann in 1922 and experimentally confirmed by the astronomer Hubbell in 1930. Einstein called his attempts to oppose this implication of the "cosmological constant" the greatest mistake of his life. A further historicization of the universe was the Wilson-Penzias discovery in 1965 of the "cosmic microwave background", which confirmed (for most physicists) the "Big Bang" theory of universe origins, and settled the ongoing debate between the "steady state" school of James Jeans and the school of Fred Hoyle in favor of the latter. By 1980, physics, which had marginalized the cosmological problematics of general relativity since 1930, was deeply involved with theories of "the very early history of the universe" (*cf.* S. Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes* [1977]).

13. While not at all in the Hegel-Marx tradition, the understanding of time in Jean Gebser, *Ursprung und*

Gegenwart (1949; English trans., *The Ever-Present Origin*, 1986) has a similar idea of a “primitive” phase returning on a higher level. One classic statement in the Marxian tradition is Engels’ *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* wherein he calls communism “the Stone Age returned on a higher level”.

14. This critique is documented by L. Pearce Williams, *Origin of Field Theory* (1966).

15. This is expressed in Marx’s (and later Trotsky’s) theory of “permanent revolution”.

16. Again, Gebser (*op. cit.*) has one of the rare discussions of the appearance of non-Euclidean geometry in an historical context.

17. The German word for “object”, *Gegenstand*, captures the external, contemplative aspect of objectivity; an object is something which “stands against”, “over and against”, the observer (*gegenüberstehen*).

18. Already in late antiquity Plato-influenced Christian philosophers had polemicized against Aristotle’s idea of the eternity of the world because it denied creation. This, in theological form, was an expression of the creativity of the intellect that later resurfaced in the Renaissance. Cf. Sorabji, R. ed. *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science*.

19. Fundamental in particular to Lurianic Kabbala. Cf. H. Bloom, *The Breaking of the Vessels* (1982).
20. It also has deeper historical roots in the Egyptian myth of Osiris, and the latter's death, dismemberment and resurrection. Cf. Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art*.
21. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, p. 830 (New York, 1967) (my translation and emphasis).
22. Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, Bd. 3, pp. 838-39 (Berlin, MEGA, 1975).
23. Erigena's major work is *On the Fourfold Division of Nature*.
24. This "microcosm-macrocosm" world of "correspondences" obviously had its flaws, but the distancing of all of nature into a representation was not one of them.
25. Again, on Einstein and his repudiation of Machian sensationalism, cf. G. Holton, op. cit.
26. It is curious, and possibly noteworthy, that in 1883 as well Friedrich Nietzsche first formulated his theory of the "eternal recurrence" (*ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen*), turning bourgeois thought in a completely different

direction, and (at the very least) repudiating any idea of progress, linear, non-linear or otherwise.

27. For an excellent discussion of the emergence of Greek philosophy, and particularly the early thought of Heraclitus and of the Eleatics (Parmenides) out of the mythopoeic thought of ancient Egypt and Hebrew monotheism, cf. Henri Frankfort, *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*. The “I am that I am” of the Old Testament anticipates in theological form the actual infinite idea, most thoroughly elaborated by Hegel, that in every “particular” “sense-certainty” phenomenon there is *already presupposed* the world-historical totality, i.e. that such discreet “facts” do not exist except on the basis of world history.

28. GWF Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 310 (1807) (1970).

29. *Id.*, p. 373.

30. “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844”, in Easton and Guddat, eds. *Writings of the Young Marx*, p. 309.

31. “Towards a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law”, *id.*, p. 250.

32. From the “Unpublished Sixth Chapter” of volume one of *Capital*. The quote is translated from the 1971 French edition, p. 142. This chapter was translated into English as the appendix “Results of the Immediate Process of Production”, in the 1976 Penguin edition.

33. *Id.*, p. 165.

34. For further elaboration of the concept of the inverted world as the core concept of Marx’s *Capital*, see R. Rosdolsky, *Development of Marx’s Capital*; R. Reichelt, *Struktur des “Kapital”-Begriffs bei Marx*; I.I. Rubin, *Studies in Marx’s Law of Value*; and J. Seigel, *Marx’s Fate* (1978); for Hegel’s discussion of the inverted world (*verkehrte Welt*) see *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, pp. 128-131 (Frankfurt, 1970).

35. *Grundrisse*, p. 325 (New York, 1973).

36. Hegel, *Phänomenologie...*

37. Marx’s First Thesis on Feuerbach, in Seigel, *op. cit.*

38. The Arab appropriation of Hellenistic philosophy and science after the seventh century is elaborated in the early volumes of P. Duhem, *Le Systeme du monde* (1910).

39. Nevertheless, Dirac posited an evolution of the gravitational constant, and the Russian geochemist

Vernadsky showed how life, including human life, was modifying even the earth's crust.

40. One need only think of the practical applications of Einstein's general relativity, such as the calculation of satellite orbits, or the photon-cell technologies spun off of his early paper on photons, to see how "theory becomes a practical force".

41. The discussion of black holes in John Wheeler's book *Gravitation* (1973) posits a "singularity" at which the known laws of physics go out the window.

42. The German language captures this connection more directly. The root word *dicht*, or dense, gives the word *Dichtung*, "poetry"; poetry is the imagination's "work of condensation", as are dreams in Freud's conception.

43. The development of the neo-Platonic dialectic from Plotinus through Erigena, Eckhart, and Boehme to Hegel is only one source of Marx, but fundamental in the development of the concept of the "inverted world", cf. L. Kolakowski, *op. cit.*